



SPECIAL REPORT

PROMISE KEEPERS

IS WHAT YOU SEE, WHAT YOU GET?

By Albert James Dager

This 1998 Report combines our original 1994 writing and our 1995 update as published in Vol. 16 - No. 1 of Media Spotlight, plus some new material.

Anticipation hangs heavy over the stadium as tens of thousands of men make their way to seats becoming increasingly sparse. The mood is festive as large beach balls are punched with vigor, sending them on a never-ending course throughout the crowd. A styrofoam glider wafts its way from the upper regions, accompanied by ooohs and aaahs. Appearing to nose toward a crash, it suddenly catches a small thermal and lifts itself a little higher. Each time it descends into the crowd it is caught by someone and again sent on its way.

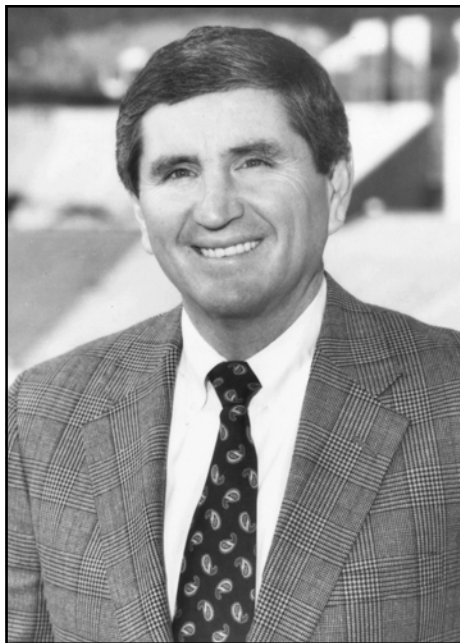
A small group of men on one side of the stadium begins to chant: "We love Jesus; yes we do! We love Jesus; how 'bout you?" The shout grows louder as more voices join in. Soon the other side of the stadium picks up the challenge. No one wins; it's a tie as to which side shouts loudest.

An announcement goes out over the speakers, asking the men to stop flying paper airplanes as a precaution against possible eye damage.

A ripple begins to form in one corner. Before long it makes its way into a wave circling the stadium, as men rise from their seats, arms raised, to shout. At first those on the stadium floor can merely pivot in place, watching the wave encircle them. Then, they, too, join in as a group at the end of the circle rises, sending the wave diagonally across the stadium floor.

The appointed time to begin the program has come and gone, but there is no impatience as the men are caught up in their boyish festivities. It's a warm summer day; everyone is having fun. So what's the rush?

About 20 minutes go by, but most everyone is oblivious to the delay. Suddenly a low rumble (is it thunder?) begins softly and becomes louder. It's the sound of a jet aircraft piercing the stadium from the huge speakers strategically placed for maximum effect. The large screen displays the takeoff of a jumbo jet as the



PROMISE KEEPERS FOUNDER
BILL MCCARTNEY

announcer welcomes the crowd to the flight for restored manhood. The now -full stadium erupts in a loud cheer. These men have come for something special; they have come to the Promise Keepers convention in any one of numerous cities. They have come expecting to hear words of inspiration that will kindle in them a zeal for greater commitment to their roles as men at home, in their church, and in their community.

A CALL TO ACTION

The first speaker gives an impassioned message, calling for a response to the offer of salvation or recommitment to Christ. To thunderous applause, thousands of men stream from every area of the stadium to take their position in front of the stage. A good beginning to an emotionally charged day just getting under way.

Speaker follows speaker, building on the Promise Keepers' theme, "*Carpe Diem*" ("Seize the Day!"). Men are encouraged to

take leadership and become involved in their churches, in their homes, and in their communities.

Closing the festivities at many of the conventions, the founder of Promise Keepers, Bill McCartney, displays his talent for motivating men—a talent that has won him national acclaim as head football coach for the University of Colorado. Toward the end of his pep talk, McCartney calls for all the pastors present to come forward for prayer. Thousands of men respond, demonstrating the pastoral support for this new and unique outreach. When McCartney urges the crowd to further demonstrate their appreciation for the pastors, they are rewarded with such prolonged, enthusiastic cheering that one might suspect it could be heard in the next state.

When the festivities end the men are dismissed to their homes, charged with excitement, determined to be "men of integrity." They have renewed their commitment to their role as husband,

father, church member, and American. Some have determined to become “Point Men” or “Ambassadors,” taking the Promise Keepers program into their churches.

Point Men are the primary contacts with the churches. They inform of conferences, training seminars, and resources, and organize promotion of Promise Keepers conferences.

Ambassadors introduce Promise Keepers to the churches in the communities, and recruit Point Men.

No matter what one may think of Promise Keepers, one must be impressed with the sheer energy, organization and ability to move men to action that is characteristic of a Promise Keepers convention. A movement of this magnitude, having arisen to great prominence among diverse churches in the course of a few short years, warrants study. The enthusiasm expressed by virtually everyone who has heard of Promise Keepers demonstrates that something of importance is occurring.

Nearly everyone to whom I had revealed that I was doing a study of Promise Keepers reacted in the same manner: screwing up their faces they exclaimed, “Don’t tell me there’s something wrong with Promise Keepers!”

Can anything really be that good? Is any organization so without blemish that it merits blind loyalty and rejection of any fair critiquing? The Lord promised that at the end He would present to Himself a church without spot or blemish. We know that the Body of Christ is nowhere near that condition. So why would we expect that any organization whose aim is to impact all the churches with their philosophy would be without spot or blemish—especially in view of the diverse and numerous contributors to the organization’s messages?

It’s precisely because Promise Keepers promotes the messages of varied teachers— from psychologists to charismatics, to fundamentalists—that discernment is essential.

Let us be encouraged that today there is a genuine desire among men to take seriously their responsibilities before God. But let’s not be blind about the frailties of men—even men who hold all good intentions for the pursuit of excellence in their Christian walk.

A HISTORY OF PROMISE KEEPERS

While on an automobile trip from Denver to Pueblo, Colorado in 1990, University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney was speaking with a friend about the need for a men’s ministry. During a luncheon at which he spoke, he noticed several fathers in attendance with their sons. This brought to mind Proverbs 27:17: “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”

Within weeks, encouraged by his Vineyard pastor, James Ryle, McCartney brought several others together for prayer and a brainstorming session, and Promise Keepers was born.

Writing in the Promise Keepers’ book, *What Makes a Man?*, Leighton Ford conveys what Bill McCartney told him was his number one goal in life:

What he said has stuck with me to this day. He said, “We want to beat Notre Dame and want to be number one. But my real goal is to use what influence I have to help raise up a generation of promise keepers. I think we need people in our country who will be promise keepers— in our families, in our businesses, in our public life, in everything.”¹

The growth of Promise Keepers has been phenomenal. Over 4,000 men attended Promise Keepers’ first conference at the Coors’ Event Center in Boulder, Colorado, in 1991. Their next conference in 1992 drew 22,000 men. 1993 saw 50,000 men attend. The total for 1994 neared 300,000 men at seven conferences, representing a growth rate of 600% in one year alone! In 1995 over 727,000 men, including some 60,000 pastors, attended Promise Keepers conferences. The original goal for 1996 was for one million men to meet in Washington D.C. as a witness to the nation. However, Promise Keepers pushed the date to October, 1977. (See our special report, “Promise Keepers’ D.C. Covenant”.)

The Nation of Islam’s Million Man March may have stolen some of Promise Keepers’ thunder in 1996. Louis Farrakhan’s plea for black men to take authority in their homes and communities paralleled that of Promise Keepers.

In February, 1996, Promise Keepers held its first clergy conference in Atlanta, Georgia, emphasizing the breaking down of denominational and racial barriers.

Although Bill McCartney is credited with founding Promise Keepers, the administrative duties are performed by its president, Randy Phillips, who, at the time of our initial writing in October, 1994, had 80 full-time workers. According to McCartney, “it’s growing by leaps and bounds.”² Phillips attributes the growth to a new move of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Gary Oliver, master of ceremonies at the 1994 Promise Keepers conference in Portland, Oregon, stated that Promise Keepers receives 10,000 phone calls and up to 5,000 pieces of mail per day.³ Those numbers have increased considerably since then.

In practical terms, much of the Promise Keepers success can be attributed to certain men who have given their whole-hearted endorsement. These include Bill Bright, Gary Smalley, and Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family. These men touch millions of lives within the Christian community. Dobson has promoted Promise Keepers most effectively through his nationwide broadcasts over hundreds of radio stations. He urges wives to get their husbands involved. Almost since its inception, Promise Keepers has become a topic of mention on these programs several times. There is hardly a church—at least among those that would call themselves “evangelical” that has not been impacted to some degree by Promise Keepers.

1 Leighton Ford, *What Makes a Man? Twelve Promises That Will Change Your Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1992), p. 18.

2 Bill McCartney, message given at Promise Keepers conference, Portland, Oregon, June 18, 1994.

3 Gary Oliver, message given at Promise Keepers conference, Portland, Oregon, June 18, 1994.

THE PHILOSOPHY

Promise Keepers operates on the belief that God wants to reestablish men in leadership and responsibility in three areas: home, church and community. To accomplish this, says McCartney, men must commit to what he calls “the three non-negotiables of manhood: integrity, commitment and action.”⁴

If you were to take the word integrity and reduce it to its simplest terms you’d conclude that a man of integrity is a promise keeper. He’s a guy who, when he says something, can be trusted. When he gives his word, you can take it to the bank. His word is good.⁵

But, as McCartney notes, being a promise keeper is easier said than done. It takes genuine commitment to fulfill one’s promises, and that commitment must be translated into action.

The philosophy of Promise Keepers is best summed up in its “Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper”:

Promise 1: A Man and His God: “A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Promise 2: A Man and His Mentors: “A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises.”

Promise 3: A Man and His Integrity: “A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.”

Promise 4: A Man and His Family: “A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values.”

Promise 5: A Man and His Church: “A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources.”

Promise 6: A Man and His Brothers: “A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.”

Promise 7: A Man and His World: “A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.”⁶

On the face of it, no one can argue with these statements. Nor can anyone deny that the zeal inspired through the electrically-charged atmosphere of a Promise Keepers conference appears to be an effective means to motivate men toward these ideals. Certainly men must assume leadership in their homes and local as-

semblies if they will be in obedience to God’s Word. And male leadership in government and the community is to be desired. One evidence of a nation’s fall from grace is that women will rule over it (Isaiah 3:12).

Promise Keepers affirms this truth. But a Promise Keepers conference isn’t going to go far beyond a cursory explanation of, and challenge to commit to, the seven promises. For Promise Keepers to have the desired effect upon the Body of Christ at large it must bring its message into the local churches on an individual basis. Thus, the ultimate objective of the Promise Keepers conference is to recruit the Ambassadors and Point Men needed to take the Promise Keepers agenda into the churches. Dale Schlafer, Vice President of Pastoral Ministries for Promise Keepers, affirms this in the April 1995 *Men of Action* magazine:

A Promise Keepers conference is simply a piece to a much larger puzzle of building men’s ministry in your church. It is designed to be a catalytic event. Men will become excited by their relationship with Jesus Christ; some will accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, while others will want to get involved in their church or begin meeting as a small men’s group. You can facilitate this process by thinking ahead and having a plan in place following a conference.⁷

The conferences do not present a complete rendering of Promise Keepers teachings. Promise Keepers recruits well-known speakers from varied backgrounds to give a personal rendition of the promise assigned to them. In order to get to the heart of Promise Keepers one must read extensively through their books, study guides and other literature. This we have done. We also interviewed Randy Phillips whom we thank for much of the information contained herein.

While we find much with which we would be in agreement with Promise Keepers—even enthusiastic agreement—there are areas of concern that require consideration by anyone interested in involving themselves or their fellowship with Promise Keepers.

Since Promise Keepers does not have its own publishing house their books are published by others—principally, Focus on the Family and NavPress. Their magazine, *New Man*, is published by Strang Communications, publishers of *Charisma* magazine. Sadly, these publishers represent some of the strongest promoters of psychology and aberrant doctrine.

It should be noted that inasmuch as Promise Keepers endorses and publishes the writings of a diverse group of men, there are some conflicting statements (some good, some bad) found from one person to another among Promise Keepers’ materials and those they recommend. It’s a mixed-bag of human wisdom and biblical truth. Unfortunately, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. And it’s difficult to say, “Thus saith Promise Keepers.” Randy Phillips has indicated that much is left to individual preference. There is no discernment offered from the top.

4 Bill McCartney, *What Makes a Man?*, op. cit., p. 11.

5 Ibid., p. 12.

6 Various writers, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishing Co., 1994).

7 Dale Schlafer, “Clergy: Think Strategically!” *Men of Action*, (Promise Keepers, April, 1995), p. 11.

FEMINIZATION OF THE CHURCHES

The reason for Promise Keepers is based largely on the belief that feminization is a major problem with the churches today. In the Promise Keepers book, *What Makes a Man?*, a revealing statement from one of the contributors, Robert Hicks, demonstrates this belief:

I have seen too many good men leave the church, or church leadership, because they were tired of playing the games and they saw a lot of what the church was doing as a waste of time. We must recapture the church for men, defeminize it, and make our appeals to men where it will cost them something more than their money or their time. Christ wants their lives.⁸

Hicks is correct. Many churches have become feminized. Even many churches that stress male leadership have succumbed to the feminization process.

Most church ministries are geared toward women; churches may have as many as five or more women's ministries and nothing for men outside of a once-a-month prayer breakfast and an occasional retreat—much of the time for the latter being devoted to fun and games. Women's Bible studies abound both inside and outside the local body. Yet Scripture says that if a woman wants to learn anything she should ask her husband at home. Today, however, this biblical admonition is impractical for many couples. The reason is that the churches have let them down by withholding sound biblical teaching for the men, as well as proper discipleship. Consequently wives often know more (or think they know more) about the Bible than their husbands do. They even seek counsel from their pastors rather than from their husbands, as if the pastor is their authority. And not all they are receiving is biblical.

We must not lose sight of the dynamics within the modern church that have led to Promise Keeper's existence. It is the pathetic, feminized church that has created the conditions for such an organization to come into being. Unless men do take their rightful place the churches will remain powerless, simply because the Lord does not bestow honor where the men are weak.

The problem of male weakness is not confined to the churches. In fact, it's because of the feminization of the churches that the nation as a whole has become feminized. Dr. Tony Evans, writing on "Spiritual Purity" for *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* says it well:

I am convinced that the primary cause of this national crisis is the feminization of the American male. When I say *feminization*, I am not talking about sexual preference. I'm trying to describe a misunderstanding of manhood that has produced a nation of "sissified" men who abdicate their role as spiritually pure leaders, thus forcing women to fill the vacuum.⁹ (Emphasis in original)

Evans suggests a radical but proper approach to men reclaiming their role of leadership where they've abdicated it to their wives:

I can hear you saying, "I want to be a spiritually pure man. Where do I start?"

The first thing you do is sit down with your wife and say something like this: "Honey, I've made a terrible mistake. I've given you my role. I gave up leading this family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim that role."

Don't misunderstand what I'm saying here. I'm not suggesting that you *ask* for your role back, I'm urging you to *take it back*. If you simply ask for it, your wife is likely to say, "Look, for the last ten years, I've had to raise these kids, look after the house, and pay the bills. I've had to get a job and still keep up my duties at home. I've had to do my job *and* yours. You think I'm just going to turn everything back over to you?"

Your wife's concerns may be justified. Unfortunately, however, there can be no compromise here. If you're going to lead, you must lead. Be sensitive, Listen. Treat the lady gently and lovingly. But *lead!*

Having said that, let me direct some carefully chosen words to you ladies who may be reading this: *Give it back!* For the sake of your family and the survival of our culture, let your man be a man if he's willing. Protect yourself if you must, by handing the reins back slowly; take it one step at a time. But if your husband tells you he wants to reclaim his role, let him! God never meant for you to bear the load you're carrying.¹⁰ (Emphasis in original)

Perhaps Evans could have advised the men to just start taking the lead without the preliminaries. But he is essentially correct in his position. Unfortunately, his sound advice is offset by not-so-sound advice from Gary Smalley. Writing in the same Promise Keeper's book, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, Smalley relates the story of his friends, Jim and Suzette Brawner, and how they dealt with their son Jason's unapproved actions. Smalley tells us that although both Jim and Suzette came from families with "dysfunctional elements," they managed to raise three "emotionally healthy children." This quote is rather lengthy, but it's necessary to understand Smalley's unbiblical mind-set which permeates many of his writings:

Recently Jason came home for the first time from college. He was unusually nervous because, as a part of his initiation into the swim team, he had been coerced into wearing an earring. None of the men in his family had ever worn an earring, and it just wasn't done among their circle of friends. Jason felt the roof might come off when Mom and Dad saw him.

