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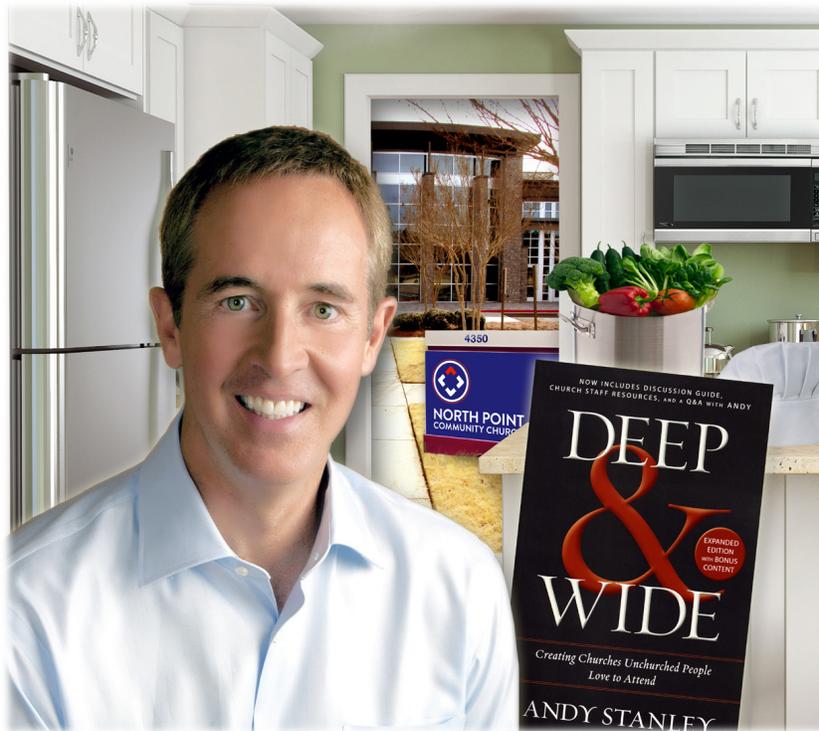
EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

Does Doctrine Matter Anymore? Andy Stanley Cooks Up a “Secret Sauce” for Building a Great Church

by Gary E. Gilley

A recent newspaper article described the phenomenal membership growth of three large churches.

When asked what sparked such growth, the pastor of one of the churches said, “Understanding budgets and balance sheets is as important as understanding church doctrine.” Another pastor said, “Church members are more interested in relational issues than doctrine. People care less about questions pertaining to what a church’s doctrine is and more about the question, ‘Does this church care for me?’”¹



evident by what these pastors said, the average Christian today does not care much about theology but rather seeks a community that cares for them, a particular style of music, an intimate experience, a service project to plug into, or any number of things.

For the most part, people are not choosing to become a member of a church on the basis of what it teaches. To be sure, certain managerial and practical elements are important to the operation of a local church. And the local

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We should not minimize the importance of fiscal responsibility, organizational needs, and loving community, but not long ago Christians sought out churches that reflected what they believed the Bible taught. As is

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Editorials

IT JUST KEEPS GETTING STRANGER AND STRANGER

There is a growing sentiment among some in historically evangelical churches that Christians should study *The Book of Enoch* along with their Bibles. Glowing testimonials regarding the book's supposed insights have grown hard to ignore. The History Channel's series *Banned from the Bible* adds to the book's mystique and allure, saying, "With its lush descriptions of heavenly powers and the horrors that await evildoers — even angels, Enoch was one of the most popular books among the early Christians."

Dr. James VanderKam, from Notre Dame University, stated on the History Channel program that, "We know that some early Christians considered the writings of Enoch to be authoritative, to contain actual revelation from God. So because some people thought that — some influential people thought that — the book was used as you would use other books of the Bible."

It's a shame that these contemporary scholars do not bestow upon Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul this same kind of endorsement and enthusiasm. The proclaimed benefits and blessings of *The Book of Enoch* sound on the surface like those we get from studying God's Word. And so the question arises whether this extrabiblical book is worth studying.

Many cults and modern religious movements insist on elevating books and revelations to the level of Scripture. This puts into question the teaching of a closed canon or a completed Bible containing all that we need for life and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Jude 3; John 17:17).

One thing is absolutely certain about this book. The *Enoch of The Book of Enoch* has absolutely nothing to do with Enoch, Son of Jerad in Genesis 5:18-22 and Hebrews 11:5. The best that anyone can tell is it cannot be dated earlier than Herod the Great (first century B.C.). There is nothing whatsoever that places it earlier. Furthermore, after A.D. 800 *The Book of Enoch* disappeared for almost 1000 years.

The Book of Enoch, though strange, is not really new, but rather newly found by some. A very small piece of it is quoted in the New Testament book of Jude (verses 14-15). Some of the early Church Fathers referred to it, though one thing is certain: *it was neither considered part of the Bible nor seen as inspired or canonical.*

In the 1700s, scholars learned that the Abyssinian Church had an Ethiopian copy of *The Book of Enoch*. Approximately 50 years later, parts from the newly found Ethiopian copy were translated into English. This "long-lost book" was now available to English-speaking people. It was not until 1853 that a German translation — with deletions and corrections — was made.

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PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

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POPE CALLS FOR REPENTANCE OF ECOLOGICAL SIN

Roman Catholics who do not recycle or car-pool may now have to spend additional time in the confessional booth. This is because Pope Francis wants Catholics to have an “ecological conversion” encouraging them to “implore God’s mercy for those sins against creation that we have not hitherto acknowledged and confessed.” The pontiff’s decree came during his message “for the celebration of World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation” on Sept. 1.

The pope appealed to church members to publicly repent of their “sins against creation” and to employ “concrete ways of thinking and acting that are more respectful of creation.” He outlined for Catholics the conduct that they should adopt, which included “avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.”

According to a report in the online news source *Lifesite*, “The papal message takes as fact questionable climate change extremism as did his encyclical *Laudato Si* released in June 2015. In the message released today, Francis speaks of ‘devastation of the environment’ and man-made ‘global warming’ and ‘climate change.’”

Pope Francis has established himself as a leading advocate on the topic of global warming. Critics charge that his theological values have become severely distorted, especially in view of his repeated comments expressing acceptance of and a tolerant stance toward homosexuals within the church. Many Catholics view their leader as more political than theological.

—MKG

MODERN TECHNOLOGY SHOWS HEBREW BIBLE UNCHANGED

A Bible scroll dating from the first century has been combined with 21st century computer science and the result is, as *The Times of Israel* headline declared, “3D tech proves Hebrew Bible ‘unchanged for 2000 years.’”

An ancient charred scroll, heretofore thought too fragile to unwrap and read, has undergone a “virtual unwrapping” by modern-day researchers. The artifact, first discovered in 1970, was originally destroyed in an ancient fire at the synagogue at Ein Gedi, a community near the Dead Sea in Israel.

According to the Israeli news source, the team of imaging technologists “painstakingly captured the three-dimensional shape of the scroll’s layers, using a digital triangulated surface mesh to make a virtual rendering of the parts they suspected contained text. They then searched for pixels that could signify ink made with a dense material like iron or lead. The researchers then used computer modeling to virtually flatten the scroll, to be able to read a few columns of text inside.”

The result was that not only was text seen but it was also “readable,” and that the “text discovered in the charred Ein Gedi scroll is ‘100 percent identical’ to the version of the Book of Leviticus that has been in use for centuries,” *The Times of Israel* report stated. Emmanuel Tov, a Dead Sea Scroll scholar from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who took part in the project, said, “This is quite amazing for us. In 2,000 years, this text has not changed.”

Researchers indicated that this was an inaugural event, being the first time an ancient scroll was readable without having to physically open it.

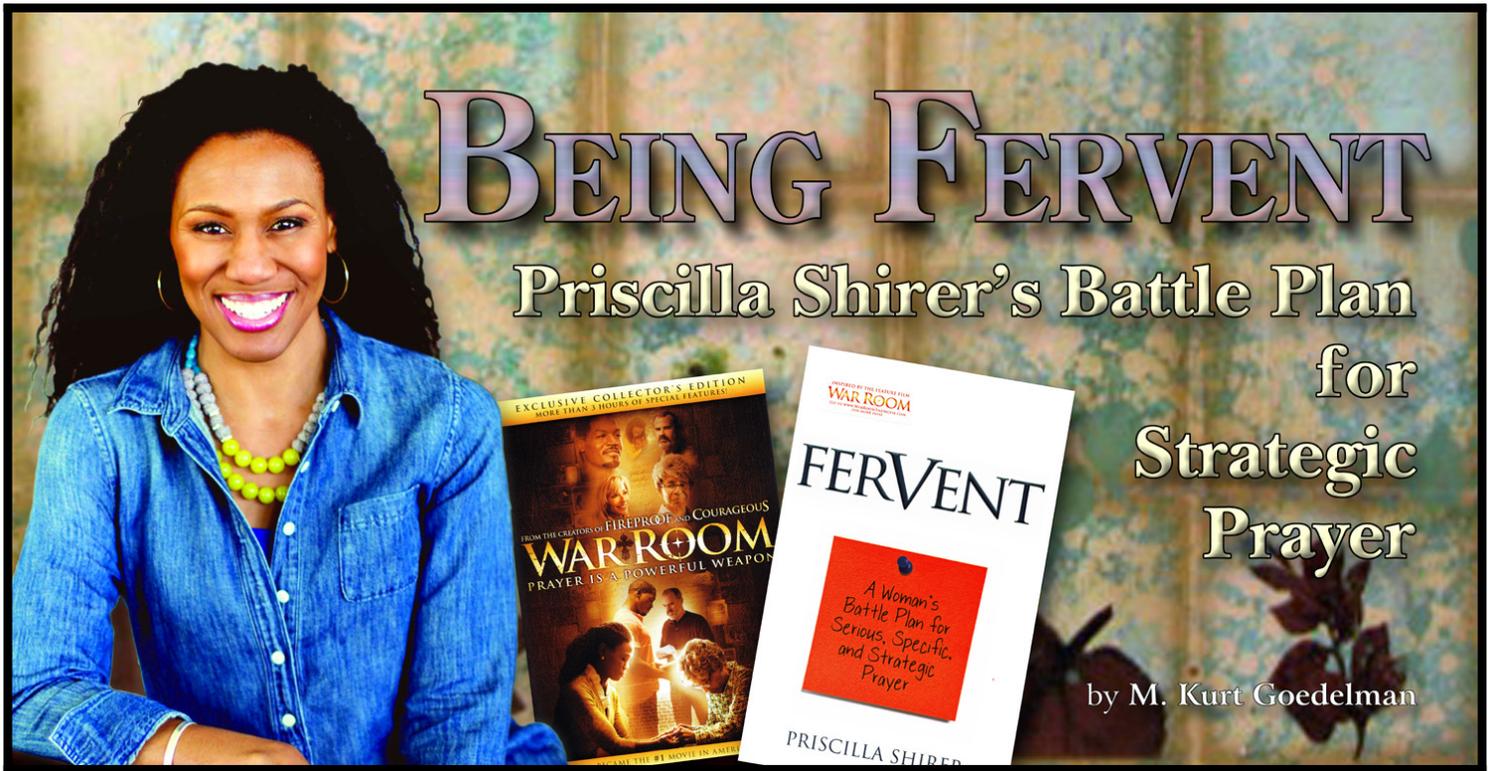
—MKG

MAJOR FINANCIAL DECLINE AT TBN

The days of unbridled income and spending at the Trinity Broadcasting Network may be over. A report in the *Orange County Register* indicated that “Trinity’s revenue has taken a precipitous dive, from \$207 million in 2006 to \$121.5 million in 2014.”

TBN began in 1973 when Paul and Jan Crouch began renting air time from a Southern California UHF television station. Today, it is said to be the world’s largest Christian television network. Paul died in 2013 after suffering from chronic heart problems. Jan died last May after suffering a stroke. The Crouches have long been accused of the misuse of millions of dollars of tax-exempt ministry funds for their opulent lifestyles and lavish spending.

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Near the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, the writer says, “Of making many books, there is no end” (12:12). Today he might have written, “Of making many books *on prayer*, there is no end.”

A search on the website of Christian Book Distributors for resources on prayer returns a list of nearly 9,300 books — and more than 16,000 total products — available from just this one company.

