

UNLEASHING GOD'S TRUTH, ONE VERSE AT A TIME

DYNAMIC RESOURCES

"How can a true work of the Holy Spirit be distinguished from that which is false?"

John MacArthur

HOW CAN A TRUE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THAT WHICH IS FALSE?



John MacArthur

THE DANGERS & DECEPTIONS OF COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY



James Alves

HOW MUCH AUTHORITY DOES A PASTOR HAVE?



Austin Duncan

A PAGAN WHO BECOMES A BELIEVER AND A BELIEVER WHO ACTS LIKE A PAGAN!



John Cheeseman

A Need for Faithful Supporters



We would be biblically illiterate and without any authentic sense of spiritual discernment if we didn't recognise that we are now living in what the apostle Paul terms as "perilous times". (See 2 Timothy 3:1-5) The implacable enemies of the Gospel (many of them masquerading as archbishops and bishops) are arrayed against the church of Christ and the cause of His kingdom in this world, so we need many more scripturally qualified Christian leaders who are bold and valiant for the truth to resist them. As John MacArthur has said:

"This is not a time for weak men in weak pulpits preaching weak messages."

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, will never abandon His sheep, He always has, and always will, call and equip in every generation those men whom He will send to be His under-shepherds – they are His gift to His church. (See Ephesians 4:11-12)

Through the Holy Spirit's anointed preaching and teaching of these trustworthy servants of Christ the gates of hell will not be able to withstand the mighty battering ram of the Gospel, which means that all those

appointed unto eternal life will believe and be saved. (See Acts 13:48)

GTU Europe is committed to identifying, and encouraging faithful and courageous young men willing to serve the Lord Jesus Christ as pastors in His church in these especially difficult days, but we need help in fulfilling this task.

Will you stand firmly with us through your prayers and financial support?

Please consider using the enclosed form and envelope to make your gift for the support of young pastors and seminarians who are willing to embrace the challenges and hardships of pastoral ministry which are necessary to serve Christ and the flock over which He has appointed them as overseers to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Yours by God's grace and in Christ's love,

Paul

Director GTU Europe

Director's Ministry Update

*"Will there still be
a church for my
children to attend
when they grow up?"*

This emotionally charged question was put to me by a deacon, a devout Christian in his early thirties, and the father of 3 young children, who had been in the congregation of the small Hungarian speaking village church where I had just preached an Easter sermon during a 12 day visit to Romania, that consisted of many pastoral consultations, translation project planning meetings, and the preaching of sermons in both Hungarian and Romanian Baptist churches. I had spent the first 5 days of my visit preaching in Hungarian churches, because they follow the Western or Gregorian Calendar (the Romanian churches celebrated Easter a week later according to the Julian calendar) and I was impressed by the seriousness of mind and heart with which congregations prepared for Easter during Holy Week; gathering each day for services of worship and preaching. Sadly, this is an important feature of church life that is now almost unknown in the U.K. Some of the churches had congregations of several hundred, including many children and young people, and others



just a few elderly saints, but they all shared the same concern: Numerical decline.

A Cause for Concern

On Easter Sunday morning and evening I preached to a congregation of about 250 people, with some delightful children who confidently recited Bible verses and sang heart-warming choruses. I commented to the pastor that it was very encouraging to see so many people present, and whilst he conceded that it was encouraging, he told me that it wasn't truly representative of how things really were, because the following week the congregation would be reduced to about 150 worshippers. He informed me that many of those present were no longer regularly attending the church, but due to the need to move for employment purposes, had become part of the Hungarian speaking diaspora scattered across Europe; so a church consisting of 150 members was of great concern when it was understood that the present building had been constructed in the not-so-distant past to accommodate the 400 or so who had gathered each Lord's Day.

In the U.K and other parts of Western Europe, where church attendance in the morally and spiritually bankrupt denominations is in steep and terminal decline, a congregation of 150 would be considered a fairly large number, and not something to be unduly



GTY Europe team in Romania



GTY Europe conference Serbia.

concerned about. But for the leaders of the Bible-believing churches where I was preaching, this was a real and justifiable concern, because within living memory a genuine work of the Holy Spirit had swept through the churches of that predominately rural area, causing the Gospel to be preached with power and authority and resulting in the revival of churches and salvation of many individuals. The legacy of that revival is still to be witnessed today in some remote areas where the size of a congregation appears to be disproportionately large compared to the few houses that constitute a village.

A Need for More Pastors

Whilst churches consisting of several hundred worshippers might be a good reason to be encouraged (and it is), there is a potentially serious problem looming on the horizon: A significant lack of pastors.

Many of the churches in these areas don't have a pastor or must share their shepherd with several other churches. I know a pastor who has oversight of 14 churches which he faithfully serves with the assistance of deacons and lay preachers. One of my close friends has charge of 5 churches, each with a congregation big enough to justify a pastor's full-time ministry.

Currently, seminaries don't even have enough students graduating to replace the pastors who have reached retirement age, never mind plant new churches (although thankfully, by God's grace, that is happening in some villages). However, the commitment to selfless service by many pastors is admirable, with some faithfully continuing well into their 70's and 80's. I find their example both humbling and inspirational - and a sharp prod to keep going when well-meaning friends suggest I've reached an age where I deserve to slow down and take things easy. My response to that: "I'm running out of time, so I need to speed up, not slow



Left to right - Justin Peters, Albin Jacobsen, Phil Johnson in the Faroe Islands.

down." As Christians we need to remember that it's up in heaven where we will rest from our labours, and not down here on earth. As John MacArthur recently said: "You don't retire from a calling, you don't retire from being an elder, you don't retire from being a pastor, you don't retire from preaching. You're faithful to the end ... the end is when you can't do it anymore."

Identifying and Supporting Potential Pastors

One of the main concerns that we at GTY Europe are trying to address is the desperate need to identify young men within the churches who have the potential to be our future pastors. In this quest we have recently organised conferences throughout Europe, travelling from the Faroe Islands high in the North Atlantic, to the Netherlands and France and across the Mediterranean, to the Balkans and countries of Eastern Europe. At the time of writing, we have 3 young men from the U.K and Europe studying at The Master's Seminary (TMS) with the help of GTY Europe scholarships, all have the intention of returning to Europe to take up pastoral ministries upon graduating. We are also collaborating with the European schools of our sister ministry, The Master's Academy International (TMAI), as they train men for ministry who are unable to take 4 years out to study in Los Angeles at TMS.

But why are so few young men offering themselves for pastoral ministry? Well, there are several reasons common to all the regions of Europe where we are ministering: A lack of biblically qualified pastors/elders to set an example for young men to follow is in my opinion the main problem. John MacArthur has said: "Biblical history demonstrates that people will seldom rise above the spiritual level of their leadership". (See Hosea 4:9) Therefore, young men in churches with a spiritually weak and doctrinally vague leadership are hardly likely to be inspired to consider a future in pastoral ministry. As I meet with pastors, I frequently hear about the considerable challenges of ministry, particularly the financial challenges. Salaries, especially within rural communities are low, which necessitates a pastor needing to supplement his income by rearing



Conference attendees in the Faroe Islands.

livestock, selling eggs, or keeping bees to produce honey.

When a well-educated young man with fluency in several languages and a master's degree in medical science or computer software development considers his career options, it's not hard to feel sympathetic when he decides to move to Germany or the U.K to take up a well-paid job with prospects that will enable him to buy a house, a decent car, and comfortably provide for his family; especially when the alternative is 300 or 400 Euros a month, basic accommodation, a very old car that constantly needs maintenance to keep it going, and schools for the children to attend that are many miles away and require several hours of travelling each day.

No Reason to be Despondent

However, all is not doom and gloom - far from it! I'm not despondent about the future of Christ's church in Eastern Europe, or anywhere else for that matter. Which brings me back to the question that was put to me by the deacon whom I quoted at the beginning of this report.

"Will there still be a church for my children to attend when they grow up?" My answer to his question was this: Yes, there will be a church! And why can I be so emphatically certain about that? Because Jesus Christ is building His church! (Matthew 16:18)

Because Jesus Christ promised to return to this earth to gather His church to Himself (John 14:3). He won't return for something that has gone out of existence, that will never happen. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

As I said to that deacon: "Yes, there will be a church for your children to attend, but whether there will be a church in this village is largely down to you, your pastor, and fellow church members. If this church doesn't remain faithful to Christ by obeying His word, which includes fulfilling the Great Commission, then there may cease to be a church in this village".



GTY Europe conference for pastors from Serbia and Croatia.

An Inspiring Example

The following morning as I prepared to leave the village I did so with a heart full of thankfulness to the Lord, because a young man in the church who was just in the process of graduating from university had reconfirmed something he had shared with me 6 years earlier when he was still a teenager: He wanted to dedicate his life to serving Christ and His church as a pastor – whatever hardships that might involve. I'm now working with him and his pastor to ensure he gets the training and mentoring he will need in preparation for attending seminary.

And something else: the church where I preached on Easter Sunday – as I was preaching in English and being translated into Hungarian, I was also simultaneously being translated into Russian by a translator located in Kyiv who was relaying my sermon into the headsets of the 5 Ukrainian refugees sitting in the congregation right in front of me. And later that evening as the pastor drove me and my wife back to our lodgings, he passed me his phone and said, "Look at this: Nearly 800 people were watching you preach on the video livestream – Hungarian people living all over the world wanting to hear teaching from the word of God." Impressive!

A Baptist church located in a small village in Transylvania with a significant international ministry to those who have been dispersed from their homeland. Inspiring!

D Paul Mitchell



Conference in Macedonia.



The Dangers & Deceptions of *Counterfeit* Christianity

by James Alves

It was right at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 that I, by God's grace and sovereign providence, came across John MacArthur's expository sermon series from Galatians on YouTube. As I listened to the first sermon titled, Getting the Gospel Right, the Holy Spirit led me to a very painful and shocking realization: I had got the gospel wrong, completely wrong, and not only that, but I had also preached a counterfeit gospel to thousands of people in many countries over the course of my life; whilst being self-deceived, I had

deceived many others. And this dreadful realization is the motivating factor behind my writing of this article so that you, the reader, will be able to understand how being a part of a false church will not only have extremely damaging consequences for you and your family in this life, but have irreversibly destructive consequences for your soul and their souls throughout eternity.

I was born in Brazil and grew up in what I have now come to understand is a neo-pentecostal-charismatic-

prosperity-gospel-word-of-faith-name-it-and-claim-it-gibberish-talking cult, which claims to be an evangelical church. By the time I was born in 1983 my father was occupying a position of leadership within the organization as a pastor. Not long after I was born my father and family were sent by the organization on a mission to Portugal where my father would plant and oversee churches in several different cities. After some years our family were sent to other countries so that my father could continue to expand the reach and influence of the organization. This resulted in us living in Canada, Ecuador and Paraguay. No matter where we were sent, the organization's supreme leadership would always expect an unquestioning "Yes Sir! We're on our way!" kind of answer, because an order coming from high-up in the command chain meant that it was actually God himself giving the order through the self-appointed and self-anointed "Bishop", who not only financially controls the organization, but rules it with an iron fist through individuals blindly loyal to him.

Life was never easy for my parents or me and my siblings as we could never settle and put down roots in a community because we would regularly, with barely any advance notice, (as is the culture within the organization) be ordered to change our place of residence, schools, and everything else that goes with it. And yet, despite this, I always had a sense of certainty from a very young age of a calling to be a pastor, a preacher of God's Word, and that I would go all over the world to save the lost at any cost to myself. My parents never pressured me or even suggested that I should pursue the same path in the organization as they had, instead I always saw them as one of the greatest examples of love, care, faithfulness and sincerity within the context of marriage, as well as the most dedicated individuals I know of when it comes to serving and reaching out to people in a genuine effort to help them find a way out of their afflictions.

While I remained at home, my parents sheltered me from many of the dreadful realities of life within the organization, realities I would only be truly exposed to once I left home to venture out in "ministry" on my own. Whilst my parents attempted to protect me from all that they saw was wrong within the organization, at the same time they were convinced, as they still are to this day, that they were doing the work of God, whilst believing and preaching what the apostle Paul calls "a different gospel" (see Galatians 1:6-9)

During our time in Paraguay, when I was close to reaching my eighteenth birthday, my father got a call informing him that "The Bishop" wanted him to send me to Atlanta in the U.S.A. so that I could serve the organization as a full-time pastor there. It's important to note that within the organization there are several individuals who hold the title of "bishop", but whenever

someone says, "The Bishop", it's a clear reference to the owner and supreme leader of the "church". It's similar to what happens within Judaism in order to avoid mentioning "The Name" out of reverence and fear of taking God's name in vain. The big and outrageously blasphemous difference between that and those people serving the organization is that they reserve this deference for a sinful and mortal man.

The common expression I heard on countless occasions during the years leading up to that notable day when the order of "The Bishop" came through, and I heard it from many other so-called bishops and pastors when speaking to my father about me, was: "It's about time you cut the umbilical cord". It was a clear and unequivocal reference to the fact that I was already in ministry as an assistant pastor, but somehow that didn't count because I was still with my father, and that supposedly made things easy for me. But now, at the word of "The Bishop", there wasn't much that could be done, and the umbilical cord would be decisively cut. So, I agreed to leave my family, high school education, future career prospects, and everything else behind and moved to Atlanta, U.S.A, where I began a new phase of life away from parents and siblings to fully focus all of my time and energy, indeed my entire life, on serving the organization - no questions asked!

At the time, and throughout all the years to come, I was, strangely enough, happy about it, since I thought I was, as they would often tell us: "doing the work of God". I felt privileged to have been chosen and it didn't cross my mind to refuse to obey the bishop's command to serve in his organization. In fact, this is what I had always prayed for and dreamt of doing: giving my life to be used by God to "save souls".

During the years I was in Atlanta, I pastored and planted several "churches" and was eventually transferred to New York, where I pastored other congregations. It's important to note that when I refer to "churches" I'm actually referring to local branches of the cult. The organization holds to the belief that all other Christian denominations are either false or dead churches, enslaved to serving the Devil.