Jason pulled into the driveway and found his mom. She was so excited to see him that she gave him a big hug before she noticed his ear and gasped. Then she laughed. "What a great joke!" she said. "I assume it's one of those stick-on kinds?"

8 Robert Hicks, *What Makes a Man?* op. cit., p. 155.

9 Tony Evans, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* op. cit., p. 73.

10 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

“No, Mom, this is the real thing,” Jason answered. “I had my ear pierced. Everybody on the swim team has an earring, and I was the only one who didn’t, so I gave in.”

Suzette became nervous, not because she was upset with her son, but because she wondered how her husband would react when he got home. After taking Jason’s laundry and getting him something to drink, she called two friends. Then, while Jim was still at work, she made a trip to the home of one of those friends and discussed how she should handle the situation.

Both Jason and his mother were anxious as Jim arrived home.

When he walked in the door, Jason said, “Hi, Dad, I’m home for the weekend.”

Jim immediately hugged his son—on the side opposite the earring—then said, “Well, how’s college going?” He hadn’t noticed, and Jason just kept waiting for the explosion. Finally, Dad saw it. “Hey-y, what’s this?” he said.

Jason thought, *Oh, no! He’s going to rip it off my ear.*

Suzette gently suggested, “Now, don’t overreact.”

But Jim didn’t react at all. Calmly and sensitively, he asked, “What’s going on?”

Jason answered, “Dad everybody on the swim team has an earring. I knew you’d be upset, but Dad, I was the only guy who didn’t have one. The seniors said either I do it or, you know, I’m in trouble.”

“If you want to wear the earring, that’s your business,” Jim answered. “It’s not up to me. Only God knows how much I love you. Personally, I wouldn’t wear an earring, but hey, I understand the pressure you were getting.”

Suzette calmed down immediately. “I thought you were going to be mad,” she told Jim.

“No, we need to support our son,” he said. “Actually, I’d like to do something about it, but I don’t think anything would help.”¹¹

Smalley lauds Jim for his “sensitive” approach to a potentially explosive problem. But what’s really going on here? Is this how a godly father should act? Notice a few key elements to this story:

1) Jason knew his father would be upset. In that case, why did Jason have his ears pierced and wear an earring? Jim evidently succeeded in raising “emotionally healthy children,” but this example raises the question of whether they are godly, parent-honoring children. A child away from home has many opportunities to have his love and honor for his parents challenged. To Jason, being a member of the team was more important than honoring his father who should be his head. Had Jim raised him to be a biblically-oriented child, Jason would have stood his ground rather than succumb to the counsel of the ungodly, even if it cost him his spot on the swim team. At the least he would have called his father and sought his counsel.

Now, we all fail at times. This is not an indictment of the Brawners. Rather, it is to point out Smalley’s unbiblical mind-set in offering such an example for male leadership.

This is not a trivial matter; the earring is nothing in itself, but it became a symbol of Jason’s failure. Additionally, rather than say, “I don’t think anything would help,” a godly father would instruct his son on the need to remain faithful to God’s Word (honor your father and mother) rather than acquiesce to ungodly peers. Jim need not have ripped the earring from Jason’s ear, but a stern rebuke was certainly in order.

2) Suzette ran to her friends for advice on how to handle Jim. If this were a godly home instead of an “emotionally healthy” home, she would have instructed Jason to remove the earring rather than risk his father’s displeasure. She would also have instructed Jason on honoring his parents according to the biblical mandate. And she would trust her husband and back him up no matter what his reaction to Jason’s folly.

3) Jim’s response, “God only knows how much I love you,” is a cop out for his own cowardice. His Smalley-oriented mind-set does not allow him to correct his son in a biblical manner, but to accept his son’s actions in spite of the sin behind them. Suppose Jason told him that initiation for the swim team required him to engage in homosexual acts. Would Jim’s “unconditional love” be reflected in acceptance of Jason’s decision to acquiesce?

Smalley tells us that Jason was 19 at the time which, according to society, would make him an adult. But he was still under his father’s roof, so to speak, even though away at college. And even if he were on his own, the admonition to honor one’s parents precludes doing anything that would offend them. It is the law of love that compels us to forego personal desires or expediency for the sake of others, and to remain true to God’s Word.

So again we have a dichotomy: Promise Keepers tells us to be men—to take the lead as men should. Some teachers, as we’ve seen, eschew the feminization of the churches. But other elements teach as God’s truth lies that are based on a feminizing requirement for unconditional acceptance and “sensitivity” to unrepentant sinners. Dad is still the one to be feared for meting out righteous punishment, but mommy will intercede by throwing Gary Smalley’s “sensitivity training” at him.

(For an in-depth analysis of Gary Smalley’s and John Trent’s philosophy on husband-wife relationships see our special report, *Gary Smalley: The Psychology of Matriarchy*.)

Yes, feminization of the churches has been a problem. And in spite of their call for rejecting this feminization, Promise Keepers’ openness to certain teachings keeps that feminization firmly entrenched. Their answer to the problem of feminization will either fail or will result in the exchange of that problem for other problems. For even if there were success in achieving full masculinity of the churches, there is no guarantee of that masculinity not posing as many problems (albeit of a different kind) as feminization carries. Male leadership in and of itself is insufficient for adherence to the biblical mandate that demands doctrinal purity and unity in the bond of love. Men who teach error

11 Gary Smalley, *ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

lead their church nowhere closer to obedience to the Lord than women who teach, whether what they teach is truth or error. Both operate outside the biblical mandate. And the eclectic approach of Promise Keepers blurs the lines of distinction between truth and error.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WAY

There is a strong emphasis on psychological theory in much of Promise Keepers' materials. For a good analysis of the psychological teachings found in Robert Hick's book, *The Masculine Journey: Understanding the Six Stages of Manhood* (written for Promise Keepers), I recommend *Promise Keepers and PsychoHeresy* by Martin and Deidre Bobgan. (You may receive this booklet by writing to Media Spotlight.)

Besides Hicks' book, psychological theory that is in direct opposition to biblical truth is found in the writings of James Dobson, Gary Smalley, John Trent, Bob Beltz, and others.

The small sampling that follows in no wise covers the full degree to which the problem of psychological integrationism exists in Promise Keepers.

In the Promise Keepers book, *Daily Disciplines for the Christian Man*, Dr. Bob Beltz champions the 12 steps program of Alcoholics Anonymous. As does AA, Beltz calls alcoholism a "disease." Relating the story of "Mitch," Beltz says:

His name is really not important because his profile fits multitudes of men in our world today. Mitch is an alcoholic. He has a disease. It is killing him.

Ironically, Mitch has taken two major steps toward recovery from alcoholism. Several years ago he overcame the hurdle of denial and named his disease.¹²

Beltz relates how Mitch has not improved by attending AA. But his lack of improvement is based on his failure to work the program. In other words, AA would work for Mitch if Mitch would work the program. Beltz then praises AA for its successes:

For several years I have been intrigued by the phenomenon of Alcoholics Anonymous. Without any paid staff, building, advertising budgets, management consultants, or efficiency experts, AA has become one of the most successful movements in the world.¹³

AA has not been as successful as they would have us believe. The rate of failure is greater than is the rate of success. Any psychology-based program will experience a modicum of success. The greatest failure in AA is not in the rate of recidivism, but in leading men to false gods—"God as you perceive him to be." Yes, some have taken the first step to God through AA, but that is not to AA's credit; it is to God's credit.

In spite of the ungodly elements within the 12-steps program of AA, Beltz says, "Every principle of the twelve step program is biblical."¹⁴

(For an in-depth study of AA and the 12-steps program, read *Twelve Steps to Destruction*, by Martin & Deidre Bobgan, Eastgate Publishers.)

Much of the advice offered through Promise Keepers is pragmatic rather than spiritual. If it works, if it makes one feel good about oneself, it is to be commended. Self-acceptance is seen as acceptance by God. An illustration from William Gaultiere is an example:

We men who struggle with guilt, pride, or apathy are prodigal sons. The father is God. We need to experience the same kind of fatherly love and forgiveness in order to feel better about ourselves as men. When we do, we'll want to commit ourselves to love God and to share His love with others.¹⁵

No, we need to experience God's forgiveness in order to be saved from our sins. His forgiveness is not available without repentance on our part. God's Word and His Holy Spirit, as well as our own conscience, reveal that the more we become aware of our sinfulness, the more we understand God's grace and the less good we feel about ourselves.

Paul did not feel good about himself as a man. He struggled with sin, but still held onto his faith to overcome the problems of his own flesh:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing, for to will is present with me but I do not find how to perform that which is good.

For the good that I would do, I do not do, but the evil that I do not want to do, that I do.

Now if I do that which I do not want to do, it is no longer I who does it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

For in the inward man I delight in the Law of God, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, so then with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:18-25)

To offset certain problems Promise Keepers touts psychological counseling:

Do you have problems that are ruining your relationships? I strongly urge you to consider taking counseling. Big boys do cry, and crying is very healthy. In this day and

12 Bob Beltz, *Daily Disciplines for the Christian Man: Practical Steps to an Empowered Spiritual Life*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1993), p. 9.

13 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

14 Ibid., p. 12.

15 William Gaultiere, *What Makes A Man?*, op. cit., p. 31.

age when “macho” is in, I challenge you to get the help that you need. If you had a painful childhood and it controls your life each and every day, get help!¹⁶

The only legitimate help comes from surrender to God’s Word. Most victory over sin is a matter of making up our minds that we will be obedient to God’s Word and then acting accordingly. No one has escaped life without some trauma and some pain in their childhood. But what Promise Keepers is promoting is not seeking admonition by an elder brother, but “counseling” to deal with one’s painful childhood.

Rather than maintain complete trust in the pure water of God’s Word Promise Keepers delves into the polluted cisterns of human wisdom. This carnal attempt to achieve spiritual purity can result only in failure.

VIEWS ON SELF-LOVE

The issue of self-love is another on which we find some differences of opinion among Promise Keepers writers. On the biblical side of the issue we find Don Osgood’s statement in the Promise Keepers book, *What Makes a Man?*

The reason love of possessions is wrong is that it is the way we get trapped into preoccupation with ourselves. Real love looks out for someone, wishes good for someone, gives to someone. But love of possessions is loving ourselves, taking care of us, wishing good for us, giving to us. A family where each one is acquiring something just for self is a bankrupt family, whether or not the money has run out. And it usually won’t be long before the money runs out. If we truly love someone, we are willing to deny ourselves.¹⁷

But Osgood’s teaching is in contrast to the teachings of Gary Smalley and John Trent, found in the same book!

The degree of self-control you have in your life is in direct proportion to the degree of acceptance you have for yourself. Put another way, if you don’t value yourself, you won’t “pull in the reins” on actions and attitudes that will affect you for the worse. . . .

If you’re caught up in the first steps of any addiction or twenty miles down the road, there’s a hole in your heart, an inner hurt, and dislike of self that can make you worthy of failure, but not success.¹⁸

Osgood’s advice is biblical; Smalley’s and Trent’s advice is humanistic psychology. The Holy Spirit tells us through the apostle Paul that no one really hates himself (Ephesians 5:29). It is not self-hatred, but self-love, that leads to aberrant behavior. Who is right—the Holy Spirit, or Smalley and Trent (as well as myriad other “Christian psychologists”)?

Within Promise Keepers we have found a preponderance of advocacy favoring self-love over self-denial, the latter of which is the biblical admonition.

The dichotomy between Osgood’s position on self-love and the Smalley-Trent position is merely one indication of the eclectic approach Promise Keepers takes toward teaching. This eclecticism is found in other areas as well.

VIEWS ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Another issue of great importance in which Promise Keepers often strays from a purely biblical stance is that of homosexuality.

Promise Keepers maintains that the only valid sexual expression is that between a husband and wife, and that all other sexual activity is sinful. However, that claim is watered down by applying a politically correct, psychological approach to the subject of homosexuality:

As to homosexuality, Promise Keepers shares the same historic and biblical stance taken by Evangelicals and Catholics—that sex is a good gift from God—to be enjoyed in the context of heterosexual marriage. Promise Keepers also recognizes that homosexuality is a complex and potentially polarizing issue. There is a great debate surrounding its environmental and genetic origins, yet as an organization we believe that homosexuals are men who need the same support, encouragement and healing we are offering to all men. While we have clear convictions regarding the issue of homosexuality, we are sensitive to and have compassion for the men who are struggling with these issues. We, therefore, support their being included and welcomed in all our events.¹⁹

So Promise Keepers claims to share “the same historic and biblical stance taken by Evangelicals and Catholics.” But they then take a worldly stance on homosexuality as “a complex and potentially polarizing issue;” homosexuality must be understood within the context of humanistic psychology and questionable genetic research.

And why the fear of “polarizing” homosexuals? Scripture tells us that those who openly practice sin are to be removed (“polarized”) from the assembly. Is this so difficult to understand? Yet Promise Keepers welcomes homosexuals to all their events without addressing it as sin.

It is understandable that homosexuals should be welcomed to evangelistic outreaches. But Promise Keepers is not an evangelistic outreach beyond the offering of a single salvation message at their conferences. Remember that they view their conferences as “simply a piece to a much larger puzzle of building men’s ministry in your church.” They choose to downplay a sin that has a large, politically active lobby in government, the media and society at large. This equates to an open invitation to churches to be accepting of homosexuality. It offers fellowship between homosex-

16 Bill Sanders, *ibid.*, p. 55.

17 Don Osgood, *ibid.* p. 97.

18 Gary Smalley and John Trent, *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

19 Fax from Promise Keepers to Greg Dixon, pastor of Indianapolis Baptist Temple, 12/8/93.

ual “Christians” and those who would normally choose to distance themselves from that sin.

Why? Because homosexuals who claim to be Christians do not believe that homosexuality is a sin; they would never respond to the Promise Keepers salvation message because they believe they are already true Christians. As a result, the Promise Keepers events are a fellowship of light with darkness—unbelievers praising “Jesus,” while linked arm-in-arm with naive believers.

In *The Masculine Journey*, Robert Hicks reinforces the soft-on-homosexuality attitude:

Some of my early “Counselees” were individuals whom I once thought were logical contradictions. God brought to me Christians who were homosexuals and Marxists. I listened, tried to understand, debated back and forth, but was left with the conviction that they were sincere about both their faith in Christ and their views on sexuality and politics, though these views differed from mine. I have problems maintaining a view of sexuality or politics that is incompatible with clear biblical injunctions (against homosexual behavior) or clear biblical teaching on human nature (which is contrary to Marxism’s “new man”). My last visit to the Air Force Chaplain School also broke down some long-standing categories. At the beginning of the school, a Catholic priest gave one of the most heartfelt testimonies about what God was doing in his life and how much he wanted our time at the school to be a time of reflection on God and our walk with Him. He concluded by saying, “I want you to be born again here as I have been.” Oh, don’t get me wrong, I haven’t become Catholic, or a Marxist, or gay. I don’t condone Marxist politics or homosexual behavior. But I have learned that the way to look at God or the world is not necessarily through the lens or categories I currently believe are the correct ones. The labels don’t matter all that much, whether they be Communist, Democrat, New Age, feminist, fundamentalist, or hookers-married-to-crossdressing codependents.

I think I now see the world and people differently because I try to look beyond the labels to the person, his unique situation, station, and needs. I fail often and get hooked back into my old warrior responses, but now I consciously recognize that pattern for what it is. I believe this is the way Jesus related to people, and His modeling provides me with a much richer and broader perspective on ministry.²⁰

These statements represent the typical “sensitive” approach to sin that characterizes the churches at large today. Few leaders wish to stir the waters of controversy by taking a hard stand against sin—especially homosexuality. Hicks and others within Promise Keepers have fallen prey to their own human reasoning

in the face of experiences. They are convinced that one may be an unrepentant homosexual and still be a Christian. They no longer look upon this particular sin in the light of Scripture, but in the darkness of their own rationalization. They met people who appear to hold a genuine faith in Christ; these people justify their sin in spite of Scripture’s clear teaching; Hicks, et al., decide that, if God can accept them with His “unconditional love,” who are we to reject them? At the least, we must cease looking “at God or the world through the lens or categories [we] currently believe are the correct ones.”