Many of these books have little biblical substance. Those that attract the most attention and record the largest sales often are the least biblically sound. They owe their success to claims that they offer the latest and greatest insight into communicating with God, breaking spiritual traps and “strongholds” caused by the devil, overcoming and eliminating the difficulties of life, or getting the Almighty “on board” with one’s dreams and aspirations.

Bruce Wilkinson’s *The Prayer of Jabez* was an example of how eager some Christians were to seek instant solutions, spiritual panaceas, and transcendental spirituality.

This small hardback volume written about 15 years ago sold millions of copies in just a few months upon its release. The dustjacket copy promised that the reader would “Join Bruce Wilkinson to discover how the remarkable prayer of a little-known Bible hero [Jabez] *can release God’s favor, power, and protection*. You’ll see how one daily prayer can help you leave the past behind — and break through to the life you were meant to live.”¹

Wilkinson himself pledged in the book’s Preface that this brief and heretofore uncelebrated prayer “*contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God*” and that those who regularly pray this “daring prayer that God always answers” are “seeing miracles happen on a regular basis.”² The power of God would be released in one’s life, Wilkinson said, by reciting word-for-word each and every day for a month that one-sentence “prayer of Jabez” (found in 1 Chronicles 4:10). Yet Jabez’s secret appears to have escaped the attention of Jesus and the authors of inspired Scripture. As Gary Gilley notes:

“David did not write a psalm about it, Jesus did not mention it,

and the epistles, while calling on us to pray without ceasing, are silent on the subject. Paul, in his marvelous New Testament prayers (e.g., Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14) ignores it. At no time or place in all of the Word of God are we commanded, told to examine, follow as a model, or repeat daily the prayer of Jabez.”³

After millions of copies were sold at a retail price of \$9.99, the “break-through” promised to its readers never transpired. The fad died out and scores of *Jabez* books gathered dust on the shelves of dollar stores and discount book outlets.

AND NOW, SOMETHING NEW

Since the time of *The Prayer of Jabez*, others have tried matching Wilkinson’s initial success. In August 2015, brothers Alex and Stephen Kendrick released *War Room*, the fifth in their series of faith-based films. The movie’s title and plot developed from the subject of prayer and, according to Alex, was a result of interacting with the Divine. He told NBC News:

“We literally asked God, “what do you want us to do next?”

And the Lord started prompting us to call people back to prayer and to learn how to fight in prayer,' says Alex Kendrick. 'He gave us the analogy of the war room. Just like the military uses a war room to strategize against the enemy. Many people run into their battles/issues with their own logic, too often get in over their head and then run to God. We need to go to our "war room" and seek God first.'"⁴

The movie took in \$11.4 million at the box office in its opening weekend, more than double what was expected. From this success, the Kendricks and others were able to produce and promote a line of resources developed from the movie's theme. Among the products were two books on prayer. The Kendrick brothers wrote *The Battle Plan for Prayer*⁵ and Priscilla Shirer, who was cast in the film's lead role, wrote *Fervent*.⁶

By the end of 2015, the Kendricks' volume ranked sixth with sales of more than 127,000 copies. And Shirer, with sales of nearly 165,000, found herself in the No. 2 spot, behind only Sarah Young's *Jesus Calling* and ahead of Joel Osteen's *The Power of I Am* and Jonathan Cahn's *The Mystery of Shemittah*.⁷ Publishers Weekly noted the Kendricks' and Shirer's good fortune:

"One of the big stories out of the religion category in 2015 was the success of books related to the movie *War Room*. *Fervent* (#2 on the list) and *The Battle Plan for Prayer* (#6) are both companion books to the film."⁸

By 2016, Shirer had received a "Gold Book Award" for *Fervent*, which indicated sales exceeding 500,000 copies.⁹ And both books were pitched by Family Christian bookstores as their "Books of the Year" for 2016.

The Kendricks' effort is directed at men and was advertised with great promise:

"Men, if you want to experience the joy of mightily answered prayer, pick up this thrilling read to engage with God at another

level, find out how effective prayer works and develop specific prayer strategies for each area of life."¹⁰

Shirer's book, written for women, comes with no less fanfare. Shirer says that by the time readers have finished her book, it should be "noticeably disfigured," an "impossible option for regifting at Christmastime" and have its "pages ripped out and written on."¹¹

Fervent is said to be a "battle plan" that teaches people to "fight back" and resist "the enemy's cruel, cunning intentions against you in all kinds of key areas."¹² Here is what her publisher said in a press release:

"*Fervent* is a hands-on, knees-down, don't-give-up action guide to practical purposeful praying. Shirer brings her role from the film into the real lives of today's women, addressing the topics that affect them the most: renewing their passion, refocusing their identity, negotiating family strife, dealing with relentless regrets, navigating impossible schedules, succeeding against temptation, weathering their worst fears, uprooting bitterness, and more."¹³

Shirer subtly suggests her book is heads above other books — if not the definitive work — on prayer. There is "an undeniable, unknowable, invisible mystery to prayer," she proffers. "That's why you and I need this book. That's why this intersection of our life journeys in these pages is so crucial — not because of what I'm writing but because of what we are going to be doing with our time together — and what our God is going to be doing as a result."¹⁴ Hers is an ardent "prayer strategy" and she says, "that's what makes it work."¹⁵

Elsewhere Shirer is less subtle. She tells readers that the book was a fulfillment of a prophetic word spoken to her. Shirer tells of the first time she went to a "Bible study" which, by her description, sounds more like a Charismatic prayer meeting:

"No welcome. No announcements. No opening Bible reading.

Just ... A holy hush. Soft worship music lightly pulsed in the background, while a thick silence fell across everyone present."¹⁶

Shirer then writes:

"You see, at the end of that first meeting (which, by the way, I attended faithfully for the next seven years), the person who was teaching from the Bible that day — a man I'd never met beforehand, a man who didn't know me or anything about me — looked my direction and spoke directly to me. From my vantage point he was framed between a couple of pairs of shoulders positioned between us, but he was obviously addressing *me*. ('Yes. You.') I held my breath while he told me in vivid terms that, among other things, he sensed I would have the privilege of calling many people to prayer during my lifetime. And not just to prayer but to a refreshed, renewed focus and fervency of prayer they'd never known before. My heart burned within me as this stranger spoke what I knew to be God's very word for my life that morning. I knew then that in some way he was right. I wasn't sure how or what all of it meant. I just *knew* it would be part of my calling. My purpose."¹⁷

Shirer extends that divine calling to those who will read her book:

"And I know without a doubt that God planned the chance for you and me to get together like this too — to unite through our passion for prayer. In fact, He whispered to me about you at that very first Bible study. I didn't know it then. But I see it clearly now. It's you. You're the one He had in mind."¹⁸

Shirer touts her book as one Satan doesn't want you to read. "At the end of the day," Shirer tells her readers, "the enemy is going to be sorry he ever messed with you. You're about to become his worst nightmare a million times over. He thought he

could wear you down, sure that after a while you'd give up without much of a fight."¹⁹

Shirer is presumptuous — and perhaps even violates Scripture — by disparaging Satan in this manner. The epistle of Jude (vv. 8-10) warns us not to speak with contempt against the principalities and powers that are in high places. But becoming Satan's "worst nightmare a million times over" is critical to her prayer treatise, because Shirer teaches the devil is the root cause of the believer's problems:

"Let's get specific. Let's put a bead on the bull's-eye where the real source of your family strife and discomfort and unmet needs are originated from, and let's show him the kind of resistance that a steady dose of prayer is able to exact against his demolition plans."²⁰

In this regard, Aimee Byrd, who blogs about theology and the Christian life and cohosts *The Mortification of Spin* podcast, is precise in her evaluation of Shirer's book:

"And yet there are some major things missing for a book that is about fervent prayer. When I read a book about prayer, I expect to learn about prayer and, well, the One we pray to. But I felt like this book is more about women's struggles and Satan's strategies. And while I don't disagree that Satan has personal and tricky strategies, I felt like he gets the bulk of the blame for our lack of spiritual growth. Sin seems consequential to Satan's ploys in this book. We need to hear that sin is a serious personal offense against God. We aren't merely strategizing in prayer so that we have good marriages, a fabulous self-image, and peace in our lives."²¹

Byrd adds:

"All of our proclivity to sin is not Satan's fault. We need to take responsibility for our own sinful nature. James tells us, 'But each person is tempted when he is

lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death' (1:14-15). In this age, we live under the effects of the curse. So our suffering could be from many different things. Yes, we need to be aware of Satan, who is at work, but Scripture's emphasis is more on our personal responsibility and our focus on the Lord."²²

ALL OVER THE PRAYER MAP

In recent years Shirer has positioned herself in various locations on the prayer map. She appears to promote whatever prayer form is popular at the moment or in the venue in which she finds herself. Shirer earlier was part of *Be Still*, a video project that promoted contemplative prayer as a "vital way to find peace" and connect with God. Contemplative (or "listening") prayer is the mystical practice of clearing one's mind and waiting to hear God "speak." On the video, Shirer says:

"When you're in His presence you hear His voice. That's one of the greatest benefits. You hear Him speak to you. You receive direction for your life. Guidelines for your life and there's nothing like it. And nothing can take the place of it. No great book. No great conference. No great seminar. All those things are fabulous, but they can't take the place of personally experiencing the manifest presence of God."²³

In her earlier writings, Shirer was unapologetic about her view of the mystical underpinnings of prayer. She stressed that prayer is *not* a one-way conversation and advocated what she called "prayerful listening." She told her readers:

"So I've sought to no longer neglect that element to my prayer life now, and it has begun to make all of the difference. ... Rather than telling God things I already know, I invite Him to tell me things only *He* knows, things

He wants to share with me by His Spirit."²⁴

Now, apparently, Shirer has moved on from contemplative prayer to a spiritual warfare-based format. In *Fervent*, the mysticism found in Shirer's past works appears to take a back seat to battling the forces of darkness. The belief that God speaks to us in prayer is all but absent. Perhaps she wants to address a wider audience. Or maybe her move is symptomatic of the Church's wandering in general.

HER BATTLE PLAN

In presenting her "battle plan," Shirer lists 10 strategies used by Satan, which are "carefully calculated methods to disorient and defeat you."²⁵ Shirer's index comes not from Scripture, but from the experiences of those whom she surveyed. She explains:

"[W]ell, don't just listen to me; hear it from the loud voices who responded when I polled a large cross section of women, asking them to tell me the primary ways the enemy attacks them. After boiling down all their answers into the most common categories of responses, I ended up with what I believe to be a top ten of his favorite strategies."²⁶

These are presented as Satan's attacks against your passion, focus, identity, family, confidence, calling, purity, contentment, heart, and relationships.²⁷ *Fervent* is therefore intended to "develop some intentional strategies of devil-busting prayer, designed to counteract his specific strategies against us."²⁸

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

At times Shirer offers a biblically sound evaluation of Satan and the demonic.²⁹ Yet such judgments are brief and few and far between, and it doesn't take long before she detours into a simplistic deliverance mindset and oversells her "strategic prayer" model:

"Dressed in the armor of Ephesians 6 and committed to the practice that activates our spiri-

tual power — *prayer* — all you need is one bullet, trained on one enemy, tracing his one path as he skirts around corners and slithers up through the ductwork, finding any little rat hole he can squeeze through. Nice try, devil. But your tricks are no good here. We're shutting you down. Shutting you out. Praying with full voice where you can hear us loud and clear. Now hear this — Get. *Gone*."³⁰

Here again, Shirer needs to apply instruction from Jude's epistle (v. 9) warning against such a pretentious attempt at spiritual warfare. As pastor and author Mark Hitchcock reminds us, "Our defense is not to speak to the devil or demons by binding or rebuking them, but to pray to God."³¹ We are to "resist the devil," not rebuke him. And beyond her "one bullet" is "all you need" approach, Shirer is hardly middle-of-the-road when it comes to the demonic and spiritual warfare. Her charismatic and deliverance leanings are all too apparent. She informs readers that: "Flesh and blood, skin and bones — those aren't the places where your real struggles lie. The identity of your real enemy, once the Bible has weighed in, is clear as day. It's him. It's *all* him. It's *always* been him."³²

In another attempt to present a balanced concept regarding the demonic, she sets forth — whether unknowingly or knowingly without credit — a proposition C.S. Lewis used in *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis wrote:

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."³³

Shirer offers a similar dichotomy:

"Whenever the conversation of demonic activity comes up in a book like this, most people scatter to one of two extremes. Either they *overestimate* Satan's influence and power, living with an in-

flated, erroneous perspective of his abilities. Or they *underestimate* him. They don't assign him any credit at all for the difficulties he's stirring up beneath the surface of their lives. One extreme leaves you saddled with undue fear and anxiety; the other just makes you stupid — (*too blunt to say it like that? sorry*) — unaware and completely open to every single attack. Which of these categories do you fall into or lean toward? Either?"³⁴

However, Shirer is much more emphatic in her proposition than was Lewis. And how she knows that "most people scatter to one of two extremes" rather than adopt a view that is in harmony with Scripture is never explained. But based upon repeated instruction and illustrations in her book, it is apparent that Shirer has pitched her tent in the "overestimate" camp, giving Satan more conduct and credit than he is due.