During my time in the U.S I met various people who purported to be living the American dream. My superiors, especially "The Bishop" and his son-in-law certainly were, but I never experienced it personally because the leadership subjected me to all kinds of hardships so I could prove my loyalty to them. This is common practice within many cults when recruiting individuals aspiring to a leadership position. They will often target the young and single, and subject them to an extended period of inhumane conditions, including withholding of food, sleep deprivation, and insanitary accommodation. Whilst I suffered "The Bishop" and his

family resided in their grand mansions, located in some of the most prestigious places in the world, travelling between each home in their private jets.

I was subjected to a great many trials and tests during my years in the organization, stoically embracing suffering without complaining or questioning, working hard every single day with a smile on my face, all with the hope that I'd eventually be "Approved".

After passing all the tests to prove loyalty, the leadership knew they could instruct me to preach and teach virtually anything, even if it was unbiblical, since I was convinced that it must be true because "The Bishop" had a direct line to God which endowed him with a greater level of authority than just the scriptures. Later, after more years of successful service, which included attracting large crowds to the local "temples" and convincing people to part with increasingly large sums of money to support the leadership, I reached the point where I was granted permission to get married. Yes, you read that correctly, the leadership decides if pastors can marry and whom they marry. At this point I was so blinded and manipulated that I sincerely believed I was serving God and felt I must go through all these terrible experiences because God Himself was preparing me to take on even greater responsibilities within the organization in the future.

Because I was constantly meeting the leadership's crowd-drawing and money raising targets, they were willing to arrange for me to marry a woman of their choice, someone like me who was completely loyal to the organization. Some years went by, and after several failed attempts at finding a suitable marriage partner, by an act of God's Providence (as I now understand it), I met Ana, who was the daughter of a bishop, born and raised in the cult. She, like me, was also indoctrinated from childhood to obey, do as she was told, and not cause any problems for the "church".

Becoming a married pastor meant taking on even more responsibilities to the point that totally dominated every aspect of our lives and marriage. We knew, as the leadership would repeatedly teach us, that many more sacrifices would need to be made for the sake of the work of God and saving souls. One of those sacrifices had to be the forgoing of having children. Within the organization, a pastor will only be allowed to get married if he's willing to undergo a vasectomy. In the early years of the organization, they rightly considered children as a blessing from the Lord, but some years later "The Bishop" changed his view on this, so only a few pastors or bishops have children, notably "The Bishop" and those who have been with the organization from its inception. This wicked and anti-biblical practice, frequently taught by "The Bishop" and therefore by everyone else subject to him, is enforced so that pastors and their wives serve God 100%. They

must give up their right to have biological children and instead must only focus on having "spiritual children". They inculcated in us the belief that children would only prove to be a burden upon our ministry and would limit our ability to serve God, resulting in His unwillingness to entrust us with special responsibilities and blessings. I realize now that this is an evil and cynical business strategy designed to minimize costs for the organization, while also ensuring the pastor and his wife are always ready to be sent anywhere, at any time, without the inconvenience of having to consider the needs of a family.

Regrettably, I believed that was the right decision to make, as did Ana, so even before we were married, I had the obligatory vasectomy at the age of 23. Now that God has delivered us from that cult, we clearly see this is nothing short of spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical abuse. There is a sickening anti-children culture within the cult which is imposed and enforced by the bishops and evidenced in several videos posted on the internet where "The Bishop" endorses abortion, which is nothing less than the murder of babies in the womb.

After all I have described so far, you might be asking: "How would anyone put up with any of this, not only believe all this wicked nonsense, but remain serving in an organization that is so evidently an evil cult masquerading as the authentic church of Jesus Christ?" I have often asked myself this same question since leaving and I still have this lingering feeling of having wasted most of my life in the organization, but at the same time I'm reminded of the apostle Paul. Before his conversion no one would have been able to convince him that he was so very wrong in his understanding of God's word, especially those passages concerning Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was so thoroughly convinced that what he believed and practiced pleased God that he was very zealous in his persecution and killing of Christians, even thinking he was doing it for God's honour and with God's approval. The truth will never be obvious to anyone unless the Holy Spirit removes their spiritual blindness, convicts them of their sins and points them to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Saviour. Sadly, my wife and I knew little of life outside the cult, our reality and lives revolved entirely around the organization. We were raised within that false belief system and had no clue that there was anything beyond it.

Whilst still in the neo-Pentecostal cult, Ana and I became even more engaged and committed to achieving the aims of the organization; we travelled on missions to many places within Spain where we were sent to spread the (false) gospel and were willing to die for this cause. Several years later we were sent to minister in Portugal and then Greece and Cyprus, and eventually back to



"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."
(Acts 20:28-30)

Greece again.

The years we spent in Greece and Cyprus were what I would term as the beginning of the end with respect to our remaining part of the cult. We returned to Greece after spending some years in Cyprus, where we managed to plant and establish the regional headquarters of the cult. The reason we returned to Greece, as we later found out, was that although we had left a thriving congregation, the leadership who oversees the activities of the cult in Europe was not pleased with the numbers of people attending the meetings, and specifically the insufficient offerings, which meant the local congregation couldn't financially sustain itself and was dependant on donations coming from a "sister church" in the U.K. As the leadership no longer wanted to waste money on something they deemed unprofitable, they simply ordered the "pastor" who had succeeded me to close it down and move to another country. The order to do this came from high up in the command chain and when I found out about it, I was infuriated and disappointed because it clearly proved that all they were looking for was money, they had no care or concern for the souls of the people they callously cast aside when they shut down the operation.

Eventually the leadership decided to send us to Greece again to re-plant the "church" and hopefully be as successful as we had been previously - and that's exactly what happened! I was determined to work even harder and achieve even more than when we had served in Greece some years before; I poured myself into reaching out to people in any way I could. Ana and I went all over the streets of Athens door to door, handing out leaflets, inviting people to attend (so-called) miracle events at various venues in the city. I would regularly reach the end of a day totally exhausted, but with the feeling that God would bless our efforts, which in a way it seemed like He was doing. On one occasion we were able to hold a Sunday morning meeting with over 120 attendees, most of whom were first timers! And this was happening in Greece, where the Orthodox church holds sway over the souls of most Greek people. Ana and I were extremely excited with the results, yet we were also anxious because we knew

that if things didn't work out in such a way as to meet and exceed the leadership's expectations, we would suffer the consequences of public humiliation before all the other pastors and bishops, just as had happened before when financial targets hadn't been achieved.

Motivated by the "success" of the first event, I planned a second one, certain that we would at least double the attendance - and that's exactly what appeared to be happening when within a few days we had had over 200 confirmed guests. We were ecstatic and were busy preparing to welcome all the people who would be attending the next "miracle crusade" when disaster struck. The meeting was scheduled to take place on a Sunday, but on the Friday immediately prior to the event, the Greek government announced that due to the pandemic all conferences, events, and public gatherings were to be subject to immediate cancellation and forbidden until further notice. This is when things really took a divine turn for our good in the sense that from here on, although my wife and I were unaware of it, God was sovereignly in charge and through His amazing ordering of providence, our days within the cult were nearing an end.

Once I heard the news of the lockdown, my whole world came crashing down around me, and a key component of all the heretical doctrines that had been instilled into me kicked in. I became extremely angry at God, appalled even, which is one of the many dangerous anti-biblical doctrines I wholeheartedly believed, doctrines which teach if things are not going according to what you determined or declared, even though you have "obeyed God in everything", and everything seems to be going in the opposite direction to what you expected, you are supposed to confront God over it, remonstrate with Him, and demand He bends to your will and grants you success. So, I began questioning God and pouring out all my anger on Him, saying things like: "Why did You let this happen?", "Ana and I are here to save souls, pouring all our lives into this, reaching out to people, sacrificing our entire life every single day and you let this all go down the drain." "Why Lord?" "I demand an answer, I cannot accept this." This

blasphemous nonsense went on for a few days and I am now aware that I am only still alive because God is a Gracious and Merciful God, otherwise I would have been exterminated a long time ago. I was addressing Him in a shameful and dishonoring manner; He didn't owe me anything, He wasn't obliged to do something for me just because I had "worked" for it. But glory to God, some days later I began to calm down and I'm certain the Holy Spirit began to work in us so as to point us to the Lord Jesus Christ in a way that would change us forever.

As we were navigating through the pandemic amid the lockdowns and restrictions, which in Greece were amongst the harshest and strictest around the world, we were quite limited in what we could do in the daily operations of the cult. We were only allowed to hold online services, which meant we now had plenty of spare time on our hands. In fact, until that moment when God delivered me from that false church, I had spent 24 years of my life serving the leadership; every single day, Monday-Sunday non-stop, forbidden to ever rest or take a holiday, I was constantly bombarded with emails and text messages full of their cultic jargon upbraiding me to work harder and not slacken, otherwise the devil will blow evil thoughts into my mind causing me to fall into temptation. They also reminded me that my faith must always be at work and be made visible by my works, otherwise the devil would cause me to doubt, and my faith would be contaminated and grow cold. I realize now that this is how they keep people trapped within the cult, by never allowing them time to think for themselves, by never allowing them to make their own decisions, they are always kept busy obeying everything they're taught by the cult leadership, that way they don't understand they are being enslaved into a religion, which whilst having some similarities to Christianity, is in fact a satanically controlled false church.

It was during lockdown that God led me and Ana to authentic biblical Christianity; with so much spare time on our hands we began to search the internet for a teacher who could help us make sense of everything that was happening to us. In God's providence we "stumbled" upon **Grace to You** and the verse-by-verse Bible teaching ministry of John MacArthur, as well as Dr. Steve Lawson, Paul Washer, R.C. Sproul, and Justin Peters, all of whom God used to make a profound impact upon us through their preaching of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. After pouring ourselves into prayer and reading the Bible without taking verses out of context, which is what I was used to doing, we began to realize that God's salvation is a work of His sovereign grace, it can't be earned by performing good deeds, and it certainly isn't something we deserve. How wretched, wrongful, and sinful we were, that we should have believed we could demand that God grant

us a place in His heaven based on the false teaching of a cult. In His mercy we came under a deep conviction of the Holy Spirit, which led us to repent of an entire life of preaching and obeying heresies which we had learnt since our childhood. We had been so deceived by the leadership of the cult that we really and sincerely thought we had been doing God's will, but at this point we realized we had been practicing a false religion and believing a counterfeit gospel. For several days and nights, we wept copious tears of sorrow, imploring God that in the same way in which He had opened our eyes to see the truth, He would also have mercy upon us and forgive us our many sins. As we listened to the preaching and teaching of John MacArthur and the other faithful preachers, we became confident in claiming for ourselves the promises of God for repentant sinners contained within His word, and so we threw ourselves upon His amazing grace and embraced Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour – trusting in nothing other than all that He had accomplished for us when He bore our sins on Calvary's cross.

From then on, Ana and I knew we had to take radical action in every aspect of our lives, and since the cult we belonged to was basically the center of our lives, we knew that we couldn't remain in it any longer. At the same time, I had a "congregation" to care for in Athens and was determined to confess my sins and recant before them for preaching a false gospel. I also knew that once we left the cult, the leadership would act immediately and send someone to replace me, and he would continue preaching the same heresies as I had preached before the Lord had mercy upon me.

When the lockdown restrictions on gatherings were lifted, I announced to the congregation that we would now be only preaching the Bible verse by verse and would abandon all practices that were not found in the Bible – or were even contrary to the Bible's teaching. I confessed my sins to the congregation regarding having been deceived by the cult's leadership and having deceived them by preaching and teaching another gospel that is not the Biblical one. I also told them that whilst I had sincerely believed the things I had taught and preached, sincerely believing something doesn't mean it's right or godly, as a person can be sincere, but sincerely wrong. I asked them to forgive me as God already done for all those years in which I had taught them isolated verses taken out of context, which then laid the foundation for the organization to teach all kinds of heresies, including bargaining with God in exchange for so called miracles or breakthroughs, as is a common practice in prosperity gospel "churches". I made it clear that for as long as I was there, we would no longer hold the so called "healing services" or "prayers of deliverance" to supposedly cast out demons, use "holy waters" or "anointing oils" and other garbage. There would be no more speaking gibberish and calling



"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1)

it the gift of tongues, which had nothing to do with the authentic tongues spoken by the apostles in Acts.

In the weeks that followed I began preaching verse-by-verse through Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and the Gospels. This caused most people a great deal of consternation as it undermined the foundations of sand upon which their entire belief system was resting – and it also took a wrecking ball to the heretical theology of the organization. Since I no longer performed the supposed healing rituals with anointing oils, holy handkerchiefs, and demonic exorcisms, most people began to leave until there was only a handful of us left.

Eventually the cult leadership realized that something had changed with me and my wife and demanded to know what was happening in Athens. I realized this was the opportunity I needed to confront the leadership of the organization in Europe (which consisted of several “bishops” who would defend their ultimate leader at all costs), and I pointed out the many inconsistencies between what the Bible teaches and what the cult teaches and practices, two sets of doctrines which are diametrically opposed to each other. Needless to say, the conversation went nowhere, my intelligence was insulted, I was branded a demon-possessed rebel, cast out from the organization and informed that someone would be sent to Athens to replace me as pastor. Ironically, the man who replaced me was someone I had recruited to the organization many years before whilst I was serving in Atlanta.

I hope that after reading this account of how the Lord was patient and gracious to us during the many years we were ensnared in a cult, you can now understand

how being involved with a false church can be extremely dangerous and damaging to your soul. Any “church” that distorts the gospel cannot and should not be tolerated - but resisted and fought against with the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Do not think that continuous scandals, spiritual and psychological abuse are mere human errors, they are the rotten fruit of heresy and deceit. Run away as soon as possible, even if it costs you dearly. In our case, we not only lost our salary, but our apartment and car, which were owned by the organization. At the age of 39, I experienced for the first time what it was like to write a C.V. and look for a job. The relationship we had with our families was severely affected; even to this day they do not accept our departure.

