

Promise Keepers

A Pastor's Perspective

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Promise Keepers: A Pastor's Perspective

Copyright 1998

First Printing: 1998 (3000 copies)

Published by Indian Hills Community Church

Systematically Teaching the Word

1000 South 84th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68510-4499

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INTRODUCTION

As the pastor at Indian Hills Community Church, I knew in the spring of 1994 that a decision needed to be made concerning the men's organization known as Promise Keepers. In particular, would our church become involved with this movement that was rapidly sweeping the Church? So, in May of 1994 I looked into the issue of Promise Keepers and, as a result, preached a message to our congregation. In this message I told our people that despite the good intentions of the leadership of Promise Keepers, the theological foundation of the movement was flawed, and I, as a pastor, could not recommend our church's involvement with this movement. Shortly after I preached this message, we published a booklet stating our position on Promise Keepers and our concerns with the movement. This work was called *Promise Keepers and the Rising Tide of Ecumenism*.

The reaction to our position on Promise Keepers in our community was mixed. Though some were supportive of our stand, many thought we were being unfair to Promise Keepers. Many could not understand why we would not participate in a movement that had, as its stated purpose, the desire to produce godly men. My concerns with Promise Keepers, however, were not with its stated purpose of producing godly men. That is my desire as a pastor, as well. My concerns stemmed more from *how* godliness should be pursued in the life of the Christian. It is not enough to have an honorable goal—we must use the proper biblical means to attain that goal. Despite the good intentions of men, God's work must be done God's way—in accordance with His plan as revealed in His Word.

My concerns with Promise Keepers are biblical and theological in nature. I want to make clear that I do not question the motives and sincerity of the leaders of Promise Keepers or anyone involved with the movement. Only the Lord can judge the motives and intentions

of men's hearts. Nor do I doubt that many involved with Promise Keepers are truly godly men and that men have been saved as a result of Promise Keepers gatherings. The Bible, however, tells us to "examine everything carefully," and to "hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This command certainly applies to an organization such as Promise Keepers that is having such a wide and profound impact upon so many men. Though we, as Christians, are not called to judge men's motives and intentions, the Bible does give us the right to examine their doctrine and their teachings. As a pastor, I take seriously the commands and warnings given to pastors and elders in Scripture. Titus 1:9 says we are to "exhort in sound doctrine" and to "refute those who contradict." Being a pastor means not only teaching the truth, it also means refuting those who promote error. Any group, including Promise Keepers, that claims to represent Jesus Christ must be held accountable in certain areas. First, they must preach a pure Gospel; and second, they must address man's spiritual growth from an accurate interpretation of God's Word. It is in these areas that I have serious concerns with Promise Keepers.

Since we made our statement in 1994, much has taken place with Promise Keepers. That is the reason for this update. As Promise Keepers has produced more literature and more rallies have taken place, we can see today even more clearly the direction of this organization and the influence it is having on the Church. My purpose in this work is to point out what I consider to be major theological problems with Promise Keepers. I do not want to stop there, however. From the positive side, I would also like to show from Scripture what God's plan for godliness is according to His Word. When we become familiar with the plan He has given us in His Word, we are less likely to fall for a man-made substitute.

As we begin this discussion, the following is the direction we will be taking: In chapter one we will look at the history, growth, purpose and direction of Promise Keepers. In chapter two we will look at the Promise Keepers' approach to godliness, especially as it relates to the "Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper." In chapter three we will compare the Promise Keepers' approach to godliness with the biblical plan. It is my intent to show in this section that true godliness is produced in the context of the local church where the Word of God is faithfully taught and people are exercising their spiritual

gifts for the good of the Body of Christ. Chapter four looks at the Promise Keepers' attempt at unity and the breaking down of denominational barriers. In this chapter we will examine the factors that have led to doctrinal compromise in the Church as well as Promise Keepers' involvement with Roman Catholics and Mormons. In chapter five we will examine some of the beliefs and teachings of the leaders of Promise Keepers and show the strong connection between Promise Keepers and the Vineyard movement.

CHAPTER ONE

What Is Promise Keepers?