Elsewhere, more of her charismatic bias and a bit more of her pragmatism are displayed as she instructs her readers:

"And through the bold, mighty name of Jesus, pray that we'll live with our armor on and not let Satan's otherworldly forces wreak their havoc in *this* house, in *this* heart, on *this* day. That's called being *focused* and *strategic* in prayer. And it works, I'm telling you."³⁵

In a personal illustration, Shirer tells of one of her sons who was "prone toward fear and anxiety." She writes:

"Three or four years ago, night after night, he started seeing something he described as a man in his room. It couldn't *really* be a man in there, of course. The outside doors and windows were locked. Nobody was getting inside. Part of me wanted to write it off as nothing, tell him to go back to sleep and not worry about it. But he was able to tell me in rather striking detail what this 'man' looked like, where he was standing in relation to my

son's bed, how paralyzing it felt when he sensed this presence in the room, as if a heavy blanket had fallen on him, suffocating him. That did it. I started to pray over him even more specifically, to pray over their room while the boys were away, to command this spirit of fear to leave my son alone in the name of Jesus. One day in particular when the issue seemed to be reaching a climax of intensity, I stormed into that bedroom like a rocket. I paced the floor, I quoted Scripture, I posted passages on the wall, I laid hands on the doorposts and window ledges. And I'm not joking here, that was the last day my boy ever mentioned that man. As far as I know, he's never been bothered by it since to that degree or in that precise way."³⁶

Shirer further describes Satan dredging up our past sins and failures in order to "sabotage our potential." She writes:

"He carefully archives footage from our history so he can pull from those files and remind us what our days of defeat, sin, and failure looked like. You've seen them, same as I have, a million times. If your life is anything like mine, I'd imagine he's turned every room in the house into a screening room at one time or another, popping one of his old favorites into the player — for his amusement, for our humiliating shame and embarrassment. ... Not to mention, despite our best efforts, we keep feeding our enemy new clips of failure to choose from and compile. And as soon as they fade into the past, he fires up the projector and invites himself over for popcorn, to make sure we're seeing how bad it is and how bad we are."³⁷

SATAN IS THE ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL

Shirer urges her readers to "Personalize your prayer by asking God to help you pull back the curtain today — and every single day — so you can

see when the devil is behind the argument, the frustration, the anger, the discord, the falsehood, the insecurity, the fear."³⁸

So no matter what issue in life one is facing, according to Shirer, it is fairly certain that Satan is behind it, working one of his "strategies" to wreak havoc in the life of the believer. In one illustration, she recounts a conversation she had with a friend named Shawna. Shawna, we are told, is highly accomplished, highly intelligent, dynamic, able to provide spot-on insight, and a licensed counselor who runs her own business.³⁹ Shirer adds:

"[S]he's the kind who gets sent referrals when people hit a dead-end through all other routes of care and treatment and simply aren't going to make it unless they see someone of Shawna's caliber. She's the best in her field ... and in every other way too."⁴⁰

Yet, it seems, all was not well with Shawna. Shirer writes that, "the Lord had been fairly obvious and direct in leading her to start cutting back on her caseload and start focusing on doing some writing — cataloging all this stellar wisdom she's been dishing out for all these years and collecting it into resources that can multiply her ministry of counsel and encouragement to who knows how many others."⁴¹ But that was not happening because of fear — Shawna's "internal struggle" that included, "what if I do get some stuff written, start to feel pretty good about it, but nobody likes it?" which would mean, according to Shawna, that she "failed miserably."⁴²

Shirer describes the counsel she gave to her "best in her field" counselor friend:

"Shawna, if the *only* reason you aren't moving forward is fear, then don't you see that the enemy is trying to paralyze you? He's the one behind this. Don't sit there and let him do that. Don't let him stop you from moving forward. I don't care *how* afraid or not ready you may feel. Obey God anyway!" She stared at

me blankly. I stared back. Both of us stunned by my indignation. The fact is, I was mad. Still am. Mad at the enemy for messing with my friend like that. And I'm mad at him for messing with you too ... and with me."⁴³

So once again, it's all Satan. Shirer errs here in significant areas. Foremost is her contention that Satan is behind Shawna's fear. In reality what we have is a fear of man. The late Bible teacher and author Jerry Bridges reminds us:

"I believe, however, that the most universal source of fear is what the Bible calls 'the fear of man' (Proverbs 29:25). Even in the best of times, we are afraid of what people will think or say about us. We are afraid they will ridicule or reject us. But as Proverbs 29:25 points out, '*The fear of man brings a snare.*' The fear of man — that is, of other people — can prevent us from living our lives as God intends for us."⁴⁴

As one studies books such as *The Christian Counselor's Manual* by Jay Adams or *The Fear Factor* by Wayne and Joshua Mack, Satan is never identified as the source of fear. Adams explains:

"Christian counselors must determine the *source* of fear and meet it by a proper call to repentance and love. Is the fear basically a fear of God or of man? If the counselee fears God, his relationship to God must be explored. The counselor should consider these questions: Does the counselee genuinely believe? Does he understand the biblical teaching about assurance and peace? Is there sin in his life disrupting his relationship to God and chilling his ardor for Him? (Cf. Deuteronomy 28:65-67 for a sober description of the dread and fear that God may send as the consequence of sin.) Repentance and renewed loving service for God is in order. If the counselee's fear fundamentally is a fear of men, then the answer lies in encouraging him to en-

gage in loving ministry, in which he may give of himself to others."⁴⁵

Shirer's counsel is devoid of any of Adams' biblically sound recommendation. All of this is so very critical. If we misunderstand or incorrectly label the source of a life issue — such as fear — then how we respond and handle it will also be incorrect.

If one goes to a doctor complaining of headaches, the outcome could be catastrophic if the physician does not correctly identify the cause. If the cause is allergies but is misidentified as a brain tumor, the medical action taken by the doctor will be disastrous. Likewise, if it is truly a brain tumor but is diagnosed as allergies, the result will be equally tragic. Wayne and Joshua Mack concur:

"If a doctor doesn't know what your problem is, he is unable to give you the correct prescription. And if you have not thought carefully about what the Bible says about this problem of fear, you are not going to understand its solution. You need to know what you are up against."⁴⁶

The Macks outline the three primary categories of fear.⁴⁷ These are a *natural fear* (Proverbs 22:3, a non-sinful fear of danger, like standing outside in a lightning storm or standing too close to the edge of a cliff), a *holy fear* (Proverbs 1:7, a godly fear that produces loving reverence, submission, and obedience to God), and a *sinful fear* (Proverbs 29:25, a self-centered fear that caused us to disobey or neglect the commands of God). Yet in all of this, the Macks never indicate, as Shirer stated, that "fear is one of Satan's primary schemes for crippling God's people."⁴⁸

MORE TO OUR ARMOR THAN ORIGINALLY THOUGHT

In a strange twist, Shirer makes prayer a part of Paul's description of the armor of God set forth in his letter to the Ephesians. Shirer writes:

"So we strap on weapons that work — weapons divinely

authorized for our success in spiritual warfare: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace. Then we take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, as well as the sword — the very Word of God. *But we don't stop there. Because neither does Paul in his description of our spiritual armor in Ephesians 6.*"⁴⁹

To the believer's "spiritual armor," she then adds prayer, citing verses 18-19. Elsewhere, she writes:

"And again, the one weapon that ties this whole ensemble together, the one that activates and infuses our armor with the power of God Himself ... is prayer. *Prayer!* 'Pray at all times in the Spirit,' Paul said (Eph. 6:18)."⁵⁰

Here Shirer presents a novel — and unbiblical — exposition of the "whole armor of God." Nearly all students and expositors of Scripture draw their understanding and description of this armor from Ephesians 6:13-17.⁵¹ Bible commentator Adam Clarke directly speaks to Shirer's aberration, describing the armor's components and telling us why prayer is not included therein:

"The apostle does not put praying among the armor; had he done so he would have referred it, as he has done all the rest, to some of the Grecian armor; but as he does not do this, therefore we conclude that his account of the armor is ended, and that now, having equipped his spiritual soldier, he shows him the necessity of praying, that he may successfully resist those principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and the spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places, with whom he has to contend. The 'panoply,' or whole armor of God, consists in (1) the girdle, (2) the breastplate, (3) the greaves, (4) the shield, (5) the helmet, and (6) the sword. He who has these was completely armed."⁵²

While prayer is critical in the life of the believer and is commanded by the apostle, it is not part of the armor. And when one surveys the spiritual correlations of each of the six items that Paul lists, it is easily discernible that adding prayer as another piece of equipment is out of place. Truth (v. 14), righteousness (v. 14), gospel of peace (v. 15), faith (v. 16), salvation (v. 17) and the Word (v. 17) are all things that have been given by God to man. Prayer, on the other hand, is from man to God.

Shirer is also wrong when she teaches that prayer "activates and infuses our armor with the power of God Himself." This suggests that apart from action (or prayer) on our part, the armor God gives us is of no use. This is similar to the faulty teachings of Word-Faith proponents. While Shirer does not take her theology as far as Paul (David) Yonggi Cho does, there are similarities. For example, Cho taught:

"You create the presence of Jesus with your mouth. If you speak about salvation, the saving Jesus appears. If you speak about divine healing, then you will have the healing Christ in your congregation. If you speak the miracle performing Jesus, then the presence of the miracle performing Jesus is released. He is bound by your lips and by your words. He is depending on you."⁵³

It appears that Shirer would have her readers believe it is up to us to activate God's armor and give it power:

"Through intentional, deliberate, strategic prayer, you grab hold of Jesus and of everything He's already done on your behalf. It's how you tap into the power of heaven and watch it reverberate in your experiences. It's a key part of your offensive weaponry against a cunning foe who prowls around and watches for your weaknesses, your vulnerable places, for any opportunity to destroy you. In prayer you gain your strength — the power to gird yourself with armor that

extinguishes every weapon your enemy wields."⁵⁴

Author Kris Lundgaard disagrees:

"Many people talk about the power of prayer as if our words or will could move God. The Scriptures say the *Spirit* is the real power of prayer, giving life, vigor, and strength to our prayer, and making it persuasive to God. When we can't drag ourselves out of bed, he enables us to pray with 'groans that words cannot express' (Romans 8:26)."⁵⁵

Prayer does relate to the armor of God and to our spiritual warfare, just not in the way Shirer describes. Pastor and author Mark Hitchcock writes:

"The significance of prayer to spiritual warfare is evident in the very first word of Ephesians 6:18. The word 'with' is a connecting word. Prayer is vitally connected to the discussion of spiritual warfare and the Christian's armor in 6:10-17. Our defense is not to speak to the devil or demons by binding or rebuking them, but to pray to God. Ephesians 6:18-20 comes right on the heels of eight verses that deal with spiritual warfare and our arsenal of six pieces of armor. We might say that after describing our spiritual battle dress or what to wear to war, Paul now tells us how to get dressed. We get dressed for battle in an attitude of prayer."⁵⁶

Shirer's ideas are self-gratifying and borderline narcissistic. The power in the armor or our weaponry does not come by way of our prayer, no matter how *fervent* it may be. The power is there because it comes from the One who provides the armor and is not contingent upon anything from or in us. There is no inherent power in our prayers. The power comes from the sovereign God who hears and answers them.

FAULTY FORGIVENESS

Shirer's teaching on forgiveness is also faulty. She writes:

"Unforgiveness is his [Satan's] design to 'outwit' you."⁵⁷

“If you feel utterly, hopelessly, intolerably resistant toward forgiving this person or these people who’ve offended you, don’t consider yourself a random victim. *The devil is behind this.*”⁵⁸

“Where he could keep twisting it. Inflaming it. Where almost any memory or passing thought of it could poke at you, pick at you, draw blood, inflict new damage. Make no mistake, it is *his* doing. By specific design.”⁵⁹

“Unforgiveness put us in prime position for demonic influence and activity to take advantage of us.”⁶⁰

Here again she diminishes our own sinfulness and Satan becomes chief in creating in us a failure — or unwillingness — to forgive. In our dealing with strong and even paralyzing emotions such as anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness, it is imperative to know that we must *control our thinking*. We must understand the thought process because we are unable to change our feeling without changing our thoughts. If we control our thought life, then we can control our emotions and our actions. In the arena of our emotions, Scripture consistently speaks to our minds and our thinking (e.g., Proverbs 4:23; Romans 12:2) — not to Satan.