Following Christ may cost you everything, but I know He is faithful and just and will not leave you alone. And as you read this article, if you identify with us and find yourself in a place just like we were in, don't shrug it off as if it were all mere coincidence. Having been liberated from a cruel and tyrannical organization I feel a burden of responsibility to warn and earnestly appeal to any of you out there in a similar situation to ours. Listen to the voice of God as found in His word the Bible. Please don't allow yourself to be deceived by the supposed prophecies and words of knowledge which are the product of the deluded and deceitful imaginations of men and women enslaved to a religion, which whilst claiming to be Christianity, is in reality a soul-damning fraudulent scam that will rob you of everything, both now and in eternity.

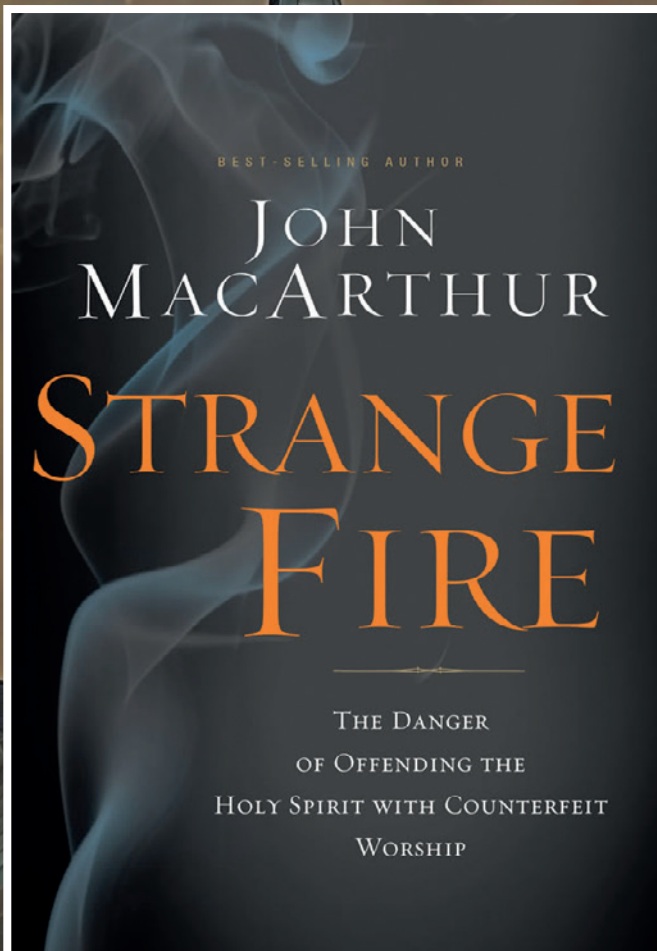
It is not by chance that you're reading this, it has been providently ordained by God that you would come

across this article and He's calling you to repent of your sins, and to stop believing in a false gospel that cannot and will never save you!

I encourage you to look for a church that resembles that found in Scripture. Grace to You has many wonderful resources to help you to find an authentic church with leaders who are scripturally qualified to shepherd you by faithfully teaching the Bible and modelling a Christlikeness for you to imitate.



JAMES AND ANA ALVES are now valued members of a biblically faithful church with a scripturally qualified leadership, under whose mentorship they are using their experience and insights to help others enslaved within the numerous counterfeit churches and Christian-like cults to be found in the U.K. and across Europe.



Strange Fire (book - hardcover)

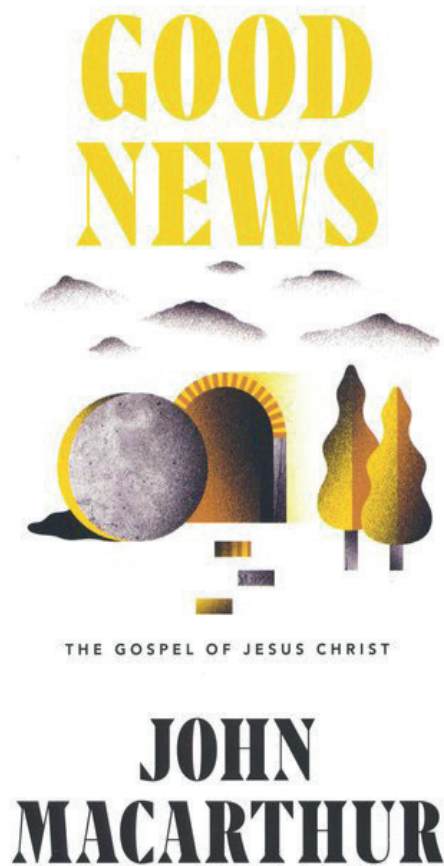
John MacArthur

What would God say about those who blatantly misrepresent His Holy Spirit? Who exchange true worship for chaotic fits of mindless ecstasy? Who replace the biblical gospel with vain illusions of health and wealth? Who claim to prophesy in His name yet speak errors: and who sell false hope to desperate people for millions of dollars?

In *Strange Fire*, John MacArthur chronicles the unsavoury history behind the modern Charismatic Movement. He lays out a chilling case for rejecting its false prophets, speaking out against their errors, showing true reverence to the Holy Spirit, and above all clinging to the Bible as the inerrant, authoritative Word of God and the one true standard by which all truth claims must be tested.

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Good News (book - hardcover)

John MacArthur

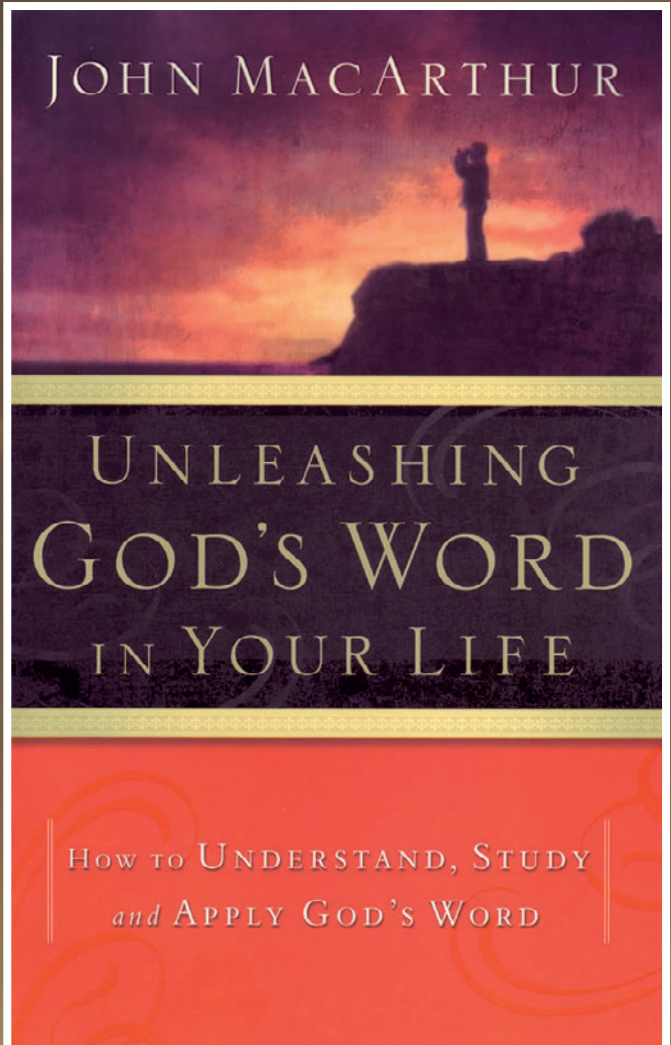
Everything the Bible has to say about the gospel is simply an exposition of its central message: Jesus Christ lived and died to save sinners.

The gospel is about Him, and it answers Jesus' key question: "Who do you say that I am?" It is good news. In this book John MacArthur examines the Bible's revelation of Christ and encourages Christians with the vast implications of all that Christ accomplished for them.

This is a book to rekindle love and awe for the Saviour.

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Unleashing God's Word in Your Life (book - softcover)

John MacArthur

What's so important about understanding the Bible? The Bible is God's counsel to you. John MacArthur shares what he has learned about how to let the Bible change your life.

In this book John explains: How the Bible is organized – Why we can trust the Bible – What the Bible means by what it says – How the Bible reveals God's will for our lives – How to grow spiritually through Bible study – How the Bible prepares you for spiritual battle – How God's Word can set you free

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HOW CAN A TRUE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THAT WHICH IS FALSE?

By John MacArthur

HOW CAN A TRUE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THAT WHICH IS FALSE?

From a careful study of 1 John 4, the great theologian and pastor Jonathan Edwards was able to identify five distinguishing characteristics of the Holy Spirit's work. In short, a true work of the Holy Spirit:

1. Exalts the true Christ
2. Opposes Satan's interests
3. Points people to the Scriptures
4. Elevates truth
5. Results in love for God and others.

(The following material is condensed, adapted, and excerpted from Jonathan Edwards's *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*.)

IT EXALTS THE TRUE CHRIST.

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1 John 4:2-3).

When a ministry raises people's esteem of the one true Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin and was crucified—if it confirms and establishes their minds in the truth that He is the Son of God and the Savior of men—then it is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God.

If the spirit at work among a people convinces them of Christ and leads them to Him; if it confirms their minds in the belief of the history of Christ as He appeared in the flesh; if it teaches them that He is the Son of God to save sinners; if it reveals that He is the only Savior, and that they stand in great need of Him; and if it begets in

them higher and more honourable thoughts of Christ than they used to have; if it inclines their affections more to Him—that is a sure sign that it is the true and right Spirit. This is true even though we are ultimately incapable of determining whether anyone's conviction or affections reflect real saving faith.

The words of the apostle are remarkable. The person to whom the Spirit testifies must be that Jesus who appeared in the flesh—not another “Christ” in His stead. It cannot be some mystical, fantastical Christ, such as the “inner light” extolled by the Quakers. This imaginary Christ diminishes their esteem of and dependence on Jesus as He came in the flesh. The true Spirit of God gives testimony for that Jesus alone.

The devil has a fierce hatred against Christ, especially in His office as the Savior of men. Satan mortally hates the story and doctrine of redemption; he never would go about to stress these truths. The Spirit that inclines men's hearts to the Seed of the woman is not the spirit of the serpent that has such an irreconcilable enmity against Him.


IT OPPOSES SATAN'S INTERESTS

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.” (1 John 4:4-5)

When the spirit that is at work operates against the interests of Satan's kingdom, against sin, and against worldly lusts—this is a sure sign that it is a true, and not a false spirit. Here is a plain antithesis. The apostle is comparing those who are influenced by two opposite spirits, the true and the false. The difference is plain: the one is of God, and overcomes the spirit of the world; the other is of the world, and is obsessed with the things of the world. The devil is called “he who is in the world.”

What the apostle means by “the world,” or “the things that are in the world,” we learn by his own words: “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (2:15-16). So by “the world” the apostle evidently means everything that pertains to the interest of sin. The term also comprehends all the corruptions and lusts of men, as well as all those acts and objects by which they are gratified.

We may also safely determine from what the apostle says that whatever lessons people's esteem of the pleasures, profits, and honours of the world; whatever turns their hearts from an eager pursuit after these things; whatever engages them in a due concern about eternity and causes them earnestly to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness; whatever convinces them of the dreadfulfulness of sin, the guilt it brings, and the misery to which it exposes, must be the Spirit



**"every spirit
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of God.

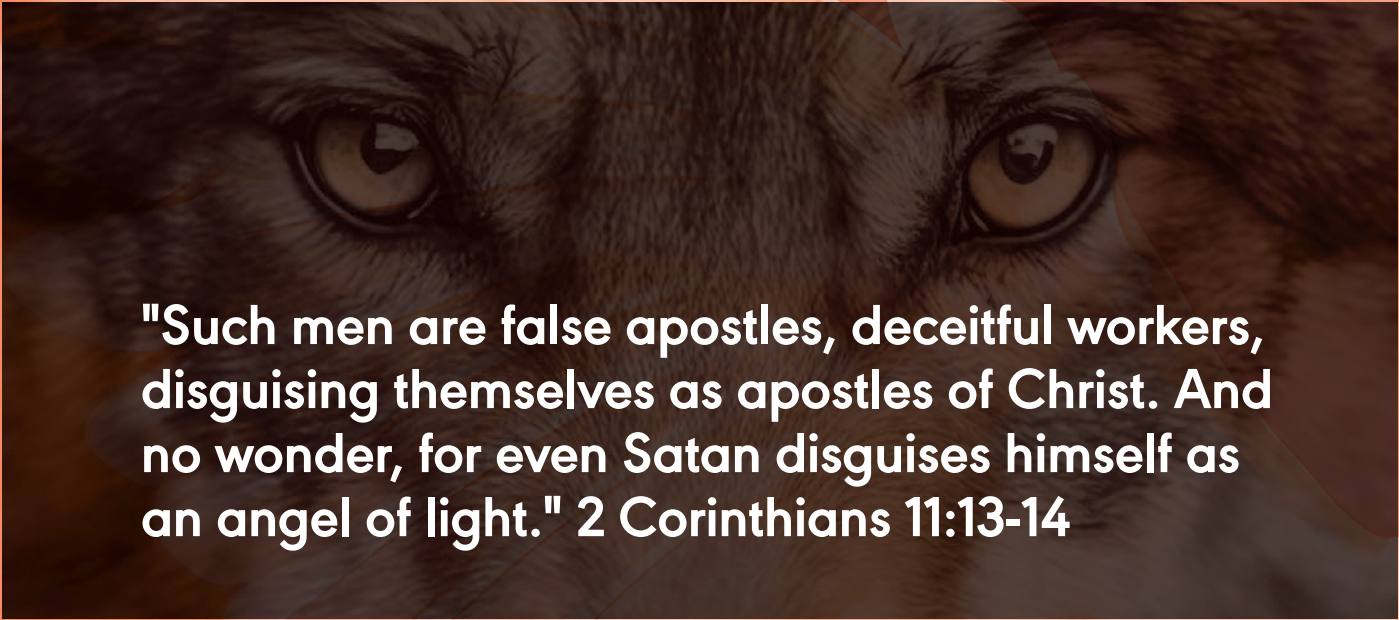
It is not to be supposed that Satan would convince men of sin or awaken the conscience. It can no way serve his end to make that candle of the Lord shine the brighter. It is for his interest, whatever he does, to lull conscience asleep and keep it quiet. To have that with its eyes and mouth open in the soul would tend to clog and hinder all his designs of darkness. The awakened conscience would evermore disturb his affairs, cross his interests, and disquiet him. Would the devil, when he is about to establish people in sin, take such a course? Would he make them more careful, inquisitive, and watchful to discern what is sinful, and to avoid future sins, and to be more wary of the devil's temptations?