Before we begin our evaluation of Promise Keepers, it is necessary to understand some basic history of the movement. The origin of Promise Keepers can be traced to March 20, 1990, when Bill McCartney (at that time, University of Colorado Head Football Coach) and his friend, Dave Wardell, were on a three-hour car ride to a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting in Pueblo, Colorado. During this trip, the idea of filling a stadium with Christian men first came up. Later in 1990, 72 men began to fast and pray about this idea of thousands of men coming together for the purpose of Christian discipleship.¹ The first Promise Keepers conference was held in Boulder, Colorado, in 1991 with 4200 men attending.

Growth

Since 1991 Promise Keepers has seen phenomenal growth:

- 1992: 22,000 men; University of Colorado's Folsom Field
- 1993: 50,000 men filled Folsom Field to capacity
- 1994: 278,600 men in several stadiums nationwide
- 1995: 727,342 men in thirteen stadiums nationwide
- 1996: 1.1 million men in twenty-two stadiums nationwide
- 1997: Nearly one million men attend "Stand in the Gap" rally in Washington, D.C.²

With many more rallies scheduled for 1998 and a focus that is going international, Promise Keepers continues to impact many men

in this country and around the world.

Structure

As for structure, Promise Keepers is a nonprofit organization governed by a 16-member board of directors and operated under the direction of CEO Bill McCartney and President Randy Phillips. Promise Keepers is headquartered in Denver, Colorado, and as of 1997, employed a full-time staff of 452 with an estimated budget of \$117 million.³

Mission and Vision

The stated mission of Promise Keepers is as follows: "Promise Keepers is a Christ-centered ministry dedicated to uniting men through vital relationships to become godly influences in their world."⁴ As for the vision of Promise Keepers:

Promise Keepers believe God wants us to be a spark in His hand to ignite a nationwide movement calling men to reconciliation, discipleship, and godliness. With God's grace and direction, Promise Keepers is seeking to fill stadiums in at least 50 major cities across the United States by the year 2000.⁵

The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper

The main purpose of Promise Keepers is to produce godly men. At the heart of this plan for producing godliness is a commitment to seven basic promises. One Promise Keepers publication states:

Promise Keepers (PK) is a Christian outreach to men. Through stadium conferences, educational seminars, resource materials, and local churches, PK encourages men to live godly lives and to keep seven basic promises of commitment to God, their families, and fellow man.⁶

Those "Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper"⁷ are as follows:

1. A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs

brothers to help him keep his promises.

3. A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.
4. A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection and biblical values.
5. A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources.
6. A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.
7. A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (see Mark 12:30-31) and the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19-20).

CHAPTER TWO

The Promise Keepers' Plan for Godliness

Since the keeping of “seven promises” is foundational to being “a Promise Keeper,” it is important to look at these promises and how Promise Keepers says they are to be carried out. I must admit that when studying these seven promises, I found myself in general agreement with most of them. In fact, most of these promises simply describe what should be true of every Christian. For example, Promise #1 states, “A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.” This simply describes a Christian and should characterize every believer. In fact, “Christian” could be used in place of “Promise Keeper” in most of these promises.

Do Men Need “Vital Relationships”?

I do disagree, however, with two of the promises— #2 and #6. Promise #2 states, “A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises.” In short, this statement tells us that godliness is linked to “vital relationships” with other men. I find this promise to be without biblical support. The only “vital relationship” necessary for a man according to Scripture is the woman God gave him to be his wife. The Lord has provided the perfect complement for a man, but it is not his brother—it is his

wife. The Bible does not say that a man must enter into “a vital relationship” with another man to be godly. This is not to say that male friendships have no place; but to say that a man must have intimate relationships with other men in order to be godly has no biblical warrant.

There are also problems with how Promise Keepers promotes these “vital relationships.” The following is a statement from one Promise Keepers publication:

We believe that vital relationships among men are the foundation for helping one another become promise keepers. We contend that this is best accomplished when a small group of men agree to pursue God—face to face, shoulder to shoulder, and back to back—and establish covenant relationships with one another. . . . In the context of covenant relationships, a man willingly grants other men the right to inquire about his relationship to God, his commitment to his family, his sexuality, and his financial dealings.⁸

According to this statement, men need to be in covenant relationships with other men who have the right to inquire about such things as “family,” “sexuality,” and “financial dealings.” The Bible, though, does not say that giving men the right to ask about these private matters is necessary for spiritual growth. Nor does it say that men must be accountable to other men in such personal areas to be godly. This is an example of going beyond what the Scripture says.

