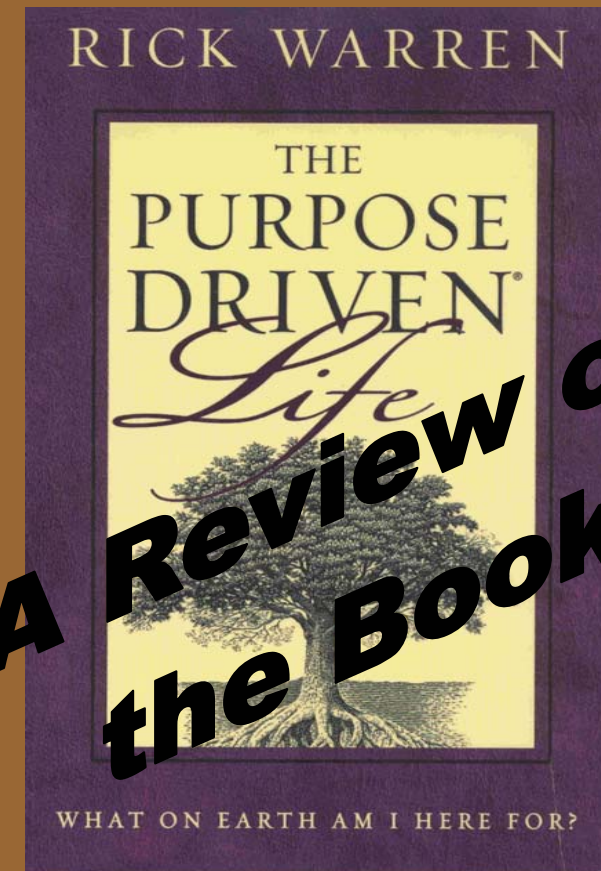


The Church Growth Movement and



**A Review of
the Book**

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want. Yet, the BIBLE says we are to **aim to please God**, not men. If we are really concerned about learning how to "build a church," does it not make more sense to **study God's Word**, rather than studying polls and surveys of popular opinion? Conspicuous by their absence in this book on church growth were any extended expositions from the pastoral epistles. Isn't God's opinion on the matter what we should really be seeking?

Rick Warren's approach to church growth stems from his primary philosophy: *man-centered pragmatism*. From that faulty foundation arises a ridicule of the old fashioned, and a disdain for the fundamentalist/separatist. Like so many in our age, being intoxicated by the sweet aroma of worldly success, he has stooped to building a church ministry based on a market-study of the unregenerate, rather than a Bible-study from the appropriate Scriptures.

[Adapted from a 4/98 report by [Jim Delany](#), Salem Bible Church, Salem, NH 03079.]

[Editor's Note: In January of 1998, Dr. Dennis Costella attended a "Building a Purpose Driven Church" seminar where Warren taught that the following must occur to transform a traditional church into a dramatic growing church (March-April 1998, *Foundation* magazine): (1) A contemporary-styled, non-threatening "Seeker Service" must replace the traditional Sunday worship service; (2) The dress must be casual; (3) The music must be contemporary; (4) The message must be only positive so that saved and unsaved alike can feel better about themselves after a message that often mixes psychology and an uplifting Scripture text; (5) Church ministries must be geared to meeting needs, with support groups for [depression](#), eating disorders, infertility, homosexuals' family/friends, post-abortion, and marital separation. Warren scoffed at the idea of passing out gospel tracts or going door-to-door since the typical "Saddleback Sam" is offended by such old-fashioned evangelism; (6) Doctrinal instruction is not given to the church as a whole on Sundays, but is available in sub-groups apart from formal church services; and (7) A spirit of pragmatic compromise must prevail. Warren was trained as a [Southern Baptist](#) (he frequently speaks at SBC events), but said, "It really doesn't matter your denomination, folks. We're all on the same team if you love Jesus." (Source: 6/98, [Calvary Contender](#).)

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Niche Marketing, Audience-Driven, Full Service Churches: How We Got Here?

By [Orrel Steinkamp](#), The Plumblin, Volume 8, No. 1, January/February 2003

By the end of the 19th century the "enlightenment" of the age of reason had significantly penetrated the church. One by one the historic, main-line denominations capitulated to the scientific rationalism of the wider culture. The culture was infatuated with progress and change and a new golden age of enlightenment seemed poised to change the world forever. But two world wars and the holocaust dashed all this utopian optimism. Nevertheless, German theological rationalism and scientific Darwinism had already been swallowed, digested, and infused into the bloodstream of the historic churches. Two popular media pastors in the 1930's were Sloan Coffin and Harry Emerson Fosdick. In their accommodation to modernism they denied such foundational tenets of Christianity as the resurrection of Christ and His virgin birth. The fundamentalists rose to challenge this denial of truth, but with very little attempt to make the Gospel culturally attractive.

Near mid-century a number of fundamentalists rightfully decided to end the needless Christian isolation from its cultural surroundings. Consequently, in 1942 the National Association of Evangelicals emerged. In 1947 Fuller Seminary was organized. Billy Graham began his nation-wide crusades in the early 50s and *Christianity Today* appeared in 1956. In a few years *Christianity Today* had more readers than the liberal *Christian Century*. For the next 25 years Billy Graham expressed the focus of the new evangelicals. This more outward-looking movement, known as Neo-evangelicalism, became so successful that Time magazine declared 1976 the "Year of the Evangelical."

In the last 25 years, however, the Church Growth Movement has become the main focus of evangelicalism. Church Growth teaching is the application of Donald McGavran's missiological church growth principles to the American church. Church Growth, like many movements, is a grand mixture of things good, bad, and in-between. David Wells, commenting on the Church Growth Movement, writes:

"A new and more culturally adapted evangelicalism emerged the central figures of which were no longer the scholars who had been prominent in the immediate postwar years but rather a host of managers, planners and bureaucrats - and not far behind them, marketers. This new set of leaders view growing a church or for that matter, any Christian ministry as essentially no different from growing a business." [1](#)

In the late 70's a ground-breaking cultural movement was recognized, commonly

quote from Dr. Harold Ockenga, the father of [New Evangelicalism](#): "The New Evangelicalism has changed its *strategy* from one of separation to one of *infiltration*." Warren's thinking is thoroughly New Evangelical.

Man-centered philosophy: Examples of this philosophy abound throughout the book. His aim is obviously to *please men*. Consider Rick Warren's own words:

Figure out what mood you want your service to project, and then create it. (p. 264); We start positive and end positive. (p. 271); We use humor in our services ... it is not a sin to help people feel good. (p. 272); Cultivate an informal, relaxed, and friendly atmosphere. (p. 272); We made a strategic decision to stop singing hymns in our seeker services. (p. 285); We have attracted thousands more because of our music. (p. 285); Saddleback now has a complete pop/rock orchestra. (p. 290); Use more performed music than congregational singing ... (p. 291) (emphasis on entertainment); The ground we have in common with unbelievers is not the Bible, but our common needs, hurts, and interests as human beings. You cannot start with a text ... (p. 295); Make your members feel special ... they need to feel special. (p. 320,323)

Rick Warren's church (and others like it) have attracted thousands. His methods *do work*. He says that the reason for the spectacular growth has been his emphasis on creating a "purpose driven church." It could be argued with equal force, however, that the real reason for the spectacular growth is not at all related to his thesis. *The real reason for the growth is because of the New Evangelical principle of [pragmatism](#)*. He asked the people what they wanted, and he gave it to them. He provided the product the market demanded, and it sold like hot-cakes. If you please people, they will come and come again.

But what could be more contrary to the principles found in Scripture? Consider what God told the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:4-11). Ezekiel was told that the people would not like his ministry or message, and yet he was to preach it anyway, *regardless of the response*. Ezekiel was successful if he did what God said. His success in God's sight had nothing to do with the response of the people. It had to do with the faithfulness of the servant. They would know that a prophet was in their midst. He was not to ask the folks what kind of a prophetic ministry would most appeal to them. He was given a forehead harder than flint to stand for the truth against all opposition. "Whether they will hear or forbear" was not the prophet's responsibility. His goal was not to get as large a crowd as he could. His job was to preach the truth, and he did (vs. 11). That is success in God's eyes. That was a fruitful and faithful ministry.

Of course our churches will grow faster if we throw out Scriptural standards. Of course our churches will grow faster if we please men and give them what they

God HAS called us to be fruitful and that God is not pleased if we are not successful. But in those examples he cites, the lack of fruit was the proof that Israel was an apostate, unbelieving nation. It had nothing to do winning souls for Christ.

A church ministry based on a market-study of the unregenerate, rather than a study of the Scriptures: When Rick Warren began his church, he started out using the very same methodology of [Robert Schuller](#) and [Bill Hybels](#). Not surprisingly, Schuller praises the book inside the front cover, and Hybels highlights the book on his Willow Creek Internet web site! Warren spent twelve weeks going door to door and surveying the "needs" of the people (p. 139). Therefore, he offers what he calls a "full menu" of [support groups](#) for empty nesters, divorced couples, grief recovery, etc. In other words, offer the community/consumer what they want, and they will come. Perhaps the title "[Market Driven Church](#)" would suffice as well as "Purpose Driven Church." While he SAYS he is not "pandering to consumerism" (p. 200), his own words seem to contradict that. He states that church, in order to be successful, must target its audience, and then appeal to that audience. He even goes so far as to claim that Jesus *targeted* the audience of Israel "in order to be effective, not to be exclusive" (p. 158). In applying this philosophy to dress standards, Warren discovered that people in his community do not like to dress up, but instead prefer casual, informal meetings. Therefore, Warren said, "I never wear a coat and tie when I speak at Saddleback services [his home church]. I intentionally dress down to match the mind set of those I'm trying to reach."

Warren states that Jesus also used this methodology. He and His disciples "targeted people they were most likely to reach -- people like themselves. Jesus was not being prejudiced, he was being strategic" (p. 187). To say that Jesus targeted Israel because He could relate to them culturally and in order to be strategic (successful) flies in the face of prophecy, the real purpose of His ministry, and common sense. Jesus "targeted" Israel because He was sent there by His Father, not because He felt He would be more successful there than in Egypt!

Disdain for fundamentalism and separation: Rick Warren's distaste for fundamentalism is expressed subtly, yet distinctly. On page 236 he writes, "Must we choose between liberalism and legalism? Is there a third alternative to imitation and isolation?" Note what he considers to be the opposite of liberalism - legalism. The opposite of liberalism and modernism is in reality, fundamentalism! Warren knows that, but avoids using the term. Note how he refers to the doctrine of separation -- isolation! After asking if we must choose between the liberals or the fundamentalists (which he calls legalists), he offers a third alternative -- a new (?) method. Consider his words: "The *strategy* of Jesus is the antidote to both extremes: *infiltration!*" His words sound strangely like a

called Postmodernism. This movement is a challenge to rational thought, so much so that classical liberal theologians, asserting that most of the Bible is not factually true, have no more cultural support than Bible-believing Christians. The "Jesus Seminar" is the final bloom of liberal theologians attempting a last hurrah. In Postmodern thought there is no universal truth to be established; everyone has total freedom to create his or her own truth. Postmoderns are driven by the heart rather than the head. Current pop-spirituality reflects this in its focus on feeling, the inner life, and promotion of spiritual pluralism. Consequently, evangelicals do not have the same need, as previously, to think through their apologetics. In fact there is a truth "vacuum" which frees the church to present an audience-driven, user-friendly gospel in order to compete with the new smorgasbord of spiritualities. There is no longer a compelling need for evangelicals to express their faith in clear and logical propositions.