God’s Word is not “current.” It is eternal. The truths contained therein do not change with the world’s acceptance or rejection of those truths. If one is looking at God or the world through the lens of experience or religious tradition (as Hicks says, “though these views differed from mine” [as opposed to differing from God’s Word, which he should have said]) one may well change his viewpoint. But if one is looking at God or the world through the clear teaching of God’s unchanging Word, one may not change his viewpoint without first rejecting God’s Word.

And labels *are* important. One cannot label himself (i.e., identify with) an anti-Christ philosophy (e.g., Marxism, New Age, homosexuality) and still lay claim to biblical faith.

A reason Hicks takes this compromising stand may be found in his belief that Jesus was tempted with homosexuality Himself:

I believe Jesus was phallic with all the inherent phallic passions we experience as men. But it was never recorded that Jesus had sexual relations with a woman. He may have thought about it as the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* portrays, but even in this movie He did not give in to the temptation and remained true to His messianic course. If temptation means anything, it means Christ was tempted in *every* way as we are. That would mean not only heterosexual temptation but also homosexual temptation! I have found this insight to be very helpful for gay men struggling with their sexuality.²¹ (Emphasis in original)

To digress for a moment, why does Hicks say, “it was never recorded that,” rather than, “but Jesus never” had sexual relations with a woman? Semantics? Not really. As a writer and psychologist Hicks knows how to state what he means. And Jesus did not eschew sin in order to remain “true to his messianic course.” He had no “course” except to do the will of His Father. He would have given up the “messianic course” were it the Father’s will (Luke 22:42).

Also, to cite *The Last Temptation of Christ* as evidence that Jesus may have been tempted with lust for Mary Magdalene is as blasphemous as that movie itself was. It portrayed graphic sexual desire, not merely temptation. To be tempted is one thing; to fantasize about sin is another. It is sin within the heart.

20 Robert Hicks, *The Masculine Journey: Understanding the Six Stages of Manhood* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1993), pp. 133-134.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

Hicks' concept of a "phallic Jesus" is offered in the context of the various seasons of a man's life—one season being that during which his sexual energy is dominant. Coincidentally(?) Gnostics believe in a "phallic Jehovah" whose nature we have no space to deal with here. Like Gnostic writings, Hicks's book smacks of man-centered esoteric interpretations of Scripture.

On the matter of homosexuality, was Jesus tempted in every way (i.e., with every possible temptation)? If so, then He was tempted with stealing, with murder, with every gross sin and lesser sin imaginable to man. This would mean that his mind was constantly on temptation; He would have had to be tortured with temptation day and night for every possible sin to be accounted for. What about drinking blood? Was He tempted to do that? Or to dress in women's clothes? Or to have sex with children—or with animals? No. Reason tells us that the Scriptures mean that, just as we are tempted, He was also tempted. But there is no indication that Jesus was a latent homosexual as implied by Hicks.

Of all the materials Promise Keepers has produced or that they recommend, several take the "tolerant" position on homosexuality. In view of the many other incongruities and dichotomies, one should expect at least *one* strong, purely biblical statement on this issue that is otherwise dealt with at length in several places.

While calling for strong male leadership in the churches Promise Keepers has wimped out on an "issue" (read "sin") that strikes at the very heart of masculinity and presents an affront to God by its militant in-your-face challenge to accept sexual perversion or risk being called "unloving." It is the same approach for which Gary Smalley lauds Jim Brawner for the manner in which he handled his son's rebellion.

Besides *The Masculine Journey* and others of their own books, Promise Keepers recommends scores of others, not all of which are biblically sound. Because of criticism Promise Keepers removed *The Masculine Journey* from their resource list. But they continue to defend it and Hicks in their official response to inquirers. Promise Keepers has issued an eight-page statement in defense of Hicks, et al., that may be obtained by writing to them at P.O. Box 18376, Boulder, CO 80308. The Bobgan's rebuttal to that statement is included in their report on Hicks' book. And Promise Keepers still retains Hicks' teachings in other publications.

One must ask why the leadership of Promise Keepers would even attach themselves to Hicks in the first place? His philosophy had certainly been revealed in previous writings. Promise Keepers decision to remove *The Masculine Journey* from its resource list is a smoke screen meant to give the impression that Promise Keepers was unaware of its contents. But this act is disingenuous in light of Promise Keepers having co-published the book in the first place. Because *The Masculine Journey* has not only become widely read among Christian men due to Promise Keepers promoting it, but also because it forms the basis of one Promise Keepers' study guides for its men's groups, Promise Keepers has given credibility to the teachings of a man who espouses a form of Christian humanism.

ROBERT HICKS' TEACHINGS

Robert Hicks is co-founder of Life Counseling Services in the Philadelphia suburbs, and Professor of Pastoral Theology at Seminary of the East. He is a counselor and frequent speaker on traumatic stress issues.

Hicks would be classified as an integrationist—one who blends humanistic psychological theory with biblical truth. He holds to the inner healing techniques popularized by Agnes Sanford and promoted by Leanne Payne. These techniques include visualization, meditation and regression therapy, whereby a person imagines Jesus in the midst of a past trauma that has prevented him from becoming self-actualized. Confronting one's "inner child" is another technique offered by Hicks to deal with one's psychological and spiritual lack. In his book, *Failure to Scream*, Hicks states:

The concept of the inner child is not new, but it has become increasingly popular. From Freud to Erikson, Horney and Sullivan, all have talked much about the child within. The child within is the real or true self who has never had the freedom to develop properly. It is the part of us that is ultimately alive, energetic, creative, and fulfilled but that has been put down by parents, institutions, education, religion, politics, the media, or significant early-childhood trauma. The theoretical aspects of the concept are sound....

Some therapeutic techniques that have been found to be helpful are those John Bradshaw has popularized. In order to "heal the shame that binds," he encourages the victim to heal the memories by reestablishing contact with the child within, even talking to it.²²

While maintaining a profession of faith in Christ, Hicks blurs the distinction of who constitutes a true child of God, preferring to believe that all mankind is of one spiritual brotherhood. This is evidenced by his joining in fellowship with others who are not even professing Christians.

Hicks relates an experience following his tending to the trauma of survivors and relatives of victims from the crash of Delta Flight 191 at Dallas-Fort Worth on August 2, 1985:

Quickly, the [Roman Catholic] priest, the rabbi, and I put together a joint ecumenical memorial service for that evening. We had this one widely advertised by means of television and fliers circulated throughout the hotel. That evening the ballroom was packed with families, friends, and hotel and Delta Airlines personnel. We had several Scripture readings, prayers, and meditations. Then, at our priest's request, Father Brown opened the service to the congregants. He encouraged them to tell God how they felt. I personally was skeptical. But one by one individuals began to pour out their grief, anger, and dismay to God. I saw before my eyes the therapeutic effect....

This service was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. I wish I had a videotape of the experi-

22 Robert Hicks, *Failure to Scream* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), pp. 155-156.

ence. This memorializing of grief brought a sense of healing and gave permission to grieve in new ways.²³

Evidently one “new way” to grieve is to blame God for life’s tragedies. While this is sometimes the human response to adversity, it is not to be advocated or even defended in the Body of Christ.

Hicks’ ecumenical approach to healing reveals how someone can say they believe in Jesus and yet affirm that unbelievers can receive healing through Him the same as those who are in Him.

I am convinced more than ever that when we talk about healing, we are talking about something that is very mysterious, if not mystical. It is the human spirit that has been wounded in trauma. To facilitate healing in the deepest parts of the unconscious as well as the conscious, we must make contact with this spirit. It takes a spirit to make contact with spirit. Jesus had great insight into human and divine psychology when He said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). If man is not only a material being (flesh) but also a spiritual being, then contact must be made with the Spirit of God in order to have true healing.²⁴

How is one to make contact with the Spirit of God if, according to Hicks, a true healing comes only in this manner? Evidently it is not through faith in Jesus Christ, but through psychological technique:

For whatever reasons, the recovery movement, beginning with Alcoholics Anonymous, has created a climate that is needed for healing to take place. Support groups have been successful because they create a climate in which any emotion or statement can be aired without critical evaluation. What is created is an atmosphere of gracious acceptance. What the Catholic Church and biblical Christianity have known for centuries is now being used by almost all therapists in their support groups (see James 5:14-16; 1 John 1:9). Healing takes place when we hear others reveal their hurts, sins, and struggles and when we reveal our own in a context of acceptance and affirmation.²⁵

Besides wrongly citing John, James and 1 John above, Hicks does violence to Matthew 18:20 by inferring that Jesus is in the midst of these support groups.²⁶

Additionally, Hicks credits the Roman Catholic eucharist with bringing healing:

It is in this Eucharistic memorial that our screams meet the scream of God in the symbolic blood of His own Son.²⁷

Jesus’ blood is not symbolic; it is the means of atonement for sin. To equate it with the idolatrous Roman Catholic eucharist as a means to effect healing among unbelievers denigrates the work of salvation wrought by Jesus on the cross.

Anyone with a modicum of discernment must recognize such unbiblical teachings when they encounter them. If Promise Keepers’ leaders lack even that modicum of discernment so that it would not only endorse, but publish and promote, the teachings of Robert Hicks, they are exposed as unqualified to teach the brethren in Christ. This alone should cause concern.

New Age Leanings?

It’s interesting that Hicks mentioned the New Age in his rethinking about homosexuality—especially in view of some lead-in quotes to the chapters in his book. One quote, from the late U.N. Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld is pure New Age:

The longest journey
Is the journey inwards
Of him who has chosen his destiny.²⁸

As is this allusion to evolution from Charles Darwin:

Man with all his noble qualities
still bears in his bodily frame
the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.²⁹

Man’s origin was not lowly; he was created in the image and likeness of God. Darwin’s reference to “lowly origins” reflects his theory of evolution. How may true believers give credence to this?

Does this mean we are accusing Promise Keepers of being New Age? No. It merely points out the lack of discernment the organization demonstrates in its choice of spokesmen.

A Low View Of Scripture

Incredibly, Hicks makes the following statement in his book:

The mature king, as well as the mature man, is one who rules his life with the wisdom of the Scriptures.³⁰

As valid as this sounds, however, “the wisdom of the Scriptures” is not the issue. Freemasons believe in “the wisdom of the Scriptures.” The issue is *obedience* to Scripture. The difference is that wisdom may be perceived as a trait to be acted upon if expedient for good. Obedience, regardless of expediency, is a requirement of God. It is based not on the *wisdom* of Scripture, but on the *inerrancy* of Scripture, which is the foundation of its wisdom.

Yet evidently Hicks doesn’t even rule his own judgments by the wisdom of Scripture. Is this so surprising given his belief that, based on the Psalms, David was a manic-depressive?

23 Ibid., p. 188.

24 Ibid., p. 166.

25 Ibid., pp. 185-186.

26 Ibid., p.186.

27 Ibid., p. 191.

28 Robert Hicks, *The Masculine Journey*, op. cit., p. 13.

29 Ibid., p. 31.

30 Ibid., p. 141.

I call the Psalms of David the musings of a manic-depressive! David's psalms are either all praise or all depression. He is either singing joy to God or calling upon God to judge the wicked who oppress him!³¹

It appears as if Hicks doesn't believe that the Psalms were inspired by the Spirit of God. Or perhaps he felt he had to draw the line at calling God a manic-depressive. For all his psychological training, Hicks should understand that a so-called manic-depressive is one who exhibits mood swings for no rational reason. David's praises were based upon his victories. His call for God's judgment was based upon his righteous view of God's holiness as well as his desire for deliverance. The Holy Spirit used David's experiences in writing the Psalms. These were experiences that God brought into David's life for the purpose of perfecting him.

It is a low view of Scripture that seeks to paint any part of God's Word as the ravings of an unstable human mind. It also prompts one to take a soft approach toward sin and heresy. Robert Hicks demonstrates such a low view of Scripture—so much so that he may as well throw it out the window for all the good it does in his hands.

ENCOUNTER GROUPS

One method of breaking the ice in the Promise Keepers men's groups is to play a game called "People Bingo." In this game the men review categories pertaining to certain traits and experiences, and mark a box that contains those elements. They go from man to man asking about those traits and experiences. The first to complete five in a row in any direction within a set time wins. The traits and experiences are based on Robert Hicks' book, *The Masculine Journey*, and many focus on the men's sexuality.

Some of the questions regarding traits and experiences ask if they have been arrested at least once; if they are wearing boxer shorts or bikini briefs; if they were neglected or abused by their father; if they have emotional battle scars from a recent family feud; if they have had a circumcision, vasectomy or prostate operation.

In the chapter dealing with the phallic male, the group leader is told how to get the men to divulge their deepest sexual experiences including their sexual fantasies:

Note to the leader: If the men in your group are likely to have difficulty talking vulnerably and emphatically with each other about their sex lives, then stop and talk about why you are having that difficulty.³²

One question designed to get men to open up is found under the section, "Exploring the Issues with Other Men:"

Our culture has presented many initiation rites, or passages to manhood, that are associated with the phallus.

Which ones have you experienced? Do you have a story to share with other men about one such event?

- When I was potty trained and stopped wetting the bed
- Pubic hair and growth
- An unfortunate experience with pornography
- My first dating experience
- My first really embarrassing moment with a girl
- The wedding night
- Conceiving my first child
- Other:³³

I call this spiritual voyeurism.

How many wives who are supportive of Promise Keepers would really want their husbands to answer some of these questions, especially pertaining to their phallic experiences in the conception of their first child or their wedding night?

The manual asks what creative alternatives to these might the church offer as a rite of passage. Further on it suggests that the children's sins might be celebrated as rites of passage in the following manner:

Instead of jumping all over teenagers when they have their first experience with the police, alcohol, sex, or drugs, we could look on this as a teachable moment and a rite of passage. Perhaps the true elders could come forward and confess their own adolescent sins, and congratulate the next generation for being human. Then they could move on to the all-important issues of forgiveness and restoration, but on common ground with the young person, as a fellow sinner!³⁴

Our identification as sinners should be relegated to the past. While we still commit sin, we are not classified as sinners by God any more than a person who fixes a faucet is classified as a plumber. Sinners are those whose way of life is sinful and unrepentant. I would hope that the elders don't fall into that category.

As far as dwelling on one's sins as a "rite of passage," what does Scripture say?

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becomes saints—nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not proper, but rather giving of thanks.

For this you know: that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord.

31 Ibid., p. 114.

32 Robert Hicks with Dietrich Gruen, Study Guide, *The Masculine Journey* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1993), p. 32.

33 Ibid., p. 33.

34 Ibid., p. 81.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather rebuke them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things that are done by them in secret. But all things that are rebuked are revealed by the light, for whatever reveals is light.

Therefore he says, “Awake, you who sleeps, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.”

See then that you walk diligently, not as fools, but as wise, 16redeeming the time because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:3-16)

Promise Keepers begs the question by stating in response to this Scripture:

The key to understanding these passages lies in what he means by having these things “named.”

Paul is encouraging the church of Ephesus to not let these sins be found in their lives. He is not placing a prohibition upon even talking or mentioning such sins, because he himself does so on numerous occasions...Paul, it seems, wrote about these subjects so that the church would have proper insight on what it means to live as Christians.³⁵

This is only half true. Yes, Paul spoke of these sins as things to be avoided in practice. But He did not sanction speaking of them as a means to male bonding. Further, he certainly didn't suggest that we should dwell on these things and indiscriminately share them in groups. If a man is having difficulty in avoiding sexual sin, or any sin, he should seek ministry from a godly elder in the Faith.

Also, where in Scripture are we ever told to “celebrate” our sins as a rite of passage? Or to congratulate someone for being human (i.e., sinful)? For the elders to get suckered into this would only denigrate them in the eyes of the youth; it would further justify the young men's sins in their own eyes.

Naive pastors who think Promise Keepers is going to somehow enhance their standing in the eyes of their congregants might be interested in the following psychological mumbo jumbo:

For men to survive their wounding, they need to feel safety among fellow sufferers. How can you improve the dynamics in groups of men so that men would feel that safety and start sharing their pain?