Shirer further strays from sound biblical interpretation as she teaches forgiveness apart from repentance:

“Nobody needs to tell you how bad you’re hurting from the injustices in your life. Even people who’ve suffered similar abuses or offenses as yours could never completely understand how your own rejections feel. Yours are personal and private and seemingly impossible to forgive. *But forgive anyway.* Not because it’s easy but because your enemy gets exactly what he wants from you otherwise. *Forgive anyway.* Not lightly and quickly but ferociously and fervently. Not only for the other person but mostly for *you* — so you can be free and full and whole and complete.”⁶¹

So, according to Shirer, extending forgiveness is “mostly” for us — a concept never stated in Scripture. Shirer has missed the fact that biblical forgiveness is a transaction. Repentance must be expressed and forgiveness sought. Then forgiveness can be extended to the offending person. As Donald Whitney observes, “biblical forgiveness is never given or required where there is no repentance.”⁶²

While Shirer, in her discourse, correctly incorporates God’s forgiveness to us as the basis and mandate for us to forgive others, she fails to understand that God’s forgiveness is conditional — based upon our repentance. Apart from our repentance, there is no forgiveness of sin. Divine forgiveness without repentance is *Universalism* — the belief that everyone with or without repentance will be saved.

Two passages, cited by Shirer in her book, Ephesians 4:31-32 and Colossians 3:12-13, instruct us in this regard. The Ephesians passage commands, “forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (v. 32); while the verse in Colossians states, “even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (v. 13). The Lord forgives us as we confess, repent, and seek forgiveness. Consider how often this model (repentance then forgiveness) is found in the Word:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ And You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5).

“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psalm 86:5).

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

“If My people who are called by My name will humble them-

selves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

One other Scripture cited by Shirer is Luke 17:4 and even that verse speaks to repentance. But Shirer waters down our Lord’s teaching by eliminating verse 3. In its fuller context, the instruction of the Lord states: “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). The operative word there (and similarly in verses cited above including 1 John 1:9 and 2 Chronicles 7:14) is “if” — “if he repents, forgive him.”

In addition, to extend forgiveness without being asked disavows Jesus’ instruction in Matthew’s Gospel:

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17).

Once again, we have an operative phrase that moves the offended party from one course of action to a new or higher level of action and involvement. That operative phrase is, “if he will not hear” or “if he refuses to hear.” If we forgive when there is no repentance, then the whole process of Matthew 18 is meaningless. If we grant forgiveness to the person who “will not hear,” there will be no need to follow the Lord’s directive of the involvement of others, including, ultimately, the church family.

This is significant because it disconnects us from Jesus’ instruction. The process outlined by our Lord out of His great love and mercy is prescribed in this way to add a compelling force to bring one to repentance

and restoration. Matthew 18:15-17 is not implemented to get the sinner out of the church, but to get the sin out of the sinner.

So, then, if we cannot extend forgiveness apart from repentance, how do we keep from being, as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 2:11, “outwitted by Satan” and fall victim to “his designs”? Whitney provides the healthy and biblical course to follow when a Christian wants to forgive, but the one who has offended refuses to seek forgiveness:

“What Christians should always do, as Jesus exemplified in His prayer, is be *ready* to forgive. And then, when forgiveness is sought, forgiveness can be extended. Yes, we ought to release our sinful bitterness and hatred whether the offender ever seeks forgiveness. Some equate this decision with forgiveness itself. In reality though, this is only getting ready, being willing to forgive. Then if the offender repents, we are prepared to complete the process by saying, ‘I forgive you.’ The one who announces forgiveness where it hasn’t been sought not only discounts the importance of repentance, he also misunderstands the requirement of Scripture. But the one who is not willing to forgive is contradicting the Scripture and, for the moment at least, is putting the reality of his salvation to the test.”⁶³

To this, biblical counselor Craig Rowe adds:

“The Bible never says, ‘Forgive and forget.’ ... But what you can do, you can live enough life this side of the offense so when you look at it, in the horizon of your life, it’s only a speck. It’s not a dominating feature. ... Hatred will tie you to a person just like love will tie you to a person. Only hatred is like being connected to a sewer system and all the sewage is flooding into your mind. Love sets up a filter and it says, ‘I will not allow that garbage in my mind.’ ... A change of

my heart and a change of perspective heals.”⁶⁴

As one seeks to be liberated from the sinful anger, bitterness, hatred, and a desire for vengeance, he must replace it with something else — kindness, love, blessing. For just as when we were in sin and an unrepentant state, it was God’s goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering that led us to repentance (Romans 2:4). For some, a daily dose — reading, personally praying, and applying the admonishments — of Romans 12 is a wonderful prescription to overcome the pangs of bitterness, malice, and anger.

THE ENEMY WITHOUT OR THE ENEMY WITHIN?

The above, while not an exhaustive inventory of all the weaknesses of *Fervent*, demonstrates Shirer’s bad exposition and misuse of Scripture. While Satan is our enemy and we need to be aware of his strategies and schemes,⁶⁵ we must maintain a balance drawn from the Word of God and not from experience. Shirer has her readers thinking more about Satan than sin.

Aimee Byrd spotlights the absence of the believer’s warfare against sin as part of Shirer’s prayer battle plan:

“Even when she speaks about repentance, Shirer doesn’t mention confessing our sin and asking for forgiveness. She does tell us to ‘see the foolishness of anything that perpetuates old sin patterns, and by His Spirit walk away,’ and then, ‘Ask for freedom, for release, for the ability to deflect lies and embrace truth’ (101). This all has the tone of self-empowerment by ‘claiming your calling’ (105), rather than humbly submitting to a holy God whom we have offended. The word sin doesn’t even appear in her definition of repentance, which is the ‘R’ in her acronym P.R.A.Y.”⁶⁶

We must be aware of not only the enemy without, but the enemy within: the power of sin and how it works in the Christian’s life. Kris Lundgaard

reminds us that “Indwelling sin works like this — enticing, threatening, even bullying.”⁶⁷

HOW THEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

Excluding the Psalms, there are 650 prayers recorded in Scripture. They are all worthy to be used as prayer prompters, remembering that prayer is a personal matter of the heart. Jay Adams reminds us:

“Prayer is not a bag of techniques, not learning the right formula, possessing some magic charm, or tacking on an open-sesame type password like ‘in Jesus’ name.’ It is not a matter of going through the proper rituals, nor agonizing before God for long periods of time or anything of the sort. No, the essential conditions to fulfill have to do with your heart. ... In essence, effective prayer is a matter of the heart.”⁶⁸

No matter how perfect a “battle plan” or “strategy” we outline for prayer, if our heart condition is not right, then our prayers are ineffective and wasted. Scripture tells us what makes up the condition of a “right heart.” We can pray effectively — or fervently — when we approach God with an obedient heart (1 John 3:22), a forgiving heart (Mark 11:25), an undoubting heart (James 1:6), a broken or contrite heart (Psalm 51:17), an undivided heart (Jeremiah 29:13), a faithful heart (John 15:7), and a yielded heart (Romans 8:26). These seven conditions do not constitute an exhaustive list but they do provide the basics of the heart attitude and spiritual temperament of the one who desires a fervent prayer life.

Adams also addresses the gross deficiency of prayer in the lives of most believers and what that means in our day and age:

“The present generation has grown up prayerless. Even where giving of thanks at meals still prevails, all too often it is but the hollow vestigial remains of a worn-out tradition. Few children

are taught (or taught how) to bring their problems to God. At home and in school, they are reared according to an uneasy doctrine of self-sufficiency that leads to a radical self-centered pride and arrogance or (conversely) to an unhealthy dependence upon parents and society. Without prayer, God is in a picture on the wall; and for many 'religious' people today, that is just where He is. Without prayer, there is no vital connection with God, no confession, adoration, thanksgiving or petition; that is to say, no communication is established with God."⁶⁹

Therefore, we are certainly grateful for any teacher or any publication that encourages believers to pray more or establish a discipline of daily prayer. However, prayer should never be seen as an exercise in becoming Satan's "worst nightmare a million times over." The Lord's Prayer provides a more comprehensive model for prayer. In it we learn that prayer is first of all a relationship. We also learn that prayer is to change us as we confess our sins and bow before His glory. We also find that it is not done to get our will done, but to submit to His will. There are certainly great mysteries in prayer. These mysteries are both theological and philosophical. Prayer is our way as believers to express our total dependence on God. We also remember that we pray because we are commanded to pray. To the undiscerning, Priscilla Shirer and her *Fervent* book misses these truths while overselling and overpromising.

Endnotes:

1. Bruce Wilkinson with David Kopp, *The Prayer of Jabez*. Sisters, Ore: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2000, back cover, emphasis added.
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 7, emphasis added.
3. Gary E. Gilley, "I Just Wanted More Land" — *Jabez*. Vienna, Va.: Xulon Press, 2001, pg. 10.
4. Alicia Hadley, "Faith-Based 'War Room' Promotes Healing Through Fervent Prayer," NBC News, Aug. 27, 2015.
5. Stephen and Alex Kendrick, *The Battle Plan for Prayer*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015.

6. Priscilla Shirer, *Fervent*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015.
7. Jonathan Segura, "Inside 2015's Category Bestsellers," *Publisher Weekly*, Jan. 29, 2016. Document accessed at: www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/69286-inside-2015-s-category-bestsellers.html.
8. *Ibid.*
9. "Gold/Platinum/Diamond Book Award Winners," Christian Book Expo website. Document accessed at: <http://christianbookexpo.com/salesawards/>.
10. "Our 2016 Books of the Year" product page from Family Christian website.
11. *Fervent*, op. cit., pg. 1.
12. *Ibid.*, back cover.
13. "WAR ROOM books hit New York Times bestseller list" B&H Publishing Group press release, Sept. 28, 2015.
14. *Fervent*, op. cit., pg. 4, 5.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 38, italic in original.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 184, ellipsis in original.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 186, italics in original.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 188.
19. *Ibid.*, pg. 8.
20. *Ibid.*, pg. 78.
21. Aimee Byrd, "Fervent," Housewife Theologian blog from the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals website, posted Dec. 18, 2015. Document accessed at: www.alliancenet.org/mos/housewife-theologian/fervent#.V7SRhlsrLMY.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Be Still*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006, 6:40 timemark of the "Alone With the Lord" chapter.
24. Priscilla Shirer, *Discerning the Voice of God*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012, pg. 30, italic in original.
25. *Fervent*, op. cit., pg. 14.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 19.
29. For example, see *ibid.*, pg. 49.
30. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
31. Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to Questions About Satan, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2014, pg. 217.
32. *Fervent*, op. cit., pg. 42, italics in original.
33. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982, pg. 3.
34. *Fervent*, op. cit., pp. 19-20, italics in original.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 48, italics in original.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82, italic in original.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 100.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 106.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107, ellipsis in original.
41. *Ibid.*, pg. 107.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109, italics and ellipsis in original.