The man who has an awakened conscience is the least likely to be deceived of any man in the world; it is the drowsy, insensible, stupid conscience that is most easily blinded. The Spirit that operates thus cannot be the spirit of the devil; Satan will not cast out Satan (Matt. 12:25-26). Therefore, if we see persons made sensible of the dreadful nature of sin and the displeasure of God against it, we may conclude that whatever effects this concern is from the Spirit of God.

IT POINTS PEOPLE TO THE SCRIPTURES

“We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).

The spirit that causes people to have a greater regard for the Holy Scriptures and establishes them more in the truth and divinity of God's Word is certainly the Spirit of God. The devil never would attempt to beget in persons a regard to the divine Word. A spirit of delusion will not incline persons to seek direction at the mouth of God. “to the law and to the testimony!” (Isa. 8:20) is never the cry of evil spirits who have no light in them. On the contrary, it is God's own direction to discover their delusions. Would the spirit of error, in



"Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." 2 Corinthians 11:13-14

order to deceive men, beget in them a high opinion of the infallible Word? Would the prince of darkness, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness, lead men to the sun? The devil has always shown a mortal spite and hatred towards that holy book, the Bible. He has done all in his power to extinguish that light, or else draw men off from it. He knows it to be that light by which his kingdom of darkness is to be overthrown. He has long experienced its power to defeat his purposes and baffle his designs. It is his constant plague. It is the sword of the Spirit that pierces him and conquers him. It is that sharp sword that we read of in Revelation 19:15, which proceeds out of the mouth of Him that sat on the horse, with which He smites His enemies. Every text is a dart to torment the old serpent. He has felt the stinging smart thousands of times.

Therefore, the devil is engaged against the Bible and hates every word in it. We may be sure that he never will attempt to raise anyone's esteem of it.

IT ELEVATES TRUTH

"We know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (v. 6). Another rule by which to judge spirits is that whatever operates as a spirit of truth, leading people to truth, convincing them of those things that are true—we may safely determine that it is a right and true spirit.

For instance, if the spirit at work makes men more aware than they used to be of the central gospel truths: that there is a God; that He is a great and sin-hating God; that life is short and very uncertain; that there is another world; that they have immortal souls; that they must give account of themselves to God; that they are exceeding sinful by nature and practice; that they are helpless in themselves—then that spirit operates as a spirit of truth. He represents things as they truly are. He brings men to the light.

On the other hand, the spirit of darkness will not uncover and make manifest the truth. Christ tells us that Satan is a liar, and the father of lies. His kingdom

is a kingdom of darkness. It is upheld and promoted only by darkness and error. Satan has all his power and dominion by darkness. Whatever spirit removes our darkness and brings us to the light undeceives us. If I am brought to the truth and am made aware of things as they really are, my duty is immediately to thank God for it without inquiring by what means I have such a benefit.

IT RESULTS IN LOVE FOR GOD AND OTHERS

"The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (v. 8).

If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God. This last mark which the apostle gives of the true Spirit he seems to speak of as the most eminent. He devotes more space to it and so insists much more largely on it than all the rest.

When the spirit that is at work among the people brings many of them to high and exalting thoughts of the Divine Being and His glorious perfections; when it works in them an admiring, delightful sense of the excellency of Jesus Christ, representing Him as the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely; when it makes Him precious to the soul, winning and drawing the heart with those motives and incitements to free love of God and the wonderful dying love of Christ—it must be the Spirit of God.

"We love, because He first loved us," verse 19 says. The spirit that makes the soul long after God and Christ must be the Spirit of God. When we desire the presence and communion of the diving Savior, acquaintance with Him, conformity to Him, a life that pleases and honours Him, we must be under the influence of His Spirit.

Moreover, the spirit that quells contentions among men gives a spirit of peace and good-will, excites to acts of outward kindness, earnestly desires the salvation of souls, and arouses love for all the children of God

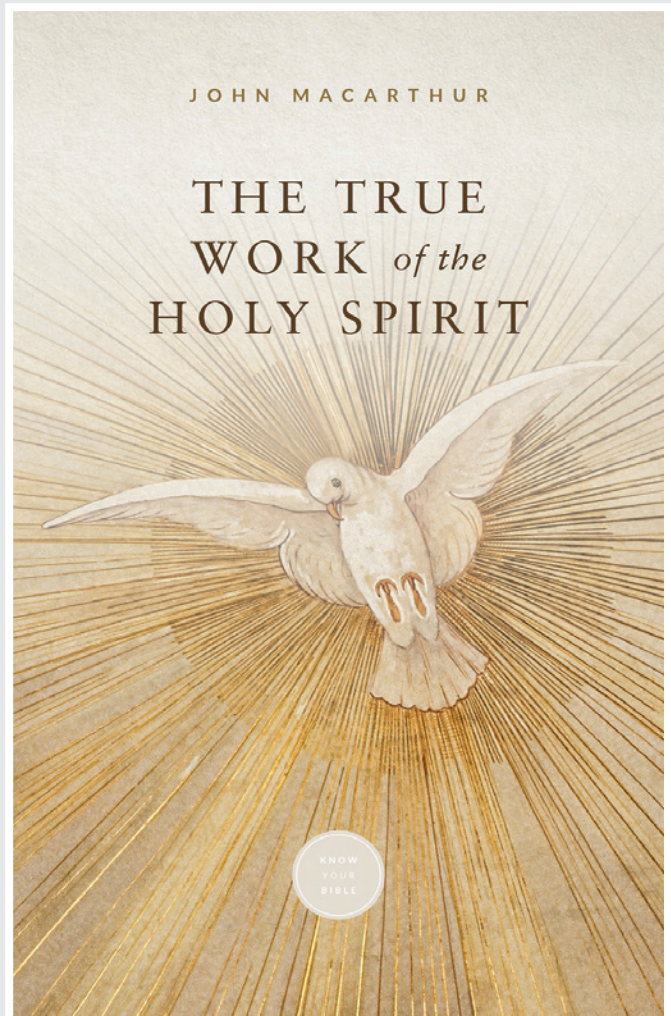
and followers of Christ. I say that when a spirit operates after this manner, there is the highest kind of evidence that this is the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, there is a counterfeit love that often appears among those who are led by a spirit of delusion. There is commonly in the wildest enthusiasts a kind of union and affection arising from self-love. It is occasioned by their agreeing on issues where they greatly differ from all others and for which they are objects of ridicule from the rest of mankind. That naturally will cause them so much the more to prize those peculiarities that make them the objects of others' contempt. (Thus, the ancient Gnostics and the wild fanatics that appeared at the beginning of the Reformation boasted of their great love to one another—one sect of them in particular calling themselves "the family of love.") But this is quite another thing than that Christian love I have just described.

There is enough said in this passage of the nature of a truly Christian love to distinguish it from all such counterfeits. It is love that arises from apprehension of the wonderful riches of the free grace and sovereignty of God's love to us in Jesus Christ. It is attended with a sense of our own utter unworthiness (see vv. 9-11, 19). The surest character of true, divine, supernatural love—distinguishing it from counterfeits that arise from a natural self-love—is that the Christian virtue of humility shines in it. It is a love which above all others renounces, abases, and annihilates what we term self. Christ's love is a humble love (1 Cor. 13:4-5). When, therefore, we see a love attended with a sense of one's own littleness, vileness, weakness, and utter insufficiency; when it is united with self-diffidence, self-emptiness, self-renunciation, and poverty of spirit—those are the manifest tokens of the Spirit of God. He that thus dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.

CONCLUSION

These marks that the apostle has given us are sufficient to stand alone and support themselves. They plainly show the finger of God and are sufficient to outweigh a thousand such little objections as many make from oddities, irregularities, errors in conduct, and the delusions and scandals of some professors. But here some may object. After all, the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, "Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." To which I answer that this can be no objection against the sufficiency of these marks to distinguish the true from the false spirit in those false apostles and prophets—even when the devil is transformed into an angel of light. After all, the very reason the apostle John gave these marks was so that we could test the spirits. Therefore, try the spirits by these rules and you will be able to distinguish the true spirit from the false - even under such a crafty disguise.



The True Work of the Holy Spirit (booklet)

John MacArthur

The church today desperately needs to rediscover the true person and work of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity has been grossly misrepresented, insulted, and grieved by a counterfeit movement that is being propagated in His name.

In this concise booklet, John MacArthur pushes past the counterfeits and caricatures to rediscover what Scripture teaches us about The True Work of the Holy Spirit. Our view of God is the foundational reality in our thinking, and it encompasses all that we believe about the Holy Spirit. Thinking rightly about Him and His work is essential to our worship, doctrine, and proper application of theology in everyday conduct.

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HOW MUCH *Authority* DOES A PASTOR HAVE?

by Austin Duncan

"If Jesus, the sinless and perfect son of God, limited Himself to speaking nothing during his incarnation except the truth He received from His father, how much more should those who have been called into His ministry speak only on the authority of divine Scripture?" (John MacArthur)

Heavy-handed, cult-like leaders abound in churches today. These types of leaders are in all sorts of churches - both small and large. Micromanagers of the flock and power-tripping elder boards are not confined to corporate mega-churches. Pastoral authority has been abused and has overreached its God-given boundaries. But this top-down leadership, CEO mentality, bullying, and intimidating are not Jesus' style of leadership. I believe much of the problem is rooted in a misunderstanding of the nature and limits of pastoral authority.

Pastors and elders need a functional understanding of spiritual authority. A lack of clarity will make both leading and following in the church more difficult. Authority is a precious gift from God intended for our stability and direction. God's authority is ultimate. The pastor's authority is delegated and limited by the Word of God. The pastor who understands his authority is a blessing to the church because he operates within the boundaries of God's written word, he increases his people's confidence in the Scripture, and he honours the conscience and competence of spirit-filled people.

So, what are the nature and limits of pastoral authority? There's not a single verse that explains everything, but by compilation and consolidation of the Bible's teaching on authority, we can derive several principles that will help us define pastoral authority as the following:

A DELEGATED AUTHORITY

1 Peter 5:2 refers to the church as "the flock of God."

Jesus is called the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). The church belongs to Christ. She is His unique possession. This alone should remind the pastor that he does not bear authority in the church. Why? Because Christ, and Christ alone, demands that right. The pastor holds an office similar to a steward. In ancient times, a steward was responsible for managing the estate of his lord, specifically when the lord was absent. The steward would delegate tasks to the other servants in the household, manage the lord's financial accounts, and oversee the success of the lord's estate. This is the authority of the pastor—it is at its core delegated. While the Lord readies to return, the pastor is commissioned to faithfully steward the house of God that it might be found ready at His coming.



LIMITED BY SCRIPTURE

It is important to understand that no pastor has authority outside of the Word of God. We can keep biblical, pastoral authority in check through the sound teaching and parameters set forth in the Word of God. The preacher is called to interpret and proclaim Scripture with sympathy, compassion, and humility. But he also is charged to present biblical truth with authority, commanding God's people to hear, believe, and obey God's Word. The pastor must always be aware that what he proclaims is confined to the Word of God and not a preference-laced, selfish agenda.

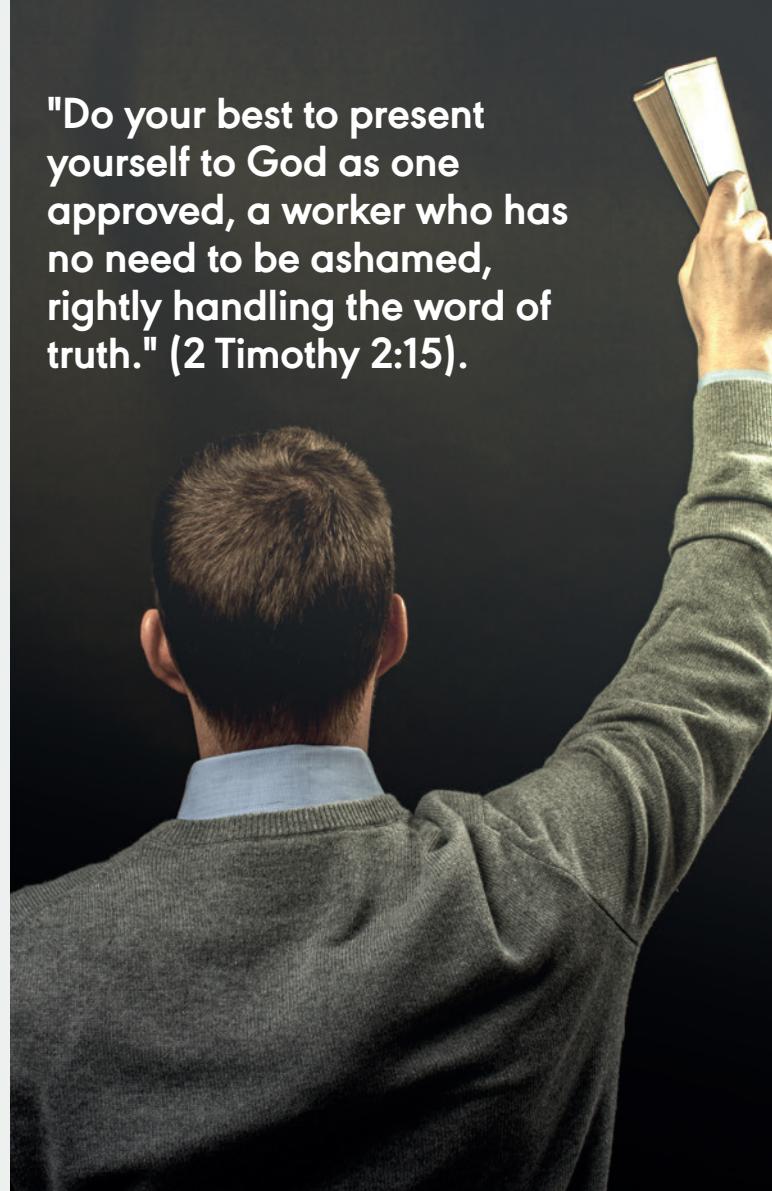
CHRIST-LIKE IN ITS DEMEANOUR

In the Great Commission, Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). John 3:36 tells us that under His authority, the one who believes the Son has eternal life. In Matthew 8:27 we see that "even the winds and sea obey him." Undeniably, these verses testify to the unparalleled authority of Christ. Yet what is so beautiful about Christ is that His matchless authority and His immeasurable compassion always go together. So, with our limited, delegated, biblically defined authority, how much more do we need the compassion of our master? Our Lord possessed all authority, and He came to serve and to lay His life down as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). That kind of sacrifice reminds us that we are not CEOs. Biblical authority is not just marked by correctness, but by Christ-likeness. Luke 12:37 humbles me each time I read it: "Blessed are those slaves whom their master finds alert when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve and have them take their place at the table, and will come and wait on them." Jesus embodies servitude, and it should shock us to think how we so often demand authority, respect, and obedience.