- Have the pastor model his own woundedness from the pulpit.
- Have other men in power (“bully pulpits”) share their heart wounds.
- Create a Christian fellowship of soldiers, athletes, or businessmen whose ticket for admission is the admission of wounds (as in “AA”).
- Sponsor more AA-type recovery groups for the man in the pew.

- Create “Purple Heart Awards” for broken spirits, not just war wounds.
- Other³⁶

Okay, pastor, get up there and open yourself up to your congregation; tell us all about your woundedness—especially your innermost struggle with sexual sin; or the times your wife rejected your sexual advances, or your father abused you.

These guys are playing with some dangerous stuff here. This is group therapy with no holds barred. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Space doesn't allow for the full gamut of unbiblical and ungodly psychological manipulation at the hands of amateur therapists who think they want to lead these men's groups.

You think women can be gossips? We've already heard of how men are gossiping about the things they hear in these groups.

The marriage bed is sacred; it isn't up to men to share with other men in a group therapy session the intimacies of their relationship with their wives. Nor are we to dwell on past hurts and learn to feel our pain and the pain of others all over again.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have possessed, but this one thing I do: forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth toward those things that are ahead, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, let as many of us as are perfect be thus minded. And if in anything your are otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this to you.

Nevertheless, toward we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule; let us mind the same thing.

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark those who walk so as you have us for an example. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ—whose end is destruction; whose God is their belly; whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things.)

For our conduct is in Heaven, from where we also look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body so that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to himself. (Philippians 3:13-21)

The Body of Christ today is in much the same position as Israel in the days of Balaam. As a prophet of God, Balaam succumbed to the temptations of Balak and caused Israel to sin by going after false gods. Balaam was a spokesman for YHWH, and so was trusted by the Israelites. If a man of God can do certain things, they no doubt reasoned, why can't all of God's children do the same?

Many pastors are spokesmen for Jesus, and are leading their congregations in the same direction—not worshiping other gods, per se, but stumbling over spiritual errors that will lead to compromise of the Faith. Confidence in men leads to sin in the name of Christian faith.

35 Pete Richardson, Promise Keepers letter to Al Dager, April 7, 1995, p. 6.

36 Hicks & Gruen, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

Promise Keepers, while claiming to be an instrument to draw men closer to Jesus Christ, is in reality minding earthly things. Their god may not be their belly, but it certainly appears to be their loins.

MENTORING

One movement within Promise Keepers that is gaining prominence among other ministries is that of mentoring. Promise Keepers believes that every man must have an older mentor to whom he can be held accountable for his decisions and actions in life.

Another word for mentoring would be discipling or shepherding.

Dr. Howard Hendricks, writing in *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, states that every man should have in his life not only an older mentor, but a spiritual peer, and as well, a younger man to whom he can be a mentor.

I want to recommend a cord of three strands—a Paul, a Barnabas, and a Timothy. An older man building into your life, a soul brother to keep you accountable, and a younger man into whose life you can build.³⁷

This is really an ideal scenario. Close relationships at every level within the Body of Christ are important to one's own spiritual welfare.

E. Glenn Wagner offers yet another view of mentoring based on "one anothering." Building on several passages of Scripture, Wagner encourages men to "Love one another (John 13:34)"; "Accept one another (Romans 15:7)"; "Encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24-25)"; "Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32)"; "Honor one another (Romans 12:10)"; "Instruct one another (Romans 15:14)"; "Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)"; "Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)." ³⁸

For the most part today, "one anothering" in the churches is done on a superficial scale—no one wanting to make themselves sufficiently vulnerable to correction from others, including their own pastors. This is another reason the churches are so weak.

Yet as much as Promise Keepers insists on the importance of accountability, their manuals are based more on psychology than on Scripture. The key word is "sensitivity." Judgment is to be avoided. On the subject of "one anothering," author Geoff Gorsuch, writing with Dan Schaffer in the Promise Keepers manual, *Brothers! Calling Men into Vital Relationships*, states:

The first job of men's small groups is to learn complete acceptance: no judgment, no "I told you so" or "you should have known better." No hidden agendas! I'm not out to change you and you're not out to change me.³⁹

If men are not seeking to be changed, why do they join Promise Keepers? And if the Holy Spirit does not use men to change one another, what's the purpose of Promise Keepers? In fact, what's the

purpose of the assembly? This is less than honest in view of Promise Keepers' stated purpose to change men into sensitive models of integrity. So how is a group to deal with sin in its midst? In all things Promise Keepers suggests the "positive" approach:

In fact, there are over fifty commands relating to "one another" in the New Testament....All of these commands, however, can be summed up under three major headings: to accept, encourage and exhort "one another." The way these concepts build upon each other is the dynamic of brotherly love and the foundation of men's small groups in Promise Keepers.⁴⁰

Very good—except that they have neglected another important element in "one anothering." It's what some "sensitive" people call "negative." The word is "rebuke."

There can be no genuine ministry to those who hold to their sins or who reject instruction from God's Word without the element of rebuke. Jesus even instructs us to rebuke those who offend us in the hope that they will be led to repentance.

"Take heed to yourselves: If your brother offends you, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him. And if he offends you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turns again to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4)

But is rebuke really loving? Or is it merely an expression of self-righteousness? If one's motive is to lead a brother to repentance it is indeed loving.

The purpose of rebuke is not to establish oneself as "holier than thou." It is to bring into focus a brother's ungodly behavior for his own spiritual benefit. It is to lead to repentance. It is, in fact, typical of God's love for His own children:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

And what about "judgment"? These Promise Keepers are careful to list Romans 14:13 as a reason not to judge. But Romans 14:13 has to do with not judging a brother for what he eats or doesn't eat, or for the days he regards as more important than other days. It does not negate righteous judgment that is necessary for maintaining the purity of the Body of Christ or for leading others to repentance.

Righteous judgment is based upon the clear teachings of God's Word. We cannot escape having to pass judgment on what we see and hear in the Body of Christ. The Lord commended the assembly at Ephesus for judging false teachers:

"I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars." (Revelation 2:2)

37 Howard G. Hendricks, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, op. cit., p. 55.

38 E. Glenn Wagner, *ibid.*, p. 60.

39 Geoff Gorsuch with Dan Schaffer, *Brothers! Calling Men Into Vital Relationships* (Boulder, CO: Promise Keepers, 1993), p.10.

40 *Ibid.*

We are not to judge others on the basis of religious tradition or personal preferences. Unfortunately, there is more of the latter type of judgment than the former type found in the churches today. There is also a strong element of judgment against those outside the Body of Christ. This is contrary to God's Word that exhorts us to judge not those outside the Body, but inside:

For what have I to do to judge them also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But God judges those who are outside. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (I Corinthians 5:12-13)

Let God judge even homosexuals who lay no claim to faith in Jesus Christ. Let us persevere with patience in ministering to those struggling with sin. But there is a difference between those who struggle with their sin and those who justify their sin. We must judge those who justify their homosexuality—or any sin—while claiming to be members of Christ's Body. This, Promise Keepers fails to do.

MALE LEADERSHIP

One thing that Promise Keepers stresses is strong male leadership in the churches. But it seems as if the problem isn't female leadership as much as it is lack of male leadership. In other words, women are leading more than men; it's better if men lead as much as women—an "equality of leadership," as one pastor writing for Promise Keepers puts it:

The church, over a period of years, became one of the largest in the denomination I served. Because of the men? No! Because we had a balance of leadership in the church. It was the way God intended the church to operate. Now we had the best of both worlds—male and female leaders sharing the burden for their families and their community. Every church must have that equality of leadership.⁴¹

What Promise Keepers seems to express is not so much a desire for men to take absolute leadership, but to begin to share in the leadership held by women. Were they to take the biblical position as stated by Paul, they would not be as popular as they are. Why? Because they would not receive the unbridled endorsement of wives that they receive—and need to keep operating!.

No one can argue that men should not be strong leaders at home and in their assemblies. But are they becoming stronger leaders or are they becoming more compliant mates and members? And in which direction are they leading if, in fact, they really are leading at all?

An example of how men are becoming more compliant with their wife's desires was graphically illustrated on a local Seattle television news magazine called Northwest Afternoon. On their October 9, 1995 program, co-hosts Dick Foley and Elisa Jaffe interviewed three Promise Keepers. The first, Jace Blomstrand, appeared with his daughter Alisa, who spoke of how her father was before he attended Promise Keepers:

Alisa: He was really angry a lot. He had had a stroke at the first of the year and a lot of times with strokes comes depression, because you're angry at yourself, because a lot of times you don't have the same attributes that you had beforehand.

Elisa Jaffe: How did this affect you, though? Was he nasty to you?

Alisa: Yeah, yeah. I mean, well, he would get really angry, you know, short-tempered and stuff like that. And it was really hard for me, being a teenager, with having a lot of problems of my own, that I want to go to my dad and, you know, talk to him about, and a lot of stuff. And sometimes I didn't feel that I could because he would get mad at me, or he just wouldn't be understanding, you know, or wouldn't want to listen to what was going on.

Jaffe: Fly off the handle maybe for no reason.

Alisa: Yeah.

Dick Foley: Did you, Jace, notice the change in yourself? Were you aware of how you had changed after the stroke, emotionally?

Jace: Oh, yeah. I think it was like a vicious circle that continued to feed on itself, and it took me down this vortex of despair until, ultimately, six months after I'd had the stroke, I think compounded by the medications I was taking, plus the pot, which I had chosen to begin smoking again, I was at a point of emotional disparity [sic]—what I refer to as a pity party. My wife kicked me out of the house. It was time for me to leave, she said, she was over and done with me unless I was going to make some serious alterations in who I thought I was.

Jaffe: Did you think you should have been kicked out of the house? Now that you look back were you a horrible husband and a miserable father?

Jace: Horrible husband; miserable father, yeah.

Jaffe [to Alisa]: You're shaking your head.

Alisa: Oh, yeah!

Foley: Do you remember things he would say to you that would be hurtful, Alisa? Or was it mostly just ignoring your needs?

Alisa [crying]: It wasn't so much that he was really saying things that, you know, would really hurt me. He would just, I mean, being a teenager, you know, I have to try and keep my self-esteem up because a lot of times, you know, teenagers, they go through a lot of stuff—body changes, emotional changes and stuff—and, you know, when I would go to my dad with a problem or something, and I just wouldn't feel that he was really there, 'cause he was off in his own world and, and, and, worried more about how he was doing. It was the whole Jace thing.

Jaffe: Selfish?

Alisa: Yeah.

41 H.B. London, Jr., *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, op. cit., p. 142.

Foley: You know, I hope a lot of dads are watching this show today—even guys who think of themselves as good dads, because, you know, the depth of your emotions really illustrates the impact that we as fathers have on our kids, doesn't it?

Jaffe: When you hear her saying that you were basically shooting down her self-esteem and her self-worth, what happens to you when you hear that?

Jace: It compounds the guilt that I was already feeling, realizing that I was distancing her from me. I have two other children; they're both younger than Alisa, and maybe they weren't as caught up in the loss of daddy's affections. Alisa was. She was reacting to it. And when she would come and would need me or want me, and I was unable to be there for her, and she'd react to that again, and, instead of, "Gee, I'm really sorry; I shouldn't have done that," it was digging myself into a deeper hole.

The conversation reveals that Jace is now able to relate to his daughter again, and he's there for her to answer her questions about boys and stuff.

This is tragic. The man had a stroke which debilitated him. Anyone who has dealt with stroke victims knows that there is a stage of anger and frustration that comes about as a result of having lost the ability to make one's body and emotions respond to one's thoughts. It's a difficult thing not only for the victim, but for the family. It's a time when Christians should exercise special patience, love and sacrifice of personal fulfillment for the task of ministering to the one stricken. Instead, Jace has guilt heaped upon him by his wife and daughter who think he should forget about his problem and focus on their "needs." "It was the whole Jace thing," as Alisa said.

But it was really the whole Alisa thing. Where was the mercy and concern for her father? Where was her mother's counsel to help dad through his disability. Rather than cope, they wanted him out of the house.

Granted, the pot issue was not good. But while we may point the finger at Jace for seeking escape from his misery, the real lack of Christian love was demonstrated by his own family.

There's nothing lacking of Alisa's self-esteem. It's because she loves herself so much that she couldn't love her father enough. This isn't a judgment against Alisa; it's an indictment against the philosophical inroads of psychology into the churches, that stresses self-love above love of God and others.

They don't say how Promise Keepers enters into this picture, but psychological integrationism is a major flaw in Promise Keepers' agenda. Jace and Alisa merely reflect that flaw.

Another couple, Dave and Donnie Weigand state that Promise Keepers has changed Dave from an abusive father into a loving man. Dave acknowledges that he used to abuse his son verbally and physically:

Jaffe [to Dave's wife, Donnie]: Did some of this verbal abuse bleed over into your relationship together, Donnie?

Donnie: Absolutely. That's not done in isolation.

Foley: Do you remember it with pain?

Donnie: Oh, definitely.

Foley: I mean, when you call those memories up it's still a painful thing to you.

Jaffe: Well, look right now. I mean, I can still see the tears in your eyes. Did you ever think there was any way for him to change?

Donnie: No. At one point I just gave up and figured that I had to actually live the rest of my life in a sort of a distant misery.

Foley: Now you actually began to change in your life, Dave, some years ago when you attended a new church. What were the changes that crept into your life then?

Dave: I lived by a legalistic form of religion. And there were lots of rules and lots of things that I had to follow. But it never came into my heart. And about fifteen years ago we started attending Overlake Christian Church. And we started going on the evenings, because very frankly, we had been taught that the only people that were going to go to Heaven was this small group of people [presumably from their original church]. And so we would go in the evenings, and Donnie and I would go to church, and we'd just cry. There was something different; something was happening to it. And basically what happened is Christ came into my heart. And He became real. And suddenly the rules and the things—there are still things that I don't do because God says don't do them, but I don't do them because I don't want to do them.

Jaffe: We've got somebody on the line who has either a question or a comment about this. Hi. Are you there?

Caller: Yes, I have a question. I heard that Promise Keepers like to keep the women in the kitchen, and raising the kids. [Audience is shown shaking their heads.]

Jaffe: You know, I've heard that too—that they want to put the women back in their place. Please address this, Donnie, because you would know, you've seen the change. Do you feel like a subservient wife now?

Donnie [shaking her head vigorously]: Absolutely, unequivocally not! I mean, this is the one thing that I wish that we could get the message across to women—that if the men take their rightful leadership—and I'm not saying tyranny, I'm saying leadership by permission [gesturing from herself to Dave], that if they take their right place of leadership—there is no greater reward than to have a husband that says to me, "Donnie, what can I do to make our marriage better?"

Jaffe: So he can be a leader within the household without taking control of the household.

Donnie: Absolutely.

Jaffe: You're saying you can be a leader also in the home.

Donnie: Absolutely; it's sharing.

Foley: Do leaders then, make beds and clean toilets? Is that what we're hearing here?

Dave & Donnie: Absolutely; yes! [Audience applauds vigorously]

Who's really in control here? Dave is allowed to lead by Donnie's permission? Where do we find that in God's Word? The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of His

Called Out, not by permission but by divine mandate. Does the Body of Christ give Jesus permission to be its head? Do kings reign by permission of their subjects?

It may be argued that kings can be deposed. But to depose them is rebellion, not godly perseverance.

The fact that Donnie Weigand's remarks brought such applause from the Promise Keepers audience indicates that this is no small problem among Promise Keepers adherents. And, again, it reflects the mind-set of psychologizers in the movement, most notably Gary Smalley and James Dobson, whose human wisdom plays to the sympathy of discontent wives and children.

So Promise Keepers male headship comes down to this: a man who truly leads is one who finds out what his wife wants, and then does it for her. He helps make the bed and clean the toilet.

Give me a break!

Leading On

No doubt there are some genuine conversions involved. Some men may be taking a stronger leadership role in their marriage and/or in their assembly. Sometimes that results in happier wives and pastors. Sometimes it results in less happy wives and pastors.

It takes a strong commitment to God's Word to lead in the direction God wants to go. Often that direction is contrary to that of wives or pastors.

Many pastors want their men to be strong leaders provided they lead in the direction the pastor wants them to go.

Many women want their men to be strong leaders provided they lead in the direction their wives want to go.

Glowing reports of wives in response to Gary Smalley's male-emasculating teachings abound. That they want husbands who think and act more like women (i.e., more "in touch with their feelings") reveals that those wives don't really want strong male leadership. They want husbands who are compliant with their wives' "needs." They do not really want a man whose strength and determination for God may interfere with those "needs" being met.