44. Jerry Bridges in Foreword of Wayne and Joshua Mack, *The Fear Factor*. Tulsa, Okla.: Hensley Publishing, 2002, pg. 7, italics in original.
45. Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselors Manual*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973, pp. 416-417, italic in original.
46. *The Fear Factor*, op. cit., pg. 45.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-59.
48. *Fervent*, op. cit., pg. 109.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 13, emphasis added.
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 48, ellipsis and italic in original.
51. While Shirer is not alone in purporting prayer as part of the armor of God (see, for example, "What is the full armor of God?" on the CompellingTruth.org website), she does digress from the mainstream and majority of trusted Bible expositors. In fact, Shirer's father, Tony Evans, in his book on spiritual warfare, places "The Power of Prayer" in a subsequent section apart from his section describing the six items in "The Armor." (See, Tony Evans, *Victory in Spiritual Warfare*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2011.)
52. Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, pg. 1187.
53. Paul Yonggi Cho, *The Fourth Dimension*. South Plainfield, N.J.: Bridge Publishing, Inc., 1979, pg. 83.
54. *Fervent*, op. cit., pg. 12.
55. Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publications, 1998, pg. 149, italic in original.
56. *101 Answers to Questions About Satan, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare*, op. cit., pg. 217.
57. *Fervent*, op. cit., pg. 157.
58. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
59. *Ibid.*, pg. 158, italic in original.
60. *Ibid.*, pg. 160.
61. *Ibid.*, pg. 157, italics in original.
62. Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2001, pg. 115.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 116, italic in original.
64. Craig Rowe, "Understanding Biblical Forgiveness," NANC National Conference 1999, Tape #N9948, side 2.
65. See further, "How Satan Operates" in M. Kurt Goedelman and J. Greg Sheryl, "Obsessed with Demons," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2014, pp. 12-14.
66. "Fervent," Housewife Theologian blog, op. cit.
67. *The Enemy Within*, op. cit., pg. 24.
68. Jay E. Adams, *A Thirst for Wholeness*. Woodruff, S.C.: Timeless Texts, 1999, pp. 56-57, 64.
69. Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling (More Than Redemption)*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979, pg. 67.

church should be a community — even a family — composed of those who love one another in such a way that the world stands up and notices (see John 13:35). But this nearly wholesale dismissal of doctrine is unusual within the context of Church history.

WE HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

However, it is not unique. What is happening today is an echo of the rise of theological liberalism that began in the 18th century. At that time European theologians began to question the truth about the historical Jesus. Many embraced the idea that Jesus was not the Son of God and never claimed to be. Rather, they said, it was His followers who ascribed deity to Jesus in order to buttress their ethical message. These theologians dismissed the so-called myths but kept the parts of Jesus' story that they found desirable.²

Some consider 1835 a turning point in the history of the Christian faith. Church leaders such as David Friedrich Strauss determined that “the miraculous events of the gospels never happened, and the gospel accounts of them are the result of a long process of legend and religious imagination. ... The fact that the resurrection [as well as other claims about Jesus] was unhistorical did not rob it of its religious significance.”³

This German Rationalism spread throughout Europe and entered the United States in the late 1800s as more American pastors and theologians studied the works of their European counterparts and sought degrees at their universities. What was born of this process was termed modernism, or theological liberalism, which has undermined the foundations of biblical Christianity and continues to wreak havoc long after the movement lost its momentum.

Before Strauss there was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). In his youth, Schleiermacher had drunk from the Enlightenment's rationalistic

well and had come to a crisis of belief and faith in the historic Jesus and the truth of Christianity. As he matured, Schleiermacher did not champion rationalism, but rather Romanticism. To him the truthfulness of Scripture and the actual existence of Jesus were not central. What was important was “primarily not a matter of doctrine but rather of feeling, intuition and experience.”⁴

Truth and knowledge were not the basis for religious experience; it did not matter what one believed. Church historian Iain Murray summarizes Schleiermacher's thinking:

“Questions of orthodox belief were thus instantly reduced to matters of secondary moment; not what we *think* but what we *experience* is the important thing. ... Christian experience consists of life, not doctrine.”⁵

Schleiermacher went so far as to bar “doctrinal preaching from the pulpit. Experience, not teaching, has to be the object of the preacher.”⁶

It is important to understand that as liberalism was being birthed, men such as Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl did not directly deny the authority of Scripture or the cardinal doctrines that had re-emerged from the Reformation. Murray writes:

“Yet liberal theology very rarely presented itself as being in opposition to Scripture. On the contrary, its exponents claimed the authority of the New Testament for the view that Christianity is life, not doctrine.”⁷

It is vital to note that the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who is favorably quoted by many evangelical authors and speakers today, lived during this same era (1813-1855) and is known as the father of existentialism, which views truth as subjective.

Much like Schleiermacher and Ritschl, the objective historicity of Jesus or Christianity did not really matter to Kierkegaard; what mattered was experience. R.C. Sproul wrote, “Kierkegaard's subjective method

stresses the importance of personal experience over factual information.”⁸

Church historian George Marsden confirms in his book *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* that for the liberals “the Bible” was not an encyclopedia of dogma, but rather an ancient model of religious experience. Marsden writes:

“The key test of Christianity was life, not doctrine. ... religious feelings [not doctrine, and not the historic Jesus] were central to Christianity.”⁹

J. Gresham Machen fought on the final battlefields against the invading hordes of old liberalism. In his book *Christianity and Liberalism*, written in 1923, he documented that the liberal mantra then sweeping through Christendom was, “Christianity is a life, not a doctrine.”¹⁰ Machen strongly cautioned:

“The growth of ignorance in the Church is the logical and inevitable result of the false notion that Christianity is a life and not also a doctrine; if Christianity is not a doctrine then of course teaching is not necessary to Christianity. But whatever may be the causes for the growth of ignorance in the Church, the evil must be remedied.”¹¹

Machen's warning went largely unheeded and by the end of the decade liberal theology raised its flag over Princeton Seminary — where Machen taught — and could declare victory over conservatism in virtually all the major denominations and Christian organizations. Those who had resisted the liberal call of “life, not doctrine” would move on to start their own denominations, churches, and Christian organizations proclaiming with gusto that doctrine mattered.

Sadly, it is the great-grandchildren of these Fundamentalists and Evangelicals who now espouse the very themes and ideas that birthed liberal Christianity in the beginning. Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Kierkegaard would feel right at home in much of modern evangelicalism.

It should be observed that while liberal theology had been percolating in Europe since the early 1700s, it had not gained much traction in America until the latter part of the 19th century. By that time two factors contributed to its increasing acceptance.

First was the diminished interest in theology during the earlier decades of the 1800s, which followed the Second (1800) and then the Third Great Awakenings (1859). Each of these movements — and the revivalism they stimulated — resulted in an increased desire for emotion and experience at the expense of biblical instruction. Accommodating the desires of the masses, pastors tended to “dumb down” theology and elevate experience.

In time this left the average Christian with little biblical knowledge and no doctrinal foundation. The second factor was that liberal theologians were not directly denying the faith. They were only modifying and making more palatable the old truths — or so they claimed. But the combination of these two factors would prove lethal over time. Church historian David Bebbington captures well the state of the American Church as it moved into the 20th century and began to broaden its doctrinal position:

“The Fatherhood of God, a milder view of the atonement and the centrality of the incarnation came into vogue. Eternal punishment faded away, the Bible was studied critically, and evolutionary thought led to a stress on immanence. The net effect of all these trends was to promote a more liberal brand of theology. At first the newer views were stated in ways that normally seemed compatible with evangelical convictions, and in the short run they undoubtedly appealed to many in the growingly prosperous congregations. Gospel and culture were remaining in step. But in the longer term the newer stance was to develop into a version of liberalism that self-consciously

diverged from the evangelical faith. The seeds of the modernism of the twentieth century had been sown.”¹²

Many Christians have become fixated on experience and what they consider to be life, and see little use for theology. Doctrine is often viewed as a hindrance to unity. Many people have little interest in truth. They are interested in themselves, in having a worship experience, and in being noticed or included.

The Church at large is on a march to minimize doctrine and to elevate having a good time. Such emphasis will draw people, while in-depth Bible study, in most cases, will not.

A MODERN CASE STUDY

Touted as the second-largest church in America, with between 20,000 and 30,000 attendees each week when all campuses are combined (and depending on who is doing the counting), North Point Community Church near Atlanta, Ga., is the epitome of the modern church success story. The lead pastor is Andy Stanley, who is the son of famed Southern Baptist leader and pastor Charles Stanley. The younger Stanley has borrowed from the playbooks of Bill Hybels and Rick Warren and is passionate about spreading his techniques for church growth.

In Stanley’s book, *Deep and Wide*,¹³ he reveals his “secret sauce” for building a great church. *Deep and Wide* promotes the seeker-sensitive, market-driven approach of “doing church.” There is virtually nothing in the book that hasn’t been said or done by Stanley’s self-proclaimed hero, Bill Hybels, and others who teach the same paradigm. From basing North Point’s programming on surveys and secular management,¹⁴ to seeing people as consumers,¹⁵ and a target audience that must be attracted and pleased,¹⁶ to erroneously believing that the unbeliever should like us because they liked Jesus,¹⁷ to virtually every aspect of what they do, Stanley is parroting the philosophy of Hybels. It is ironic that Hybels has admitted that he did not accomplish his goal of

making fully devoted followers of Christ.¹⁸

The real issue is not whether something works, but if it is biblical. Therefore, Stanley attempts a scriptural justification for his church model. This attempt is disappointing as Stanley makes no effort to engage the key Scriptures dealing with the doctrine of the Church. His only venture into biblical exegesis is an examination of the counsel at Jerusalem in Acts 15.¹⁹

Stanley offers a strained interpretation of the text because he uses what some call rhetorical hermeneutics, which says Scripture should be interpreted based upon the characters’ actions, not their words.²⁰ Using this method, Stanley believes, “But everything he [Paul] taught should be defined within the context of what takes place in Acts 15.”²¹

The Jerusalem council in this account resolved the first major doctrinal conflict of the early Church with the following brief statement: “that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well” (Acts 15:29).

Stanley believes the modern Church should adopt this pattern and make few theological pronouncements as well.²² Wrapping — or ignoring — everything else in the New Testament pertaining to the Church around this concept, Stanley offers a strained understanding of the biblical foundation for the local church.

Stanley tries at this point to address two questions and, because he turns to culture, pragmatism, and marketing instead of Scripture, he comes to an incorrect conclusion. The questions are, “What is the church?” and “Who is it for?”²³ He rightly states that the church is not a place, but a people. Yet he does not grasp the *ekklesia* as exclusively the people of God.²⁴ This skews his answer about whom the church is for.

To Stanley, the church is an evangelistic center in which the focus is on the “unchurched,” as he calls unbe-

lievers. Stanley's goal is to attract non-Christians and retain them, even if this means putting new Christians and even unbelievers into positions of ministry and leadership.²⁵ A person can even join North Point online, without talking to anyone.²⁶ North Point has limited classroom instruction and the teaching of Scripture is consistently belittled throughout the book.²⁷

Relationships, on the other hand, especially through small groups, are dominant. These groups, sometimes led by new Christians and apparently even unbelievers, by necessity are not primarily centered on Scripture or even Christ, as biblically understood, but on relationships. This is hardly the model found in Acts 2:42-43. Too bad Stanley did not choose the second chapter of Acts, rather than Acts 15, to develop his ecclesiology — or better yet the New Testament epistles which give instruction on why God has created His Church and how He wants it to function.

Deep and Wide showcases North Point's "secret sauce," as Stanley calls it, for his "spiritual formation model."²⁸ There are five ingredients to this sauce. Stanley admits that this list is not drawn from Scripture, but comes from what he and his leadership team have "observed."²⁹ Having laid a foundation for the church on an arbitrary selection of Acts 15, he now believes the church should be built on five ingredients not found in Scripture. These ingredients are drawn from Stanley's "experiences with [his] various men's groups" and the things that showed up in the "faith story" of these men.³⁰ The five ingredients for Stanley's "secret sauce" are:

- **Practical teaching.**³¹ Here Stanley claims that very few are "actually on a quest for truth."³² He also tells us, "People are far more interested in what works than what's true."³³ Thus according to Stanley, pragmatism, not truth, should be at the heart of our teaching and preaching.

- **Private disciplines.**³⁴
- **Personal ministry.**³⁵
- **Providential relationships.**³⁶
- **Pivotal circumstances** (defining moments).³⁷

When the sauce is stirred and cooked, the recipe yields little understanding of the Word of God, but, it is hoped, strong relationships in small groups and dedication to "creating churches unchurched people love to attend" (as the book's subtitle says).