I also have concerns about Promise #6 which states, “A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.” We will speak more about this in chapter four in our section “Promise Keepers and Unity,” but passing over foundational doctrinal issues is not the proper approach to spiritual growth.

Are Seven Promises the Way to Godliness?

As mentioned, I do not disagree overall with most of the seven promises of a Promise Keeper. Most of them describe, essentially, what any Christian—male or female—should be. There is a problem, though, when Promise Keepers promotes these seven promises as a

standard for godliness. Some statements by Promise Keepers' leaders seem to suggest that being a godly man includes adhering to the seven promises of a Promise Keeper. For example, Bill McCartney says,

We start by committing our lives to Jesus Christ and becoming a new creation (see 2 Cor. 5:17). Then we make the kinds of commitments to growth embodied in the seven promises covered in this book, and we make them to other men who will hold us accountable and give us the benefit of their experience and wisdom. As we do this, our thoughts, words, decisions, and actions will change over time."⁹

Promise Keepers President Randy Phillips has stated,

These promises. . . are meant to guide us toward the life of Christ and to transform us within so that we might see transformation in our homes, among our friends, in our churches, and ultimately, in our nation.¹⁰

Another publication of Promise Keepers states the following:

Through stadium conferences, educational seminars, resource materials, and local churches, PK encourages men to live godly lives and to keep seven basic promises of commitment to God, their families, and fellow man.¹¹

This is an area where Christians must be careful. The Bible teaches that true godliness does not come from man-made rules or standards, no matter how wise they may appear. Paul dealt with this issue of man-made rules in his letter to the Colossians, where he addressed the legalists who were trying to impose extra-biblical regulations upon the Colossians:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!". . . in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? . . . These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement. . . but are of no value against fleshly indulgence (Col. 2:20-23).

The Colossians were told that they needed to do certain things

to be godly, but these commands did not come from Scripture. Rather, they were the “commandments and teachings of men.” Many of these commands seemed good. In fact, they had the “appearance of wisdom,” but as Paul would say, they “are no value against fleshly indulgence.” The principle of this passage is this—*man-made regulations do not produce spiritual maturity or help in fighting the flesh*. In the same way, godliness does not come through telling men to keep “seven promises.” The seven promises of a Promise Keeper sound dangerously similar to the regulations Paul condemned in his letter to the Colossians.

Paul also faced a similar situation with the Galatians. He wrote to them because they had fallen prey to the Judaizers, a group that was telling them they needed to keep the Mosaic Law and be circumcised. Paul told the Galatians:

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal. 3:1-3).

Paul scolded the Galatians for accepting the error of the Judaizers. The Galatians were trying to live out their Christian lives by doing the works of the Law. Paul shows how inconsistent that is. Since the Galatians were saved by the Spirit alone, why did they think they needed to live out their Christian lives by the works of the Law? They needed to abide by the same principle that saved them. Just as salvation is totally of the Holy Spirit apart from human effort, so, too, the living out of the Christian life must be according to the Holy Spirit and not according to fleshly efforts. One must grow the way one was saved. Paul would later tell the Galatians, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). The key to godly living is continual reliance upon the Holy Spirit, not adherence to the rules of men—and certainly not seven promises. With the “Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper” we see something very similar to the error of the Judaizers. Promise Keepers tells men to keep “seven promises” to be godly. They are preaching, in other words, an extra-biblical criterion for godliness—something the book of Galatians condemns.

Two Plans for Godliness?

In order to produce godly men, Promise Keepers has put together a plan that is specifically for men. There are seven promises for men, rallies for men, books for men and small groups for men. As I read the New Testament, though, I do not see such an emphasis on getting people of the same sex together outside of the local church. Paul never says, "What you need to do is get the men together." Or, "Get the women together." He does not say, "Here is the plan the men must follow." Rather, God's plan for godliness is the same for all people regardless of sex. As Galatians 3:28 states, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is *neither male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (emphasis mine). The Bible does indicate that there are role distinctions between men and women in the Church, but there are not separate plans for men and women in regard to spiritual growth.