Don Matzat writes:

"The postmodern expression of Christianity is no longer historically based but is merely built upon the spiritual whims of the populace. Fifty years after the rise of the new evangelicalism and 20 years after Time declared 1976 the Year of the Evangelical, what has become the shape of American evangelical Christianity? Has the push to attain cultural relevance been successful? By and large the Christian church has not impacted the secular culture with the Gospel. Instead the philosophy, method and style of the secular culture have invaded the Christian church... Many pastors are CEOs. The worship services offer entertainment. We have Christian television Christian radio, Christian books, and Christian gift shops. We search the Christian "yellow pages" to find Christian lawyers, psychologists, and financial advisors. We cast our vote for the Christian politicians. Christian music is marketed the same way as secular music. We can do Christian aerobics and join Christian weight-loss programs. A Christian ghetto has been produced. While Jesus told His church to be in the world but not of it, the culturally relevant evangelical is of it but not in it. Successful evangelical pastors like Bill Hybels and Robert Schuller are really no different than the successful modern liberal clergy, like Sloan Coffin and Harry Emerson Fosdick. While Coffin and Fosdick built their congregations by appealing to human reason, Hybels and Schuller "grow a church" by appealing to the feelings and experience of people. While the classic liberal pastor questioned on the basis of reason the truth of traditional Christian doctrine, the postmodern pastor ignores doctrine and focuses on methods which produce success. [2](#)

The new liberalism is incognito and flies below the radar. The Bible-believing pastor doesn't, for one minute, doubt the truths of scripture, but in adopting the market-driven, Postmodern model, his presentation of the gospel is deceptively altered. G. A. Pritchard, who spent the first 183 pages of his book listing the positives of Willow Creek, finally concludes:

Hybels incorporates large chunks of the American psychological worldview into his basic teaching and teaches that fulfillment is a consequence of the Christian life. There is a lack of critical evaluation to Willow Creek's approach to relevance. This felt-need approach to relevance ultimately distorts their Christianity. " (*Willow Creek Seeker Services*, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1996, p.200).

It is not a false gospel as such, but rather an incomplete gospel. Jesus is still the Savior but the primary purpose of the cross is meeting felt needs and life fulfillment. Here an illustration may be helpful. In my backyard I have a sandbox, but the sandbox is really a tractor tire. It works well for a sandbox and I didn't have to build one. But the first and primary purpose of a tractor tire is to be put on tractor wheels. It can have a secondary purpose of being a sandbox, but that is not the reason it was manufactured. Market-driven evangelism is selling tractor tires as sandboxes. They say that though the cross does work for canceling out sin, unchurched Harry is not interested in the cross canceling out sin as much as in a gospel he can use for the joys of sandbox Christianity. Christian marketers have done their market surveys and are market-wise enough to make their gospel pitch in this way. Note the subtlety of this: not one Christian doctrine is denied (as the old liberals did), but the essential purpose of the cross is being assigned to the margins and often ignored. This is alarming.

This Little Church Went to Market, by Gary E. Gilley

... [Evangelicals] having watched a large segment of the church become content with short yardage and lousy scores, ... decided that there had to be a better way. The church was not penetrating society; she was not pulling in the masses; she was not making a significant impact for the gospel. It was not that the church leaders didn't care, it was, it seemed, that they lacked the "know how," the tools, to effect change. The gospel was still the "power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16), but it was being rejected out-of-hand by too many. What was needed, apparently, were new methods to reach the lost, new techniques to promote the church, new packages for the gospel message. People, we were told, were not rejecting the gospel or Christ; they were rejecting our out-of-date, unappetizing form, philosophies, and methods...

... We will focus on the two flagship churches: Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California, and Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago. These churches serve as the models that are reshaping the way we "do church" today. As a matter of fact, many refer to these churches and their clones as "new paradigm churches." Churches all over the world ... are imitating the many methods promoted by Saddleback and the "Creekers." Others have written about church growth, but these two churches have made it work, and for their

to demonstrate how church leaders should operate. He says pastors need to learn to recognize a "wave of God's Spirit and ride it" or "catch a spiritual wave of growth" (p. 14). His advice is to learn how to recognize a *wave* in which people are getting saved (a successful method). He also suggests that we learn to get off dying waves (methods that do not seem to be producing fruit). This is nothing more than a modern illustration of an old principle New Evangelicals have been teaching for decades, namely, "if it works, it must be right"! His advice seems to boil down to this -- look around at different methods used by other churches, and if it seems to bring people in -- jump on the bandwagon -- ride the wave! His updated illustration of surfing is nothing more than pragmatism. This is the principle that serves as a foundation to his whole approach to church growth.

Ridicule of the "old fashioned": Warren mocks churches which "seem to think that the 1950s was the golden age, and they are determined to preserve that era in their church" (p. 55). He later makes it clear what he means by this. He encourages young pastors to leave behind that old fashioned church music in favor of jazz or rock or whatever turns your people on! He encourages churches to imitate the culture and "dress down" for church. On the one hand, he states that "there are those who, fearing irrelevance, foolishly imitate the latest fad and fashion; in their attempt to relate to today's culture, they compromise the message and lose all sense of being set apart." Yet Warren and those who follow his methodology practice exactly what he says is "foolish." He is desperately trying to be relevant, and in the process has lost all sense of being "set apart." Walking into church with food and drink, dressed down as if at the mall, and hearing rock & jazz music may be relevant, but it is NOT much different from the world. On page 62, Warren attempts to shelter himself from criticism on this issue. He says, "Never criticize what God is blessing, even though it may be a style of ministry that makes you uncomfortable." In other words, the new rock music, the new dress down look, and all the "cultural changes" which make many fundamentalists uncomfortable should be overlooked -- IF IT WORKS!

Enamored with success: Fundamentalists have for years made "faithfulness to the written Word of God" their hallmark. Many fine sermons have been preached in which it was declared that God has not called us to be successful, but to be faithful. This principle is well documented in the Word of God. Noah faithfully preached for many decades, and yet seemed to have precious little fruit to show for it! While he may have only won his own family, he was successful in God's sight. Missionaries around the world have sown the precious seed of the gospel for years and have not seen much fruit for their labors. Yet Rick Warren *strongly disagrees* with that principle (p. 64). He argues that God HAS called us to be successful. He cites an example from the gospel in which the Lord Jesus judged the unfruitful tree (Matt. 21:19). He states that the nation of Israel lost its privileges because of unfruitfulness (Matt. 21:43). He concludes from this that

billion people on earth, and Jesus wants all his lost children found" Does Warren believe we can save the whole world? Warren's intentions are admirable but not realistic.

It is for these reasons I'm concerned about what is written in this book. Because so many have already read it I can only hope it is used to spur some people on to more than what they are doing.

In conclusion, does God want us to have *only* purpose or is faithfulness a necessary element so he can fulfill his purpose in us?

1 Cor. 4:1-2 "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

There is a principle that is supposed to be at work. Luke 16:10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much." God is looking for faithfulness. Paul writes in 1 Tim. 1:11-12 "according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry"

Jesus told us to take up our cross and follow Him and we do not know each step of the journey. We need to rest in God and His sovereignty as He works His divine purpose through us, this can take time. Denying our self is the first step, and let our talents and abilities be crucified so he can breathe new life into which of them he wants to. By walking in God's will and way we find fulfillment, peace and our purpose is developed.

Review by: Let Us Reason Ministry
<http://www.letusreason.org>

Review: *The Purpose Driven Church* ***Rick Meisel***

Rick Warren is pastor of the 14,000-member Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California. He has influenced tens of thousands of pastors and church leaders during the last decade through his church growth seminars at Saddleback and as director of "Building a Purpose Driven Church" workshops (see note at end of this article). His 399-page book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, is being used as a "How-to" manual throughout church growth circles. Its principal teachings are:

The principle of pragmatism: (p. 13-15) Rick Warren uses a surfing illustration

success they are idolized and adored by the modern evangelical community...

An interesting article, just the type that shapes the new paradigm system, is found in *American Demographics* (*American Demographics*, April 1999, "Choosing My Religion," pp. 60-65, by Richard Cimino and Don Lattin) ... According to this article people today claim they are:

"...into spirituality, not religion... Behind this shift is the search for an experiential faith, a religion of the heart, not the head. It's a religious expression that downplays doctrine and dogma, and revels in direct experience of the divine - whether it's called die "Holy Spirit" or "cosmic consciousness" or the "true self." It is practical and personal, more about stress reduction than salvation, more therapeutic than theological. It's about feeling, on being good. It's as much about the body as the soul... Some marketing gurus have begun calling it "the experience industry". (Ibid., p 62).

But is a market-driven church so bad? After all, a lot of people seem to be getting saved and they're really "packing 'em in." Rick Warren puts a positive spin on new paradigm philosophy in his very popular book *The Purpose Driven Church* ... Many of Warren's suggestions are excellent. Churches should pay attention to cleanliness and attractiveness, where people are going to park ... We should strive for excellence and do the best to communicate God's truth. And we should want to grow - in the right ways. Warren states, "Every church needs to grow warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through worship, broader through ministry, and larger through evangelism." (*The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p. 48)

Who could argue with that? And who would debate the need for churches to know why they exist (their purpose), channeling their energies in that direction rather than wandering aimlessly as many do? And what about evangelism? Warren and the new paradigm churches are geared to reaching the lost. While many churches are wasting precious energy fussing over the color of the drapes in the foyer, the Saddlebacks and Willow Creeks are focusing their attention on bringing unchurched Harry and Saddleback Sam to Christ. You can't help admire that kind of emphasis ... Perhaps no single source carries as much weight in the "seeker sensitive" church as George Barna and his Barna Research Group. Barna, the church counterpart to George Gallup, has ignited a number of fires in Christian circles with his books such as *The Frog in the Kettle and Marketing the Church*. In his more recent book *Church Marketing, Breaking Ground for the Harvest*, Barna declares that he and his types have won the ideological battle over the issue of marketing the church (p. 13, 14). That is, only a few old-fashioned stick-in-the-muds still question the validity of the market-driven strategy ... Barna assures us that churches sell (or market) their product the same way Wal-Mart sells shoes and Sears sells tools. But what is the church's product? What are we trying to peddle to consumers? This has to be thought through carefully, for

unlike shoes and tools that have great attraction for some consumers, the gospel is repulsive, foolishness to the unsaved (I Cor. 1: 18-23). How do we market such a product? By changing the package. Note the subtle bait and switch in Barna's philosophy. Ministry, in essence, has the same objective as marketing - to meet people's needs. Christian ministry, by definition, meets people's real needs by providing them with biblical solutions to their life circumstances (p 21).