A PLURALITY

Eldership in the New Testament is always found in a plural form (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5). Even the writings of Solomon in the Proverbs demonstrate the wisdom of leading in a plural system: "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counsellors there is victory" (Proverbs 11:14). Elders are accountable to one another in church polity. This kind of plurality is rooted in the wisdom of God and acts as a guard against individual oversteps of authority. Where one man can go wrong, three might correct him.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15).



HONOURING TO THE FREEDOM OF THE CHRISTIAN

Baptists in the old days called this the "soul competency" or the "freedom of conscience." The idea is to trust the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to illuminate, convict, and transform His people. John writes in John 17 that "God will sanctify his people." That does not excuse human responsibility, but it should empower us not to micromanage people's sanctification. If leaders are bossy, opinionated, and heavy-handed, so too will be their people. If you keep your preferences in their appropriate containers, your people will learn to do that as well.

HONOURING THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

The pastor is not the mediator between God and man. Because of their position, sometimes pastors think that they are in a place that is different than the people to whom they minister. That is not a biblical understanding of our position before Christ. There is only one head

of the church, Jesus Christ. The true picture in the New Testament is not that of a congregation under the authority of the preacher, but of both preacher and congregation under the authority of God's written Word.

CONSISTENTLY EXEMPLARY

1 Peter 5 and 1 Timothy 3 remind us that there are requirements to meet before you can be in leadership. Authoritarianism does not fit with a man who is to be gentle, blameless, and concerned for others. The pastor who leads as Christ has mandated models a consistent illustration of a life under the subjugation of the Word of God.

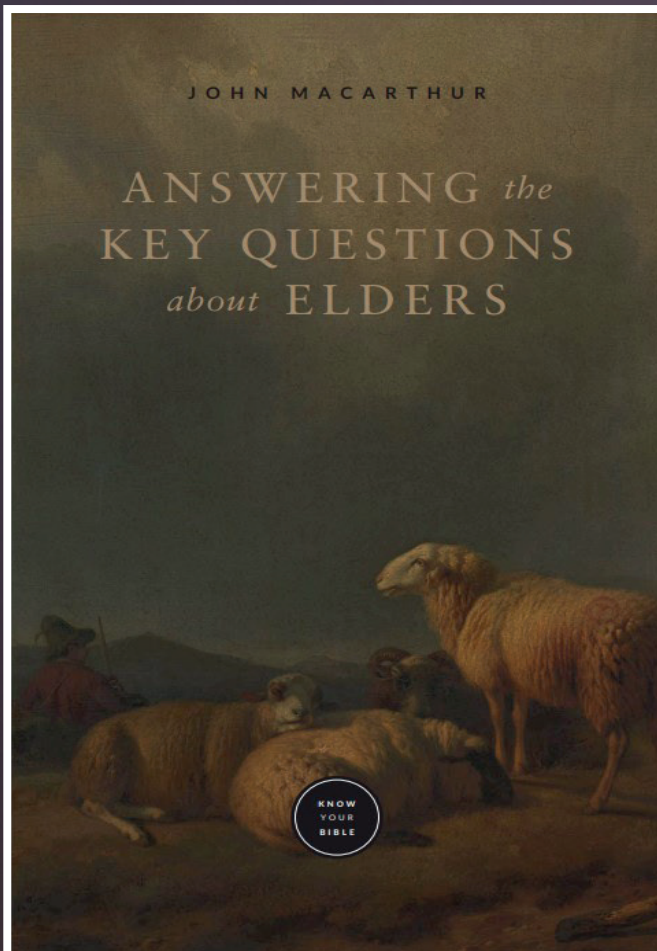
CONCERNED WITH OBEDIENCE TO GOD, NOT THE PASTOR

Don't be easily offended when someone doesn't take your advice; you're not a medieval monarch. John Owen wrote, "The authority of the pastor is in respect to their office only. If those who suppose themselves in office do teach and enjoin things that belong not onto their office, there is no obedience due unto them by virtue of this command." Owen is communicating here that the pastor's authority is ministerial; it is not in every area of life.

GUARDING AGAINST ABUSES

None of us are perfect. But how you handle the times you overstep defines your progress in managing your pastoral authority in a way that honours God. Pastors, you can apologize; you can admit you are wrong. A pastor is not exempt from admitting his failures and repenting, he is to lead in it. Among the followers of Jesus, leadership is not a synonym for lordship. Our calling is to be servants, not bosses; slaves, not masters. Proper pastoral authority is shown not in power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reason. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.

DR AUSTIN T. DUNCAN serves as Director of the MacArthur Center for Expository Preaching, Director of D.Min. Studies & Pastoral Ministries Department Chair at The Master's Seminary.



Answering the Key Questions About Elders (booklet)

John MacArthur

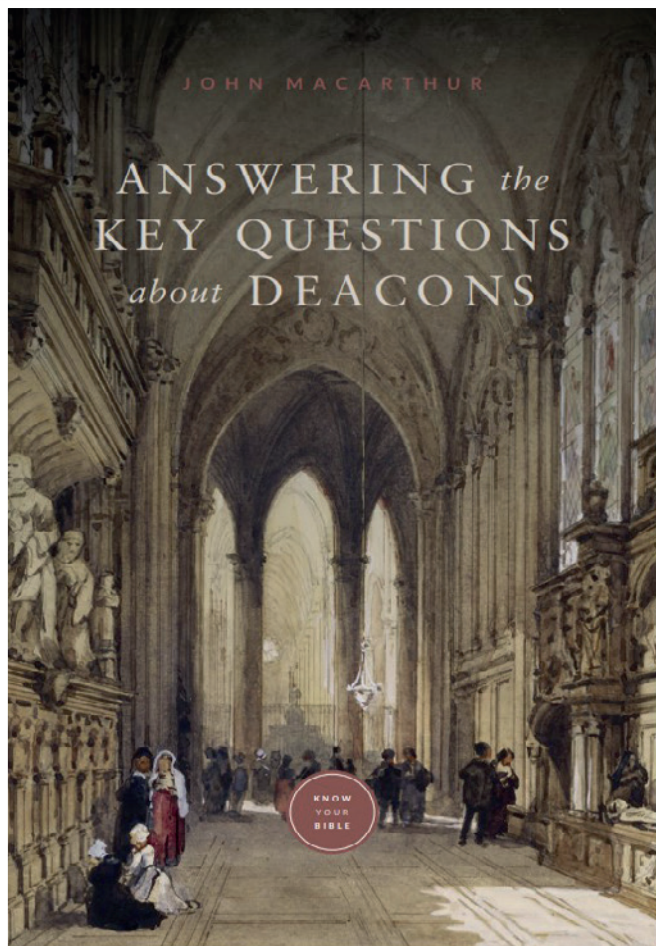
The church, by God's design, depends upon its leadership. Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder.

Elders are the ones charged with teaching, feeding, and protecting the church, and they are the ones accountable to God on behalf of the church. Yet many people do not understand either the gravity or the potential of that role.

In this booklet, John MacArthur answers ten frequently asked questions regarding elders. Following the biblical pattern of leadership will do much to revitalize the church today.



Product code - 451016



Answering the Key Questions About Deacons (booklet)

John MacArthur

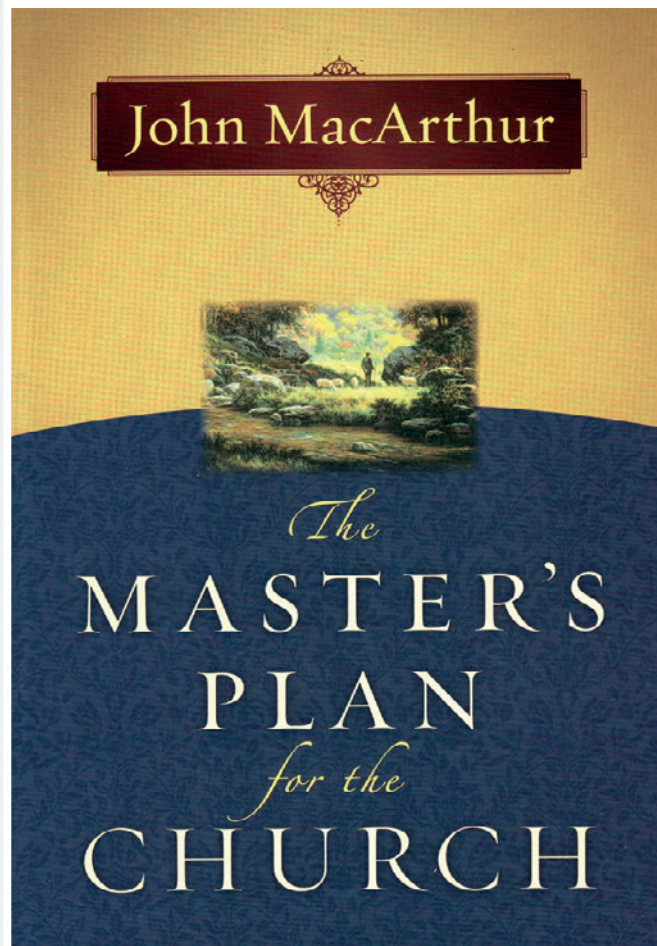
Different churches define the office of a deacon in different ways. Scripture itself is vague about what deacons specifically are to do.

However, it is very clear about what qualifies a man to be a deacon. The primary emphasis in church leadership should be on what a man is, and not on what he does.

In this booklet, John MacArthur answers ten frequently asked questions regarding deacons. Discover the qualifications of a deacon and the basis of his relationship to the church and elders.

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The Master's Plan for the Church (book - softcover)

John MacArthur

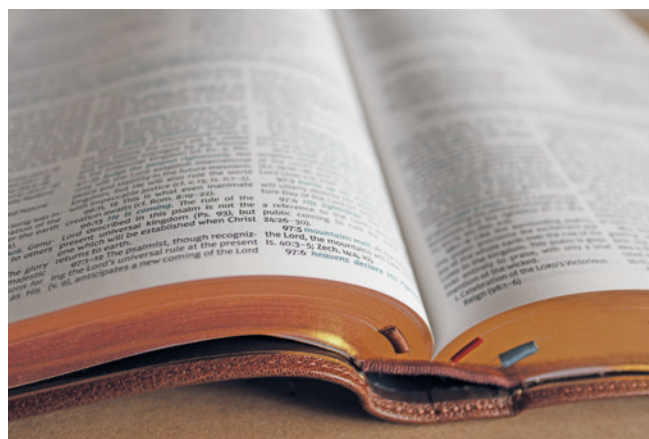
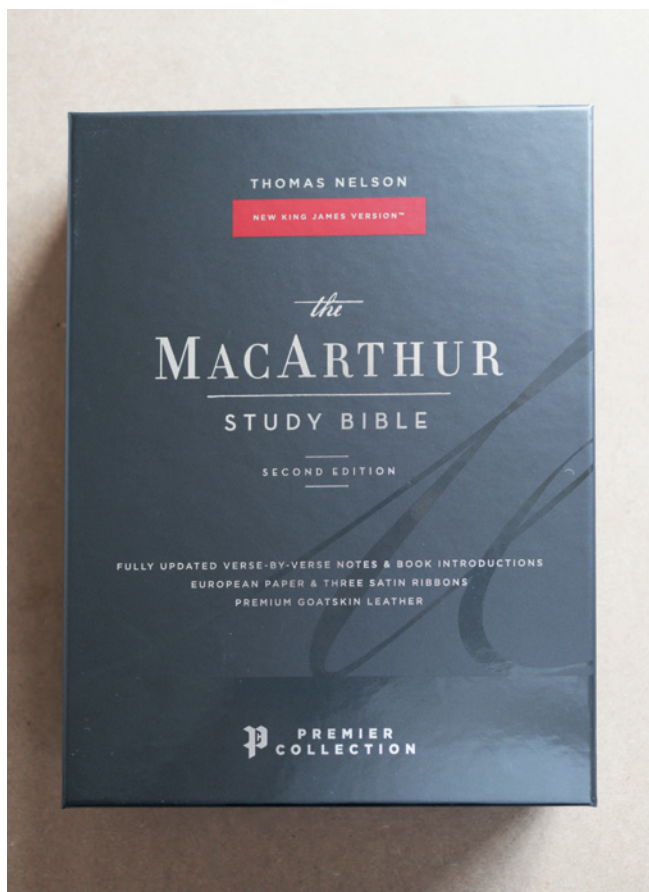
It's absolutely essential for a church to perceive itself as an institution for the glory of God, and to do that, claims John MacArthur, the local church must adhere unfalteringly to biblical leadership principles.

Christ never intended church leadership to be earned by seniority, purchased with money, or inherited through family ties. He never compared church leaders to governing monarchs, but rather to humble shepherds: not slick celebrities but to labouring servants.

This book is pertinent not only for pastors and elders, but for anyone who wants the church to be what God intended it to be.