The Age of Shortcuts

Though most of the seven promises of a Promise Keeper are not inherently wrong, telling men to keep them is not the right way to godliness. Rather than coming from Scripture, these promises are more in line with the world's way of dealing with problems. We live in an age of shortcuts. There are twelve-step programs for alcoholics, seven-step programs for dealing with demons¹² and now we have seven promises for becoming godly. But what does this say about our God? Did God give His Word in a time when He did not know how to simplify things? There are no shortcuts to victory over sin and living the Christian life. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." "Walk," is in the present tense. That means we must continually, day by day, moment by moment, live according to the Spirit. Living for God is a lifelong battle. In fact we must take up the armor of God that consists of truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation, the Word of God and prayer (see Eph. 6:10-20).

Though Promise Keepers has a noble goal—to produce godly men—good intentions are not enough. God not only has ordained the ends, which in this case is godliness, He also has ordained the means to that end. And what are those means? As we shall see in the next section, those means include the functioning of the local

church where the Word of God is taught in its purity and where believers function together as the body of Christ ministering to one another.

CHAPTER THREE

God's Plan for Godliness: The Local Church

The Church comes into trouble with an issue such as Promise Keepers when it loses the anchors of sound doctrine and theology. That is why it is so important to know the Word of God. We must have a starting point for evaluation as we look at Promise Keepers. That starting point must be the biblical doctrine of the Church. We must look at what God has called the Church to be. The more we understand what God intends the Church to be, the better we are able to determine the validity of movements such as Promise Keepers. As we will see, God has already laid out a plan for growing in godliness. It is a plan that works for men and women alike. It is a plan centered in the local church.

Universal and Local Church

The Church of Jesus Christ was born on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and includes all those who have trusted in Christ alone for their salvation. Yet, in the New Testament, the Church has two emphases.

First, there is what we call the “universal” or “invisible” Church, comprised of all true believers in Christ. It includes all those who are related to Christ by faith through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 4:4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13). All believers from around

the world make up this universal aspect of the Church. The universal Church is a spiritual entity and has no physical manifestation of its own.

Second, the New Testament also refers to what is called the “local church” or “local churches.” A local church consists of people who are believers in Jesus Christ who meet together in a local or a specific place. Local churches are not only related spiritually to Christ, but also have a physical and geographical identity. The seven churches to which John wrote in Revelation were local churches. He wrote to the churches at Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and so on. These churches, though all related to each other by faith in Christ, were each distinct entities and were addressed as such. In the same way, churches today, consisting of true believers, are local churches. If one wants to know what the Church of Jesus Christ is like, he can visit a local body of believers. Whenever we attend a local church, made up of individuals who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we are seeing the body of Christ. There is no other place to go to see the Church as it is presented in the New Testament. The only physical representation of the universal Church is the local church.

There is confusion today, though, over how the ministry of the Church is to be carried out. But the Bible is clear on this issue. Put simply, God’s plan for ministry in this age is centered in the local church. Though the New Testament refers to the two dimensions of Christ’s Church—universal and local—the emphasis is not equal. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, is used 114 times in the New Testament. More than 90 times it refers specifically to the local church.¹³ Statistics in and of themselves do not prove anything, but this does show us the importance of the local church in the New Testament. The local church, not the universal Church, is emphasized in Scripture. The local church is the expression in the world today of the universal Church. Thus, whenever a body of believers meets together as a church, we can rightly call them the Church of Jesus Christ. This gathering is not all there is of Jesus’ Church, but it is still Christ’s Church. Paul, when addressing the Ephesian elders from Miletus in Acts 20, told these men “to shepherd the church of God.” Though the church at Ephesus was not all there was to Christ’s Church, they could be rightly called “the church of God.”

Why is this important? One reason is that in Christianity today, the universal Church, not the local church, has become the dominant emphasis. We can see this with the development of parachurch ministries. Parachurch organizations, of which Promise Keepers would be included, are groups that carry out Christian ministry that is not rooted in a local church. These organizations minister, but they are not churches in the biblical sense. Since the 1940s there has been an explosion of these parachurch ministries. It is not my intent to critique the parachurch movement. I do believe, however, that parachurch groups, on the whole, have moved into and blurred what is the responsibility of the local church. God's plan, as given in Scripture, is for the local church to carry out the ministry. Today, though, the local church is often viewed as weak and ineffective. For that reason, many are drawn to larger movements—those that have numbers, resources and power. These groups often attract the best and the brightest. They are appealing because of their numbers, resources and the extent of their ministries. The smaller local churches with not nearly the specialized resources find it hard to compete.