By repackaging ministry ... Barna has made it attractive. If we can convince people that Christ died to meet their need, they will line up at our doors to buy our product. But is this the Gospel message? Has Barna merely repackaged ... the Gospel product, or has he gutted it of its purpose and value? An important question upon which so much hinges...

The standard rhetoric coming from new paradigm churches is that they teach the same message, the same gospel, as the more traditional evangelical churches; that they differ only in methodology and philosophy of ministry. Lee Strobel (former Teaching Pastor at Willow Creek Community Church) writes, "Objections [to the market-driven church] generally relate to the method that's used to communicate the Gospel, not the message itself and consequently we're free to use the God-given creativity to present Christ's message in new ways that our target audience will connect with" (*Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, by Lee Stroebel, p. 168). This is simply not the case. While some methods may disturb us it is their message that is of real concern. ... Barna defines marketing as "a broad term that encompasses all the activities that lead to an exchange of equally valued goods between consenting parties."...Is the gospel marketable by this definition? Is the gospel the "exchange of equally valued goods between consenting parties" Let's see. The Gospel is offered by grace (undeserved favor) and received by faith. In the exchange God gets us, we get Him (equally valued goods?). In the exchange we receive the righteousness of Christ, He takes our sins upon Himself (equally valued goods?). The market process breaks down in its very definition when the "product" is Christ... The Gospel is not bringing people to Christ in order to meet their felt-needs. **According to Scripture the gospel is the good news that lost sinners can be forgiven of their sins and receive the righteousness of Christ in exchange.** This is the real need of humanity, the need for which Christ died... The gospel message in a nutshell is this: Harry (to use Willow Creek's name for the unsaved) is a sinner, in full-blown rebellion against God (Rom. 3:23; 5:1-12). While some Harrys are outwardly religious and some even desire the gifts and benefits that God can supply, no Harrys truly seek after God or desire Him (Rom. 3:10-18). As a result of Harry's sinfulness he is under the wrath of God (Rom. 1: 18), faces future judgment (Heb. 9:27), will die both physically and spiritually (Rom. 6:23) and will spend eternity in hell (Rev. 20:11-15)...

The new paradigm church operates under the credo that Harry is "hostile to the church, friendly to Jesus Christ" (ibid. p. 47) ... Now we know that Harry is not

He writes "*If you want Jesus to come back sooner focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy*" (p.286). There is nothing we can do to make Jesus come back sooner. No one will be able to bring this about any sooner than God's timing (Warren has said he avoids teaching on prophecy).

On p.298 He uses the term Middle eastern (is a new term) avoids the apostles ethnicity being Jewish. This is intentionally done, for what purpose I do not know. "*When Jesus told his followers to "go everywhere into the world, and tell the good news to everyone" that small band of poor, Middle Eastern disciples were overwhelmed*"

He calls people who get involved — world class Christians. P.298-299. What does this mean? Do we now have two classes of Christians. What's the other class that does not have the purpose?

p. 300 He then speaks of our *Shift from local thinking to global thinking*. Because God cares for the whole world we should too. He then explains how co-operations and business already think globally. While I agree with him on praying for other countries we are never asked to love and focus on the whole world as God does. He later says even *Jesus did not meet the needs of everyone on earth. You have to choose whom you can best help*.

On p.300 he says *World Class Christians pray for the world*. And suggests to get a globe or map to pray with. "The Bible says "*If you ask me. I will give you the nations, all the people on the earth will be yours*" (Ps.2:8 New Century Version)

God is not saying he will give them (all) to us, this is about Jesus and Warren is among many that take this Scripture out of its context. Ps. 2:7-9 "I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'"(NKJ).

p.302 *I urge you to save and do whatever it takes to participate in a short term mission trip overseas as soon as possible.*

p.304 "*What steps can I take to prepare to go on a short-term missions experience in the next year.*" Missions are good and necessary and it is often beneficial to do something like this, however, not All Christians are called to be missionaries: Warren has a myopic view of purpose in mind, it seems to relate only to evangelism/missions. Many people who are Christian are called to be doctors, firemen, lawyers, housewives, etc. and are used in their vocation, not just in mission work in other countries. Our mission is to be witnesses of Jesus to anyone we may come in contact with, both home or abroad.

If you want to be like Jesus, you must have a heart for the whole world. You can't be satisfied with your family and friends coming to Christ. There are over 6

sons.” (Hebrews 12:5-8) “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev. 3)

On page 97 using Jacob as a model he further says *God isn't offended when we wrestle Him, after all he let Jacob win*. Yes and he gave him a limp for the rest of his life to remember it by. I thought he wants us to surrender to his will. It is a fact that many of us will probably wrestle with him over one thing or another, but to say he is not offended when he asks for obedience is wrong?

p.101 “*when Jesus said you must worship in spirit, he wasn't referring to the Holy Spirit, but to your spirit.*” This is incorrect. God's Spirit is the Spirit of truth. If we take what Warren states we would have to assume man's sinful spirit can worship God correctly without his Holy Spirit. Man's spirit is fallen and it is the Spirit who prompts and enables us to worship our creator, without the Holy Spirit it could not be acceptable.

To expand on his idea of worship Warren's comments on music are quite liberal, this is why in his services they rock and the music is loud enough to be felt. p.65 “*God loves all kinds of music because he invented it all*” *fast, slow, loud and soft, old and new*”.... *If it is offered to God in spirit and truth, it is an act of worship.*”

Can he actually back up this statement? Warren gives no boundaries on music, everything is acceptable. God may have created music but man has also perverted it. To say He approves ALL music even those that cater to the flesh and lyrics that are against God is hardly acceptable. I'm not someone that is against contemporary music but if there is no standard, anything goes.

On p. 219 “*It is my deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart The most likely place to start is with the person's felt needs.*”

Is this Biblical to say it is easy for someone to believe, all we need to do is find that key and turn it? This means it is our fault if someone does not repent and come to know the Lord because we failed to correctly present it for them. It says the gospel — the cross is an offense to people when it is preached correctly. How can this be easy? Jesus said no one comes to him unless the Father draws them. Though methods can be useful, Warren is reducing witnessing to a successful method that is centered on what the person wants in his life. He is starting with the wrong premise.

p.284 “*this is why we must all be urgent about our mission*” Good point but he applied the wrong Scripture “*All of us must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent me, because there is little time left before the night falls and all work comes to an end*” John.9:4 (New Living Translation)

NKJ John 9:4 “*I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.*” Jesus is speaking of himself Warren uses the NLT which subtly changed it to include all of us.

motivated by the commands of God, nor is he all that interested in truth, [so] we can abandon the direct approach. And since he is looking for something that will help him reach his goals in life and feel good in the process, we are ready to package the gospel to draw his attention. The new paradigm church does this by focusing on the gospel of felt need. “The Church's problem today is simply that it does not believe that without tinkering, the Gospel will be all that interesting to modern people” (*Losing Our Virtue*, by David Wells, p. 207). And tinker it must... The new paradigm church is offering a purely Americanized, yuppie brand of Christianity found nowhere in the NT...

G.A. Pritchard, after spending a year (onsite) studying the ministry at Willow Creek, eventually came to the conclusion that “Hybels believes that Harry's most important concern is for his personal fulfillment”...Hybels teaches that Christianity will satisfy Harry's felt need and provide him fulfillment ... Hybels and the other speakers do not condemn the search for fulfillment. Rather they argue that Harry has not searched in the right place. (*Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p. 254-256). Pritchard's analysis is on the money:

“Is Willow Creek correct in their teaching that a relationship with Christ will provide a life of fulfillment? In a word, no. ... Personal fulfillment is the dominant goal of the vast majority of Americans. In this context it is a great temptation for American evangelicals to argue that Christianity is a means of a more fulfilling life. ... the Church becomes another place that promises to satisfy emotional desires.... To argue for Christianity primarily by pointing to its usefulness in satisfying felt needs is to ultimately undercut it. To teach Christianity as a means eventually teaches that it is superfluous. If someone is able to satisfy their felt needs without Christ, the message of Christianity can be discarded. ... The bottom line why individuals should repent and worship God is because God deserves it. Fulfillment theology does not reflect the teaching of the Bible. We find in Scripture vast evidence that Christianity is often not 'fulfilling,' Jesus promises his disciples that "in this world you will have trouble..... The Lord did not promise fulfillment, or even relief, in this world but only in the next... (Pritchard, p. 254-256),

In response to those who object to the new gospel, Stroebel counters that “these objections generally relate to the method that's used to communicate the Gospel, not the message itself, and consequently we're free to use our God-given creativity to present Christ's message in new ways that our target audience will connect with” (Stroebel, p. 168). This is simply not the case. While some of the methods may disturb us, it is their message that is of real concern. The new paradigm church would loudly proclaim that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But they have redefined salvation. Salvation is not simply, under the new gospel, the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness. It is not a deliverance from the wrath of God upon a deserving and rebellious people. The new gospel is liberation from low self-esteem, a freedom

from emptiness and loneliness, a means of fulfillment and excitement, a way to receive your heart's desire, a means to meeting your needs. The old gospel was about God; the new gospel is about us. The old gospel was about sin; the new gospel is about needs. The old gospel was about our need for righteousness; the new gospel is about our need of fulfillment. The old gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing; the new gospel is attractive... We are forced to ask, with Peter Jennings in the thought-provoking video, *In the Name of God*, "As these churches try to attract sell-out crowds, are they in danger of selling out the gospel?"

The above article consists of excerpted sections from a four-part article at

<http://www.svchapel.org/ThinkOnTheseThingsMinistries/publications/html/marketl.html>

Exploring the Headwaters of Willow Creek

Proponents of Willow-Creek Seeker Sensitive evangelism and the wider public have little knowledge of the historical genealogy of this movement. Most simply assume that George Barna and associates originated the marketing model now employed widely in seeker sensitive evangelism. Barna, however, is a late-corner, who actually adapted and expanded ideas that had been earlier discovered by Robert Schuller. G. A. Pritchard quotes Schuller as saying "An undisputed historical fact is that I am the founder, really, of the church-growth movement in this country ... I advocated and launched what has become known as the marketing approach in Christianity." [3](#)

Schuller tells of ringing 3500 doorbells and concluding that to reach his Garden Grove neighbors, he had to "throw the kind of bait out that they would like". Schuller decided that the best and most attractive bait was to appeal to self-esteem. Accordingly, he turned to the guru of self-esteem, Norman Vincent Peale. Schuller was aware that he needed to modify the message to fit this new method. Consequently, Schuller called for a new reformation to move from a theocentric (God-centered) to a "human need" approach. In Schuller's book, *Self-Esteem: A New Reformation*, he re-defines sin: "Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem." [4](#) This was indeed radical surgery on the body of biblical theology. Schuller's message ceased to be the Gospel of the New Testament!