£6.50

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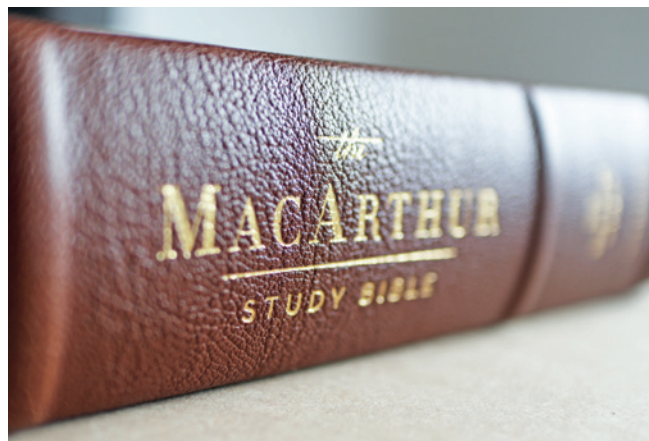
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Confronting false christianity with the TRUE GOSPEL

By RD Norman

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9 LSB)

Sadly, wherever you live in Europe you are sure to find many false versions of Christianity. In Eastern Europe it may be dead Orthodoxy, in central Europe, superstitious Roman Catholicism, and in Western Europe and the United Kingdom, liberal Protestantism. Additionally, across the whole of Europe there is a huge and rapidly increasing number of neo-Pentecostal/ extreme charismatic groups and myriad heretical sects, each claiming to be true churches, or in most cases, the only true church of Jesus Christ.

As a missionary in Romania, I have encountered all kinds of people caught up in false religious movements and the number is so great it can at times become a source of discouragement. The situation is so serious that it begs the question: "How can we possibly reach all of these deceived people with the Gospel?"

Thankfully, the Lord is good and absolutely sovereign over every situation, no matter how discouraging it may appear from a human perspective. Irrespective of whom we speak to, the message never changes: We are made right with God by the sin-cleansing sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross - we are saved by grace

alone through faith alone – nothing else! (See Ephesians 2:8-9). That is our message and that is what we need to preach. The Orthodox need to hear the message of justification by faith as much as Roman Catholics, Mormons, and Adventists. Yes, the starting point for making initial contact and engaging in conversation with each adherent of a false form of Christianity may vary slightly, depending upon which particular version of false Christianity they are ensnared, but the message remains essentially the same and never changes. What a wonderful fact. If we rightly understand what the Bible teaches concerning the sovereignty of God in the salvation of a sinner, we can confidentially evangelize anybody, literally anybody.

Justification, Truth and Works Based Lies

In Romania, the state religion is Eastern Orthodoxy. As a missionary I go out on the streets searching for people who will listen (even if reluctantly) to the message of the glorious Gospel. I recall on one occasion speaking to a young woman caught up in the false teaching of the Orthodox church. She had been giving money to the church in the futile hope of earning her salvation. I read the following to her: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). I could see tears of sorrow welling up in her eyes as she realized she had been lied to by the priests for her entire life.

In my experience, such cases are common all over Europe. People sincerely believe they only have to

TRUTH

chant by rote certain words (which invariably have been ripped out from their context in the Bible), or repeatedly perform some ritual (which was only applicable to the people of Israel in Old Testament times) and they will be absolved of their sins, then providing they maintain this delusional religious charade for the rest of their life, they may gain sufficient favour with God to earn an entry pass into heaven when they die.

The other common denominator of all forms of false Christianity is the obligation placed upon adherents to donate large sums of money, usually to ensure the priest, pastor, bishop, or glorified saint in heaven intercedes on their behalf with God. The reality could not be further from the truth: The Gospel message is that we are saved, not by any merit in ourselves, and certainly not by giving money, but only by the grace of God. This justification gives us peace with God. It is through the work of Christ and nothing else. Anything claiming otherwise is false Christianity and is to be avoided at all costs.

What is the situation where you live? Do you live in the U.K. where almost every town seems to have several “churches” whose pastors claim to be able to perform all kinds of healings and miracles by God’s power, but fail to faithfully preach the true gospel of Christ which is the power of God unto salvation (see Romans 1:16-17)? Liberal Protestant churches certainly don’t preach the gospel, because unlike the Apostle Paul, they are ashamed of it.

Do you live in eastern Europe where justification by faith alone in Christ alone is trampled by traditions and works? Do you live in France or Germany where any religious aspect is supposed to be accepted as “that person’s truth”? Wherever you are, no matter who surrounds you, know that you can reach them all with the same message. If this message is in your heart, what is to stop you telling other people?

How to Proclaim the Truth

As we consider this it is important to remember our calling. Jesus called us to go out into the world, adding new disciples (Mat. 28:19). Do you want to play your part in this ministry? If so, you must strengthen your faith by spending more time in reading and studying the Bible and those books which help us understand the Bible in greater depth. Through this preparation, we teach ourselves and can then teach others key truths from Scripture. Doing so ensures that, no matter whom we meet, we will have a good doctrinal understanding to defend our hearts and minds.

Yet, this alone is not enough. I have spent a lot of time speaking to a Jehovah’s Witness who is currently deeply involved in his religion and is adamantly convinced that Jesus is not God. Despite all the theological knowledge I have given him, he simply will not accept



this truth (even though he has no counter arguments). He needs to see that there is no condemnation in the loving embrace of the true Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:1). The arguments and the theology are important, but to him they mean nothing. What is working in his heart is the display of gentleness he sees in comparison to other evangelicals he has met. He is not used to this, and it’s impacting him greatly. That is what is causing him to rethink his position.

The point here is that we must present the truth in love and gentleness (see 2Timothy 2:24-26). I need both truth and love in my evangelism - and you need both in yours! Without a good grasp of biblical theology, the Jehovah’s Witness would pick me apart easily. Without love there would be nothing to show him how this truth changes lives. Both are necessary when we evangelize those caught up in false Christianity. There is no use in aggressively forcing our views on others. This is not a Christlike model, and neither is it what the apostles did. Instead, we must be meek and lowly like our precious Saviour and show genuine love when we present people with the message of the Gospel. That does not mean we cannot be firm. People need to be urgently warned about their hell-bound destiny if they continue to follow false Christianity. Firmness and gentleness are thankfully not incompatible when engaged in evangelism.

Encouragement to Go

What is stopping you from pursuing this calling? Do you fear their arguments? That is why we must study, grappling with the truths of the Bible. Are you scared you will not present the truth in a loving manner? Study the life of Jesus and work hard to live like He did, putting off all the sin you see and replacing it with His gentleness (Gal. 5: 16-18; Eph. 4:22-24).

Whatever other excuses we might have, we must get over them and work to fulfil the Great Commission. It is not only atheists who need the Gospel, but those stuck in false Christianity. Reflect on your own heart right now and ask yourself what is stopping you. If you

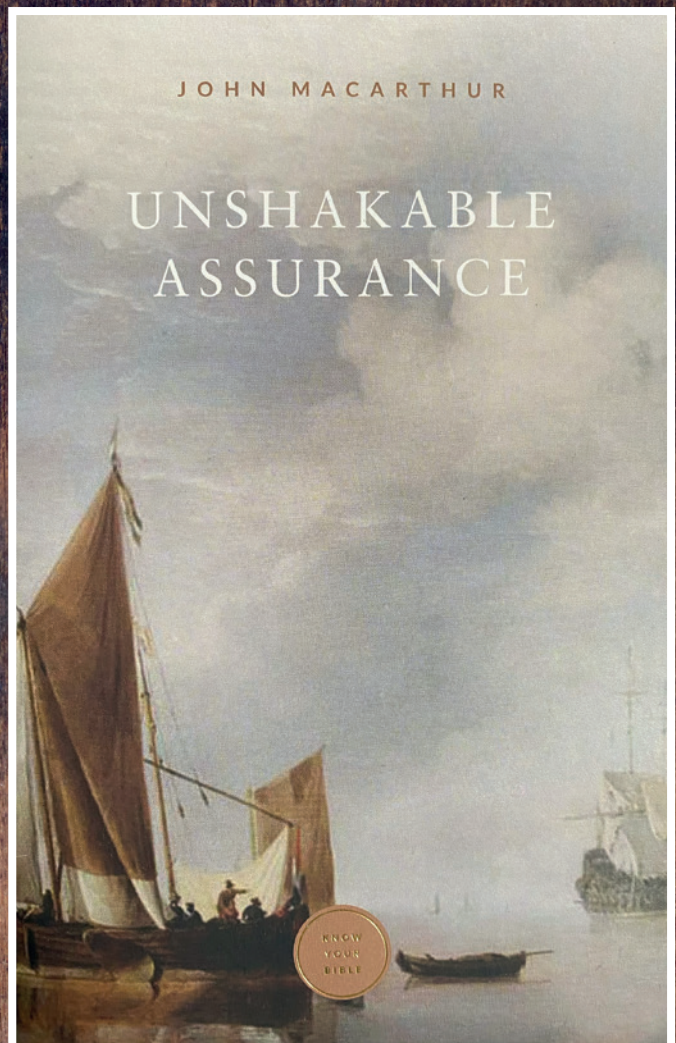
persistently and believingly pray, and carefully study to present your message graciously, then God, through His divine ordering of providence, will lead you to opportunities amongst those benighted souls ensnared by the devil in a false version of Christianity. If we are not properly prepared, how can we be used? A good forester wants the sharpest axe to cut down trees. He will pass over the bluntest axes looking for that sharp axe. Do you want to be used? Sharpen yourself in these things and be ready for when the trees come into view for harvest (Matthew 9:37-38). As John MacArthur once wrote: "Heart work is God's domain." (Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully. Pg. 11). If our hearts are on fire with doctrinally sound truth, then let us spread the flame.

I recently met a man who appreciates Christian spirituality. He recognizes there is a lot of value in Christianity, but he doesn't want to make any commitment to religion. When I first met him, he had fleetingly been to Protestant churches, but he was much more interested in his hobbies than becoming a Christian. Over the last two years he has become more and more open to the truth, and I have been there for him during difficult moments in his life. Due to this, he has seen the gentleness of Christ and found the church a lot more attractive than before. Two years! Yes, it can take a long time.

Sometimes people come to church and immediately begin to find themselves drawn by the Spirit. Others take a very long and winding path, which at times can almost cause us as evangelists to lose hope. The truth though is that God works in His own way to change hearts. That is why it is essential that we remember salvation is His work and not our own. We cannot force conversions. We can only be instruments whom God uses to show people the Gospel. The outcome is not in our hands. It is in His hands. What a joyful relief. The burden is not on us. We need merely meet those lost sheep, talk to them, and keep up a Gospel-centered relationship with them. Who knows what God will do with those lost in false Christianity, for the sake of the Gospel? Are you ready to go to them? The walls of false Christianity will not fall if we are not ready to engage with those who are stuck there.

May the truth of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners and contained in the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ break apart all the walls of works-based salvation for His glory.

RD NORMAN is a British missionary to Romania, he is married and lives in Iasi, a university city with a large and internationally diverse student population, amongst whom he proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



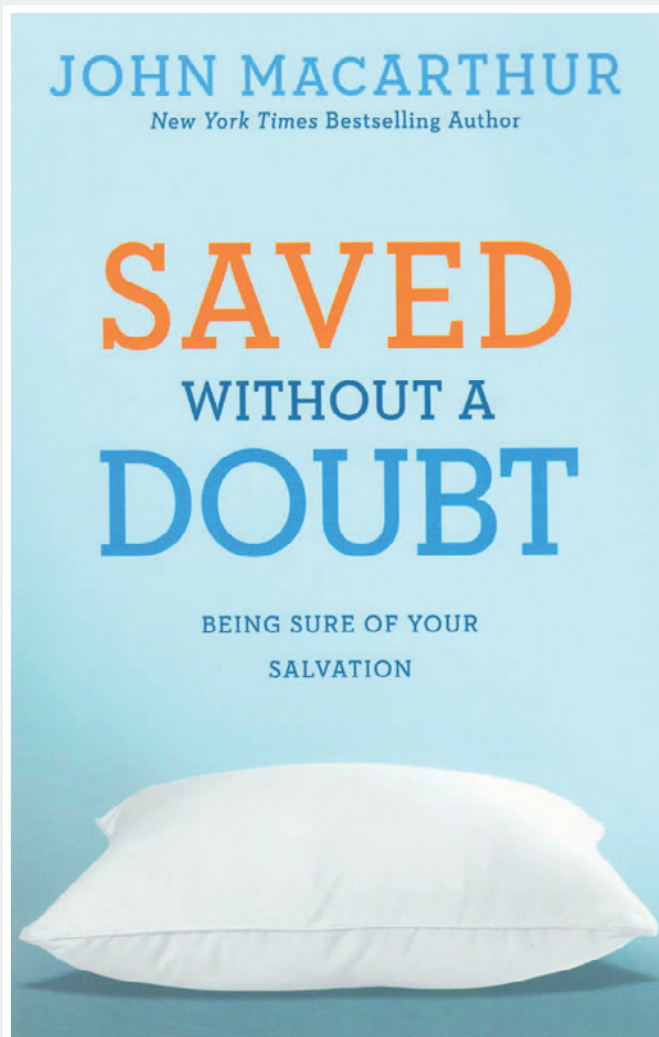
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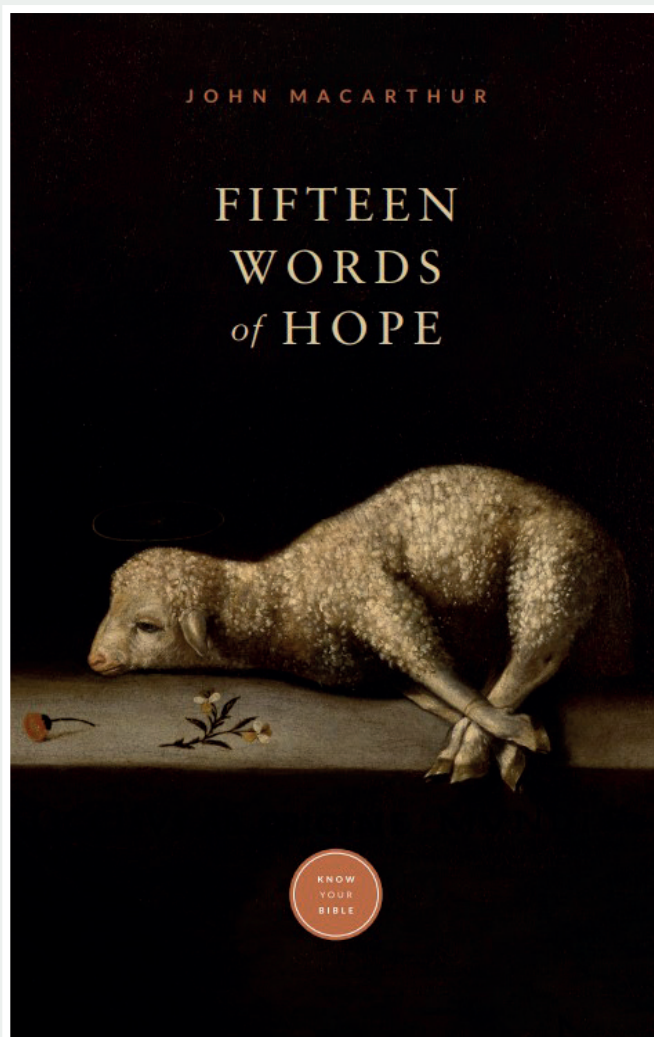
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REACHING SCANDINAVIA FOR CHRIST

By Mika Kaltoff

THE SPIRITUAL CLIMATE IN SCANDINAVIA

On June 29, 2021, my family and I began a journey back to Denmark in Scandinavia to serve as missionaries and church planters after four years on the pastoral staff of a faithful Bible believing church in Southern California. Now you might ask: "Why would anyone give up serving at a sound church in sunny California (of all places) and return to rainy Scandinavia? Aren't these Christian countries riding high on the Reformation with the banner of the gospel in the forefront?" Well, sadly, no they are not. In reality, the Scandinavian nations are considered the most secular and non-religious on earth. Current statistics reveal that the population of Scandinavia might be less than 2% Christian. And considering Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland host more than 20 million people, it means that Scandinavia can rightly be considered an unreached people group.