Numbers and great resources, however, are not the criteria for an effective ministry. An effective ministry takes place when it is done according to God's plan—whether it is with a church of 50 or 5000. God's work is rooted in His sovereignty and on the faithfulness of His people in carrying out the ministry of the Word He has given them to proclaim.

Ephesians 4:11-16

As believers, we do not have to wonder how the work of the ministry should be carried out today. Ephesians 4:11-16 is foundational to understanding how Christians are to grow to spiritual maturity in this age. It is in this text that God specifically addresses the issues of true spiritual growth and unity.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11).

As Paul details God's plan for spiritual growth, he says that gifted men, given by Christ, will be a part of the process. These are men that He gives to the Church based on His victorious resurrection and ascension to heaven (Eph. 4:8-10). The "apostles and proph-

ets” were the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20). Though we do not have apostles and prophets today, we still benefit from the foundation they laid—including the New Testament writings that are the basis for our instruction. “Evangelists” are those who preach the Gospel to those who do not know Christ. As evangelists share Christ, people are saved and added to the Church. “Pastors and teachers” lead and teach the people the Word of God. The next verse tells us what these gifted men accomplish in the church:

For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

This verse shows the results of the ministries of these gifted men. They equip the people of God for service. The word “equip” means “to make ready.” Thus, as people in a local church are taught the Word, they become ready to do the work of the ministry. God does not give gifted men to the church so they can do all the ministry; He gives them so they can show the church *how* to do the work of the ministry. A second purpose is also given: “to the building up of the body of Christ.” As people learn from gifted evangelists, pastors and teachers, the church body will be built up—it will grow in godliness.

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Many today talk about unity. But how is true unity accomplished? Is it by setting aside doctrinal differences? According to this verse, unity is accomplished in the context of the church proclaiming the Word of God. The more people learn and submit themselves to the truths of Scripture, the more there will be true unity. So how can we have more unity? Teach people the pure Word of God. This verse clearly shows that there is a vital connection between truth and unity. We cannot have true unity without the truth. Additionally, since we are part of the body of Christ, we will grow in our knowledge of Christ—and we will become more like Him.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming (Eph. 4:14).

As people in the church learn the Word, they will not fall prey to false teachings and deception. The only way a person can avoid being tossed about by “every wind of doctrine” is to know the truth. That is why the church is to be “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). This truth involves the whole counsel of God, including instruction for salvation and godly living. That is why Peter commands us, “like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).

Paul goes on to say,

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4:15-16).

Here we see that speaking the truth is linked with spiritual growth. As we proclaim the truth in love, we will mature in all areas in Christ. As we know and live the truth, we will see the “growth of the body.”

But what if the church is not doing its responsibility? Many claim we need groups like Promise Keepers because the church is not doing its job. The churches in the early church era, however, were not always doing well, either. Paul had to correct the Corinthians and the Colossians and strongly rebuke the Galatians. Many of the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation were struggling and not doing their jobs either. But did Paul and Jesus come up with another option to the church? Did they say, “I know the church is not doing what it should, let’s try a better plan?” The answer is a resounding “no.” Likewise, we do not have the right to decide that we have a better plan. Men cannot function apart from the local body of believers and expect to grow spiritually. At first there may be an appearance of godliness, but often it will not be biblical godliness.

Promise Keepers and the Local Church

I realize that many see Promise Keepers as working in harmony with and not against the local church. Promise #5 even states, “A

Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources." However, almost every parachurch organization has made that claim. Nearly all parachurch organizations say they want to help the local church, but that is hardly the case. The simple truth, though, is all time, money and resources poured into Promise Keepers are time, money and resources that were not given to the local church. One evaluator of Promise Keepers stated:

One risk is that a strong PK presence in the local church may in some situations compete with the church rather than complement it as PK makes demands on men's time and money through small groups and other initiatives.¹⁴

I have yet to meet a person who can be passionately and completely committed to two spiritual ministries. He may be involved with two ministries, but one will consume his life and one will not. Too often, though, the passion is for the parachurch activity, not the local church.