Promise Keepers somehow recognizes this. Thus the macho posturing while being careful not to offend the ladies who really remain in control. Thus, too, the popularity of Gary Smalley and his ilk who emasculate men while claiming great success in achieving marital harmony.

Women love Smalley because he focuses men's attention not on how to please God, but how to please their wives. His seminars are very popular among non-believers for the same reason. His infomercials on television are geared not to believers but to the general public. His courses do not utilize Scripture as the basis as much as psychological theory. And what woman wouldn't be thrilled with a husband who becomes more attuned to her feminine attitudes, as Smalley proposes?

They may think their husbands are now more compatible with them, but they don't realize that they've sacrificed their manhood in the process.

I'm not speaking of violent men who abuse their wives. These need biblical correction. But the average guy who just tries to provide for his family and receive some respect from his wife is generally denigrated as a knuckle-dragging brute who can't get in touch with his feminine side. So Smalley will show him how. As one of the leading spokespersons within Promise Keepers, Gary Smalley is also one of the most dangerous to true masculinity.

Women who read Smalley's books tend to look upon their husbands as less than adequate—men who don't meet their needs. They are never told that their husbands were not made for them, but they were made for their husbands (I Corinthians 11:9).

It is the woman who is to meet the needs of her husband. The husband is to rule over her with love and protection, giving her what is good for her. To rule over her in this way is not insensitive (the psychological model); it is godly (the biblical model).

Leadership in Promise Keepers' small groups reflects the feminization process. It is based not on gifting by the Holy Spirit as much as it is based upon human skills. Likening growth in small groups to a baseball diamond (moving from home to first base, to second base, etc.) Geoff Gorsuch states:

As we move toward second, therefore, we should expect some adjustments as we rub up against each other's expectations for the group. To insure that this friction is properly handled, we'll need skills in two areas: discussion and conflict resolution.

Discussion

The key to good discussion is to introduce relevant material, subjects that men feel they need to discuss. Also, we need to lead it in such a way that the men feel free to express what's really on their minds. Our research indicates that men are interested in discussing the following issues:

1. What is true manliness?
2. What is success? The real "bottom line" of life? Excellence?
3. How do we deal with guilt feelings?
4. What is male sexuality? Is purity possible for the modern man?
5. How can we nurture family life?
6. What is Christian leadership? How is it developed?
7. What are the basic disciplines of the Christian man?
8. What ministry skills need to be developed? How?
9. What is biblical business conduct?
10. What is integrity? How is it developed?

This is just a partial list of what is on the minds of men today. If the men are not yet comfortable with the Bible, we can recommend many books, such as *The Man in the Mirror* by Pat Morely, which offer Christian insight into some of the above issues and are designed to be used in men's small groups.⁴²

42 Geoff Gorsuch, with Dan Schaffer, op. cit., p. 28.

Why not just be led by the Holy Spirit? This is all so complicated, based not on leadership by Spirit-led, biblically literate elders, but by any Joe who thinks he wants to start a men's fellowship using Promise Keepers materials.

And are we talking about joining with believers or non-believers? What true believer is "not yet comfortable with the Bible"? God's Word should have been used to lead him to Christ in the first place. The question of whether we are dealing with believers or non-believers is never really resolved. The nebulous approach to "group discussions" allows for equal consideration for all points of view; remember, we are not to judge or to be confrontive. This is a perfect recipe for spiritual disaster and a weakening of resolve against error finding its way into the assembly. Essential truth extends beyond the basic tenets of the faith to *all* of what Scripture clearly states. God requires more than lip service; He requires obedience to His Word.

SENSITIVITY TRAINING

To establish that sensitivity is paramount in handling difficult situations, Promise Keepers deals dishonestly with Scripture. Their instruction on how to handle an offensive brother selectively quotes Matthew 18:15-20:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over....For, where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.⁴³

What's missing? Only four important verses. Let's fill them in, using the same NIV that Gorsuch uses:

"But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:16-19)

Why were these verses omitted? Based on the "sensitivity" requirement, it just wouldn't do to suggest that difficult conflicts must be dealt with in difficult ways. God's Word reveals another reason for rebuke:

Those who sin, rebuke before all so that others also may fear. (I Timothy 5:20)

Fear of reprisal keeps the congregation purified. Readiness to rebuke demonstrates concern for others so they will avoid sin rather than face exposure.

The "sensitivity" approach goes beyond proper concern for others and wise handling of sin in the midst of the group. It would be

unthinkable to remind the Body of Christ of how Paul rebuked Peter to his face for his hypocrisy. Churches have become sanitized through the inroads of human psychological theory that eschews conflict in favor of "unity."

By all means, let us have unity and cooperation where we are all in accordance with God's Word. But otherwise there must be conflict; there must be confrontation; there must even be anger, though without sin.

Additionally, there must be a willingness to put the unrepentant sinner out of the assembly:

Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (I Corinthians 5:13)

While excommunication is really the responsibility of eldership in the local assembly, there is still a precedent for individual believers not to fellowship with those who call themselves brethren yet continue in unrepentant sin:

I wrote to you in a letter not to keep company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company if any man who is called a brother is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or abuser, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—with such a one not even to eat.

For what have I to do to judge them also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But God judges those who are outside. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (I Corinthians 5:9-13)

What Promise Keepers proposes is to welcome all who say they are of Christ into fellowship, and not to judge them. They are not accountable to the fellowship as much as they are accountable to their mentor.

I'm sure that Promise Keepers would deny this. One of their agendas is to make men responsible within their congregations. But this is not the function of a para-church organization; it is the function of the local body itself. In the process of establishing its male-bonding program, however, Promise Keepers leads astray into teachings that are based on psychological theory rather than on sound biblical teaching.

The psychological approach is not the biblical approach. It avoids conflict when conflict may be necessary. For example, Gorsuch advises that we stay away from accusatory remarks:

Focus on "I" statements, not "you" statements. Each one of us must own our feelings and take responsibility for them. Normally, when we're upset, we accuse the other person with "you" statements such as, "You put me down!" However, if we say, "I may be too sensitive but, when that happened, I felt put down," this does not accuse the person or his character; but it does help him

43 Ibid., p. 35.

reflect upon his behavior in a specific, positive way.⁴⁴ (Emphasis in original)

Dare we follow the biblical rule and rebuke him, even kindly? Evidently not. Yet rebuke need not be harsh unless harshness is called for. One may rebuke another with kind words if that is appropriate. But sometimes kind words are not appropriate. An honest heart will receive rebuke even if given in less than polite terms. This calls for leading by God's Spirit, not psychological ploys.

As much as Promise Keepers touts the importance of God's Word, much of its advice is contrary to God's Word. Some advice even substitutes the importance of conflict resolution over the necessity to defend the integrity of the Word of God regardless of how "unloving" the defender of truth may be. Gorsuch errs in the following:

Focus on understanding, not winning. The goal of any conflict is greater understanding.⁴⁵ (Emphasis in original.)

No, the goal of any conflict for the believer is to bring opposers into conformity to God's Word.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war after the flesh because the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

Paul's teaching did not mean we are engaged in spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons only, but also to every thought of man that exalts itself above the Word of God. Within the Body of Christ we are to strive to bring all thoughts into captivity to Christ. There should be no conflict except where God's Word is pitted against human understanding and reason.

An example today especially is the emphasis upon psychological integration with biblical truth. Throughout Promise Keepers literature certain psychological terms consistently crop up: "dysfunctional," "sensitivity," "listening skills," "meaningful relationships," "unconscious," and many others. We are not nitpicking by pointing this out. Some of these terms may occasionally be valid in the proper context, but the consistent use demonstrates a mind-set heavily influenced by secular psychology's inroads into the Body of Christ via "Christian" psychologizers.

Gary Smalley, John Trent, James Dobson, Robert Hicks, and many others are in the forefront of Promise Keepers speakers and writers. Their seduction by psychology has tainted their understanding of God's Word and, for some, even of the person of Jesus Himself. This, if nothing else, should raise red flags of caution for anyone who may feel attracted to Promise Keepers.

ANOTHER JESUS

To understand Promise Keepers' reason for ignoring the difficult aspects of God's Word in these areas of conflict, one must understand how Promise Keepers perceives Jesus' view of men:

Jesus didn't view men as losers. He saw them as lost.⁴⁶

That's a clever cliché, but it's not true. The Scriptures view men as both losers and lost. What is a loser but one who cannot gain victory over life's trials? And what man can gain full victory without the grace of God? More important than gaining victory over life's trials (which may be accomplished to some extent even by unregenerate men), no one can gain the victory over death and the grave without the benefit of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and His resurrection.

In terms of man-to-man relationships, some men are winners and some are losers. In terms of man-to-God relationships, all men are losers. Our victory is in the finished work of Jesus, not in ourselves. Many Scriptures tell us about the depravity of man's heart. Jesus would not even trust Himself to men because he knew their hearts:

But Jesus did not trust himself to them because He knew all men, and did not need that any should testify of man—for he knew what was in man. (John 2:24-25)

It's precisely because Promise Keepers has succumbed to human wisdom that it has adopted the no-conflict stance. It's a feel-good approach to the issues of life, but it isn't biblical. It reshapes Jesus into the image desired by men who shrink from judgment—a nice guy who went around trying to "meet needs." Gorsuch paints such a picture of Jesus:

Jesus always asked those who came to Him what he could do for them.⁴⁷

This is patently false. Yes, He did ask blind Bartimaeus what He wanted. And Scripture probably doesn't record some instances where He asked others what He could do for them. But He did not "always" ask those who came to Him what he could do for them. This is more than hyperbole; it is consistent with the entire tenor of the Promise Keepers manual that paints Jesus as non-confrontive—the model for Promise Keepers men. Bob Beltz's description of Jesus adds to the error:

Jesus Christ is challenging and exciting! He was and is the most attractive and winsome personality in all of human history.⁴⁸

Such a statement projects a stereotype of the godly man as one who is "Mr. Personality" rather than one who is committed to holiness at all costs, even the cost of his life and reputation.

Scripture tells us about Jesus:

44 Ibid., pp. 33-34.

45 Ibid., p. 34.

46 Ibid., p. 49.

47 Ibid., p. 63.

48 Bob Beltz, op. cit., p. 99.

...He has no form nor handsomness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we would desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:2-3)

It was not Jesus' personality or looks that attracted men to Him; He was rejected and despised by most. For the few who did follow Him it was the words of truth that He spoke, coupled with His display of God's power that attracted them. Men are not saved by coming to Jesus as a man; they are saved by responding to the Word of truth about Him.

So then faith comes by hearing a word about Christ. (Romans 10:17)

It is the Gospel that leads men to faith in Jesus Christ. There are many human concepts of Jesus, but there is only one biblical truth about Him. It is not sufficient to hold onto a close facsimile; one must hold onto the biblical Jesus.

Beltz presents an unbiblical Jesus—a Jesus viewed through the romantic eyes of nostalgia. This is the feminized, "sensitive" Jesus, not the true Son of God who will appear in flames of glory to bring judgment upon an unrepentant humanity.

ECUMENISM

An area of great concern to those who care about maintaining the purity of the Faith is that of ecumenism. Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney places a strong emphasis on unity without regard to racial or denominational barriers:

Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're white. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God?

Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're black. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God?

Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're brown. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God?

Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Pentecostal. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God?

Hear Me: Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Catholic. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God?⁴⁹

No one can argue that there should be no division within the Body of Christ. It is important, however, that we look at the overall agenda connected with such a statement. To do so we should first consider the issue of race as a hindrance to unity; we will then consider the issue of denominationalism.

Race

Certainly the color of one's skin should not be a hindrance to unity. Promise Keepers is correct in its assessment that racial boundaries still exist within the churches. And they are at least partially correct in stating that those boundaries are the result of racism within the churches. There's no doubt that racism exists within the churches, because they are replete with nominal

Christians who impose their worldly values upon the congregations to which they've attached themselves. These are the spots in our feasts of which Peter and Jude speak (II Peter 2:13; Jude 1:12)—the false brethren who bring reproach against the name of Jesus Christ.

Promise Keepers is on the right track by taking an active approach to overcoming the barriers of separation, whether by racism or by demographics. To embrace brethren of different races honors Galatians 3:26-29. However, separation is not exclusively racist. True believers, regardless of their color, are not racists. There are other factors that contribute to separation. These are economic, cultural and logistic.

Right or wrong, the fact remains that neighborhoods more often than not are established along racial and cultural lines. Assemblies within those neighborhoods are automatically going to reflect those neighborhoods' overall racial and cultural structure. People in general—Christians and non-Christians—choose to live within their racial and cultural backgrounds. While racism in society has contributed to neighborhood demographics, it is not the only factor. Nor should it be implied that racism is the reason that black Christians worship in black neighborhoods, white Christians worship in white neighborhoods, and Asian Christians worship in Asian neighborhoods (within the Asian community the diversity is further broken down according to country of origin).

Nor should we assume that racism is a white thing—it's a human thing. It is found among blacks, Hispanics and Asians, as well as among Semitic peoples. Racism is normal to the fallen human condition, but it is not normal to the Holy Spirit-regenerated heart. True disciples of Jesus recognize the inherent evil that lurks within all hearts. We, of all people, should be objective in the matter of racial equality and inequality. Yet we should not embrace anyone as a brother in Christ on the basis of his being of the same or a different race, but because he is of the same *Spirit*. Unity based on racial quotas is not unity in the Spirit any more than is unity based on denominational quotas.

Denominationalism

If the Lord desires unity without regard to racial distinctions, what about denominational distinctions? After all, isn't denominationalism a man-created thing? Yet some denominations have grown out of the desire to create a fellowship based on a more biblical doctrine. In fact, for centuries denominationalism, for all its faults, guarded against the central authoritarian apostasy of Romanism from which it sprang.

With few exceptions, within virtually all the denominations that call themselves Christian there are true believers in the Lord. Their denominational ties may have resulted in their being stunted in their spiritual growth or understanding of God's Word, but their faith is genuine. And it must be admitted that some denominations have historically, at least for a time, held the Word of God in higher regard than others. The goal of

49 Bill McCartney, Promise Keepers '94 Seize the Moment Mens Conference, Portland, Oregon, June 18, 1994.

Promise Keepers, as stated, is to unite all who love Jesus and are born of the Spirit of God, regardless of denomination. Because this concerns Roman Catholicism it was the major issue with which we dealt in our interview with Randy Phillips:

Al Dager: On the issue of Catholicism, does Promise Keepers have a policy on how to interact with Roman Catholics?

Randy Phillips: What we do care about is do you love Jesus, and are you born again by the Spirit of God? And so if you have been born again by the Spirit of God, then whatever the labels are should not divide us. So from that standpoint, all men are welcome, and certainly are, whether you're Baptist, Pentecostal or Roman Catholic. If you are in the Body of Christ, then you should certainly be welcome.

AD: Considering the exclusionary policy of the Roman Catholic Church, and its doctrines relative to Transubstantiation, the mass and so forth, is there anything Promise Keepers would say as to how their members should interact with Roman Catholics? Would they be allowed to challenge on those issues, to try to bring enlightenment, or to try to lead them out of the Roman Catholic Church?

RP: I think you're dealing with a whole area that is not our expertise or calling. I think there are those in the theological community that are dealing with those issues from both camps. Even now a lot of those issues are being talked about and debated, prayed about—sources of hope and sources of division.

AD: The reason I asked is that there are non-Catholic Christians who would consider the Roman Catholic Church a cult, or at least not really a Christian denomination in the true sense of the word, based upon some of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, much as they would Mormonism. How would Promise Keepers overcome that barrier between those brothers and the Roman Catholics that might be involved?

RP: Based upon the [Promise Keepers'] statement of faith, based upon what the purpose of Promise Keepers is—it's a Christ-centered ministry dedicated to uniting men to vital relationships to become godly influences in their world—I would ask them, are those seven promises to commitment to Christ, to one another, to integrity, to the family, to the Church, to reconciliation, to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, you know, that's what unites us—that's our focus.