The problem isn't that people are unreachable. The problem is that almost no true Christian missionary

organization reaches them with the biblical gospel. Alas, it's possible to live in Scandinavia without ever meeting a genuine Christian or hearing the gospel preached. Denmark alone has around 6 million people, and we only know of a few healthy churches that faithfully preach the word of God. The Lutheran state church is liberal to its core, and I believe its beautiful buildings will soon become soulless museums, as attendance rapidly declines, and the church desperately tries to survive by tickling people's ears. The Free church appears vibrant, but its "Bible teaching" and doctrine are generally as thin as paper. Pastors often preach personal experiences instead of faithful sermons based on God's word. On top of that, receiving a sound, formal theological education in Denmark is impossible because there is no sound Christian college or seminary. If you went to a state university to study theology, you would find professors completely neglecting, rejecting, and twisting Scripture to fit their post-Christian and secular agenda.

Generally, people in Scandinavia are atheist, relativist, and modernist – far away from God (Ephesians 4:18). As I hope you can now understand, the gospel need is enormous in these modern and affluent countries, but gospel workers are very few.

CHURCH PLANTERS

My wife and I (and our three children) had always seen our long-term future and ministry in the USA, but at the end of 2019, the Lord began placing a huge burden for my homeland (Denmark) and Scandinavia in our hearts as we sought God's guidance for the future. Although the Lord was working through our ministry at the church in California, it became clear that Denmark would be





Mike Bachmann and Mika Kaltoff

a more strategic sphere of ministry for us in the long term and that our gifts could be used for the greater benefit of Christ's church and the advancement of God's kingdom here on earth. So, after receiving formal theological training at The Master's University and Reformation Seminary with practical, church-based pastoral training, our dear church family in California sent us back to Scandinavia as missionaries and church planters on June 29, 2021.

A NEW CHURCH PLANTED IN DENMARK

When we arrived in Denmark, we landed on the ground running. Within the first week, we began our church plant with a small group of solid believers who had longed and prayed for a biblical-sound church for many years, and with this core group we officially planted Aarhus Bible Church in August 2022. The reason why we chose to plant the church in Aarhus is very strategic: it's the second-largest city in Denmark with 330,000 people and it's also a dynamic university city with many nationalities from all over the world.

Every year, thousands of unbelieving students from all over Denmark move to Aarhus to study and they usually spend 3-8 years in the city before returning to their hometown to work and settle with their families. We want to intercept their lives with the gospel, reach them for Christ, and disciple them so that they will live passionate lives for God. And when they return to their homelands, they will carry the gospel with them and be equipped to help plant more healthy churches. You can think of it as an influx of unbelievers to Aarhus and an outflux of equipped believers ready to reach the lost in all corners of Denmark, Scandinavia, and the rest of the world. In Scandinavia, many Christians don't have a healthy church family close to their hometown so, they may have to drive more than an hour every Sunday to attend a worship service. By God's grace, we hope to see more solid churches planted all around Denmark and Scandinavia in our lifetime.

NORDIC HOPE PRESS PUBLISHING MINISTRY

Whilst church planting is our primary focus, we also want to disciple believers and equip church leaders, so we find ourselves in a difficult situation. Unlike the U.S.A. or the U.K. there is a massive lack of trustworthy biblical resources in Scandinavia to enable believers to understand God's word and live to His glory. When we talk with Christians living outside of Scandinavia about our mission field, it's often hard to give them a proper perspective on the spiritual situation because it's so very different from their experience. Spiritually, America is like a cultivated field with good crops everywhere. Scandinavia, on the other hand, is like a field ready for seeds to be planted everywhere before the crop can yield its fruits. Whether it be faithful gospel proclamation, sound expository preaching, Christlike discipleship, healthy churches, or biblical-sound resources, the field is almost bare. Because of such a great need, my brother in Christ, Mike Bachmann and I started Nordic Hope Press, a Christian publishing ministry that translates biblically sound resources from English into Danish. We trust our triune God that He will use Nordic Hope Press to fight biblical illiteracy in Scandinavia, make biblical resources available, accessible, and affordable to all Scandinavians in their native language, and equip a new generation of faithful believers.

Granted, it's a bold vision! But didn't William Cary rightly say: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God"? Since the beginning of time, God has used ordinary men and women to do extraordinary things to advance His kingdom on earth. Some of the greatest preachers and Christian minds, like Charles Spurgeon and Martyn-Lloyd Jones, are long gone, but their words speak powerfully to us today through the ink of their pens. We are weak and ordinary people. But we serve a sovereign and powerful God. And He has graciously blessed us with partners who have come alongside us to help us fulfil this grand mission of reaching Scandinavia for Christ.

Grace To You Europe has especially been a tremendous help in enabling Nordic Hope Press to get off the ground by providing a solid biblical partnership, loving and knowledgeable mentorship, and much needed financial support to fulfil our mission. For our part we are eager to translate and publish Grace to You's resources because their content is biblically accurate, culturally relevant, and easily understandable. This year alone, GTY Europe has financially made it possible for us to translate, publish and distribute free of charge 23 titles within the Spotlight on Scripture series of booklets. These booklets are strategically important because they answer real people's questions with real biblical answers in everyday language, a tremendous need in biblically illiterate Scandinavia. Lord willing, we would like to translate and publish not only John Macarthur's books and booklets but also his study Bible and Bible commentaries, among other resources, in the years to come.

A PAGAN WHO BECOMES A BELIEVER AND A BELIEVER WHO ACTS LIKE A PAGAN!

By John Cheeseman

In the fifth chapter of 2 Kings, we are faced with a very ironical situation. On the one hand we have the account of a pagan general, Naaman, who became a true believer in the God of Israel. On the other hand, there is the account of Elisha's servant, Gehazi, a true born Israelite, who is converted to the thinking and practice of a pagan. Let's examine each of these cases in turn.

The first half of the chapter contains the remarkable story of a pagan commander who is healed of leprosy through the ministry of the prophet, Elisha (verses 1-14). But Naaman was not just healed physically, a real work of grace went on in his heart, with the result that in verse 15 he publicly confesses his faith in the true and living God. 'Behold I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.' It is fascinating to observe that if this man had not suffered from the living death of leprosy, he would not have gone to Elisha for healing, and consequently he would not have experienced the power of God leading to his conversion. In the words of the hymn-writer, William Cowper, 'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform'. It is often at a time of crisis and difficulty that sinners come to genuine faith in the Lord. This was certainly the case during the earthly ministry of Jesus, and so it is today. How unsearchable are the ways of God! Who'd have thought that Naaman's leprosy could possibly be a way into God's richest blessing? But one day we shall stand in glory with Naaman the Syrian, and we shall bless God for those things which seemed at the time to be complete and utter tragedies, and yet God, in His infinite wisdom, has woven them into the rich tapestry of our existence.

4 GREAT PROOFS OF GENUINE SPIRITUAL LIFE

In verses 15-19 Naaman demonstrates four great proofs of genuine spiritual life. In the first place, we have his public confession of faith in verse 15. Now, there was no need for Naaman to return to Elisha; after all, he'd received what he'd come for – the healing of his leprosy. Nevertheless, he chooses to return to the prophet, and in so doing he makes a great public confession of faith in the God of Israel. It is instructive to note that it was public, not private. We are told that he returned to Elisha with 'all his company'. He could have told all of his servants to stay back whilst he privately went to

see the man of God. But no, he decided to make this confession in front of all his fellow Syrians who were on the journey with him. This is a striking statement from someone with a pagan Syrian background.



If, like Naaman, we have been brought to a knowledge of the true and living God, an inevitable consequence of that will be a public confession of our faith. The apostle Paul writes, in Romans chapter 10, 'If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.' (Romans 10:9). According to the New Testament, there is no such thing as a genuine Christian faith without a public confession. A secret disciple is a



contradiction in terms. Jesus said, 'Whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven.' (Matthew 10:33). This is why baptism is such an important ceremony in the Christian church. Inward conviction and outward confession must go hand in hand.



Secondly, we need to notice Naaman's spontaneous expression of gratitude to God. Having made his confession in verse 15, Naaman then says to Elisha, 'Accept now a present from your servant'. In verse 16 the prophet refuses the offer, but Naaman urges him to take it, as if to say, 'Elisha, you are God's representative in Israel. Please accept a present from me as a visible token of gratitude of my heart'. Here was a spontaneous, loving gesture. The Syrian had no orders to do this. He had not been given a booklet with six instructions for new converts! On the contrary, having freely received from the hand of God, he wanted to give freely in return. This should always be the response of a heart that has been touched by the grace of God. It is unthinkable for somebody to experience the free, unmerited grace of God, and not to be grateful. This is the second great proof of Naaman's spiritual healing.



Thirdly, he was determined to worship and serve no-one but the true God of Israel. In verse 17 Naaman told Elisha that if he refused to accept the present, 'please let there be given to your servant two mules' load of earth for, from now on, your servant will not offer burn offering or sacrifice to any God but the Lord'. Naaman wanted the earth in order to build himself an altar at which he would worship only the Lord. This

is a truly remarkable decision. After all, it would be relatively safe to confess that there is no God but the Lord when you are in Israel, standing in front of a prophet, in the presence of those who had just seen that God perform a miracle. That's like getting baptised in a Christian church in front of your friends. But this man Naaman was planning to build an altar to the Lord way back in Syria, the heartland of paganism and idol-worship. What an example of holy boldness! He had a determination to worship the Lord even at possible risk to his own life. To what extent are we prepared to turn our backs upon all forms of idolatry, even at great personal cost? For most of us, of course, it's not the idols of wood and stone as it was for Naaman. It's more likely the idol of the approval of our friends, and some of us would sooner trample underfoot the blood of Jesus Christ than raise a disapproving glance from one of our friends. For some of us, the idol may be ambition. It may even be our family. Whatever it is that takes the place of God in our lives, that is our idol, and the Lord will not tolerate any rivals.



The fourth evidence of Naaman's newfound faith was his deep desire to walk before God with a good conscience. In verse 18 Naaman says to Elisha, 'In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant. When my master goes into the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter'. To which Elisha replies, 'Go in peace,' (verse 19). It is important to note that the prophet does not chastise Naaman for bowing down in the house of Rimmon, and he doesn't do so for a very good reason. We must draw a distinction between the bowing down of Naaman simply because his royal master leans on his arm (verse 18), and the bowing down of the Syrian king for the purpose of worship. Surely the very mention of this scruple of Naaman proves not only the tenderness of his enlightened conscience, but also the fact that in no way was he in any danger of conforming to heathen worship. This is why Elisha could say to him, 'Go in peace'.

When a man or woman comes to true faith in the living God there is immediately impressed upon the heart a deep desire to walk before God with a good conscience. This principle is absolutely basic to maintaining a vital spiritual life. The apostle Paul said, 'I always take

pains to have a clear conscience towards both God and man,' (Acts 24:16). In 1 Timothy 1:19, he mentions certain persons who by rejecting conscience 'have made shipwreck of their faith'. They started out on the road to apostasy when they allowed their consciences to be corroded up with the rust of unconfessed sin. They rationalised, they excused themselves they went for days and weeks glossing over their faults and misdemeanours until their hearts by degrees became hardened and in the end their judgment began to play tricks in order to justify the state of the heart. To what extent is this true for some of us? When those harsh words slip out of our mouths, are we grieved until we have confessed our sin to God and sought His forgiveness? When we feel the stirrings of envy, lust, and bitterness, do we cry to God for cleansing in the blood of Christ? Do we have the conscience of a Naaman? One of the most wonderful things is to see the tender conscience of a person who has been newly converted to Christ. How sad it is that so few maintain that till the end of their days. How salutary to see a young Christian in tears and you ask what's wrong and they say, 'I was so busy I didn't read the Bible today'. Whereas some of us can go for days without reading the Bible and our conscience doesn't trouble us at all.