The fourth section of Stanley's book promotes the creation of irresistible environments.³⁸ While some helpful ideas can be found, Stanley is once again reading from Hybel's playbook. The church is turned into a production at every level in which the question at the end of the day is whether or not the presentation was engaging³⁹ and met felt-needs.⁴⁰ Bottom-line, Stanley and his staff are after a "win" in everything they do.⁴¹

Their short-term wins are based on attendance and other external factors such as people desiring to invite friends to come to North Point.⁴² A win is when they create a weekend experience in which they can say, "Wow, this weekend, we killed it!"⁴³ For Stanley, "The long-term win is life change."⁴⁴ Although, given Stanley's overall philosophy, what that life change looks like is questionable. For example:

"I'm not trying to produce Bible scholars. And by the way, teaching through the entire Bible doesn't create Bible scholars anyway. It creates people who *think* they are Bible scholars. And those are some of the meanest, most uncompassionate human beings on the planet. ... I'm partial to hungry, ignorant Christians myself. The kind who are content to love Jesus and the people he died for. I'll take the Christian who doesn't know it all but is committed to doing what he or she knows over the Christian who knows it all and that's as far as it goes."⁴⁵

Stated this way anyone would side with Stanley, but Scripture does not describe a disciple in such either-or-terms. Instead the student of biblical truth is one who does not seek knowledge for its own sake, or to stake out a position of superiority over others. The biblical picture is that

truth and theology are used by the Holy Spirit to change lives not just fill our heads. As the Puritan William Ames defined it, "Theology is the knowledge of how to live in the presence of God."⁴⁶

Deep and Wide offers nothing that has not been said before by seeker-sensitive leaders. This philosophy of ministry which first gained traction in the 1970s via Robert Schuller and Bill Hybels has radically changed the Church in the Western world. The unsaved consumer is now king, marketing strategy sets the direction, and pragmatism rules. The system "works," at least numerically, for many like Andy Stanley. But a careful examination of the New Testament leads us to conclude that this is not God's design for His Church.

WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Perhaps the most revealing statements in *Deep and Wide* are these:

"People are far more interested in what works than what's true. I hate to burst your bubble, but virtually nobody in your church is on a truth quest. Including your spouse. They are on happiness quests. ... But that's the way it is. It's pointless to resist. If you try, you will end up with a little congregation of truth seekers who consider themselves superior to all the other Christians in the community. ... If people are more interested in being happy, then play to that. Jesus did."⁴⁷

Stanley draws a distinction between truth for truth's sake and showing people how truth makes a difference, and he's right. God's truth is designed to change our lives and, if not presented as such, it is cold, sterile, and merely academic. But culture, not biblical truth, guides Stanley's philosophy of church ministry. He states that, "Culture is like the wind. You can't stop it. You shouldn't spit in it. But, if like a good sailor you adjust your sails, you can harness the winds of culture to take your audience where they need to go."⁴⁸

We should turn back to the New Testament to see what the Lord has to

say about the Church and how it should function. Stanley has admitted that his “secret sauce” for church growth is not drawn from Scripture, but from pragmatism and experience. The Lord has His own sauce, but it is not secret. It has been openly revealed in Scripture.

Stanley’s first ingredient is to dispense with proclaiming truth, except as it enhances the hearer’s pursuit of happiness. If Stanley is correct, this would greatly affect what is taught in the context of the church, and it will limit what we teach and how we teach it. As for content, our messages will focus on practical matters that directly relate to the pursuit of happiness.

Stanley himself often preaches on topics such as worry, marriage, finances, time management, and other pragmatic issues. And while instruction concerning all of these things and more is contained within Scripture, it is found within the fuller context of biblical truth. However, matters of deeper theological concern are largely ignored when church leaders adopt a topical, felt-needs approach.

Those who practice such instructional methods probably would not consider preaching a message on Christ’s priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. However, the Holy Spirit indicates in Hebrews 5-7 that the Christian life will never be lived out as the Lord intends if we do not have a firm grasp on the priesthood of Christ. In addition, what we believe is important to teach and preach will determine to a large degree how we “teach and preach.”

Stanley has gone on record as being opposed to expository, verse-by-verse instruction from Scripture. In an interview he was asked: “What do you think about preaching verse-by-verse messages through books of the Bible?” Stanley’s answer was:

“Guys that preach verse-by-verse through books of the Bible — that is just cheating. It’s cheating because that would be easy, first of all. That isn’t how you grow people. No one in the Scripture

modeled that. There’s not one example of that.”⁴⁹

Yet, according to the New Testament, teaching God’s Word in context, clearly, truthfully, and practically, is the way to grow disciples. Let’s take a quick overview.

John 8:31-32 — Jesus told His followers, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Jesus valued truth.

Acts 2:42 — The important marks of the local church are outlined in this verse describing why the first Christians came together. They “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

At the Great Commission Jesus told His disciples to “make disciples” by baptizing them and “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus did not tell the apostles to merely teach the Old Testament Scriptures, but to teach what He had commanded them, and He had promised them in the Upper Room that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that He had said to them (John 14:25-26; cf. 12:16).

As the Holy Spirit did so, the apostles in turn taught these things to the early converts. In contrast to modern philosophies of church life, the crowds were drawn because they were on a “truth quest.” They hungered for the teaching of the apostles for they knew that in these teachings was true spiritual life.

Acts 20:32 — The story of the rest of the book of Acts is that of the spread of the Gospel and the ministry of truth. The words spoken to the Ephesian elders and recorded here summarize the emphasis of Paul’s ministry, “I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Far from shunning the proclamation of truth, Paul declares that it is the means by which God builds up His people.

The epistles contain the “apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) in written form. While the Lord communicated to us “at various times and in various ways” (Hebrews 1:1), He “has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus Himself never wrote a single word of Scripture. The task of spreading the words of our Lord was given to His disciples, mainly His apostles: “After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard” (Hebrews 2:3, NASB).

Because of this dynamic, the epistles are not so much full of commandments to teach the Word as they are full of doctrine and instruction, containing inspired revelation on how we are to live and what we are to believe. However, when we turn to the more personal letters, often called the “Pastoral Epistles,” we find Paul repeatedly admonishing these early church leaders to devote themselves to teaching the instructions that were handed down to him by Christ and in turn him to them (cf. 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2).

When we turn to the Pastoral Epistles we find the Holy Spirit-inspired writings by the Apostle Paul, who is nearing his exodus from the scene and is telling those following him what God’s design for His Church should be. It is important that we observe carefully the emphasis in all three letters — 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus — on doctrine and teaching. If the Pastorals represent God’s “secret sauce” for what is important and how the local church is to function, then the main ingredients are:

Doctrine: There is clear warning concerning false doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3; 6:3), which Paul calls “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). Conversely, God’s people should be nourished by sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:6) so that our lives do not blaspheme God’s name or His doctrine (1 Timothy 6:1), but rather adorn the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10). We are all to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

At times, people, even Christians, will not desire or even endure sound

doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3). Nevertheless we are to preach the Word even when it is out of favor (2 Timothy 4:1-5) because it is the divinely appointed means by which Christians are made “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17).

Theology is so important that “holding fast” to sound doctrine, being able to teach it, and being capable of refuting those who contradict it is a requirement for an elder of the local church (Titus 1:9). It is interesting that the New Testament says nothing about an elder needing to be able to run a business, read spreadsheets, or organize socials, but it speaks clearly of the need to teach and protect sound doctrine.

The Faith: A virtual synonym for doctrine is the phrase “the faith,” which is peppered throughout the Pastorals (1 Timothy 1:2; 3:9, 13; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21; 2 Timothy 2:18; 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:13; 3:15). We are told that in the latter times some will fall away from the faith or apostatize (1 Timothy 4:1), go astray from the faith (1 Timothy 6:21), and upset the faith of others (2 Timothy 2:18; 2:8). For this reason church leadership works diligently to help its people be sound in the faith (Titus 1:13). Paul himself was most pleased to report that he had kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7).

Truth: Sound doctrine is truth. If people are deprived of the truth of the Gospel they are not saved (1 Timothy 6:5), so it is vital that they come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4; Titus 1:1). False teachers, and those enslaved by sin, are characterized by Paul as having gone astray from the truth (2 Timothy 2:18; Titus 1:14), lacking knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25; 3:7), and turning their ears from the truth (2 Timothy 4:4).

For these reasons the Church must understand that it is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15) and that all Christians, but especially the leadership, are those who are “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). The local church can and does many other things, but if it does not major on the careful procla-

mation of the truth it is not fulfilling its mission from God.

Assemblies that do not take the teaching of truth seriously may look like a church, call themselves a church, and function much like a church, but they are not living out their calling as the Church of Christ. Kevin Vanhoozer, in his book *Faith Speaking Understanding*, writes:

“What does the church have to say and do that no other institution can? Nature and society alike abhor a vacuum, and there are many ideologies and agendas waiting to rush in and fill the hearts and minds of the uncommitted. Doctrine orients the church’s life by teaching it how to live and what to live for.”⁵⁰

Teach/instruct: Teaching is mentioned by name in every chapter of the Pastorals except the last one. For example, Paul warns of those who teach things that are contrary to sound teaching (1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:11), that some will accumulate for themselves teachers who will tell them what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3), and others will oppose biblical teaching (2 Timothy 4:15). But God’s people should be instructed with truth (Titus 2:1, 3) so that love, purity, a good conscience, and faith are produced (1 Timothy 1:5).

Church leadership, particularly elders, must be able to instruct (1 Timothy 3:2), working hard at teaching the Word so that it affects and changes lives (1 Timothy 4:11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:2, 17-18; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 4:2-3). In Ephesians 4:11-12 we find that the reason God gives the Church gifted men, including pastor/teachers, is “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

If we are developing our churches around God’s paradigm, it would be impossible to miss the central role of doctrine, truth, and instruction in the Word. If we take our cue from God and have a biblically informed ecclesiology, rather than starting with the ideas of people and pragmatism and trying to sandwich a few Scripture

verses into our program, we must conclude that God loves truth, has given us truth in His infallible Word, and has instructed His Church to be a place in which the teaching of Scripture and sound doctrine is paramount. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote:

“As well might a medical doctor discard his books on anatomy and therapeutics as for the preacher to discard his books on Systematic Theology; and since doctrine is the bone structure of the body of revealed truth, the neglect of it must result in a message characterized by uncertainties, inaccuracies, and immaturity.”⁵¹

Vanhoozer strikes the right balance when he writes, “Desire for God without doctrine is blind; doctrine without desire is empty.”⁵² Yet many forces are at work to untether the Church from serious study of Scripture and theology. Let’s examine some of them.

WHEN DOCTRINE DWINDLES

Vanhoozer observes that “when doctrine dwindles, disciples can only limp. It is difficult to walk with a dislocated hip.”⁵³ And yet many disciples are limping badly these days due to the de-emphasis of theology and expositional teaching of Scripture in the Church.

Vanhoozer draws his readers’ attention to four books that have analyzed American Christian faith. They each have come to similar conclusions concerning the lack of theological depth, but they each point to slightly different roots.⁵⁴

- Alan Wolfe, a non-Christian sociologist, wrote an insightful book in 2003, *The Transformation of American Religion*, which documents his research demonstrating that culture has triumphed over every aspect of religious life. He asserts that “the faithful in the United States are remarkably like everyone else.”⁵⁵

Most Americans, Wolfe believes, have little interest in doctrine, but are interested in “spirituality,” or the feeling of intimacy with God that

apparently can be had, according to some, apart from knowledge of biblical truth. Churches have tapped into this trend, giving people what they want. Wolfe writes that, "Evangelical churches lack doctrine because they want to attract new members,"⁵⁶ and they do that by "playing down doctrine in favor of feelings."⁵⁷

This emphasis on feelings rather than biblical knowledge is reflected in studies which demonstrate that "58 percent of Americans cannot name five of the ten commandments, just under half know that Genesis is the first book of the Bible, fewer than that can tell interviewers about the meaning of the Holy Trinity, and 10 percent of them believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife."⁵⁸

- Christian Smith's main contribution to our thesis is the development of what he calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) as "the new mainstream American religious faith for our culturally post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalist society."⁵⁹

Smith sees MTD as representing the core beliefs held in common by the masses who claim to be Christians today. MTD's deistic creed reads something like this:

"I believe in a creator God who orders and watches over life on earth. I believe that God wants people to be good: to act nice to one another [the 'moralistic' tenet]. I believe that the central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself [the 'therapeutic' tenet]. I believe that God is not involved in my life except when I need God to solve a problem. I believe that good people go to heaven. Virtual worlds without end, Amen."⁶⁰

MTD is a most fitting religion for those who are concerned for a moral society, who have been soaked since birth in psychobabble, and who see no need for God except in moments of crisis. Smith's observations appear to be on target not only within the general culture but within much of the Christian Church as well.