CHAPTER FOUR

Promise Keepers and Unity

We live in a day where there is great emphasis on “unity” and bringing together professing Christians regardless of denomination and beliefs. The hope is that Christians will set aside their doctrinal differences and focus instead on what they agree about. The unity called for includes all stripes of Protestants and even Roman Catholics. We clearly see this emphasis on unity in the March 1994 document entitled, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*,¹⁵ which is strongly supported by Promise Keepers. In this document, leading Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics agreed to downplay doctrinal differences and stress points of agreement for the sake of unity in political and social activity. The document even went so far as to say, “Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.”¹⁶ This document, though, passed over the most important issue of “What makes a Christian?” In a similar way, Promise Keepers also stresses unity by joining those of different beliefs. For example, Promise #6 of “The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper” reads,

A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and *denominational* barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity¹⁷ (emphasis mine).

The following are other examples showing Promise Keepers’ emphasis on unity:

We believe that we have a God-given mission to unite men

who are separated by race, geography, culture, denomination, and economics.¹⁸

We are dedicated, then, to addressing the division that has separated the Body of Christ for too long. We are committed to call men to reconcile in Christ, to live as one.¹⁹

This reaching beyond “denominational barriers,” as we will see, has extended to Protestants, Roman Catholics and even Mormons.

Factors Leading to Compromise

This stress for unity did not start with Promise Keepers, of course. Certain issues and movements have come before the Church over several years that have blurred the biblical issues and have brought a compromising spirit. An understanding of these issues will help us understand why Promise Keepers has been so successful in unifying people of various beliefs. These issues include the Charismatic movement, the influence of psychology on the Church, and the emphasis on man-centered methods. All of these helped pave the way for the ecumenical success Promise Keepers is experiencing.

The Charismatic Movement

The first of these ecumenical influences is the Charismatic movement that has swept the Church this century. The Charismatic movement has been very effective in uniting those otherwise separated by doctrinal beliefs and convictions. With this movement, doctrinal differences and disagreements that once caused separation are no longer stressed. The important issue was no longer doctrine but a common experience in the Holy Spirit. A person could become a Charismatic and be united with other Charismatics, whether he or she were Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Roman Catholic or any other religious group.

I saw the beginnings of this in the late 1970s when I had the opportunity to visit Melodyland in Southern California, which, at that time, was a major center for the Charismatic movement in the United States. I had the chance to speak with one of the leaders of Melodyland—a man who at that time had written a major theological

book from a Charismatic perspective. As he was telling me about their School of Theology, he pointed out how the professors at his school came from a wide variety of denominations and beliefs. I asked him, "There is obviously strong theological differences between the men on your staff; what gives unity to your school when there is so much diversity?" His answer was very significant. He said, "We all have had a common experience in the Holy Spirit." The unifying factor in this school was not common *beliefs* but common *experiences*. And with his answer it was clear—experience overrules doctrine.

As the Charismatic movement became more prominent in the Church, doctrine became secondary to common experiences in the Holy Spirit. Over time, this created an attitude that said, "Since we have all had the same experience, let's not be divisive about theology."

Psychology

The influence of psychology on the Church has also multiplied this compromising spirit. Most of the books dealing with Christian living in today's Christian bookstores are not written by theologians or Bible teachers—they are written by the "Christian psychologists." Many of the prime spots on Christian radio no longer belong to the Bible teachers but to the Christian psychologists. Most Christians, though, do not know what these leading Christian psychologists believe regarding doctrine, nor which denomination or church they belong to. Most believers are satisfied to know only that the psychologists they read and hear on the radio are professing Christians and believe the Bible. These psychologists are also able to unify Christians because their psychological teachings are transdoctrinal. In other words—their teachings do not come from the Bible. Since their teachings do not come from Scripture, there is no cause for division.

The influence of psychology on the Church has also brought the common but dangerous belief that, "all truth is God's truth." With this thinking, the discoveries of psychology, which supposedly are "truth," are thought to be useful in helping Christians with their problems. Thus, we can use truth, wherever it is found, whether in psychology or the Bible to address people's needs. There is a problem with this, however. Though it is true that all truth does come

from God, it is not correct that all truth, in this case the findings of psychology, can properly be used in the areas of salvation and Christian living. Only the Bible, as God's revealed truth, properly addresses the spiritual needs of men. The experiential and often changing discoveries of psychology are wholly different from God's revealed, absolute and never changing truth. The Bible alone is "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If men needed the findings of psychology to be complete, the Scripture would not be sufficient. But it is. Many, though, have taken the findings of secular psychology and have put them on the same level as God's Word. This has had a devastating impact on the Church.