There was a time when, if we switched on the television set and saw something obscene, we would reach out instinctively to turn it off. Now we just settle back comfortably in our armchairs and drink it all in. Things that once made us blush, don't raise an eyebrow anymore. Our consciences don't even twitch. Maybe we even say to ourselves, 'I've grown up spiritually now. I've come to understand the doctrine of Christian liberty.' No, no! That is a lie of the devil. The truth is, we've become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and we need to get back to the place of a tender conscience, like Naaman the Syrian. Otherwise, we are putting our eternal souls in great danger. For the true Christian nothing is more precious than personal communion with God, and that cannot co-exist with a heart that has been hardened by sin.

THE CONVERSION OF A TRUE ISRAELITE TO THE THINKING AND LIFESTYLE OF A PAGAN

Having seen in verses 1-19 the conversion of a pagan to saving faith in the God of Israel, it is so ironical that in verses 20-27 we see the conversion of a true Israelite to the thinking and lifestyle of a pagan, as we read the sad and sorry tale of the sin of Gehazi, Elisha's servant.

We mentioned earlier that Naaman was so grateful to Elisha for all he had done for him, that he begged the prophet to accept a present as a token of his appreciation. Elisha refused to accept any such gift, perhaps because he didn't want to obscure the fact that salvation was by grace alone. Gehazi, however,

had no such scruples and he sees this as a great opportunity for sinful gain. We are told in verses 21-23 that he runs after Naaman and he concocts a deliberate lie, taking advantage of the reputation of his master. He asks, in the name of Elisha, for a talent of silver and two changes of clothing, allegedly for two poor sons of the prophets who had just arrived to visit the man of God. Naaman, in all innocence, is quite happy to comply with this request. Indeed, he gives Gehazi two talents of silver in addition to the clothing. Then, in verse 24, we see how Gehazi attempts to cover his tracks, because he takes the presents into his house and he sends away Naaman's two servants, before they realise what's going on. No doubt he thinks he has committed the perfect crime, and no-one is any the wiser.

However, that's not the end of the story, because we read in verses 25-26 of how the prophet Elisha exposes the sin of Gehazi. First of all, he asks a searching question, 'Where have you been, Gehazi?' (Verse 25). This is reminiscent of God's question to Adam in the Garden of Eden, 'Where are you?' (Genesis 3:9). Then, when Gehazi tries to lie his way out of trouble by saying, 'Your servant went nowhere' (verse 25), Elisha responds with the withering exposure of verse 26, 'Did not my heart go with you when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments?' That must have shaken Gehazi absolutely rigid. He thought that he had committed the perfect crime, and no-one knew about it, but obviously Elisha had been caught up in some kind of prophetic vision and he had been allowed by God to see things beyond the powers of mortal man. Consequently, he is able to expose the sin of his wicked servant and also to pronounce the terrible curse of judgement in verse 27, 'therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants for ever'. So, we read that he went out as a leper like snow.

Let us ponder the significance of this for a moment. As a leper, Gehazi would be cut off from the life and the worship of the people of God. A leper was put outside the camp. No Israelite who wished to maintain fellowship with God, and with God's people, could come into contact with a leper. In other words, the nature of this judgement was precisely that of making him into a 'de facto' pagan. How deeply ironical! The pagan Naaman had become to all intents and purposes an Israelite, whereas the Israelite Gehazi was now condemned to occupy the place of a pagan. If we ask the question, 'Isn't this judgement a bit harsh on the part of God?' let me quote some words from the grand old commentator, Matthew Poole. He writes as follows: 'Nor was this punishment too severe for Gehazi's wickedness, which was great and various; horrid covetousness which is idolatry; the profanation of God's name by a wicked oath; downright theft; deliberate and impudent lying, and that to a prophet, which was in a manner a lying to the Holy Ghost (see Acts 5:3); a desperate contempt of God's omniscience, justice, and holiness; a horrible

reproach fastened upon the prophet, and his religion; and a mischievous scandal given to Naaman and all other Syrians that might hear of it.' (Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Bible, vol. 1, page 727 Banner of Truth Trust 1962 edition).

4 WARNINGS

The above comments lead me to sound four very serious notes of warning in the light of this sin of Gehazi.



The first is this: let us beware of thinking that we can cover our sin for ever. How smug Gehazi must have felt when he hid those presents, just like the cat that's caught a mouse and licks its whiskers. But then the day of judgement intruded into the situation. The apostle Paul says that the day is coming when God will judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus (Romans 2:16). There may be some reading these words who have been unfaithful to their husbands or their wives, and you're convinced that no-one knows except you and your partner in sin. Jesus says, 'Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known' (Luke 12:2). Meanwhile, so long as we cover our tracks, we will never receive blessing. 'Whoever conceals his transgression will not prosper.' (Proverbs 28:13). We won't have any peace of mind as our conscience keeps pricking and we try to ignore it by various rationalisations.

The second warning very much follows on from this. Let us beware of entertaining low views of God. Gehazi had a low view of God's omniscience. He thought he could do his dealings under the Middle Eastern sun, and no-one would know about it except Naaman, his servants, and himself. What a fool he was. Moreover, he thought he could be insensitive to the claims of God and not receive the judgement of God. He thought that he could be indifferent to the honour of God and not receive the frown of God. At every turn he had low views of God. And this led him to indulge in wickedness with such a high hand. The moment we convince ourselves that there's some place that God's eye does not reach, that's the place we'll go to indulge our sin. The moment that we convince

ourselves that there is some sin which is not really sin, that's the sin we'll commit. Of course, in so doing we will be fighting our consciences because conscience tells us that these things are sinful. This is why anti-Christian elements in our society are so militant and aggressive about issues such as homosexual practice and abortion on demand. They are desperately trying to convince themselves that these activities are acceptable, whereas their consciences are saying otherwise. All of this goes back to having low views of God. The prevailing secular philosophy is that God doesn't have the right to tell us what we should or should not do in matters of personal morality. The Bible, on the other hand, has a completely different perspective.



Let us beware in the third place of covetousness and lying. Jesus said, 'Be on your guard against all covetousness' (Luke 12:15). The writer to the Hebrews said, 'Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have' (Hebrews 13:5). The Bible is not suggesting that no-one should acquire possessions in the providence of God, but it is saying that those acquisitions should come as the fruit of good stewardship, rather than as a result of covetousness. There is all the difference in the world between those two positions. Gehazi's problem was that his heart was locked up in those bags of silver. When you visit a couple who own their own large home, whereas all you have is a small rented flat, can you rejoice in what God has given to that couple and then go home content with your flat? When you see the attractive wives of some of your friends, are you free of covetousness? We also need to guard against the sin of lying. Gehazi lied in order to pursue his sin of covetousness, and then to cover up the fruits of that sin. Usually, a lie either paves the way to a sin we desire, or we try to cover the tracks of a sin already committed. Some of us have become so used to this that we can lie at the drop of a hat, without any premeditation, and we can do it looking folks straight in the eye. In Proverbs 6:17, it is recorded that one of the things God hates is a lying

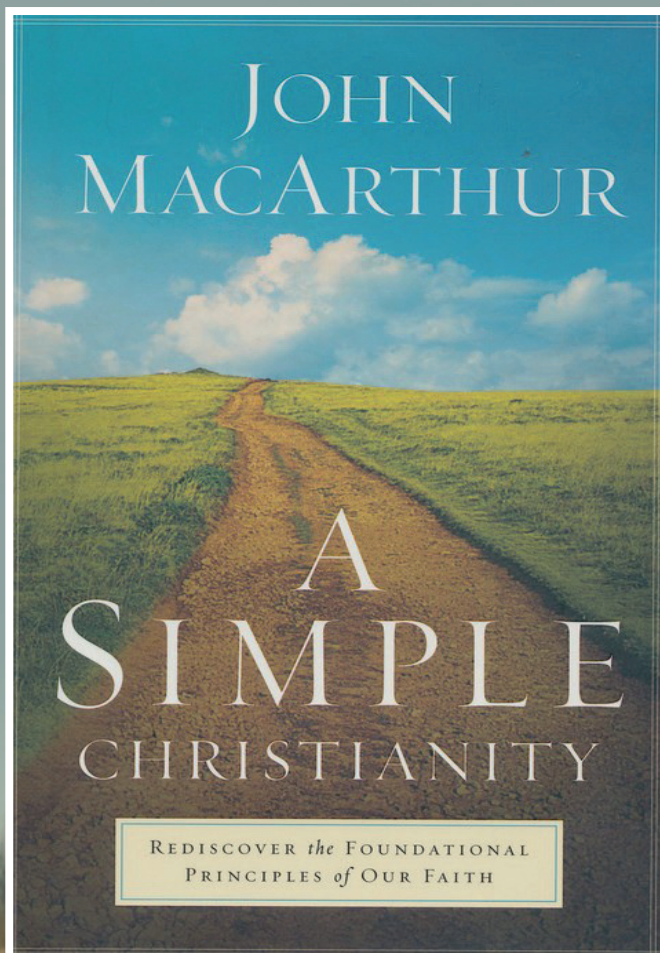
tongue. The reason God hates this is because lying is a contradiction of everything we should be reflecting of His image. He is the God of truth who has made us in His image. Therefore, as Christians, we should only speak the truth. May God deliver us from the sin of false speech.



The fourth and final warning contained in this passage has to do with the danger of bringing the curse of sin upon others. In verse 27 Elisha says to Gehazi, 'The leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants for ever'. Gehazi would live to see the fruits of his sin in his own children. What a terrifying thought. Our generation, of all generations, is seeing that particular chicken coming home to roost. When, for example, men and women dabble in sexual sin, they can bring a curse upon unborn children in terms of diseases, which may never come to light until it is too late.

The second half of this article has been gloomy in many ways but let me end on a positive note. From one standpoint it could be argued that it was very kind of God to bring the day of judgement near to Gehazi, because it might just lead him to seek God's mercy and forgiveness. And then when his children say, 'Daddy, why do we have this dreadful disease that rots our flesh and cripples our hands?' what an opportunity for Gehazi to say, 'My dear children, this is the fruit of your father's sin. Sin is a terrible thing, I plead with you to turn to God in repentance and faith'. Gehazi, albeit with gnarled hands, could then become an evangelist to his own children. Who knows whether the terrible scourge of STD in our day might be used to bring men and women to faith in the living God? If so, then this could prove to be another example of God's mercy being mingled with His judgement.

JOHN CHEESEMAM departed this earth to be with Christ in Heaven during Easter 2017 after a lifetime of faithful ministry to the church as a pastor, Bible teacher, and author. He had been a loyal friend and wise counsellor to the board of GTY Europe, where he served as Chairman.



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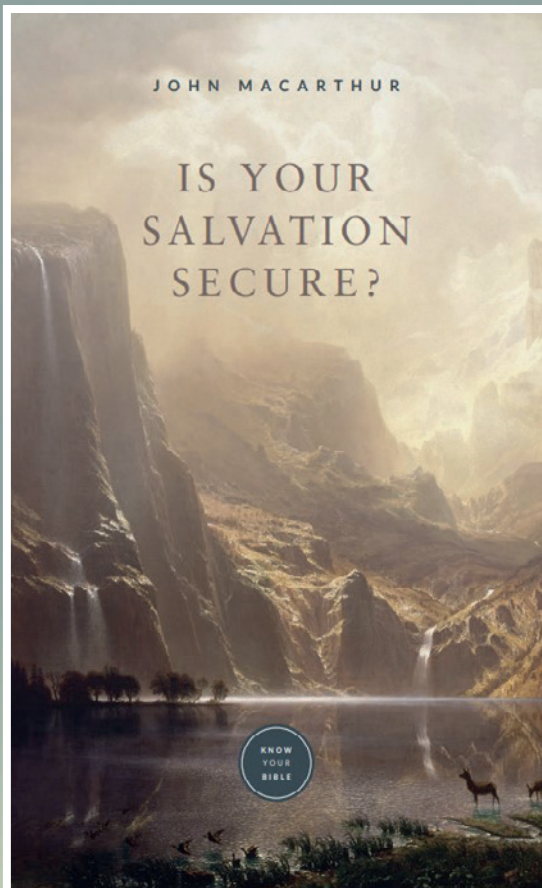
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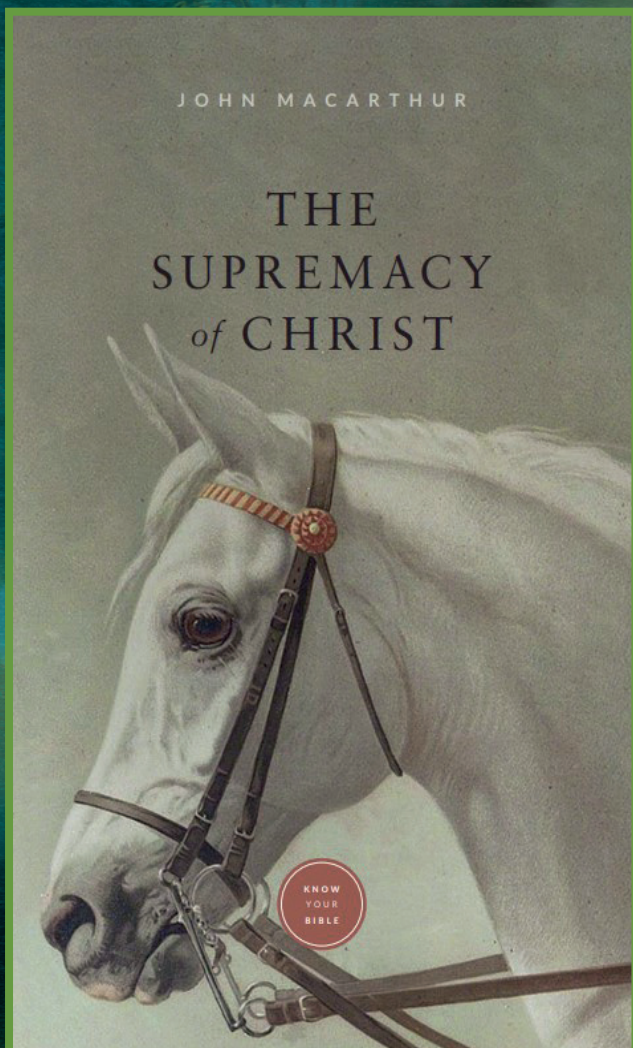
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