It is a matter of historical record that Bill Hybels attended Schuller's institute on church leadership in 1975. After this he recruited individuals to join him in starting a church and later took 25 of the core Willow Creek leadership group to another session of that leadership conference. At this conference Schuller pointed to Hybels and said: "I want you to know that this man right here is doing something out in Chicago which is actually what we are talking about at this

everywhere and is in everything." (Ephesians 4:6, New Century Version) This quote promotes "pantheism," this New Age concept teaches God is within all of His creation. This is not what this passage means as Paul is explaining our spiritual unity he concludes with "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:6, KJV) meaning, in the born again Christian. God is everywhere but not IN everything.

"The last thing many believers need is to go to another Bible study. They already know far more than they are putting into practice" (p.231). It may be true that far too many Christians are not doing ministry but don't say we don't need to go to another Bible study. I have found the opposite, that far too many do not know their Bibles well. This could be said in a better way like some of you are old enough to be teachers. Jesus said it is the bread we live on, we can never have enough spiritual food for learning. New believers especially need constant Bible study. Where are people going to learn if not at a Bible study, certainly not in their seeker friendly services!

Yet he contradicts himself in the same book *"I cannot overstate the value of being a part of a small Bible study discussion group...."* p.191). This even contradicts what he says about his own church program. "We designed this journey around four vital habits that everyone needs to grow spiritually: the habit of weekly worship attendance, a daily quiet time, a weekly group Bible study."

p.140 *"Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed."* James 5:16 (the Message.) This is not a common practice of confessing your sins on a regular basis to a group of people. This sounds too similar to the International Churches of Christ model they use for control, (they are a cult). I'm not saying by Saddleback employing this is they are a cult but that it is not biblical. The Bible never says in James 5:16 to make it a common practice. In context it is about a certain sin and reconciliation so they can be healed.

p. 79. He says that God *"He doesn't try to break our will, but woos us to himself so we might offer ourselves freely to him."* Warren correctly teaches that God wants us to completely surrender to give us freedom. However his statement is inaccurate, he does break our will if necessary; he chastens us (Jonah for example, Paul another). All one has to do is read about the history of Israel to find the examples. But Warren purposely leaves out these portions and interpretations to make God as one whom can only bless you. "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives....The word *chasten* is paideuo, it means to train up a child, i.e. educate, discipline by punishment if necessary. " God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not

be made.” This is not necessarily true. We do not honor the vessel but God who works through the vessel. We find in the book of Esther 4:14 “For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

God does want us to cooperate with him for His purpose to be accomplished, but God can easily raise up another for any work he chooses. This example can be seen with the nation of Israel as well as individuals.

On p.176 “*you cannot grow in Christ likeness in isolation.*” Why not, there are people who have lived in areas where there are no Christians and all they had were their Bible, and the Holy Spirit. It's true we should be part of a church but we are to have a personal relationship with God foremost, then with people. Jesus can do far above what any person can do in our life.

On page p.245 Warren promotes the psychological categories of sanguine and choleric personalities and applies it to the apostles. The Four Temperaments theory is one of several behavior-oriented theories that modern psychology has adopted from ancient schools of philosophy.

In the Encyclopedia of Human Behavior, R.M. Coldenson defines temperament as “A general term for emotional make-up, including characteristic energy level, moods and mood changes, intensity and tempo of reactions to people and situations ” (James Mcconnell Understanding Human Behavior 6th ed. p.434)

In the past physicians and philosophers used their understanding of the four humors (body fluids), the four temperaments, and signs of the zodiac to treat diseases and understand individual differences in people.

Greek cosmology's four elements are basic to the four temperament personality theory. (It was popularized in Christianity by Florence Littauer and Tim LaHaye, Peter being a sanguine, Paul a choleric, is right from Lahayes book.

True our personality is used by God but it does not necessarily rule over our spiritual gifts as Warren surmises, it is actually the other way around. Our Personality is part of our soul. God has given us spiritual gifts to FULFILL his purpose. God works through the weaknesses of people so that he receives the glory for what is done. It's our weakness not necessarily our strengths God uses. In fact the Bible tells us we are new creatures in Christ so whatever personality category one tries to peg us in is wrong. God often changes us, so we can do what we could not do before. These personality categories are psychology and humanistic.

We are no longer to be ruled by our old *fallen* nature Jesus has made all things new and we are to walk in the Spirit to fulfill his purposes.

On p.88 Warren uses a translation that says “*He rules everything and is*

conference” (quoted by Pritchard, p. 54). Following Schuller's suggestions, Hybels and his staff took a community survey. Based on the answers, the Willow Creek team developed a strategy for church planting, crafting messages that appealed to the audience, making sure they didn't feel guilty. Schuller was delighted in Hybels, a son who went beyond his father. Schuller said: “I was the first person to introduce real church growth to the American church. ... He [Hybels] became the first guy to take these principles, refine them, maximize them to the ultimate length of their potential” (quoted by Pritchard, p. 56).

In 1979, in what staff members refer to as the “train wreck:” a founding Willow Creek staff member was caught in adultery. In response to this crisis, Hybels began to teach and preach about sin. However, a staff member recounted that this emphasis seemed to promote a somber spirit and destroyed what had been the optimistic atmosphere in the services. Pritchard notes that this change was “a relatively short term shift” (Pritchard, p. 42). Now, however, rather than Schuller's self-esteem message being promoted as the bait, the bait is rather “personal fulfillment.” We rejoice that the pure Schullerian heresy (the re-definition of sin) was abandoned. Nevertheless, at Willow Creek, sin is still minimized and marginalized. Hybel's teaching exhibits a strong reliance on psychological categories, not as strongly as Schuller's, but still very real. The terminology is also different; while Schuller emphasizes “self-esteem,” Hybels stresses “personal fulfillment” and “user friendly doctrine.” In the final analysis, it is not possible to understand Willow Creek's method and message without exploring the source of Willow Creek. If you go upstream from Willow Creek you will come to its headwaters, flowing from Garden Grove, California, and the Crystal Cathedral.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1994, pp. 71-72.
- 2 Donald Matzat, *The New Liberals*, Issues and Etc. Journal, Vol. 3 No. 2, Spring 1998.
- 3 G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1998, p.51.
- 4 Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, Waco, Word, 1982, p. 14.

About the Author

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divisive people from the church if they ignore two warnings.”

This is good if he would qualify what he means. Certainly pastors who are upholding the word and living right deserve our support and loyalty. But what about those who do not?

Quoting Titus 3:10 *“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him”* (NIV).

Warren is referring to the Scripture that is speaking of heretics, divisive ones that have foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law (Titus 3:9), things that are not in accord with the apostles teachings, these are the ones to be removed: not anyone who is “divisive” is to be considered to be a heretic. It is what someone is divisive about. We are commanded to divide from false doctrine and those who do not uphold it. There is nothing wrong with confronting error as long as it is done with the right intentions in a spirit of love.

“God blesses churches that are unified. At Saddleback every Church member signs a covenant that includes a promise to protect the unity of our fellowship. As a result, the church has never had a conflict that split the fellowship” (p.167)

If this is what is needed to keep unity, then where is the working of the Spirit to keep the unity of the faith? The unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) leads us into the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:13; Jude 3). We are to be unified in the truth not only unified in fellowship and purpose. The early church needed no extra covenant to sign for their unity. So if one does not sign this covenant they will be asked to leave (also if they are not in service to the church as indicated earlier in this article—by moving hundreds of members for non-participation). So division would be not going along with a vision the pastor has, even when it may be unbiblical or extra biblical.

The Bible teaches the unity is based on our common faith not a certain pastor’s vision or direction for the church. Jesus never said to unite with false churches that claim his name (Warren makes no distinction, and considers keeping unity with those outside the faith (*as USA TODAY, 7/21/2003* reported posted on his website—Warren's pastor-training programs welcome Catholics, Methodists, Mormons, Jews and ordained women). Neither does Warren take into account churches that change and begin to teach false doctrine or abuse members. We are not to follow leaders who no longer uphold the Bible correctly. We are to separate from them. I can only conclude from what I have read that Warren believes that every church that calls themselves Christian is practicing the truth from what he is doing since he makes not distinction.

Overall there are some major problems with this book and numerous smaller ones that people seem to overlook throughout the book that are concerning.

p.241 *“If you don’t make your unique contribution to the body of Christ, it won’t*

know.

“Tragically, many people will have to endure eternity without God because they chose to live without him here on earth.” The most important point of being without God is where is this eternity spent, in the seeker friendly model of church the concept of hell is diminished or omitted. He not only avoids the subject but the words “eternal punishment”

The facts that non-Christians like and use this book seems to clarify the avoidance of these hard subjects that “traditional churches” teach. Of course it’s good that they are reading about Jesus and there is enough Scripture and teaching to begin them on pursuing more. But when was the last time you heard of a Christian book that was really preaching Christ that was well received by the public? The fact is, the book mentions Christ, but its main theme is how individuals find and live with purpose, a message everyone is willing to hear and can apply.

Unity and division

p.150 *God is very clear that we are to confront those who cause division among Christians.* In context he is addressing gossip and rightly so, but there are some things more serious than even gossip. This is not mentioned at all.

Warren correctly says *“We protect the fellowship when we honor those who serve us by leading. Pastors and elders need our prayers, encouragement, appreciation, and love.”* It is mentioned how you will have to give an account to God how they watched over you, members will also have to give an account how well they followed their leaders. This is all true the church is to be a loving place for all to gather, however how does he apply this? What does someone consider divisive? There is good division and bad division. This needs to be taken into account because of direction he is headed in his book on this subject.

On p.158 *“Christians often have legitimate, honest disagreements and differing opinions, but we can disagree without being disagreeable... God expects unity, not uniformity, and we can walk arm-in arm without seeing eye-to-eye on every issue”*

p.161 He recommends that we focus on what we have in common, not our differences. *“God wants unity not uniformity. For unity’s sake we must never let differences divide us.”*

It depends what those issues are, keeping unity and ignoring what is wrong is not God’s intent in any matter, be it between brothers or between churches.

On p.166 *“The Leaders are responsible to maintain the unity of the Church.”*

“The Bible gives pastors very specific instructions on how to deal with divisive people in the fellowship. They are to avoid arguing, gently teach the opposition while praying they’ll change, warn those who are argumentative, plead for harmony and unity, rebuke those who are disrespectful of leadership, and remove

Review 1: *The Purpose Driven Life,* by Gary Gilley

In our last paper I identified three relatively recent areas of concern in relationship to the Scriptures. First, there are the new hermeneutical approaches that either emphasize the subjective over the objective interpretation of Scripture, or allow for preunderstanding to be brought to the Word. The result is that the reader sits in judgment over the meaning of the text rather than allowing the Word to speak for itself. Next, I discussed some modern translations that have moved away from a literal philosophy to a dynamic-equivalent approach. I argued that the freer the translation the more interpretation is taking place by the translators, and this often takes place at the expense of the objective meaning of the passage.