- David Wells has written a five-volume series which Carl Henry called, "A penetrating appraisal of the state of religion in America." Vanhoozer summarizes the message portrayed in *The Courage to Be Protestant*, the final book in the collection, with these words:

"We can sum up [Wells'] overall thesis in one sentence: the twenty-first-century evangelical church is on the verge of selling its Protestant birthright, *sola scriptura*, for a mess of pottage, *sola cultura*. Put differently: the evangelical church finds itself in danger of being indoctrinated by culture rather than Scripture. There is too much concern with what works and sells than with gospel truth."⁶¹

- Finally, Vanhoozer turns to an old-school liberal, Harvey Cox and his book, *Future of Faith*. Cox is happy to see the end of emphasis on "belief" and a return to life — or the "Age of Faith" as he calls it — which supposedly marked the early Church before doctrine derailed vibrant spirituality. Cox endorses Aldous Huxley's rendition of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily faith, but deliver us from *beliefs*."⁶²

Of course, Cox is echoing the old and ridiculous liberal line that life and beliefs must be separated, whereas Scripture teaches that true spirituality should flow from sound theology. The view championed by Cox is at the heart of theological liberalism going back into the early 1700s. What is new and disturbing is the increased adoption of the same philosophy by today's Evangelicals.

It was in essence this same artificial divide between doctrine and life that jump-started the liberal branch of Christianity. As the people in the pews imbibed this philosophy, coupled with reduction in biblical exposition and minimalistic theological instruction, they distanced themselves from biblical Christianity. We are witnessing the same cycle, this time within evangelical and even fundamentalist communities.

CORRECTION

Returning to a doctrinal foundation, rather than building the church on what is currently tickling the ears of people, is going to be difficult.

David Wells gives a perceptive account in the Introduction to his book, *No Place for Truth*, concerning a semester-opening seminary class on theology. Knowing that his students for the most part considered theology unimportant, he had prepared his opening defense proving that everyone has a theology, but as Christians ours must be based solidly on the Word. Thinking he had set the agenda for the course ahead and had persuaded his students of his position, he was preparing to leave when a number of students made it clear that they did not share his opinion. One student spoke for the rest:

"That day, an obviously agitated student who had come forward told me how grateful he was for what I had said. It was as if I had been reading his mind. He told me that he was one of those I had described who felt petrified by the prospect of having to take this course. As a matter of fact, he said, he had had a mighty struggle with his conscience about it. Was it right to spend so much money on a course of study that was so irrelevant to his desire to minister to people in the Church? He plainly intended no insult. As a matter of fact, this confession, which I rather think he had not intended to blurt out, had begun as a compliment."⁶³

Those looking for a passionate relationship with the Lord would do well to contemplate the words of the following two evangelical leaders who want the same, but who warn that the road to such intimacy is paved with truth (doctrine). R.C. Sproul says:

"There can be nothing in the heart that is not first in the mind. Though it is possible to have theology in the head without its piercing the soul, it cannot pierce

the soul without first being grasped by the mind.”⁶⁴

And few Evangelicals speak more about passion than does John Piper, who warns, “Not to care about truth, is not to care about God. To love God passionately is to love truth passionately.”⁶⁵

These men, regardless of differences we might have with certain areas of their theology, are on target, and to ignore this wisdom, which is grounded in Scripture, is to default to a spirituality more in line with imagination and subjectivism than biblical instruction or example.

The way forward at this time is for increasing numbers of Evangelicals to take seriously biblical texts such as Jude 3. Jude had longed to write a positive letter dealing with the glorious truths of our salvation. But due to his observations of errors penetrating the Church of his day, he saw the necessity to write to his audience “exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

For the faith to thrive in our lives and churches we must take a stand for truth, even if that means division. As Steve Larson, quoting Adrian Rogers, writes:

“It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling truth than to be loved for telling a lie. ... It’s better to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude.”⁶⁶

Paul, in his final inspired epistle, warned Timothy that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

This warning is not followed by a cry of despair, nor an injunction to give the people what they want to hear, but rather, “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5). And it is preceded by, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (v. 2).

Like Timothy, we are living in times when sound doctrine is not being endured and people are creating celebrities out of those who can winsomely and creatively tell them what they want to hear. But instead of giving in to the desires of such people we are to preach the Word and seriously proclaim the truth of God as found in Scripture.

DOCTRINE REALLY DOES MATTER

The only purpose or mission statement used at my church is this: “Learning truth, living truth.” As a church family we are firmly committed to the concept that robust biblical living must spring from the truth of God’s Word.

Many try to disconnect these two components of the Christian life with the apparent assumption that one may choose to know truth or live a vibrant spiritual life, but not both. This is faulty thinking at the very minimum. If we take seriously the proclamation found in Romans 12:2 that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, then the teachings found in Scripture become central to our spiritual development. Otherwise there would be no need for the Word to explain God, describe humanity, pinpoint the problem of sin and the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, instruct us on how to live to the honor of God, and hundreds of other topics.

Christianity as a religion is distinguished from all others by its focus on teaching truth. When this is minimized, our faith is dumbed-down to sound-bites and bumper stickers. It morphs into religious moralism, self-help programs, or worse. When pastors and elders do not take this

seriously, when they major on helping people feel good about themselves or providing mechanisms to enable them to enjoy themselves, find themselves, or please themselves, rather than teaching them to live for the glory of God (e.g., Psalm 115:1) and the enduring truth centered in Christ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 2:2), they deprive their people of the sustenance necessary to sustain their walk with God.

A steady diet of biblical truth is vital for spiritual health. The teaching of Scripture and theology then is not optional, but foundational. The majority of Christians today are malnourished. They have little concept of doctrines pertaining to humanity or salvation or the importance and sufficiency of Scripture. As a result they do not have the foundation of truth needed to make informed decisions on ethical issues or biblical insight for analyzing our times.

Sadly, Christians have been fed theological junk food for so long that many have lost the appetite for truth. Therefore, the pastor who — in obedience to 2 Timothy 2:15 — labors hard to provide a biblically balanced theological diet may often be disappointed to discover that most of his people are content with “fast food.” In this regard, Peter Jeffery astutely observes:

“Christians are often put off [by] doctrine by the sort of preaching they hear. ... Doctrinal preaching, because of the subjects it is dealing with, ought to be thrilling to hear and should excite the hearts and minds of God’s people. There is no greater inducement to want to understand the doctrines of the faith, than to hear preaching of these truths that is both warm and passionate. In contrast to this is the kind of preaching that is full of stories and jokes but has little or no content. It is easy to listen to but it leaves its hearers with no awareness of the glory and majesty of God. It is entertaining but it does not create in the people a deeper love for Christ. It is popular but just as useless as the passionless doctrinal sermon

because it fails to address the minds of the people.”⁶⁷

Jeffery also emphasizes that, “Doctrine is simply a word to describe what the Bible teaches and no believer should be afraid to grapple with it.”⁶⁸

The alternative to sound biblical theology, in which people walk in truth to the glory of God, is walking in deception to the dishonor of God. Without clear biblical theology, discipleship is not possible.

As earlier noted, one of the hallmarks of old liberalism, which rose to prominence in the 18th through the early 20th centuries, was the idea that theology and vibrant Christian life did not mix. In modern times many Evangelicals are echoing the same theme and ultimately the outcome will be the same — a Christendom which maintains a facade of authentic Christianity but gutted of biblical content. As David Wells reminds us:

“[We] are called to see that the Church does not adapt its thinking to the horizons that modernity prescribes for it but rather that it brings to those horizons the powerful antidote of God’s truth. It is not the Word of God but rather modernity that stands in need of being demythologized.”⁶⁸

And as R.C. Sproul writes:

“I think the greatest weakness in the church today is that almost no one believes that God invests His power in the Bible. Everyone is looking for power in a program, in a methodology, in a technique, in anything and everything but that in which God has placed it — His Word.”⁶⁹

May we become a people who love and desire the Word, and by doing so be spared as much as possible from the many deceptions that are everywhere; and that we are aided in walking in the light of God’s truth. After all, with the Apostle John, we “have no greater joy than to hear that [our] children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

Endnotes:

1. Steven Spearie, “Mega-Growth, *The State Journal Register* (Springfield, Ill.), Nov. 22, 2015, pp. 1, 6.
2. See William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith, Christian Truth and Apologetics*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994, pp. 233-236.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 269.
4. Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided, A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000*. Edinburgh, England: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000, pg. 5.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 8, italics in original.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
8. R.C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas, Understanding the Concepts That Shaped Our World*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000, pg. 155.
9. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 34, 35.
10. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923, 2009, pg. 17.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 149.
12. David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism, The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005, pg. 259.
13. Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide, Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 14.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 15.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
18. See further, Gary E. Gilley with Jay Wegter, *This Little Church Had None*. Carlisle, Penna.: EP Books US, 2009, pp. 23-35.
19. *Deep and Wide*, op. cit., pp. 85-91.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 90-92, 298-299.
21. *Ibid.*, pg. 86.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-93.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 55.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. 59.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 94-95, 127-130.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 81.
27. See *ibid.*, pp. 111-116, 190.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108, italic in original.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 107.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-117.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 114, italics in original.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-123.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-130.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-137.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-149.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-192.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 172.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 185.
41. *Ibid.*, pg. 194.
42. See *ibid.*, pp. 331-335.

43. *Ibid.*, pg. 195, italics in original.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 197, italics in original.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 190, italic in original.
46. Williams Ames cited by Timothy George in Foreword of Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian, Resurrecting an Ancient Vision*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015, pg. 7.
47. *Deep and Wide*, op. cit., pp. 114, 115, italics in original.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.
49. J.D. Hall, “Andy Stanley Trashes Expository Preaching; Calls it ‘Easy’ and ‘Cheating,’” Pulpit & Pen website, May 8, 2015. Document accessed at: <http://pulpitandpen.org/2015/05/08/andy-stanley-trashes-expository-preaching-calls-it-easy-and-cheating/>.
50. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding, Performing the Drama of Doctrine*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, pg. 6.
51. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947, Vol. 1, pg. v.
52. *Faith Speaking Understanding*, op. cit., pg. xiv.
53. *Ibid.*, pg. 53.
54. I should mention that I have studied the material from the first three books and authors, but have not read the last.
55. Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion, How We Actually Live Our Faith*. New York: Free Press, 2003, pg. 3.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 87.
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 74.
58. *Ibid.*, pg. 247.
59. Kenda Creasy Dean cited in *Faith Speaking Understanding*, op. cit., pg. 54.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55, brackets in original.
61. *Ibid.*, pg. 55, italics in original.
62. *Ibid.*, pg. 56, italic in original.
63. David Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1993, pg. 4.
64. R.C. Sproul cited in Donald S. Whitney, “Union of Doctrine and Devotion” in John H. Armstrong, *The Compromised Church, The Present Evangelical Crisis*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998, pg. 256.
65. John Piper cited in *ibid.*
66. Adrian Rogers cited in Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land, A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2003, pg. 68, ellipsis in original, quotation rendered in italics in original.
67. Peter Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology*. Auburn, Mass.: Evangelical Press USA, 2000, pp. 10-11.
68. *Ibid.*, pg. 10.
69. *No Place for Truth*, op. cit., pg. 100.
70. R.C. Sproul, *The Prayer of the Lord*. Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 2009, pg. 101.

Scholars cannot agree as to whether it is a Christian writing or a pre-Christian Jewish writing. There is also no agreement as to whom Enoch was and whether the original was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. No such confusion exists as far as the Bible is concerned.

Enoch lays claim to visions of the entirety of history and the mysteries of heaven. He meets angels and is on a first-name basis with them as he takes trips to both heaven and hell. His celestial travels are extraordinary. Some of the book's accounts will remind modern readers of all the books available on purported trips to the "other side." (Mark Hitchcock's *Visits to Heaven and Back – Are They Real?* exposes many of these claims of modern-day visits to heaven.)

The Book of Enoch has symbols, visions, and allegories that are almost impossible to decipher. Any interpretation is totally subjective. In the end the meaning is in the eye of the beholder. Not so with the Bible. Even the figures of speech in the Bible are clearly figures of speech.

The Jewish concept of Messiah is mentioned in *The Book of Enoch*, but there is no mention of Jesus, which means it is unlikely that the book is of Christian origin.

There is almost universal agreement based on the literary evidence that *The Book of Enoch* was written by more than one person. There is some confusion as to which author wrote what, but almost complete consensus by scholars as to multiple authorship.

The big question that remains is why Jude referred to *The Book of Enoch* (Enoch chapter 1:9), regarding judgment in verses 14-15 of his epistle. One suggestion is that Jude used a source the Jewish readers would accept to cut through the readers' defenses. Though not endorsing the entire *Book of Enoch*, Jude was saying that Enoch got something right.