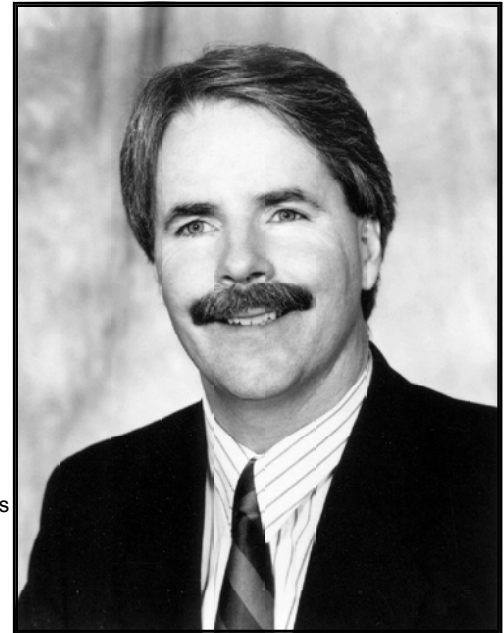
AD: So you would neither encourage nor discourage brothers...

RP: I would encourage all men to come together—any men.

AD: Regardless of doctrine?

RP: Absolutely. You know, at our conferences, no matter who the men are, if they don't know Jesus they're encouraged to come because they're going to hear a clear, biblical message of salvation. No matter who they are. So all men are welcome at our conferences no matter what their background or political affiliation.

AD: I'm not talking about the conferences; I'm talking more about involvement in Promise Keepers men's groups—the more intimate areas of mentoring—those things.



Promise Keepers
President

Randy Phillips

RP: What they choose to do in their local communities is their choice, and so we're not mandating relationships or mandating theological issues beyond the clear biblical foundations we stand on.

AD: So you're saying they would have the individual choice whether they want to confront somebody they feel holds an erroneous doctrine?

RP: That would be true. I think, and certainly in any area I think there's probably 28,000 different things that we could think of in a day that we could disagree on. But our focus is on what we do agree on, concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through Him and Him alone can we have eternal life, to the commitment to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures as the only source of true revelation and knowing God's plan, and the function of the Church. I think our commitment is based upon those things. Outside of that, to get into specifics would only put me in an arena that I'm not called for or called to, nor equipped to.

I believe Randy Phillips was being very straightforward on this issue. We cannot argue that anyone, no matter what their background, should not be invited to public evangelistic meetings. But, as stated earlier, the Promise Keepers conferences are not purely evangelistic. And there is a weakness in Promise Keepers' official hands-off policy. While Promise Keepers does not overtly promote Catholicism, it certainly endorses it. And it falls short in not addressing those Roman Catholic teachings that essentially nullify the doctrines upon which Christian unity must be based. (See our special report, *Six Roman Catholic Doctrines That Nullify Salvation By Grace.*)

This, coupled with their admonition not to judge or confront per their manual for men's groups, leaves those who wish to minister the truth to Catholics without a leg to stand on within the Promise Keepers format. By not taking a stand on doctrinal issues, Promise Keepers overlooks the doctrinal differences not so much among non-Catholic denominations but between these and Roman Catholicism.

There are few barriers to be broken down between non-Catholic denominations. The barrier that really exists is between true believers in these denominations and the Roman Catholic Church. But there is good reason for this. Recognizing that individual Roman Catholics can be saved, there is still a problem with the institution itself, which holds doctrines that, if properly understood, negate the full atoning efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Most Roman Catholics are not fully aware of the implications of their church's teachings. Many have a genuine love for Jesus to the degree that their church has allowed them to know any truth. In other words, Roman Catholicism has kept its people enslaved to its hierarchical authority while doing all it can to keep them ignorant of the full freedom in Christ that is theirs.

True believers in Christ will not attempt to lead Roman Catholics into their own denominations, but will attempt to lead them to Christ so they can enjoy the freedom that is theirs. Ultimately this leads to separation from Roman Catholicism. And that, the Roman Catholic Church has vowed to stop through its ecumenical outreach.

The climate among many Christians today is one of desiring reconciliation with Roman Catholics. But there can be no reconciliation with devout Roman Catholics without reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church. Why? Because Catholics are forbidden from even taking communion with non-Catholics. To do so is considered a "mortal sin," punishable by eternal damnation.

Additionally, Roman Catholicism does not recognize its members' relationship with the Lord apart from "Mother Church." This is the reason for the Roman Catholic priesthood. Priests stand in the gap between worshipers and their god. The people cannot approach God for atonement from their sins without the intercession of the priest (except for rare circumstances that involve imminent death). I'm not talking about how some renegade Catholics—even priests—may view their personal relationship with Christ. I'm talking about the Roman Catholic Church's position. Why else are ex-Catholics considered condemned unless they renew their loyalty to the pope's authority? Ecumenically-oriented non-Catholics betray their ex-Catholic brethren by acceptance of Roman Catholics without taking a strong stand against the Roman Catholic Church. This Promise Keepers does by 1) refusing to encourage the leading of Catholics from the darkness of their religious system into the light of liberty in Christ; 2) implying in its literature that priests are valid representatives of God's people:

One of the core values of Promise Keepers is honoring the pastors and priests of our local congregations.⁵⁰

There is no validity to any priesthood apart from the priesthood of all believers. To acknowledge the priesthood of Rome is to denigrate the priesthood of Christ and to acknowledge the validity of man standing in the place of Christ as a priest to God's people.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men: the man Christ Jesus. (I Timothy 2:5)

For any organization to honor the validity of the Roman Catholic priesthood plays into the Vatican's hands and leaves truth seekers from breaking free of religious tyranny. But McCartney goes even beyond recognition of the Roman Catholic priesthood as valid. At the Promise Keepers conference in Portland, while calling for the pastors to come forward for prayer, he indicated that he doesn't believe the "laity" can rightly divide the Word of Truth. Speaking to the pastors he said:

We cannot rightly divide the word of truth. We need you to teach us.⁵¹

Such an hierarchical mind-set establishes even non-Catholic ministers as priests over the people, contrary to God's Word:

But the anointing you have all received from Him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you. But as the same anointing teaches you about all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in Him. (I John 2:27)

McCartney's statement likewise places the pastor in the role of God's special revelator of truth. As a member of John Wimber's Vineyard movement he has evidently been influenced by that denomination's teachings on special revelation. In fact, there is a strong Vineyard influence among Promise Keepers leadership. It was founded by McCartney in association with Vineyard "prophet," James Ryle, pastor of the Boulder Valley, Colorado, Vineyard.

Randy Phillips, also a former Roman Catholic and a member of the Boulder Valley Vineyard, became president of Promise Keepers at the behest of McCartney and Ryle. (For an analysis of the Vineyard movement and its aberrant doctrines and practices, see our special report, *The Vineyard: History, Teachings & Practices*.)

It's significant to note, by the way, that when McCartney made his statements about Promise Keepers not caring what color or denomination one is, there was no applause until he said, "Here me: Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Catholic." At this, many applauded vigorously—a reflection of the degree to which the ecumenists have succeeded in convincing a significant number of Christians to accept a "hands off" policy toward leading Roman Catholics into greater truth.

It's true that many Roman Catholics do not believe in many of their church's doctrines. But these are generally nominal Catho-

50 Geoff Gorsuch with Dan Schaffer, op. cit., p. 50.

51 Bill McCartney, Promise Keepers '94 Seize the Moment Mens Conference, op. cit.

lics, or those who have just begun to understand what true faith in Christ really means. To discourage attempts to lead them out of deception dishonors God and negates any claim to belief in the sufficiency of Christ's shed blood to atone for sin.

According to Randy Phillips, Promise Keepers chooses not to get involved in ecumenical debates. Their purpose is to bring men together in mutual concern and respect for one another. The men are free within their small groups to question one another regarding the doctrines of their churches, but this is generally discouraged. While it's impossible to address false doctrine without conflict, within the framework of small group disciplines outlined by Promise Keepers, there is to be no conflict. This negates the effect of those who insist on purity of doctrine as a criterion for fellowship.

Roman Catholic Endorsement

Due to Promise Keepers' non-committal stance on doctrine there is a growing acceptance of Promise Keepers among Roman Catholic leaders. Christian Van Liefde, pastor of St. Hilary Catholic Church in Pico Rivera, California, is quoted in the Saturday, May 6, 1995 *Los Angeles Times* :

Promise Keepers places a very strong emphasis on returning to your own church congregation or parish and becoming an active layman.⁵²

Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles, urged Van Liefde to determine whether the Promise Keepers program would be appropriate for Catholic parishes. One parish—St. John Eudes in Chatsworth, California—has held a Promise Keepers seminar featuring Roman Catholic priests as speakers.

The Tidings, the official newspaper for the Los Angeles Archdiocese, dedicated a full-page article in its March 31, 1995 issue endorsing Promise Keepers, and encouraging Catholic men to attend the May 5 and 6, 1995 conference at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Mike Nelson, staff writer for *The Tidings*, stated:

Promise Keepers is a basic program of evangelization for men of faith, begun among more fundamentalist and evangelical Christian communities, but now being expanded to include Catholic congregations.⁵³

Van Liefde was quoted in the *Tidings* article as well:

There is no attempt at proselytizing or drawing men away from their faith to another church. The primary message of the weekend is turning your life over to Jesus Christ and standing tall as a man of faith.⁵⁴

Van Liefde is optimistic that Promise Keepers can grow at the parish level without adversely impacting existing parish programs or finances.

"Rather, the opposite is true," he asserts. "One of the primary promises of the program is to return to one's local church and become a force for good in the local community. Another is the commitment in financial support of one's local church. The men are challenged to give generously of their time, treasure and talent to their local church."⁵⁵

Nelson pointed out that Promise Keepers is making local parish presentations, in addition to its large-scale conferences held in various cities. Among those in the Catholic community who have endorsed Promise Keepers is Captain Steve Ruda of the Los Angeles Fire Department, a former seminarian and a parishioner at St. John Eudes Church. Ruda attended the Promise Keepers conference in Anaheim, California, in 1994, and claims that it was an event that changed his life.

"I believe that the men of America are looking for answers, and they are looking toward Jesus to provide them," says Ruda. "And at this weekend, something happened there of great importance—54,000 men, gathered to lift up their voices in a spirit of unity and begin to glorify God."⁵⁶

After the conference, Ruda brought Promise Keepers into his Catholic community, and conducted a Promise Keepers seminar for 100 men, with presentations by local priests.

In a letter to Ruda dated July 14, 1994, Cardinal Mahony stated that he was impressed with Promise Keepers. Said Mahony:

I would be very interested to know how the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and I could be of assistance in the fuller promotion of Promise Keepers, and how we might be able to work closely together to encourage this deeper level of discipleship for our Catholic men throughout the Archdiocese.

I would be open to any suggestions that you, Father Joe Shea, or Father Chris Van Liefde might have on moving forward with an expansion of the Promise Keeper concept among our Catholic men. It seems to me that there are many options available to us, and I would surely be interested in exploring these with all of you.

Mahony continues:

This seems to me to be a wonderful way to prepare for the Third Millennium of Christianity which begins in the year 2000.

The Catholic charismatic magazine, *New Covenant*, featured Promise Keepers on the front cover of its April, 1995 edition. In his article, "Bands of Brothers," writer Bob Harvey cited Promise Keepers as a hope for bringing men back into the churches. He pointed out that Promise Keepers is a backlash against the femi-

52 John Dart, "'Promise Keepers,' a Message to L.A. Men" *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1995, p. B4.

53 Mike Nelson, "'Promise Keepers' Promises Spiritual Renewal for Men," *The Tidings*, March 31, 1995, p. 3.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

nist influences in our society, and focuses on male bonding as a means to restore men's identities as members of a warrior class.

There is an issue involving the fact that Promise Keepers founder, Bill McCartney, and its president, Randy Phillips, are ex-Roman Catholics.

There seems to be emerging within non-Catholic Christian circles a number of ex-Catholics who relate a fondness for their former church. Throughout my Christian experience, those ex-Catholics I've encountered have been vociferously anti-Catholic. Not in the sense of hating Catholics, but in their rejection of the institution itself as a valid expression of the true Faith. While maintaining that Catholics may have a faith which is largely hindered by the unbiblical teachings of their church yet love the Lord, most ex-Catholics offer no such grace to the hierarchy. Many Roman Catholics do not necessarily believe all the doctrines of their church; many do not understand the implication of those doctrines.

Knowing Roman Catholic doctrine and the political machinations of the Vatican, we ex-Catholics are understandably suspicious of someone who would leave Roman Catholicism, which is extremely possessive of its members, and still seek unity with its hierarchy.

We are also suspicious of any Roman Catholic prelate who endorses a movement founded by an ex-Catholic. To the Roman Catholic hierarchy, those who leave their church are considered anathema—eternally damned, without hope unless they return in contrition to “Holy Mother Church.” They are excommunicated, and fellowship with them is forbidden.

Knowing these things, we are not out of line to ask what's going on with McCartney, the Archbishop of Los Angeles, and the Promise Keepers' ecumenical stance. The Roman Catholic attempt at counterreformation has never abated. Is it possible there is a fifth column among us? Vatican II has stated that all Roman Catholic involvement in ecumenism must be for the benefit of the Catholic Church. It seems reasonable to assume there are men posing as ex-Catholics to convince non-Catholics that the devil behind the mask of Roman Catholic piety is really the Holy Spirit prompting “Christian unity.”

My question to them is, “If Roman Catholicism is acceptable to you, why did you leave it and risk eternal damnation? Or did you ever really leave it?”

Mormon Endorsement

The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints has become aware of the potential of Promise Keepers to enhance their church's outreach to its men. Because of Promise Keepers' ecumenical, interdenominational approach, Mormon leaders of the Palos Verdes, California, stake (group of congregations) have urged members to participate in Promise Keepers. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Mormon stake president Chip Rawlings:

“The movement's ‘Seven Promises’ are like something straight out of the men's priesthood manual for the church,” states Mormon attorney Chip Rawlings, who indi-

cated that several Mormon leaders would be attending the Los Angeles Promise Keepers conference.⁵⁷

Promise Keepers, while claiming to lead men to Christ at their conferences, preaches a non-doctrinal gospel—one which finds acceptance even among Mormon leaders, whose theology and Christology are aberrant, and Roman Catholic clergy, who, while espousing belief in salvation by grace alone, insist that true salvation rests ultimately in the sacraments of their church.

In our analyses of Promise Keepers study guides and other materials we have found the organization to be largely non-committal in affirming the tenets of the Faith. Emphasis is placed upon the person of Jesus but the question arises, “Which Jesus?” Evidently it may be a Jesus with whom the Mormons identify: Satan's brother—the product of the Father's physical intercourse with Mary—a man who *attained* godhood as did His Father.

Or it may be the Jesus of the papacy—God incarnate whose sacrifice on the cross was insufficient to pay the full penalty for our sins, necessitating the Church's intervention through the sacraments. Most notably the sacraments of the mass and penance as well as time spent in Purgatory are essential elements of the Roman Catholic Church's salvation.

Failing the Flock

God's flock is being devoured by this wolf of ecumenical deception, and the hireling shepherds are leading them to the slaughter. These shepherds refuse correction from those who attempt to point out their error. Especially from those who are unschooled in the mechanics of seminary training.

They can run circles around us with their theological discourses and milk-quality teachings that never really go beyond the basics of the Faith. But they haven't the discernment to recognize error and deception even when pointed out to them by the “common folk” who suffer from seeing their beloved pastors succumb to the mob mentality.

In spite of the loose attitudes toward sound doctrine, Promise Keepers continues to grow by leaps and bounds, thanks in large part to naïve pastors who believe that a few hours in a stadium can impart some spiritual life into the men under their care. Desperate for men who don't present too many problems to have to deal with, many pastors are looking to Promise Keepers to provide the “discipling” environment that the pastors and elders of churches are unable or unwilling to provide themselves. They take little thought of the adverse effects of lending credibility to those among the eclectic mix of speakers for Promise Keepers.

COVENANTALISM

An important goal of Promise Keepers is the cementing of relationships between men. This is accomplished through covenanting partnerships. Promise Keepers insists that every man must be accountable to some other man for every area of his life, most specifically his finances, his sexual life and his relationship with God. The covenant partner is to be given the freedom to inquire into any of these areas at will, with the understanding that

57 John Dart, op. cit.

he may bring correction to those areas he feels are not in proper alignment.