These two concerns lead naturally to the third. If the reader is free to alter the meaning of the objective biblical text due to his own subjectivity or presuppositions; and if the translators are free to alter the objective biblical text with the notion that they are making it more readable or relevant or less offensive (this is especially true in paraphrases such as *The Message*); then why can’t a local church or Christian leader do the same in their teaching? If the sense of a passage of Scripture is up for grabs; if your understanding is as good as mine; if a text has more than one meaning and all meanings are equally justified, then why study the Bible at all? Why not think up something you want to teach and then run to the Scriptures to try to find a passage that supports your views? Of course, this has been an all too common practice for years. But now there is a new twist. When a leader wants to develop a certain thesis and ground it in the Scriptures, but no objectively understood passage can support this particular notion, what is to be done? He might force a passage out of context, simply misinterpret it and hope no one notices. Or he might allegorize or spiritualize the passage, adding a foreign meaning. But all of this has been done before. A novel approach, one that might work even better, is to get creative and find a translation or paraphrase that will back your claim – even if that translation has seriously distorted the passage. With this final methodology there is the advantage of actually using the Scriptures as the authority and a fair amount of certainty that few will ever bother to check the passage for its accuracy and/or context. All of this brings to mind Peter’s comments concerning the untaught and unstable distorting the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). The word “distort” in that verse basically means “to torture.” It is the idea of twisting Scripture to make it mean something it was not intended to mean, with the end result being our own destruction.

This last accusation seems mean-spirited at best, but the evidence is rapidly coming in that such is the latest rage. I first discovered this new fad when I visited some market-driven evangelical churches. Here were churches that, to my

knowledge, still preach the gospel and hold to most of the fundamentals of the faith. Their worship services were crowded and full of enthusiasm. Spiritual life appeared to flow as the congregations sang praise choruses. But something was missing – Bibles. In one church of over 400 I saw only a handful of people carrying Bibles. I wondered why until I sat through the service and found that Bibles were not needed. The Scriptures were never opened, never read. When the pastor preached at least he did open his Bible, but he asked no one to open theirs, nor did he expect anyone to do so. He preached a message loosely based on Scripture and throughout his sermon his main points were projected on the overhead screens along with a few Scripture verses. While the superficiality of the message and the lack of Bibles disturbed me, at least, I thought, he did preach from the Bible and at least verses were projected on the screens. But still, a church with no open Bibles created the scent of spiritual death to me. Was I just being too picky? Many who come to church today are biblically illiterate. They can barely find Genesis, let alone Ezekiel. Maybe this method had merit.

With a little research and input from others I began to realize that what I had experienced was not an unusual event. Churches all across the land are following the same methodologies. Apparently the church-growth leaders have been recommending this approach and their disciples have jumped on board—in many cases, perhaps, without serious evaluation. But it is dangerous for Christians to close their Bibles. What are Bereans to do without their Bibles? What if the leadership of the church has an agenda they want to foster and they misuse the Scriptures to promote it? Who would examine the Word and “see whether these things are so” (Acts 17:11). It appeared to me to be a dangerous trend.

The Purpose-Driven Life

About that time I picked up Rick Warren’s runaway bestseller, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Warren’s book promises to be “a guide to a 40-day spiritual journey that will enable you to discover the answers to life’s most important question: What on earth am I here for?” More than that, “By the end of this journey you will know God’s purpose for your life and will understand the big picture—how all the pieces of your life fit together” (p.9). With this kind of promo and with Warren’s notoriety, we would expect his book to sell well, and it has. Not only is it the number one best selling Christian book at the time of this writing but thousands of churches are gearing up to take his 40-day spiritual journey.

First, we should say a word or two about Warren himself and his book in general. His first book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, has greatly influenced churches throughout the world, due certainly to the fact that the church he pastors, Saddleback Church in southern California, is one of the largest churches in America, and a trendsetter among new paradigm churches. Saddleback reports

may hesitate, wondering whether you will have strength to live for God. Don't worry. God will give you what you need if you will just make the choice to live for him. The Bible says, “Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God.

Right now, God is inviting you to live for his glory by fulfilling the purposes he made you for. It's really the only way to live. Everything else is just existing. 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.'”

The short and long is - “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 your Lord and Savior. 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.”

It’s not that any of this is wrong but what is missing is the explanation of our sins and his necessity to die on the cross and more importantly, who this Jesus you are actually believing in actually is. So I wonder do people understand who they are accepting and why? 2 Cor.5:20-21 show Jesus was indeed God. God pleads through us to have others to be reconciled to God, in Christ. There is none of this emphasis or explanation in his book. I do not hear an emphasis on one’s urgent need to spiritually being born but instead on everyone’s purpose. Somehow this all reminds me of the past mistakes of Constantine when he legalized Christianity. The pagans later entered the church by baptism not by spiritually being born. If we have a membership boom what will happen?

Using the Message translation Warren quotes on p.58 John 3:36: “The Bible says, “Whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever!” This paraphrase is purposely used to soften the true impact of the Scripture that mentions wrath, punishment. The Bible really says: John 3:36 “*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*” (KJV).

The Message translation quoted eliminated the punishment for refusing to believe. This is consistently missing in Warren’s book even though Scriptures that have it or refer to it are quoted. Neither the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man is presented nor explained. Jesus is said to die for your sins, but why? This being explained in detail is avoided when the book is written to people who need to

Jesus said over and over to his disciples that he would be crucified by the gentiles, and rejected by his own people. God's ultimate purpose in Jesus' life was fulfilled as it was brought to a conclusion by those who rejected him "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:23-24). I John 3:8 "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" that is through the cross (Col.2:14-15; Heb.10:7,9).

Heb. 12:2-4 "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin."

Purpose is good and necessary but not the most important thing in our lives. Can anyone reduce the whole Christian life to any one element?

Gospel Explanations

Warren comes close to giving the gospel in his book but never fully explains who Jesus is; nor why our sin separates us from a holy God, or the resurrection. This is why so many consider this kind of teaching as gospel-lite. Because of this weakness it hinders some of the essentials for understanding the gospel. The "new paradigm" seeker friendly churches (AKA *Schullerism*) diminishes teaching on sin and concentrates more on the felt needs of the people.

On page 34 In explaining that we will all stand before God at the judgment seat, God wants us to pass the test..."*From the Bible we can surmise that God will ask us two crucial questions: First, 'What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?' 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? Jesus said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'*"

Second, 'What did you do with what I gave you?' What did you do with your life—all the gifts, talents, relationships, and resources God gave you? Did you spend them on yourself, or did you use them for the purposes God made you for?' Preparing you for these two questions is the goal of this book. The first question will determine where you spend eternity."

There are many cults who accept Jesus as the Son of God and believe they are serving him fulfilling God's purpose. It would have helped if Warren was more specific, especially seeing the broad base of people that are reading the book, again this can be interpreted to mean anything to anyone. On page 58 he says, "*It's time to settle this issue. Who are you going to live for; yourself or God? You*

that over 300,000 pastors from over 100 countries have been trained at their leadership conferences. Warren obviously has astounding influence over churches throughout the world.

There are a number of similarities between *The Purpose-Driven Church* and *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Both, for instance, offer some good sound advice, helpful biblical insight and practical suggestions—and both are riddled with errors throughout. The highly discerning reader can perhaps sift through the wheat and tares and make a good loaf of bread, but most readers, I fear, will swallow the poison along with the substance. This leads me to ask, "Who is Warren's audience?" I was thoroughly bewildered as to whom the author was trying to connect. If it is a book for the unsaved then he fails, for the gospel is never at anytime clearly presented. The closest he came was when he wrote, "Real life begins by committing yourself completely to Jesus Christ" (p. 58). In Warren's gospel no mention is made of sin, repentance or even the Cross. Real life (i.e., a life with purpose) seems to be the reward, and lack of real life (purpose) the problem. The thesis of *The Purpose-Driven Life* is stated, I believe, on page twenty-five, "We discover that meaning and purpose only when we make God the reference point of our lives." **Warren's message is this: find God and you will find yourself (purpose).** We will agree that meaning and purpose will be a reality to the Christian, but they are not the objects of the gospel itself. The gospel is that we as rebellious sinners have offended a holy God, are dead in our sins, enslaved to sin and the devil and under the wrath of God. But God, rich in mercy, sent His Son to die as our substitute to redeem us from our lost condition and give us eternal life. We receive this gift by faith as we turn to Christ, and from sin (Ephesians 2:1-10). That our life takes on new purpose at that point is absolutely true. However, we do not come to Christ because we sense a lack of purpose, but because God has opened our eyes to our need for forgiveness of sin and a relationship with Him. This is one of the fatal flaws in the market-driven church's message in which the unbeliever is called to follow Christ in order to receive any number of benefits—fulfillment, self-esteem, improved marriage, a thrilling lifestyle, or purpose, rather than freedom from sin and the gift of eternal salvation. If Warren is writing for new believers, which seems the case due to the elementary tone and substance of the whole book, he again misses the mark, for he uses many expressions and biblical references that would be unfamiliar to the novice. On the other hand, if he is writing to the mature he has wasted paper, for any semi-well-taught believer will be completely bored with this book. So, while much praise will surely be lavished on *The Purpose-Driven Life*, it escapes me who will really profit.

Be that as it may, I want to give credit where credit is due. Warren writes some good sections on a number of subjects, including worship, community, the church, truth and spiritual gifts. If some of these topics could be isolated from the

main body, they would make for helpful reading. But when interspersed with an array of erroneous ideas, distortions of Scripture and plain false teaching, they are of little value and may prove dangerous.

As I began reading this book, the problems were so numerous and obvious that I backed up and began marking these errors. I found 42 such biblical inaccuracies, plus 18 out-of-context passages of Scripture, supposedly used to prove his point, and another 9 distorted translations. (I will return to some of these in a moment). In general, there is much that is disturbing within the pages of *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Even though he denies it, Warren is obviously a disciple of pop-psychology, which is littered throughout. The wise reader is well aware that simply because someone denies they are teaching something does not mean they are not teaching it. The proof is not in the denial but in the substance. In this case Warren on the one hand repeatedly rejects psycho-babble, but on the other hand he immerses his reader in it. One example is "Most conflict is rooted in unmet needs" (p.154). You will find that idea in Rogers and Freud but try to find it in Scripture. He quoted favorably from a wide variety of dubious authors, from Aldous Huxley and Albert Schweitzer to George Bernard Shaw and St. John of the Cross (Catholic mystic). He apparently believes practicing Roman Catholics are true believers, several times mentioning monks and nuns as Christian examples, and of course the obligatory reference to Mother Teresa (twice). This unqualified acceptance and promotion of Catholics brings into question Warren's understanding of the gospel message itself. If he believes that faithful Roman Catholics, who believe in a works-righteousness, are born-again Christians, what does he believe the gospel is? Do we receive the gift of salvation by faith alone, or by faith plus certain works and sacraments? This is no minor issue, especially in a book that never spells out the plan of salvation.

