

Think on These Things

(Philippians 4:8)

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The Purpose-Driven Life: An Evaluation

Part II

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In my last paper I evaluated Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, focusing almost entirely on his use, or rather misuse, of Scripture. Far too often Warren plays fast and loose with the Word of God, and he does so in rather innovative ways that are going undetected by many. Let's continue to examine some examples of Warren's creative use of Scripture.

I Corinthians 2:7

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

Ephesians 1:11

A similar type of thing happens in the very next paragraph of the book. Warren makes a biblically defensible statement, "You must build your life on eternal truths, not pop psychology, success-motivation, or inspirational stories." Excellent! But rather than backing this truth with proper Scripture,

he decides to use a distorted paraphrase of Ephesians 1:11 found in *The Message* once again. It reads, *It's in Christ that we **find out who we are and what we are living for.** Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eyes on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.* Warren says that this quote gives us three insights into our purpose, the first of which is, "You discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ."

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

Jeremiah 29:11

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

Genesis 6:8

Chapter nine is devoted to the kind of person who makes God smile and is rooted in this *Living Bible* paraphrase of Genesis 6:8, *Noah was a pleasure to the Lord.* The *New King James* translates this verse, *Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.* Some other literal versions translate "grace" as "favor" and the Hebrew word can have that meaning. But when used of God, the word always means unmerited favor or grace. When Noah found grace, he was the recipient of undeserved Divine favor. He was not spared the flood because of his righteousness, but because of God's grace. By changing the word from "grace" to "pleasure," the *Living Bible* has turned the true meaning of the passage on its head. Now Noah is spared due to his goodness – he is the kind of guy that makes God smile – and you can be such a person too. But now grace is no longer grace; it has been transformed into a work that pleases God. This is not a minor error; it strikes at the root of the Christian faith. Ironically, Genesis 6:9, which tells us that *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time, and Noah walked with God,* could have been used to support Warren's chapter, so keep in mind our concern. We are not accusing Warren of being wrong in everything he is saying, but we are accusing him of distorting Scripture. He is undermining the Word of God by changing its meaning to suit his purposes. In this case the marvelous doctrine of grace takes the hit.

Job 22:21

Warren strains Scripture to interesting limits by using none other than Eliphaz as his spokesman. "The Bible is crystal clear about how you benefit when you fully surrender your life to God. First you experience peace" (p. 82). The proof-text is Job 22:21, *Stop quarreling with God! If you agree with him, you will have peace at last, and things will go well for you.* If you recall, this speech from Job's

friend is a promotion of works-righteousness which, along with Eliphaz's whole theology of living, will be condemned by God later in the book. To use it as a means of finding peace with God is an extremely careless use of Scripture.

Romans 6:17

In the same paragraph Warren also promises freedom if we surrender to God. He uses *The Message's* rendering of Romans 6:17: *Offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits.... [his] commands set you free to live openly in freedom!* It is true that we have been set free in Christ, but what kind of freedom is Paul offering? The NASB translates this verse: *But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.* Verse eighteen continues, *and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.* Warren does not mention that the freedom promised in Scripture is from sin, and that the believer becomes immediately the slave of another – righteousness. Nor is there any mention that this slavery transferal is **not** predicated upon a subsequent surrender on the part of the Christian, but rather is actually the definition of a Christian. When people come to Christ for salvation, their master is changed. They no longer owe any allegiance to sin for they have become the slave of God. Whether they live in fidelity to this new Master is another matter, but ownership has changed hands. This is the argument of Romans six, which is ignored by Warren, who forces it to say what God never intended.

Hebrews 12:1

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

Philippians 4:7

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

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

Page 24-- James 1:18

Pages 25, 30 – Isaiah 49:4

Page 104 – I Corinthians 14:16-17

Page 105 – Romans 12:1,2

Page 109 – Job 23: 8-10

Page 110 – Job 7:11

Page 219 – II Corinthians 3:18

Page 223 – Habakkuk 2:3

Page 232 – Mark 8:35

Pages 272-273 – I Corinthians 1:27

Pages 273 – II Corinthians 12:9-10

Summary

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

Southern View Chapel is an independent Bible church affiliated with the IFCA and dedicated to the careful, systematic, expository teaching of the Word of God. "Think on These Things Ministries" is the publishing ministry of Southern View Chapel. It focuses primarily on contemporary theological issues that face the church today.

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