John Benton explains that it is unlikely that Jude quoted from this book because he fully approved of it (*Slandering the Angels*, pg. 92). And in a further evaluation, Benton gives us the following:

"[T]here is no reason to necessarily jump to the conclusion that Jude accepts the prophecy of Enoch given here as Scripture. But there are a number of matters to bear in mind. Firstly, there seems a cogent argument to believe, as has been outlined earlier, that *The Book of Enoch* (with its lists of celestial beings, its angelic encounters and conversations) would be the kind of literature preferred by the false teachers against whom Jude is writing. Therefore to answer them in terms of their own sources makes sense. It may well be, in the light of verse 4, that the false teachers did not recognize the authority of Christ (who is the key to understanding

the Scriptures) and therefore Jude seeks to first refute them on their own ground. Secondly, we have to say that the contents of this particular quotation from *The Book of Enoch* can be reconstructed as a pastiche of verses from the canonical Old Testament Scriptures. Without any distortion of the basic intention of the passages, Moses' prayer for Israel in Deuteronomy 33:2-4 together with the words of Isaiah 66:15-16 and Malachi 3:13 virtually cover the whole text. So, in a sense, Jude can justify his quotation as Scripture. Indeed, such Old Testament scriptural references may well have been the original texts from which the writer of *The Book of Enoch* drew his inspiration for this part of his work" (ibid., pg. 113).

Benton is saying that a part of *The Book of Enoch* is drawing from biblical truth.

There is no need to devote our attention to studying *The Book of Enoch*. Time would be better spent studying the Bible. It is sad that we live in a day when people crave the fictional and the fanciful. People long for the bizarre, the emotional, and the esoteric. They have desires driven by fantasy rather than sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3). And so it just keeps getting stranger and stranger.

—GRF

Author's note: For more information, with additional depth and detail on the history of *The Book of Enoch*, see Volume 3 of Emil Schurer's *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*.

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

According to the newspaper, which has long kept its finger on TBN's pulse, "The company spent millions more than it took in for six straight years. The widest gap was in 2014 — the most recent year available — when revenue was \$121.5 million but Trinity spent \$162.6 million. Trinity's meaty net assets — what's left after liabilities are subtracted from assets — help it through. That nest egg, though, shrank from a high of \$857.9 million in 2009 to \$755.8 million in 2014."

And 2,500 miles away from its Costa Mesa, Calif., headquarters, another of TBN's holdings is also feeling the pain. Holy Land Experience, the Network's Bible-based theme park in Orlando, Fla., has had to exercise more caution in its spending. Just weeks after Jan's death, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported that the attraction was "Struggling with a sea of red ink in recent financial reports" and further revealed that the "Holy Land Experience is selling hundreds of ornate couches, thrones, angel's wings, nativity statues, costumes — and even a Harley-Davidson motorcycle."

However, a TBN attorney told the newspaper that "estate sales are routine 'belt-tightening' to clean out old

items from the theme park and the network's studios." But the *Sentinel* reported, "TBN is facing a drop in revenues after it stopped live telethons in 2012, and Holy Land, consequently, stopped receiving such a large contribution from its parent company."

According to the *Sentinel*, "The park received nearly \$43 million in 2010 and \$23 million in 2011. Since then, the cash injections have dropped to about \$2.5 million. Holy Land, which receives a special tax exemption because it's classified as a church instead of a theme park, showed a deficit of \$1.39 million in 2014, the most recent year for which the non-profit organization's public tax filings are available."

Following TBN's purchase of the Holy Land Experience in 2007, Jan moved to Orlando to be the theme park's president and creative director and personally oversee its operations. The park was built by Marvin Rosenthal, a Jewish convert to Christianity, and originally opened in February 2001. In June 2007, the property was sold to TBN for a reported \$37 million, and was said to be an estimated \$8 million in debt at the time of the sale.

The TBN empire is currently in the hands of the Crouches' younger son, Matthew. The *Orange County Register* stated that the "heir apparent was eldest son Paul Crouch Jr.," but that he and "his family were ousted from Trinity's board of directors and its employ" as a result of "back-and-forth allegations of financial mismanagement and a claim that some in the family covered up sexual abuse."

—MKG

PRIVATE LDS CHURCH VIDEOS POSTED ONLINE

No matter how hard one may try to keep confidential information secure, "Internet leaks," where private data is released to the public, have become all too common. Just ask the U.S. Government, Sony Pictures, Microsoft, and now The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In October, several videos showing top Mormon leaders privately discussing a range of subject matter from gay rights to membership issues with single young adults to American politics were posted on YouTube. The videos were made between 2007 and 2012.

According to the *Associated Press*, the leak "pulls back the curtain on a religion that is closely guarded about its inner workings." Citing Matthew Bowman, who is identified as a "Mormon scholar," the *AP* also stated, "Though the videos don't reveal information that is necessarily surprising or damning, they have generated widespread interest because people are curious about how the religion's top leaders — considered apostles — make decisions."

A day after the material was anonymously posted to YouTube, *The Salt Lake Tribune* identified former Mormon Ryan McKnight as the person responsible for uploading the 15 videos. McKnight said he was contacted by someone — possibly a current or former employee of the Mormon Church — who desired to have the videos broadcast but was "worried about violating a nondisclosure contract."

McKnight told the *Tribune*, "There's no reason members need to be afraid of them, or for ex-Mormons to think this will damage the church." According to the Salt Lake newspaper, "McKnight is motivated by a desire for the LDS Church to be more 'transparent,' and hopes 'this leak inspires more people to come forward with other things.'"

This is not McKnight's first such undertaking of posting insider LDS information. The *Tribune* disclosed that, "McKnight's move paralleled some of what he has done for about a year. Since November [2015] — when he played a role in the leak of the LDS Church's controversial gay-marriage policy — he has received periodic messages from Mormons who insist they work for the church and are eager to share what they believe are explosive documents from inside the faith's Salt Lake City headquarters."

"No matter how mundane the videos are, some Mormons found disconcerting elements in them," the *Tribune* reported.

—MKG

TRACT PUBLISHER JACK CHICK DIES

The man best known for his aggressive and controversial comic-book-style Gospel tracts and booklets has died. According to a post on his ministry's Facebook page, "Brother Jack Chick passed away Sunday evening, October 23, peacefully in his sleep. He was 92. He will be interred in a small private ceremony."

Chick Publications sold more than 750 million tracts in more than 100 languages since the early 1960s, but Chick himself kept a low personal profile. According to Wikipedia, "Initially, Chick wrote and illustrated all of the comics himself, but in 1972 he hired another artist to illustrate many of the tracts. Fred Carter illustrated tracts anonymously until 1980, when he was identified in an issue of Chick's newsletter *Battle Cry*."

In the 1970s, Chick began publishing a series of full-length comic books, the first of which purported that the Illuminati was the force behind the bulk of demonic influence in the world. His source was John Todd, who claimed to have been a Grand Druid and high-ranking member of the secret organization. A few years later, Chick teamed up with Alberto Rivera and his focus

shifted to the Roman Catholic Church as the primary agent of satanic activity. Rivera said he was a former Jesuit priest and secret agent of the Catholic Church. In the 1980s, Chick promoted the unsubstantiated claims of Rebecca Brown, who blamed witches and occultists for the rise of demonic activity. The claims of Todd, Rivera, and Brown have been thoroughly debunked.

—MKG

HARVARD ACQUIRES PEARSON RESOURCES

For more than a decade the ministry resources of former megachurch pastor Carlton Pearson were locked away in a storage locker in downtown Tulsa, Okla. But now the nearly “300 crates of video footage, music recordings, photos, notes, and financial records” have been donated to Harvard University. According to an article in the *Boston Globe*, “Harvard plans to exhume that corpse and give it a new life online. Pearson’s media archive, which will be digitized by Andover-Harvard Theological Library over the next two years, will offer scholars a rare unvarnished glimpse inside the closely guarded world of evangelical religious broadcasting — and the careers of some of its most notable practitioners.”

Pearson fell from grace in the late 1990s when he began to openly announce the unorthodox view of inclusionism — the teaching that salvation is available apart from a

personal saving faith in Jesus Christ. Pearson came under fire from many of his Pentecostal and Charismatic colleagues as his theological position became known. Even *Charisma* magazine, a publication which is unabashed in its tolerance and promotion of aberrant doctrine, labeled Pearson a heretic.

Pearson was once a prominent player in the Pentecostal and Charismatic world. He was a trustee of Oral Roberts University, the first African-American to host his own program on the Trinity Broadcasting Network, and the pastor of New Dimensions Church, a Tulsa-based church which numbered about 6,000 members. But all of that became extinct as revelations of his inclusionism became known. Now, as a United Church of Christ minister, Pearson “does most of his ministry online” and “said his spirituality continues to evolve,” the *Globe* reported.

Harvard’s acquisition of the ministry resources was procured by the Rev. Jonathan L. Walton, who is a professor at Harvard, after learning of them while researching a book on Pearson. Walton said the contents include “raw footage of Pearson’s highly produced television shows; receipts of the speakers’ honorariums at his annual Azusa conference, a festival of preaching and gospel music that drew just about every famous name in late 20th century evangelical broadcasting; and correspondence from the White House on faith-based initiatives,” according to the *Globe*.

It was also revealed that Pearson’s life story is being made into a feature film.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

TRUTH MATTERS

by Andreas Köstenberger,

Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw

B&H Publishing Group, 188 pages, \$12.99

Although this book is geared toward college students, it would be of benefit to anyone who has been challenged by the skeptical assaults on the Bible and the Christian faith promoted by popular contemporary agnostic religion professor Bart Ehrman and similar non-Christian academics. College students, particularly, are a critical audience to target, because this is a time in life when young people are especially susceptible to being influenced away from the Christian faith by seemingly sophisticated, knowledgeable, and unbelieving professors.

Like Ehrman, each of this book's authors is an academic at an institution of higher learning: Köstenberger and Bock are each senior research professors of New Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dallas Theological Seminary respectively, and Chatraw is director of the Center for Apologetics and Cultural Engagement at Liberty University.

Although *Truth Matters* is a small hardback book, its dimensions belie the substantial, weighty (but quite readable) contents within it. This book is a somewhat simplified version of the authors' more in-depth volume titled, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible*.

The authors appropriately end the Preface to *Truth Matters* by citing Proverbs 18:17, "The first to state his case seems right until another comes and cross-examines him" (pg. xx). The authors' obvious application of the first part of that verse is to Ehrman, and the ones challenging him, per the second half of the verse, are this book's authors.

The book is divided into seven chapters of varying lengths, each of which has a title, along with a subtitle that helps explain the theme of that particular chapter. Except for the first chapter, which is introductory, the other six each deal with a topic about the Bible or the Christian faith that Ehrman has assaulted in his writings.

The book's longest chapter is, appropriately, on biblical difficulties (so-called "contradictions"), which Ehrman repeatedly charges the Bible with in his popular-level books. Interestingly, the book's shortest chapter, its last chapter, is on the Resurrection of Jesus. The book concludes with an important Epilogue.

Although the book's first chapter, "The Skeptical Mystique: What Makes Unbelief So Terribly Believable?" is introductory, it is very important. In it they note, "Ehrman lost his faith after engaging in enough ... scholarly skirmishes. And he's been filching it from unsuspecting students ever since" (pg. 2). On pages 3-14, they give four ways unbelieving professors successfully lure students away from the Christian faith:

1. They speak your language.
2. They know you've probably never contemplated these ideas before.
3. They comfort and confirm an air of disbelief.
4. They reinforce the view that faith is at odds with reason.

The authors assure students, "Plenty of credible scholars have looked at the same arguments your professor may be making and arrived at far different conclusions. You are not as alone as some would have you think" (pg. 10) and "Faith *is* reasonable — whether they want you to know it or not" (pg. 14, italic in original).

There is much good material in this book, and it should be required reading for anyone whose faith is under attack by the likes of Ehrman and his ilk. It is good for both students *and* adults (although adults may sometimes find the casual writing style jarring). One statement made in the book is no longer true. In endnote 13 on page 181, the authors note that Ehrman (significantly) never mentions a particular work by a particular author. However, in Ehrman's most recent book, *Jesus Before the Gospels* (published two years after *Truth Matters*), Ehrman does deal briefly and dismissively with that book and its author.

In the Epilogue the authors draw the book to a close with this salutary exhortation: "The challenge for everyone who thinks the Bible is (or even is possibly) inspired by God is to actually read it. Before reading any books that seek to call it into question — before even engrossing yourself in books like this one, which argues hard for a defense of Scripture — *read the Bible!*" (pg. 174, italics in original).

—JGS

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