Warren, however, is not totally off base, and I would not want to portray him as such. Without question he is as evangelical as many evangelicals. Nevertheless, when every third page (on average) of a book presents either an unbiblical, or at least a biblically unsupportable idea, there is not much sense bothering to read it. And that would be my suggestion—don't bother.

Torturing Scripture

What we want to do in the remainder of our examination of Warren's popular book is to point out some examples of his distortion of Scripture. This is not to say that everything he says is wrong. The irony is that often he will say something that is biblically correct, but rather than use proper scriptural support he chooses to twist the meaning of some other passage to prove his point. Our concern here is focused on his blatant twisting of the biblical text to suit his purposes. This is a dangerous trend that will lead to nothing good if not recognized, challenged and rejected by the Christian community.

holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Tim 1:9-10). "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11) "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). It is his work in us that will formulate our purpose as we walk with him by faith through our life.

Romans 8:28-29 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Everything that happens in a *believers life* is under God's sovereign control and he will work out even the bad for our benefit as we walk by faith.

Warren writes of Jesus "*Knowing he was about to be crucified, he cried out: my soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? But for this Purpose I came to this hour, glorify thy name.*"

"*Jesus stood at a fork in the road. Would he fulfill his Purpose and bring glory to God or would he shrink back and live a comfortable, Self-centered life? You face the same choice. Will you, live for your own goals, and pleasure, or will you live the rest of your life for God's glory, knowing that he has promised eternal rewards*" (p.57)

This is one of the more absurd interpretations of Scripture bent on making application to the reader and ignoring the Bible's context. Jesus never lived a comfortable life and it would have been sin to even think this way; much less do it. Could the Son of God ever live a self-centered life? No. As sinners we do not have the same choice. No one is going to be persecuted, rejected or crucified for mankind's sin like Jesus. Would Jesus tell others to pick up the cross in their lives and then have the option to refuse to go to the cross himself knowing this was the very purpose He became man? (Mt.16:24-25; Lk.14:27-29). Doesn't this go against a Purpose Driven life?

The Bible explains to us that Jesus knew his purpose from the beginning. Mark 1:37-38 "When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."

So we find Jesus' main purpose was to preach, and it is not hard to zero in on what he preached...

Luke 4:43 but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent."

natural abilities are often man's hindrances to God. God uses us beyond our capabilities that are inherent to the natural man.

Warren further says, "*God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well.*" (Rom. 12:6 New Living Translation) and Warren makes the assumption "*Since your natural abilities are from God, they are just as important and as spiritual as your spiritual gifts. The only difference is that you were given them at birth*" p.242

In Rom 12:6 NKJV Paul is speaking about the body of Christ and says "*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.*" Clearly Paul is not talking about natural but spiritual gifts. This is a huge flaw in his interpretation and application. He uses the wrong Scripture, though it sounds right in the New Living Translation. More importantly Warren confuses natural abilities with spiritual gifts from God to fulfill his purposes in us. Though our abilities can be used to give God glory it does not affirm that our natural abilities are as important as our spiritual ones, nor do they *always* determine how the Lord will use us for His purposes. Just because you are a good musician does not mean one is called to minister in music. Should every talented musician be a worship leader? Just because one is a good speaker does not mean they are called to be a preacher. Where is God's call on someone's life? I'm not saying God cannot develop people with natural talents and enhance them, what I'm saying is God gives spiritual gifts enabling us far beyond our natural abilities and graces us to have abilities in a capacity we never had before. There is a difference between what is natural and what is a gift of grace from God.

What Warren is proposing is God chose "*the exact time of your birth and death*" "*where you'd be born and where you'd live*" (p.23) "*determined the natural talents you would possess*, and everything else, all the details along the way you choose. The end result of all this is that we can find our purpose by assessing our natural abilities and God approves. According to Warren God is not really involved in our choices but only his purpose. Yet these abilities gives us choices that bring us to our purpose. The Bible teaches we are to pray over the choices we make so that we are following God's lead and not our own, "not to lean on our own understanding." How do you know the direction you are being led is to fulfill God's purposes when there is this type of misunderstanding on how we get there!

Jesus is to be Lord of all the believer's life, in our choosing our mate, our job etc. not just our purpose. The theme of this book is to discover the purpose of God, but it misses the main element — the Lordship of Jesus Christ; over the daily decisions you make in what you do, not just how you do it.

Let's look at what the Bible specifically says concerning our purpose. God has mapped out his purpose for us before we even existed, and it is only found when we are in Christ through the new birth. "Who has saved us and called us with a

Matthew 16:25

As stated above, it is not unusual for Warren to make good statements, such as his rejection of pop-psychology, then turn around and by his misuse of Scripture promote the very thing he just condemned. The reader is then faced with two problems: what does Warren really believe about this subject and, more importantly, why has he chosen to either distort the Word of God directly or through his use of faulty translations? For example, in the midst of his denial of pop-psychology (p. 19) he quotes *The Message* translation of Matthew 16:25 – *Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self* (emphasis mine throughout). *The Message* has altered the meaning of Jesus' words into a means by which a person finds himself, a fad having roots back to the 1960s but not to the Bible. Compare the NASB rendering: "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it." Jesus is speaking of eternal life (v. 26 makes this clear), not the modern day concept of "finding yourself." There is a bit of bait-and-switch going on in many of these quotes. Warren is attempting to tap into the current felt-needs making the rounds—in this case finding ourselves and/or finding our purpose in life. He is then presenting the Christian life as a means of meeting that felt-need. It is true that the Lord will give you purpose in life, but that purpose will be to live for and follow Christ. It is not a promise that we will find ourselves (if you ever find yourself you are going to be disappointed anyway) but that we will find true life in Christ. What often happens is subtle: Warren turns these passages, and the Christian life, from being Christ-centered to being centered on the human self, the individual. The focus now becomes us rather than Christ.

Romans 12:3

The thesis of the book is found on page 25, where Warren says, "We discover that meaning and purpose only when we make God the reference point of our lives. *The Message* paraphrase of Romans 12:3 says, *The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us.*" *The Message* has subtly changed the meaning of the text. To see how, we turn to a good translation. The NASB reads, *For by the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.* The thrust of the verse is the problem of pride, in the context of spiritual gifts (see verses 4-8). Apparently, some in the church body were arrogant about their spiritual gifts, leading to anger, bitterness and vengeance (see verses 9-21). Paul told them not to think so highly of themselves but to have sound judgment in reference to their giftedness. The result would be the proper

functioning of the body. The passage is not giving a formula for how to understand ourselves. *The Message* abuses the true meaning of the text and yet Warren quotes it to support his thesis.

In both of these examples Warren's use of Scripture is just close enough to be confusing, but neither of these passages are being used as they were meant to be. This is not a minor issue. Once we believe we have the right to change the meaning of God's Word to suit our agenda, there is no limit as to how far the misrepresentation of God's truth can go. This is exactly how virtually every cult and heresy is started. While I am not accusing Warren of this level of deception, it should greatly concern us to see him adopting the same attitude toward the Scriptures. And it should disturb us even more to discover that so few Christians care.

1 Corinthians 2:7

In chapter one, Warren makes several statements with which I would agree. He writes that the Bible "explains what no self-help or philosophy book could know" (p. 20). He then quotes 1 Corinthians 2:7 from *The Message* paraphrase as support: *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* (emphasis mine throughout). Let's first compare this to a good translation. The NASB reads, *but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory*. Just a quick reading reveals that *The Message's* paraphrase has no real connection with the meaning Paul was intending. Paul was writing of the wisdom of God, which is unlike the world's in several ways. First, it is a mystery, which in Scripture speaks of something hidden in the past and unknowable without revelation from God (see Ephesians 3:3-5). God's wisdom is still hidden from the people of the world (vv. 6, 8), but revealed to God's people through the Holy Spirit in the New Testament Scriptures. God had determined this wisdom before time began but has now worked it out in the present age. All of this was for *our glory*. In the context of the passage this refers to the eternal salvation of God's people as a result of the crucifixion of Christ (see v. 8). *Our glory* is biblical language referring to the final goal of salvation which is to share in the glory of the Lord Himself (v. 8b). Now, let's back up to Warren and his use of *The Message*. The wisdom of God that has been revealed through the apostle Paul is not that God has determined "the way to bring out His best in us," but that the Lord has determined the way to bring us to eternal glory. It is not about purpose in life, but about the truth of salvation. It is not that Warren's original statement is wrong. He could have actually found passages of Scripture to support his view. The problem is that he is misusing Scripture, in rather imaginative fashion, to prove his position. Once we head down this slippery slope it will prove very difficult to change courses.

uniqueness of your personality" he "planned where you'd be born and where you'd live for his purpose"(p.23).

Wouldn't the things we like and do and also where we live still fall under the category of "our choice"?

At the same time he says these are the things that form you for your purpose. If these very things are all part of your purpose then we have a contradiction in his premise. If we choose all these things, not knowing God or being led by God, how do these things that our life revolves around become part of God's purpose, a purpose that can only be found in Christ (Eph.2:10)?

Warren later says "*God is more concerned about your character than anything else. We worry when God is silent on specific issues such as "what career should I choose?" He then says there are many careers that could be God's will for your life. What God cares about most is whatever you do, you do in a Christlike manner"* (p.177)

God does not only care that we do things in a Christlike manner. Is God silent? Before we are saved and following his direction, but certainly not afterwards. This all seems confusing on how we choose whatever we want to and this forms us for God's purposes. How can multiple choices we choose from be God's will; all being acceptable to him if you choose it? The way you choose or not choose to use these abilities is all up to you. His concept of this is so broad and open as he leaves it in our hands. Generally he is right and specifically he is wrong.

On p. 243: "*To discover God's will for your life, you should seriously examine what you are good at doing and what you are not good at doing. "God will never ask you to dedicate your life to a task you have no talent for. On the other hand, the abilities you do have are a strong indication of what God wants you to do with your life. They are clues to knowing God's will for you." "God doesn't waste abilities; he matches our calling and capabilities."*

This is how Warren explains how we know what God wants us to do, by what we are good at. His conclusion is erroneous. God can use what someone has learned and he can also take people beyond anything they learned. God will often ask people to do what they are not trained for. God chose Moses to speak to Pharaoh despite his speech impediment (Exod.4:10). David was chosen to be king with no training in this matter except his caring for sheep. Neither had any training or prior experience in these matters. God will often take people beyond their natural abilities so he is glorified. This sounds like a humanistic view on finding your calling. God can change the direction of ones life as well as use them in their former training. Warren writes that God wants to be intimately and personally involved with each of us but then he leaves the details to us. God raises up to the highest those who are the lowest. 1 Cor. 1:27 "God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty." Man's strengths and

or anything.