In the context of covenant relationships, a man willingly grants other men the right to inquire about his relationship to God, his commitment to his family, his sexuality, and his financial dealings. Together they form a team that is committed to advance God's kingdom.⁵⁸

This form of covenanting is not found in Scripture. On the contrary, the taking of oaths, which covenanting is, is forbidden for several reasons: 1) one doesn't know if he will be able to fulfill his covenant; 2) one cannot change many things he may covenant to change; 3) one may find himself bound to someone (or some condition) from whom he may later wish to be freed; 4) one may find God's will to be different from what he originally perceived it to be when he made the covenant.

Yet to break a covenant is to sin. No less is it a sin to enter into a covenant without being willing to suffer adversely should fulfillment of that covenant require it. Exceptions would be those covenants expressly allowed or commanded in Scripture (e.g., marriage vows, business relationships, etc.). Most especially, one should never make a vow to God. At the most we should say, "If the Lord wills, we will do such and such" (James 4:13-15). We may even say, "If the Lord allows us, or grants us the grace." Without such provision, the making of oaths is foolishness at best, and can lead to spiritual disaster.

Yet it is not uncommon at Promise Keepers conferences for the speakers to request the men to take oaths. One example is that which I witnessed at the 1994 Portland conference. Dr. Charles Cooper, speaking of the necessity to study Scripture, called upon the men to stand, lift their hands and repeat, "I will not forget" to study the Bible.

It's one thing to instill the importance of Bible study; it's another thing to put men under oaths they may fail to keep. Many oaths are entered into under emotional circumstances. And Promise Keepers conferences, by their nature, engender emotional responses.

There is an additional problem with the Promise Keepers methodology. Covenants are encouraged without regard to the spiritual maturity of the person to whom one may covenant himself. In some cases men may enter into covenants with others with whom they have only recently become acquainted through Promise Keepers.

To even enter into such covenants demonstrates spiritual immaturity. To encourage such covenants likewise demonstrates spiritual immaturity. All this aside, to make oneself accountable to a peer rather than to a proven elder in the Faith may easily lead one astray.

Accountability is to be to those in authority within the local body. This isn't to say that one cannot make oneself accountable to a brother who may belong to another fellowship. But ideally, even that accountability should be with the approval of his elders. Promise Keepers does encourage pastoral input but the bib-

lical model for accountability is to teach God's Word within the local assembly and for the elders to hold the flock accountable to the Word. Nowhere does Scripture give any man or church body authority over areas that it does not specifically delineate.

The assembly is not to bring any teachings into the body apart from Scripture. Nor is it to hold anyone accountable to anything except Scripture.

The problem today is that church authorities are holding men accountable to men's teachings, sometimes more than they are holding them accountable to God's Word. Most pastors and elders do not understand this basic fact of spiritual authority. Unless something drastic occurs within their fellowship they pretty much allow things to proceed without their oversight. Thus many within normally sound, biblically-based fellowships receive their spiritual sustenance from others whose doctrines may be radically different from those of the fellowship itself.

An example is the degree to which many, even within so-called "fundamentalist" churches, are influenced by the Christian media. The Trinity Broadcasting Network, among others, presents many differing winds of doctrine—some patently heretical. Because of lax oversight or refusal to address these doctrinal errors, the pastors of many churches leave their congregations at the mercy of wolves in sheep's clothing.

It is the same lax attitude toward what appears to be "a move of God"—whether the experiences claimed on Trinity Broadcasting Network, the Vineyard movement, charismatic, or Promise Keepers—that polarizes the elders from any attempts at bringing correction. Often, it may be found, this is due to the fact that many elders are not qualified to be elders, lacking discernment of the issues that affect today's churches. In many cases they are merely elected board members who serve in the capacity of deacons at best.

Too often the true elders of the fellowship are left in the pews or relegated to menial tasks. Only seminary-trained men (and women) need apply for pastoral office, and elders are selected according to their acceptance of the pastor's "vision".

LOOKING AT RESULTS

The effectiveness of Promise Keepers in convincing Christians that they are a God-ordained answer to Christian men's needs is nothing short of amazing. Glowing reports abound of how Promise Keepers men are more committed to their families and to their churches as a result of their involvement in the conferences.

Based on the testimonies of wives as to the changed attitudes of their husbands after becoming involved with Promise Keepers, more and more men are being encouraged by their wives and friends to get involved. Those who decline or waver are looked at askance. Yet one thing is certain: they will not be built up in sound doctrine. And the long-term results of their involvement in the small men's group encounter sessions will not be apparent for awhile.

58 Promise Keepers Work Book, "Seize the Moment Mens conference," Portland Oregon, June 18, 1994.

Lacking discernment, many pastors and elders base their judgments on these perceived “results,” rather than on testing by God’s Word. They fear that any criticism may be fighting against what God may be doing beyond their understanding.

A simple rule to avoid this problem is to know God’s Word sufficiently so that error will be easily recognized as such regardless of the outward manifestations of “holiness,” “spiritual power,” or “positive results.”

Things are not always as they seem. Why did Jesus and the writers of Scripture warn us of false prophets, false apostles and false brethren if there were no danger of our mistaking them for the real thing?

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also are transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works. (II Corinthians 11:13-15)

Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and in Your name have cast out devils, and in Your name done many wonderful works?’ 23And then I will say to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work wickedness. (Matthew 7:22-23)

Jesus warned us that the deception in the last days would be so great that if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22). Every believer must test the spirits to see if they are of God (I John 4:1). This may well include testing the teachings of their own pastors and elders. While this is a valid and important aspect of one’s personal growth in Christ it cannot be accomplished lightly or without understanding scriptural truth.

What about the results reported by Promise Keepers of increased determination on the part of men to take the lead at home and at their churches, not to mention reports of lives changed from bad to good. These results are not in themselves evidence that Promise Keepers is the answer, or that it is even of God. Sun Myung Moon presents much evidence of changed lives among his followers, as do the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses—even as did Jim Jones.

The evidence of God at work is not outward change but conformity to Scripture, which in turn results in outward change. Outward change without conformity to Scripture is merely human righteousness. Change of mind does not always equate to change of heart. A genuine change of heart results in the holding of all Scripture in high esteem. Nor does it distinguish between so-called “essential doctrine” and “secondary doctrine.”

But you continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from a child you have known the holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given through inspiration by God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may

be perfect, thoroughly equipped for all good works. (II Timothy 3:14-17)

When the Holy Spirit says that *all* Scripture is given for instruction in righteousness, He isn’t speaking only of the so-called “essential” doctrines the ecumenists are claiming as reason for unity. He means all of Scripture itself is the essential doctrine of the Faith.

This is not to denigrate the experiences of those who have made a change. No doubt the Lord has used Promise Keepers to effect some change in some men’s lives. But the end does not justify the means.

The proper focus must be on the means itself, as well as on the end. This is why Scripture warns us of Satan’s ministers being ministers of righteousness. They preach holiness; they effect changed lives; they produce “results.” But their underlying philosophies, or perhaps even merely a small amount of their teachings, are unbiblical and, therefore, ungodly. While leading in the general direction of God’s narrow path, they miss the strait way by a small margin, but sufficient enough to lead into error.

Results are not the final arbiter of truth; one’s pious demeanor is not the final arbiter of truth; one’s ability to call fire down from Heaven is not the final arbiter of truth. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers are not the final arbiters of truth. Scripture is the final—and only—arbiter of truth.

It is highly unlikely that an organization that waffles on doctrinal integrity will inspire men to truly be men of God. Strength of leadership honors God only when it is in compliance with God’s written Word. To ignore doctrinal integrity nullifies any other claims to integrity.

SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

The repercussions to our original Promise Keepers report have come in waves. Many of our readers have written or called to express thanks for putting in their hands the information that they needed to inform their pastors who want to get involved with Promise Keepers. A few have reported that their attempts to bring understanding bore fruit. Most lament that their warnings have fallen on deaf ears. The responses of their pastors have ranged from casual disregard of the information to vehement and sometimes scathing denunciation of them and/or Media Spotlight for having dared question the Promise Keepers work.

My personal experience with some pastors would be frustrating were it not for the realization that my responsibility ends at warning them; they must undertake to do what is right according to God’s Word.

Those with whom we have faced off think we are deficient in our hermeneutics, our exegesis and our logic because we don’t see things their way. They see nothing wrong with integrating psychological theory into their Sunday school teaching or pulpit ministry. Nor do they think that the issues we’ve raised over Promise Keepers are of any great concern.

One pastor informed me that I had erred in my assertion that Promise Keepers promotes heresy through Robert Hicks’ writings, one of which is used as a study guide in their small men’s groups. Given the task of checking out our Promise Keepers report for his church, he called Doug Engburg, the Washington state director for Promise Keepers, and asked him about Hicks’ *The Masculine*

Journey. He was told that Promise Keepers just grew so fast that they couldn't keep up with everything, and it was just a mistake that they endorsed the book. On that basis, the pastor felt that the other issues weren't of any great concern and he recommended that the church promote Promise Keepers.

I informed him that I had a copy of a letter from Promise Keepers defending their use of Hicks' book. I also reminded him that Promise Keepers didn't make a mistake; they co-published the book with the Navigators and gave away over 50,000 copies to the men who attended the Boulder conference in 1993.

Because he didn't trust me, he wrote to Promise Keepers himself. Now, he has found out that I was right all along. But to this date he's still behind his church's involvement.

It was my understanding that the reason he initially decided it was okay to go with Promise Keepers was that he thought I erred in my assertion that *The Masculine Journey* is still endorsed by Promise Keepers. Evidently I misjudged his intent; his decision was already made and nothing I could say was going to change his mind.

I have repeatedly asked people why they would want to give credibility to men they don't agree with, why they would encourage the men in their church to become involved in an obviously ecumenical endeavor, why they would promote something that is so doctrinally unsound. The results have not been dissimilar to those I encountered when I was approached by a Moonie several years ago. When I confronted him with the truth of the Gospel I could literally see a glaze come over his eyes; not wishing to be proven wrong he remained entrenched in his error. I have found this same glaze come over pastors' eyes when I ask them point-blank about why they would lend credibility to Promise Keepers in spite of all the problems which they agree exist.

The answer some give is that they will only encourage the men to attend the conference at the stadium but they won't bring Promise Keepers into the church.

Okay. But what will happen when their men hear some false teacher who sounds good at the conference, and then buy his books or tapes based on their trust in their pastor who sent them?

What will happen when the men come back all charged up and, as point men, ask the pastor to implement the Promise Keepers program in their church? Will the pastor tell them, "Well, I don't agree with Promise Keepers, so I don't think we should do that"? If he does, he'll get hit with, "Well, if you don't agree with them, why did you promote them in our church?"

No amount of waffling on this will convince the men that the pastor may not be so trustworthy after all, regardless of whether or not they approve of Promise Keepers themselves.

Some Radio Experiences

On May 11, I was interviewed for the radio program, *Issues, Etc.*, hosted by Chuck Spomer on KFUCO radio in St. Louis, Missouri. The subject was Promise Keepers. In the last twenty minutes of the one-hour format Chuck opened the lines to callers. All of the callers took exception with my position. One woman was distressed that I would question this wonderful movement that is bringing men closer to God and to each other. Seeing that I was getting nowhere with her on the specific issues of ecumenism, psychology, and unbiblical teachings, I asked her, "How

would you feel if you knew your husband was sharing his most intimate secrets regarding your relationship with him?"

She didn't think Promise Keepers would promote such a thing, and insisted that I was off base.

I told her that they do promote such a thing, and I asked again how she would feel about it. She weakly said, "Well, if it's with one other man."

To this I responded, "No, with a whole group." She still would not believe that Promise Keepers would do this. I explained that Promise Keepers is not a biblical discipleship program, but a male-bonding encounter group, and that they do encourage men to share their most intimate sexual secrets and fantasies with one another.

I wasn't able to convince her, and I didn't have my copy of the study guide for *The Masculine Journey* on hand from which to quote, having loaned it to someone else.

In another instance an interview was requested by the program director for a radio station in the Seattle area. He informed me that he would also interview the Washington state director for Promise Keepers in order to present both sides of our differences.

I readily agreed to this and the date and time were set. A few days later he called to apologize, saying that the station manager had put the kabosh on the thing. It seems that the Promise Keeper guy was irate to think that I would be given a forum to question his organization's beliefs and practices. He went directly to the station manager and insisted that I not be allowed to air my views. The station manager agreed.

Did I Lie?

In April of this year I received a phone call from Dr. Martin Bobgan, whose booklet, *Promise Keepers & PsychoHeresy*, is among the materials we offer. He wanted me to know that he had received a letter from a lady in Canada who was concerned about a report she had received from a pastor in the States. This pastor's parents, who attend her church, stated that I admitted to this pastor that I had lied in my report on Promise Keepers. Dr. Bobgan wanted to know how he should respond to her.

I suggested that if she would arrange a three-way conference call between herself, this pastor and myself, I would be happy to have him explain in my presence just where I had admitted to him that I had lied in my report.

After hearing from Dr. Bobgan, she called me personally to express some concern about the pastor who is involved in Promise Keepers. It seems she asked his parents to query him on the exact nature of my lies and to report back to her after their trip to see him. When they returned and she asked them about it, they did not wish to discuss it. She wanted me to know that, as far as she was concerned, his claim was unfounded.

That such a case would arise is somewhat ludicrous when one thinks about it. Having spoken about Promise Keepers with many people over the past few months, I can't recall who this pastor may be. But his claim that I admitted to him of having lied in my report on Promise Keepers is false.

Taken To Task In The Media

Another instance involves L.J. Popovich, Pastor of Rapid City Church of the Nazarine and head of the local chapter of Promise Keepers International. In a letter to the *Rapid City Journal* on

Saturday, April 22, Pastor Popovich took me to task, as well as John Beardsley, who had written a critique on Promise Keepers in the April 8 *Journal*. He accused us of publishing distortions and half-truths, and of lacking Christian charity and tolerance toward those with whom we disagree.

This is the standard lament of our detractors. Because we insist upon purity of doctrine as a criterion for fellowship we are labeled as hate-filled bigots.

Popovich implies that I am a racist because I “find fault in McCartney’s commitment to embracing all ethnic groups into the Promise Keepers movement.” He disagrees with my statement that “We should not embrace a man because he is of the same or different race, but because he is of the same belief.” He states, “if you don’t believe exactly as Dager or Beardsley, they apparently want nothing to do with you!”

This is not true, of course. I was speaking of embracing others as brethren in Christ, not as friends or acquaintances. Nor must our brethren believe exactly as we do, but serious departures from biblical truth preclude spiritual fellowship.

We are also accused of not wanting men to become better fathers, husbands and disciples of Jesus:

It is hard to conceive that anyone would have a problem with Christian men striving to become better disciples of Jesus, better fathers and better husbands. Apparently Beardsley and Dager do! [Emphasis in original]

I wouldn’t even make that claim against Hitler. No one has a problem with these things (I’m speaking in hyperbole; Hitler may have). But evidently Popovich can’t read past his own biases. As with this updated version, our original 16-page report dissected the seven promises and demonstrated how, while little can be argued against them as stated, in practice they are not met by Promise Keepers in the biblical sense.

As do so many, Popovich cited the growth of Promise Keepers to argue that “Promise Keepers is the best hope for a Holy Ghost revival in America.”

It amazes me how some people will claim the Holy Spirit’s blessings upon movements that disregard sound doctrine. Or, unable to defend their ecumenical and unscriptural position, they resort to playing the numbers game. We hear constantly how many hundreds of thousands of men are in Promise Keepers. But if we want numbers let’s look at Islam, Buddhism or even Mormonism, which is the fastest growing church in America. This is an appeal to the flesh, not to the spirit.

My Meeting With Promise Keepers

In October, 1994, I was offered the opportunity to meet with Dan Ericksen, the Western Regional Director for Promise Keepers and with Doug Engberg, the Washington State Director. The meeting was put together by Leif Moi, host of *Street Talk* on KGNW in Seattle. The meeting lasted about two hours, during which Mr. Ericksen and Mr. Engberg were given the opportunity to challenge me on my writing about Promise Keepers.

I found them to be cordial, yet concerned that I would question Promise Keepers. I answered their concerns point-by-point, and sensed that the Holy Spirit was in control of my reasoning. Although at first I felt a bit intimidated by the situation, as the

meeting progressed I was able to justify every point and leave them with legitimate questions as to the Promise Keepers stance on psychological integrationism and ecumenism, as well as several key areas relating to their handling of the Robert Hicks issue.