Man-centered methods

Another compromising factor is the man-centered approach to reaching people that we see in many churches today. I have often heard the statement, "The message does not change, but the methods do." And there is an element of truth in that statement. For example, at Indian Hills Community Church, I use a public address system. Paul did not have a public address system when he preached. So that is a change. But this idea of "changing methods" has opened the Church up to all sorts of unbiblical approaches to the ministry of the Word. Today we have "Seeker Services" where churches have gone into their communities to find out what the average person in the neighborhood wants in a church. Then a church is structured to grant what the people want. What is the result? A man-centered church. Naturally, people do not want to hear about sin, judgment or hell—so the church does not teach these things. People want more entertainment—so the church gives them more entertainment. Put simply, people want a church built around them, not God.²⁰ If teaching doctrine is not popular with the people, as is certainly true today, then that is dropped as well.

How, then, should we view this issue of message and methods? Colossians 1:28 states, "And we proclaim Him [Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ." The responsibility of the Church is to proclaim Christ. We do this by proclaiming the Word of God that reveals Him. The method for doing this is

given—by admonishing and teaching every man. “Admonishing” stresses the negative side; “teaching” emphasizes the positive side of proclaiming Christ. Thus Christ is the subject; proclamation through admonishing and teaching is the method. The manner of doing this is through “labor” and “striving” (Colossians 1:29). Proclaiming Christ may take different forms. We may give out tapes or printed material, but we are still to proclaim Him. That must never change.

With the influence of the Charismatic movement, psychology and man-centered methods, there is wave after wave of pressure to downplay doctrine and emphasize points of agreement. We are told, “let’s not emphasize doctrine; let’s not emphasize the details of the Word.” Over time we begin to wear down. We start to think that maybe what we are hearing is right. Since we say we “agree” about Christ, do we have to worry about the details? There is great danger, however, when we say we are going to set aside the Bible and doctrine for the sake of unity, even when the purpose is to show a united front on moral, social and political issues. Those things divert us from the Word of God.

What Does Being “One” Mean?

One verse commonly used to support ecumenical unity is John 17:22. I have had people call me on the phone and write me letters quoting this verse to show me that God wants the kind of unity Promise Keepers is promoting. In this verse, Jesus prays to the Father, “that they may be one, just as We are one.” But does this verse teach a unity that is based on ignoring doctrinal differences and reaching beyond denominational barriers? Is this a call to set aside biblical convictions so we can get together with men of various beliefs? The answer is “No.” In fact, this verse is not speaking about experiential unity at all. This prayer of Jesus was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and united Jewish and Gentile believers together in one body. As 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greek . . .” (See also Ephesians 2:13-14 and 3:6). The unity Jesus prayed for when He prayed that “they may be one” is *now* shared by all who believe the truth and are part of His body. Certainly, as members of His body—the Church—we have a responsibility to preserve the unity

of the Spirit in the bond of peace (see Ephesians 4:3), but John 17:22 does not support the idea of setting aside doctrinal differences to advance human unity. Nor should we be trying to cause something that God has already accomplished.

Today, we want to emphasize love and unity, but we separate it from the context of truth. In the same chapter we just looked at, Jesus also prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). True unity does not exist without truth. That is why the Promise Keepers' approach to unity will not produce true biblical unity. In fact, there are so many men of differing denominations and beliefs within Promise Keepers that the movement would be torn apart if Promise Keepers tried to work through the Scripture with any kind of depth.

"It's the Differences That Count!"

With this outcry for unity we see today, there is much emphasis on stressing points of agreement. People want to talk about what they agree on even when serious theological differences exist. When I was a student at Philadelphia College of the Bible, however, I learned an important lesson from one of my professors, who at that time also had a ministry to Roman Catholics in Philadelphia. He said, "You must remember, that when you witness to Roman Catholics, it is not what you *agree* on that is significant; it is what you *disagree* on." That is a truth that has been often abandoned in the Church. When it comes to the issue of the Gospel, it is what we disagree on that matters. I may agree with Roman Catholics that Jesus is God and that He rose from the dead. But the disagreements I have with them over the Gospel are far more important. The fact that I believe salvation is by faith alone apart from works and that Catholics link salvation to baptism and the sacraments makes what we agree on insignificant. The Judaizers of Paul's day had much in common with the Apostle Paul. In fact, they probably had more points of agreement with Paul than they had areas of disagreement. But even though they professed faith in Christ, Paul labeled their teaching as a "different gospel" (Galatians 1:6). To Paul it was the differences he had with the Judaizers that mattered. The Church has lost sight of that today. Today we just want to get everyone together regardless of beliefs.