This Scripture in a literal translation (NKJ) makes it clear: Phil. 3:12-14 “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” In Christ Jesus, not just a goal we have. Besides God used Paul in the message he preached and explained to win people to Christ. It was not Paul’s strength but God’s.

p.30 ‘Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope. ... The greatest tragedy is not death, but life without purpose” True, without God life has no purpose, however I have to disagree with his statement The greatest tragedy is not death and the answer should be obvious: dying without Jesus Christ is the greatest tragedy, for without him you have no purpose, guidance, direction, mercy, forgiveness or life. If you die without Christ, that is by far the worst thing to happen. You can live a life filled with a good purpose and not have God. You can live your life with a wrong purpose. Many people of other religions believe in God and believe they are living God’s purpose. The concept of purpose is often widely presented in the book and can be interpreted by anyone’s own predilection.

The theme of the book is to help someone find God’s purpose in their life. I want to take this portion of the article to concentrate on what Warren says that appears to be confusing. While he presents pursuing your purpose in God which many people may never have considered, his conclusions of life before Christ and after that form you for your purpose are unclear.

In the beginning of the book he explains our purpose on earth. Warren rightly states “*its not about you*” and that “*we are to begin with God.*” We ask self centered questions like “*What do I want to be? What should I do with my life? What are my goals, my ambitions, my dreams and my future?*” *But focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life’s purpose*” (p.17)

Quoting Eph.1:11 Warren comments on the verse giving three insights, number 2. is “*God was thinking of you long before you ever thought about him. His purpose to your life predates your conception. He planned it before you existed, without your input! You may choose your career, your spouse, your hobbies, and many other parts of your life, but you don't get to choose your purpose*”(p.21).

Warren is saying God does not necessarily have a part in what we do after birth, who we marry, what job we train for or take; yet these things we choose are from our self centeredness and these very things become part of God’s purpose for us later.

Yet he says, “*He also determined the natural talents you would possess and the*

Ephesians 1:11

A similar type of thing happens in the very next paragraph of the book. Warren makes a biblically defensible statement, “You must build your life on eternal truths, not pop psychology, success-motivation, or inspirational stories.” Excellent! But rather than backing this truth with proper Scripture, he decides to use a distorted paraphrase of Ephesians 1:11 found in *The Message* once again. It reads, *It’s in Christ that we **find out who we are and what we are living for.** Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eyes on us, **had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.*** Warren says that this quote gives us three insights into our purpose, the first of which is, “You discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ.”

In analyzing these comments we begin with a literal translation of the verse: *Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will* (NASB). This verse says nothing about **discovering** our purpose through a relationship with Christ. It speaks about our position in Christ – our eternal inheritance in Him. This verse tells us that we have been made the heirs of God; through no merit of our own we were given the right to all the blessings of salvation, both now and in eternity. It speaks of being “predestined according to His purpose,” not finding our purpose or identity.”

Jeremiah 29:11

A more common form of misuse of Scripture is taking passages out of context. Warren gives this exaggerated promise, “If you have felt hopeless, hold on! Wonderful changes are going to happen in your life as you begin to live it on purpose,” followed up with this quote from Jeremiah 29:11, *I know what I am planning for you.... “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future”* (p. 31). Unfortunately, this is a promise to Israel concerning their future, not a general promise for all people (even Christians) at all times. Just a few chapters later the promise is reversed, *Behold, I am watching over them for harm and not for good...* (44:27). And in Lamentations 3:38 the same prophet writes, *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?* It is strange how people love to claim Jeremiah 29:11 and ignore passages such as these last two. I have yet to find anyone who has claimed Jeremiah 44:27 as their life’s verse.

Genesis 6:8

Chapter nine is devoted to the kind of person who makes God smile and is rooted in this *Living Bible* paraphrase of Genesis 6:8, *Noah was a pleasure to the*

Lord. The *New King James* translates this verse, *Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*. Some other literal versions translate “grace” as “favor” and the Hebrew word can have that meaning. But when used of God, the word always means unmerited favor or grace. When Noah found grace, he was the recipient of undeserved Divine favor. He was not spared the flood because of his righteousness, but because of God’s grace. By changing the word from “grace” to “pleasure,” the *Living Bible* has turned the true meaning of the passage on its head. Now Noah is spared due to his goodness – he is the kind of guy that makes God smile – and you can be such a person too. But now grace is no longer grace; it has been transformed into a work that pleases God. This is not a minor error; it strikes at the root of the Christian faith. Ironically, Genesis 6:9, which tells us that *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time, and Noah walked with God*, could have been used to support Warren’s chapter, so keep in mind our concern. We are not accusing Warren of being wrong in everything he is saying, but we are accusing him of distorting Scripture. He is undermining the Word of God by changing its meaning to suit his purposes. In this case the marvelous doctrine of grace takes the hit.

Job 22:21

Warren strains Scripture to interesting limits by using none other than Eliphaz as his spokesman. “The Bible is crystal clear about how you benefit when you fully surrender your life to God. First you experience peace” (p. 82). The proof-text is Job 22:21, *Stop quarreling with God! If you agree with him, you will have peace at last, and things will go well for you*. If you recall, this speech from Job’s friend is a promotion of works-righteousness which, along with Eliphaz’s whole theology of living, will be condemned by God later in the book. To use it as a means of finding peace with God is an extremely careless use of Scripture.

Romans 6:17

In the same paragraph Warren also promises freedom if we surrender to God. He uses *The Message’s* rendering of Romans 6:17: *Offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits.... [his] commands set you free to live openly in freedom!* It is true that we have been set free in Christ, but what kind of freedom is Paul offering? The NASB translates this verse: *But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed. Verse eighteen continues, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness*. Warren does not mention that the freedom promised in Scripture is from sin, and that the believer becomes immediately the slave of another – righteousness. Nor is there any mention that this slavery transferal is **not** predicated upon a subsequent surrender on the part of the Christian, but rather is actually the definition of a

controlling God with prayer. The book has points one can say amen to and then right after their can be a pause, wondering, “what is this?”

Though this book is full of helpful ideas it is also weak in certain Biblical Foundations. There are contradictions within the book itself and the Bible. The way Warren advocates certain scriptures is weak as he tries to attach them to the same basic premise he is presenting throughout his book, even when they do not fit. You can’t use Scriptures and words accurately from the Bible when you force them to fit this theme.

Examples: 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) Mt.16:25 from the Message Bible). This leans toward a different meaning even a mystical meaning that is popular today of “finding yourself.”

NKJ Matt 16:25 “*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*” This is hardly the same meaning of finding ones life is to find your true self. It is these types of free interpretations used in the paraphrases that show us Bible translations do matter if one wants to get to the accurate meaning of a verse. Yet Warren opts to use the paraphrases over the literal word translations.

“*It explains what no self-help or philosophy book could know. The Bible says, “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”* 1 Cor.2:7 from the Message Bible

NKJ 1 Cor. 2:7 “*But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.*” Paul is talking about God’s wisdom being revealed by the Scripture, this scripture has nothing to do with bringing the best in us, as if his wisdom is in us already.

Purpose Driven

While there are numerous good portions said on this subject there are other portions that are incorrect and muddled.

“*There is nothing quite as potent as a focused life, one lived on purpose. The men and women who have made the greatest difference in history were the most focused. For instance, the apostle Paul almost single-handedly spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. His secret was a focused life. He said, “I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead”* (p.32)

If one looks at the Scripture carefully it was what Paul was focused on, not that he was looking forward forgetting the past, not just that he had a goal but what that goal was. This is missing in his explanation and is often missing in the equation of his book. He makes “purpose” a generic idea at times; it can be applied to anyone

hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture:”

This promotes the idea that one can do whatever they want after they are saved and be loved by God. Yet God says specifically that we are not “even to eat with such a person”(1 Cor 5:11), “put away from yourselves the evil person.”(1 Cor 5:13).

1 Cor. 6:9-10 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” Rev. 21:8 “These people will “have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone”

Because of the use of the paraphrase there are many scriptures taken out of their context or softened, and formed to fit into the overall theme of his book. This is poor scholarship with the translations. His application may often be correct on much of what he says on Christian living but he at times uses the wrong passage to get his point across. I find Warren has a talent to communicate his message of application of Scripture but not always Scripture itself. The truth is eclipsed with the overuse of paraphrases and at times the Scripture is not communicated well, especially for non or new believers. There are many errors but to recognize them requires tedious work, most do not have the patience to look up each Scripture quoted in the Bible, read them in entirety in the context that they are written and look to a literal translation.

Overall I find it hard to describe this book. There are portions I really liked and I know would be helpful and then there were other portions that were a real concern, appearing detrimental. He had good things to say and it’s hard to disagree with many of his practical points. But there are some points and explanations that one must disagree with if they are to side with the Bible.

Some of his insights are very practical and clear common-sense ideas seen throughout the book. Warren writes some very good practical comments: we are not to focus on self; you were born for God’s purposes. “*Only the creator or the owner's manual could reveal its purpose.*” “*The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment* (p.17) “*What ultimately matters is not what others say of you life but what God says*” (p.33) “*If worship is mindless, it is meaningless*” (p.103). “*You exist for God’s purposes, that he has not provided heaven on earth when he’s planned the real thing in eternity,*” *refined by trials people can see Jesus in you* (p.197). “*The bible must become the authoritative standard for my life*” (p.186). Warren puts down seeking experiences and affirms knowing God by his word. He does mention the cross (p.78) being born again (p.118) and God as trinity, however these are spread throughout the book and not concentrated on when mentioned. He speaks against earthly prosperity and

Christian. When people come to Christ for salvation, their master is changed. They no longer owe any allegiance to sin for they have become the slave of God. Whether they live in fidelity to this new Master is another matter, but ownership has changed hands. This is the argument of Romans six, which is ignored by Warren, who forces it to say what God never intended.

Hebrews 12:1

Warren uses *The Living Bible* paraphrase of Hebrews 12:1 to teach that God has assigned certain boundaries to each believer. “When we try to overextend our ministry reach beyond what God shaped us for, we experience stress. Just as each runner in a race is given a different lane to run in, we must individually; *run with patience the particular race that God has set before us* (p. 253). But this verse simply reads, *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us* (NASB), and is speaking of the Christian race of faith in general. This verse cannot be pressed to teach that each Christian has a **particular** race to run – it is simply not the context or meaning of the passage.

Philippians 4:7

We are told that “worry is the warning light that God has been shoved to the sideline. The moment you put him back at the center, you will have peace again” (p. 314). He then quotes *The Message’s* translation of Philippians 4:7, *A sense of God’s wholeness...will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.* While there may be truth in what Warren says, a proper translation of this verse will not teach what he says it does: *And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus* (NASB). Let’s break it down a bit. “A sense of God’s wholeness,” whatever that means (I have no clue), is not the same thing as the peace of God. The last sentence found in *The Message* is foreign to the passage. The peace of God guarding our hearts and minds cannot be contorted to mean that something wonderful happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. Warren is developing his propositions upon faulty paraphrases of Scripture and the average reader is none the wiser. Placing God back at the center of your life may indeed result in peace, but, and this is the important thing, Philippians 4:7 does not say so. To make Scripture say what it does not say is manipulation, not exegesis.