Although Doug Engberg had to leave early, Dan Ericksen remained for some time. He left with the acknowledgement that my concerns were legitimate, and the promise that he would take them personally to the Promise Keepers’ Board of Directors. To date I have not heard back.

MEN OF INTEGRITY?

With all their talk about being men of integrity, Promise Keepers allows teachings that lack integrity. There are many examples of unbiblical teaching throughout Promise Keepers literature other than what we have cited. One must question if they know the biblical meaning of integrity, or if they hold a definition tainted by worldly wisdom.

We cannot indict every Promise Keeper with lack of integrity as far as dealing with others goes. But my experiences, and the experiences of others from whom I’ve heard, demonstrate that there are, among the leadership of Promise Keepers, men who sorely lack integrity.

Integrity must go beyond keeping promises; it must extend to dealing honestly with everyone in every matter—especially with our brethren in Christ. It must extend to suffering loss ourselves in order to assure that we are not causing a brother in Christ to suffer loss. It must extend to doing things God’s way, not man’s way.

THE NAVIGATORS POSITION

One of our readers sent our original Promise Keepers report to Terry Taylor, president of The Navigators, asking how he could justify publishing *The Masculine Journey* and Bob Beltz’s *Daily Disciplines for the Christian Man*. He also asked how The Navigators could feature Renovaré’s Richard Foster at their August 2-6, 1995, Family Conference. In his response Taylor stated:

By the way, what I don’t see prominently stated in the publications you sent me is a clear acknowledgment of the overwhelmingly positive influence Promise Keepers is having on men in our society—a society in which marriage and fatherhood have never been in deeper trouble. That oversight is disturbing. The positives far outweigh the negatives in what is truly a remarkable work of God in our time.

Why should we dwell on the so-called positive aspects of a movement that is fast-becoming an idol in itself? Promise Keepers’ public relations work is excellent; they don’t need our endorsement. Their literature is full of self-congratulatory remarks. Besides, our focus isn’t on the benefits to society, but rather on the detriment to the Body of Christ that the Promise Keepers’ ecumenical fervor poses. Those who reject the Word of God in favor of ecumenical emotionalism are as good as dead themselves.

It seems as if the argument of late is that we should focus on the things in which we are in agreement and forget the things upon which we differ. This may be okay in the business and political world, but when it comes to the Faith the opposite is true, which should be no surprise. God’s ways are not man’s ways, and His thoughts are higher than man’s thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

If man's idea of focusing on agreeable things is to be accepted then we can find agreement with every evil under the sun. We can find agreement with virtually any human philosophy and religion. In fact, that is the method followed by New Thought proponents. Even if we insist on agreement only in the name of Christ, we can find agreement with Sun Myung Moon, with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and myriad other aberrant "Christian" cults.

Scripture consistently admonishes us to separate ourselves from those whose doctrine is not absolutely pure, and/or those who justify sin and compromise.

SUMMARY

We find that Promise Keepers has much to offer in the way of inspiration for men to become more active in their leadership role. Yet what may be heard at a Promise Keepers conference will not give the entire picture.

The real problem lies in Promise Keepers' concerted efforts to bring their program into churches. Much within their teaching materials is not biblically sound, and is heavily psychologized.

The motivation toward integrity is good. But the Boy Scouts also motivate their members toward integrity. Many non-believers have more integrity than many professing Christians. Although true faith encompasses personal integrity, personal integrity in itself is not the mark of true faith. Righteousness apart from true faith is filthy rags to God.

The only way Promise Keepers can validate their teachings on integrity is to be doctrinally pure in teaching and practice. We have seen that although many teachings within Promise Keepers are doctrinally sound, numerous unbiblical elements compromise their overall doctrinal integrity.

Concerning the matter of changed lives, as we stated earlier, changed lives are not in themselves evidence of God's work. Many cults report changed lives as evidence that they have the truth. The only genuine measure of any person's or group's integrity with God is strict adherence to the purity of His Word. Promise Keepers' acceptance of anything called "Christian"—unless it is perceived as "unloving"—neutralizes the effects of those changed lives.

I can testify that my life was changed as a result of Tony and Susan Alamo's ministry in Southern California years ago. It was only years later that I learned how perverse and cultic the organization had become. But no one can tell me that there were no changed lives. And the zeal within those meetings far exceeded that of any Promise Keepers meetings, including their conferences.

Finally, I'd like to offer a brief analysis of the Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper. Words speak loudly to those who do not delve deeply. But actions and results drown them out. The words of the promises are ideal. The implementation by Promise Keepers falls short of that ideal.

Promise 1: *A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God's Word.*

What is obedience to God's Word but maintaining purity of doctrine? Promise Keepers offers an eclectic mix of truth and error by utilizing the teachings of men, some of which are biblical, others of which are unbiblical.

One cannot be obedient to God's Word and base his judgments on psychological mumbo-jumbo.

This does not honor Jesus Christ. Nor is the power of the Holy Spirit present in an admixture of truth and error.

Promise 2: *A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises.*

The covenantal nature of implementing this promise requires oaths that are unbiblical, and the practices border on unscriptural forms of shepherding.

Accountability must be to the eldership within the local body, not just to someone to whom we choose to make ourselves accountable.

The Promise Keepers concept of accountability extends into areas that are highly personal and extra-biblical.

Promise 3: *A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.*

Spiritual purity is not possible without the *sola scriptura* approach to teaching, although moral, ethical and sexual purity are possible through human effort. Promise Keepers scores high on the last three, but fails on the first and most important.

Just as the Law is summed up in the two Great Commandments, the latter three forms of purity are summed up in the first. Without the first, they are merely human righteousness, found in any morally-oriented cult.

Promise 4: *A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values.*

To build a strong family on biblical values would require rejecting much of Promise Keepers' teachings on families offered through Gary Smalley and others who eschew the biblical model for the psychological model. Promise Keepers may promote "emotionally healthy" families but most of their advice is not geared toward promoting biblically sound families.

Promise 5: *A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources.*

Here Promise Keepers fails by suggesting that only the pastor can rightly divide the word of truth. In fact, the single-pastor authoritarian model is evident throughout Promise Keepers literature. The biblical model which calls for a plurality of elders to oversee the assembly is not addressed. Often, one's giving of resources is at the behest of the pastor rather than at the behest of the Holy Spirit.

Promise 6: *A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.*

Promise Keepers is making every effort to live up to this promise. And there is little fault with this promise except for its ecumenical stance. The strong inroads that Roman Catholicism has made in neutralizing many leaders within the Christian community is reflected in the Promise Keepers' ecumenical position. Several teachers utilized by Promise Keepers have taken a strong

stance toward unity with the Vatican. Cause enough to be concerned.

Promise 7: *A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.*

Promise Keepers officially takes no position on the dominionist agenda, but some teachers for Promise Keepers lean toward a dominionist position or a social gospel. It would be unfair to paint Promise Keepers as an organization that teaches dominion theology, however. (For those who would like to be informed on the subject in order to discern the dominionist message whether they hear it from a Promise Keepers speaker or someone else, see our book, *Vengeance is Ours: The Church in Dominion.*, Sword Publishers).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that many men hunger for greater responsibility and commitment in their home and in their assembly. Most men want to be men of integrity; most want to be able to properly lead their wives and children; most men want to be accountable to someone for their own spiritual benefit; most men want to take a role of leadership within their fellowship. Certainly if not *most* men, *many* men desire these things. But is Promise Keepers the best way to accomplish them? The answer is no, for the many reasons we've stated above.

Promise Keepers leads in the general direction of biblical truth; but they miss the mark on far too many points to be considered trustworthy. Therefore, those churches that do get involved with Promise Keepers should exercise extreme caution.

Do you want to join in fellowship with heretics, cultists and people who blaspheme Jesus by suggesting that He was a latent homosexual? That's what you will be doing as you join hands and lift them up together to praise the Promise Keepers' Jesus.

Yes, you will have your emotional high; you will get excited at the driving beat of the music at one time, and the lilting, worshipful melodies at another time. You will feel the thrill of tens of thousands of voices raised in unison, shaking the very foundations of the stadium in which you sit.

You will find yourself nodding in agreement with most of what is said; you will even miss hearing, or will overlook, some unbiblical teachings. If you are a pastor your state of mind will drive you forward to receive the blessings of the Promise Keepers' leaders to the thunderous applause of the crowd. The heady experience will cause you to return to your church all charged up, ready to bring Promise Keepers to your congregation. You'll take to heart the generic message calling for more loving fathers and husbands.

But when you've had a chance to think, think.

Consider the ramifications of what you have experienced. And picture that same heady experience as the earth's multitudes join in feverish worship of the all-inclusive god of the anti-Christ. True ecumenism is just around the corner. And Promise Keepers is leading the charge.

This organization is truly unique. It is the first in history that has been able to bridge the gulf between charismatics and fundamentalists, Catholics and protestants, and even Mormons are joining in, hoping to curry favor among the mainstream Christian populous.

Rather than rely on Promise Keepers at all, the churches should take it upon themselves to autonomously concentrate on consistent, in-depth Bible study and discipleship for the men, so that they can teach their wives and children. The elder women should teach the younger women how to be keepers of their homes and how to be obedient to their husbands in everything (Titus 2:1-5; Ephesians 5:22-24). Just be sure that all that is done is biblical and not merely Bible oriented.

My personal experiences convince me all the more that we are involved in a great spiritual deception. There is occurring a great separation of the true brethren from out of the establishment churches. More and more people are writing and calling us asking where they can find strong biblical fellowship. Their churches are steeped in psychological prattle and ecumenical fervor; people are falling under the spell of strange, mystical behavior that runs counter to sound doctrine and practice.

While there are some fine pastors who truly desire to adhere to God's Word without admixture of human wisdom (as has been attested to by those from whom we hear), the vast majority today seem to be caught up in the deception. As products of seminaries and Bible schools that require psychology courses, their world view has been tainted, and they don't realize it. As a result, their flocks are wandering without proper direction. Confusion is reigning in the churches as it did in Israel when the Lord came to earth.

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

Those complacent shepherds that do not watch out for the Lord's people, but rather, in the name of unity or out of love for man's wisdom, lead them in the way of spiritual error, should take heed to God's Word:

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH to the shepherds: "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

"You eat the fat, and you clothe yourselves with the wool; you kill those who are fed, but you do not feed the flock.

"None of you have strengthened the diseased, nor have you healed that which was sick, nor have you bound up that which was broken, nor have you brought again that which was driven away, nor have you sought that which was lost, but you have ruled them with force and with cruelty.

"And they were scattered because there is no shepherd. And they became food for all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.

"My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: Yes, My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them."

Therefore, all you shepherds, hear the word of YHWH.

“As I live,” says the Lord YHWH, “surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and did not feed My flock, therefore, O you shepherds, hear the word of YHWH:

“Thus says the Lord YHWH: ‘Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore, for I will deliver My flock from their mouth so that they may not be food for them.’” (Ezekiel 34:2-10)

Because so many pastors are willing to overlook doctrine for the perceived benefit of a male bonding ministry in their churches, they are being confronted by those who recognize the spirit of Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. He didn’t wish to suffer what it would take to remain true to his calling; he took the quick and easy way out.

Those who will not take that easy route refuse to compromise their birthright as sons of God; Scripture is the sole authority in their lives. As a result, Promise Keepers is developing into an issue of divisiveness.

But brethren, take heart. These things must come to pass. And worse things yet:

I have said these things to you so that you should not be offended.

They shall put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time comes that whoever kills you will think that he does God service. (John 16:1-2)

Religious men believe in their hearts that they are standing for the truth; they are not always conscious of their error. They even hold sound doctrine themselves, as did the Pharisees whom Paul pitted against the Sadducees in Acts 23. They will teach sound doctrine from the pulpit and insist upon sound practices in the church. But they will compromise that doctrine if the popular movement of the day suggests that fellowship may be extended beyond sound doctrine. That, in itself, is false doctrine as testified to in Romans 16:17-18.

Now I ask you, brethren, mark those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine that you have learned, and avoid them. For they who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Romans 16:17-18)

Notice that Paul exhorts us to have nothing to do with those who cause division and offences *contrary to the doctrine* which we have learned (God’s Word). Adherence to sound doctrine will result in many splits. Pastors who resist the ecumenical deception will be dismissed. Those pastors who go along with the program will cause many who see the deception either to leave or be disfellowshipped. Over what? Insistence upon sound doctrine and practice? No, upon the basis that they won’t get with the currently popular program. And those who resist the deception will be accused of being divisive. One need only ask

the question, however, “Which side is insisting on sound doctrine as a basis for fellowship?”

Along with false teachings comes a false “Jesus.” I can see the “Jesus” of Promise Keepers, standing on the mountainside, exhorting his listeners:

“I want you all to go back to your homes, your synagogues, and your pagan temples! I want you to take leadership roles in all those arenas and proclaim to your hearers that you are men of integrity who have learned how to be sensitive and in touch with your feelings! But be careful not to judge others on what they believe. And if they practice sin, remind them that they can escape it if they just follow my example. This should especially be your sensitive approach to homosexuals; remind them that I was tempted with homosexuality myself, but I managed to abstain.”

I am reminded of Paul’s lament:

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes proclaims another Jesus, whom we have not proclaimed, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or another gospel, which you have not received, you might well bear with him. (II Corinthians 11:3-4)

Those who do not accept just any “Jesus”—who insist on purity of doctrine as a criterion for fellowship—are rebuked with sentiments similar to that stated by Pastor Popovich:

“They need to get on board or get out of the way!”

Let’s see...Isn’t that what the pope said about the Reformers? Isn’t that what all cults say about their adherents?❖

For additional information see Media Spotlight’s other special reports on Promise Keepers: *Promise Keepers’ D.C. Covenant* and *Promise Keepers Pastors Conference: Taking Over the Churches*.

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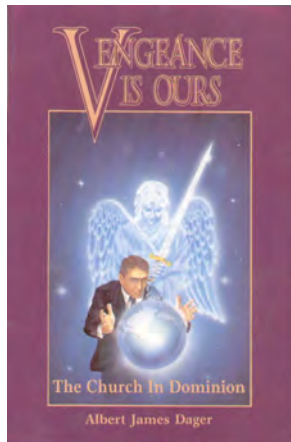
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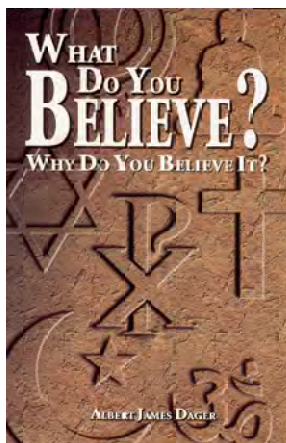
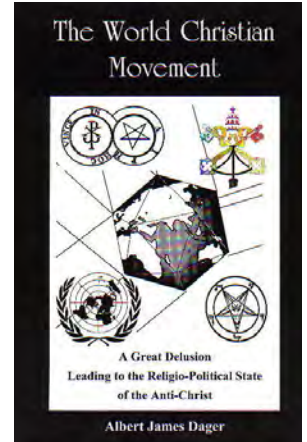


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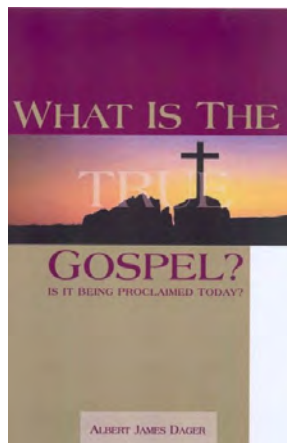
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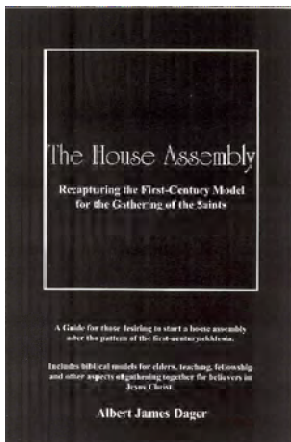
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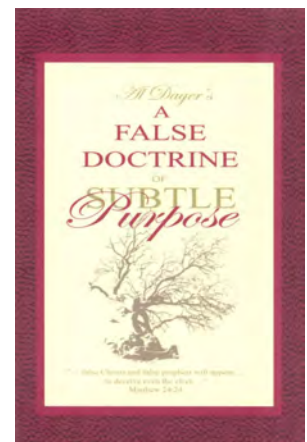
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