Of course we could go on, but hopefully you get the point. Other notable examples are:

Page 24-- James 1:18

Pages 25, 30 – Isaiah 49:4

Page 104 – I Corinthians 14:16-17

Page 105 – Romans 12:1,2
 Page 109 – Job 23: 8-10
 Page 110 – Job 7:11
 Page 219 – II Corinthians 3:18
 Page 223 – Habakkuk 2:3
 Page 232 – Mark 8:35
 Pages 272-273 – I Corinthians 1:27
 Pages 273 – II Corinthians 12:9-10

Summary

So, what difference does it make? What if Warren is misrepresenting Scripture over 40 times as well as peppering his book with extra-biblical psychological theories and other earthly pieces of wisdom, disguised as biblical principles? Overall he says many good things, and even in the sections where Scripture is abused he often says the right thing but uses wrong Scripture to support it. What's the big deal? The big deal is this: once we sign off on this kind of Christian teaching and torturing of Scripture, the sky is the limit. It should not go without notice that every cult claims to believe in the Bible. The uniqueness of cults is that they twist the interpretation of Scripture to say what they want it to say, and failing that they write their own translations to support their heresies (e.g. Jehovah Witnesses' *New World Bible*). Should we endorse these same methodologies when evangelicals promote them? Or should we refute those who openly sanction such approaches to Scripture? Remember we are not discussing different opinions on interpretations of certain passages. That too cannot be ignored. But of a more serious nature is this careless and wanton mishandling of Scripture that we have been discussing. To purposely ignore the proper translation of a passage and insert one that has no basis in the original languages in order to undergird a particular point of view is about the most dangerous thing that I can imagine. The only thing more concerning would be to discover large segments of the evangelical community being incapable of discerning this kind of problem – and/or not caring.

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for thought translation in paraphrases. Before you apply Scripture you need to understand it correctly. The principle is to seek its correct meaning then give it application. A paraphrase is more like a loose commentary and many are not nearly accurate to the literal word of God.

To understand the Message translations flaws and weaknesses compare these Scriptures and see how explaining statements of Christ and Christian living are being changed.

NKJV John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.”

The Message: John 10:30 I and the Father are one heart and mind.”

NKJV John 14:28”...The Father is greater than I.”

The Message: “The Father is the goal and purpose of my life.”

The Message Rom. 8:9 “But God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourselves than of him.”

NKJ Rom. 8:9 “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

The word for flesh is *sarx* in Greek, the very point Paul is writing about is the new nature vs. the old, to check that you possess the Holy Spirit. The Message translation completely distorts the meaning. Neither the Spirit nor the flesh is mentioned in the *Message*.

NKJV Romans 1:26-27: “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.”

The Message: “Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either - women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men - all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it - emptied of God and love, Godless and loveless wretches.”

He inserts the word no love and loveless changing the meaning of sexual immorality the lack of love, *not lust driving them to cross the human barriers of same sex partners becomes the sin*,

KJV Romans 8:35-37: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”

The Message: “Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not

This is wrong, the Bible never implies this; Noah's life was not "transformed by 40 days of rain." His "purpose" was to preach righteousness for 120 years while he built the boat as a means to escape the coming judgment. *"The Spies were transformed by 40 days in the Promised Land"*

The number 40 is significant but Warren attributes to it something the Bible often does not. 40 is often the number of testing or judgment. Num. 14: they came back after searching the land for 40 days, were fearful started murmurings, were killed with plagues. *Not a good thing.* In fact, because of the spies (except Caleb) lack of faith Israel stayed in the wilderness for 40 years and failed, (Num.14:34-38) only two men made it into the promised land.

He mentions David - 1 Sam. 17; Elijah - 1 King 19; Ninevah—*Jonah 3 The entire city was transformed when God gave the people 40 days to change.*

You mean *repent*, and It did not take Jonah 40 days. Also *"Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness."* This is wrong: He was led into the wilderness to be tempted (Mt.4:1; Mk. 1:13) Jesus was filled with the Spirit before he went into the wilderness and returned the same way (Lk.4:1,14). *"The disciples were transformed by forty days with Jesus after His resurrection."* The Bible does not say this, it actually happened on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given.

It appears that the book is written mostly to non-believers where Warren states p.20 *"1. You discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you don't have such a relationship, I will later explain how to begin one."*

As Warren's audience seems to be for new believers, much of what he says is redundant for those who are mature and know Scripture. But then I ran into another problem. The Purpose-Driven Life, cites over 1,000 verses of Scripture with an excessive use of paraphrases, and some that are extremely liberal in their writings. New Living Translation, the Message (in the majority, quoted over 90 times in his book), Living Bible, New Century Version, and the NIV which is accepted as a good paraphrase (and probably superior to the other paraphrases) in fact the literal translations of the KJV, NKJV and NASB were rarely used. While the intent may be to be helpful in bringing the meaning to our modern culture, many times they can hinder the meaning. Out of hundreds of verses quoted you can count the literal translations used on 2 hands, near one percent.

P.104 Warren states *"This is why I encourage you to read Scripture in different translations and paraphrases."*

It would be more advantageous to study the original words of Greek and Hebrew in a Concordance, Dictionary or Interlinear? We should be pursuing to move closer to the original texts meaning, rather than further away by using a thought

Review 2: *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Let Us Reason Ministry

Well known men have endorsed the Purpose Driven Life book; Bruce Wilkinson, Lee Strobel, Max Lucado, Billy and Franklin Graham and many others. Churches love its message and are willing to pour everything they have into doing it.

Like Tommy Tenney who coined the phrase "God chasers" Warren has coined his phrase "Purpose-Driven" and is using it to its utmost. There is Purpose-Driven attached to just about everything. Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry; Purpose-Driven children's Ministry; Purpose-Driven worship conference; Meditations on the Purposing Driven Life; Daily Inspiration for the Purpose Driven Life, etc. (Tenney also likes his book and lists Warren as a "top influencer.")

While beginning to read this book and hearing both the pros and cons to it before reading it, I was intrigued how it would start off and how it would finish, not just what was squeezed in between the covers. I read it without a bias hoping for the best; and it's not all bad, but on the other hand it's not all good. There are some problems that we cannot afford to ignore. I describe it like a scale with all the good things said on one side and instead of putting one or two large weights representing the things wrong on the other side, its numerous small marbles put on one by one until the scale tips. You can ignore some of the marbles but not all of them; you have to deal with the sheer weight of things that are wrong in his model of Church and the book

Warren begins the book by saying this is 40 day spiritual journey. An interesting number to pick to represent the time to read his book; one is to read a chapter a day for the next 40 days. I have heard that some have gone through it twice or more. I have also heard of church's discontinuing Bible study to go through this book.

He has one sign a covenant with a partner and with HIM in the beginning to commit the next 40 days of their life to discovering God's purpose in their life, asking the signers not to miss a single day of reading it. "By the end of the journey you will know God's purpose for your life and will understand the big picture-how all the pieces of your life fit together" (p.9)

I already had a problem with someone squeezing this life change into the time limit of the book, especially if someone is a new Christian or a not a believer yet. By doing this we impose time limits on how God wants to work with us as individuals. Not everyone has the same learning curve, nor is God on the same time schedule with us all. Can we expect him to reveal what he will do with our lives before he has shaped us in our life? I wish it were true that we can find our purpose within 40 days, but it simply is not true. God has been changing lives by

HIS WORD for thousands of years on his timetable. So the promise of his book to change your life in 40 days is flawed.

God's true purpose can take time and expecting it to be revealed in 40 days is certainly putting God on man's schedule. It took Moses 40 years out in the desert to find his purpose. It took Paul 3 years being personally taught by the Lord in the desert before he was fit for ministry. How can we think that we can do in 40 days what is needed, without going through our trials and tests that forge us for our purpose we are to have in God. What about the principle of new believers being grounded in the faith, knowing the core doctrines first before they find their purpose? God first prepares us for the ministry and the ministry for us. David served as shepherd to the sheep before he was prepared to be king of Israel, and even that took many years to transpire.

One can learn God's general will for all the believers by reading the New Testament through, which would take less than 40 days. But to tell people they will know their purpose in life in 40 days by reading this book is hardly reasonable.

Can we do the work of God correctly without understanding the word of God first? Does God prepare people for their purpose and ministry using the same method? Everyone God used always had a time of preparation, sometimes as long as the purpose God used them for.

Warren states on p.11 "*Real spiritual growth is never an isolated, individualistic pursuit. Maturity is produced through relationships and community.*" Noah, Joseph, John the Baptist, Paul and many others were all individualistic in their training so to say *never* is not an accurate statement. This is the beginning of his premise of community in the church as necessary for finding purpose in ones life.

"God blesses churches that are unified. At Saddleback every Church member signs a covenant that includes a promise to protect the unity of our fellowship. As a result, the church has never had conflict that split the fellowship. Just as important, because it is a loving, unified fellowship, a lot of people want to be a part of it!" (p.167)

I hear people sign covenants in how and what they are going to do service in the church and how much they commit to tithe. This is how this book is being interpreted and used by some. Covenant participation was employed by the Congregationalist church in early America as a reaction to the Catholic priesthood. In this covenantal agreement every believer was to do their share and participate in church activities. This can be a good thing if not brought to the extreme. As the Scripture teaches we are all part of the priesthood and gifted to serve.

Who can argue with seeing more participation? However "Saddleback practices church discipline — removing hundreds of members for non-participation or for

unrepented sin." [Christianity] CT article: Rick Warren may be America's most influential pastor Item 1237, Posted: Thu., Nov. 21 2002 Weblogged by [ReligionNewsBlog.com](http://www.religionnewsblog.com) <http://www.religionnewsblog.com>)

Warren says in his book on p.132 "The only Christians not members of a local fellowship were those under Church discipline...removed from the fellowship because of gross public sin." So why is he also removing hundreds of members of his church for not covenanting in participation. Is this a good thing, what would be the standard like this for someone being active or not. This seems to imply a forced participation. This certainly brings this practice to the extreme. People often need time to see where they fit in and it is God's Spirit that will prompt them to participate not mans programs.

Saddleback members are required to sign a membership covenant and join a small group in which they study good Christian habits necessary for growth such as having a daily quiet time.

The Scripture Mt. 5:33-37 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'" But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;" nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." *Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.*

"But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

The problem I see is when someone has a disagreement of what is taking place or is led by the Lord to go somewhere else or do something else, they have to break the covenant they signed.

Once you've signed a church *membership/service covenant* you're committed to wherever it takes you, if the church changes direction (which may not always be a good one) you are obligated to also. Otherwise you are causing conflict that splits the fellowship. This is why Jesus commands us in Matthew 5:33-34 not to make **oaths**. Do we need to sign on the dotted line to prove or commitment or our faithfulness? The New Testament does not impose any obligation for agreements like this nor promote it. Where is this found in the Bible? Our word is to be yea or no, we are to be people of our word.

Warren tries to find a connection with 40 days and begins his premise on p.9 "*Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days.*"

I have no idea how he can actually say this even by finding the number 40. Lets look at what he uses.

P.10 "*Noah's life was transformed by 40 days of rain.*"