I once read a newspaper article in the local newspaper that stressed the importance of church, family, friends and values. It was called "Church Helps Strengthen Families." Part of this article read: "In a world filled with hate, drugs, AIDS, suicide, and a host of other ills, few would deny that love, trust, and strong family bonds are virtues worth working toward." This church was known for its strong family emphasis and for providing families with options and programs that will help them spend time together and cultivate friendships. They encouraged activities that involved the whole family, such as attending church together and choosing television programs and movies carefully. As I read this article, I found myself agreeing with much of what was said. The only problem was that the church involved with promoting these programs was the Mormon Church. I agree with the Mormons that church, family, friends and values are important, but that is not enough for me to unite with them. In spite of all the areas of agreement, there are essential doctrinal differences that would not allow me to unify with Mormons on spiritual matters. The disagreements I have with the Mormons are what really matter. We cannot look for things we agree about while ignoring major areas of disagreement.

Now Why Are We Unified?

I once read a quotation from a man who attended a Promise Keepers rally:

I . . . experienced the true oneness among brethren of different faiths, races, and colors, and I also experienced an appreciation of diversity.²¹

That statement should be cause for concern, especially the claim of having oneness with those of "different faiths." What is happening is that Promise Keepers has created an environment where feelings and emotions have been brought to the fore. But the reality of that "oneness" is not based on any objective standard of truth. For example, I could sit in a room and watch a movie with other people and share a common experience with them. Depending on the program, we may cry or laugh together. In a sense we may have oneness, but that is not a oneness produced by the Spirit of God. True oneness does not come from subjective experiences but from the body of truth—the Scripture—that God has given us. How can we

say we have true oneness with those of different faiths? What is that unity based on?

I am not against conferences and gatherings where people with common commitments and beliefs come together. At Indian Hills we often have men from other ministries come to preach or lead a conference. But as a pastor, I must be true to my understanding of Scripture, and I cannot set that aside. Sometimes that means we are not able to join in ministry with others who believe differently than we do. That does not mean that those people are not saved or are not being used by the Lord; but it does often mean that we could not be joined together in ministry. Now, our desire should not be like the “fighting fundies” of old who battled over the length of hair on men or the style of clothes women should wear. We may have convictions on those things, but those are not issues the Bible specifically addresses, and there is latitude for disagreement on those areas. But when I come to the conviction that the Bible teaches something, I am responsible to hold true to that conviction.

Promise Keepers and Roman Catholics

As we have seen, Promise Keepers makes very clear in its official publications that they are trying to break down denominational barriers. This effort for unification obviously has been extended to include groups who traditionally have been considered beyond the bounds of biblical Christianity, including Roman Catholics. According to one Catholic publication, Promise Keepers estimated that 70,000 of the 720,000 men who attended its 13 rallies in 1995 were Roman Catholic.²² Of the nearly 1,000,000 men who attended the October 4, 1997, “Stand in the Gap” rally in Washington, five percent were estimated to be Catholics.²³ This inclusion of Catholics into Promise Keepers, however, is not primarily for evangelism. In fact, leading Roman Catholics do not even view Promise Keepers as a threat to the Catholic Church. Another Catholic publication quoted one Catholic priest’s view of Promise Keepers:

While noting the evangelical roots of the programme [Promise Keepers], Father Van Liefde says there is no doctrinal issue which should cause concern to the Catholic Church. . . . There is no attempt at proselytising or drawing men away from their faith to another church.²⁴

It is significant that a Roman Catholic leader can evaluate Promise Keepers and conclude that “there is no doctrinal issue which should cause concern to the Catholic.” One must ask, therefore, how clear the truth is being presented when a Roman Catholic priest can safely declare that Catholics do not have to worry about doctrinal issues or being evangelized at Promise Keepers gatherings?

One argument often heard in favor of Roman Catholics being involved with Promise Keepers is this: “It is good for Catholics to be invited to Promise Keepers so they can hear the Gospel and be saved.” I would certainly agree that Roman Catholics should be welcomed to hear the Gospel. But does the gospel of Promise Keepers stand in contrast to the gospel of Rome? Is the Gospel clear enough for Catholics to understand and be saved? There are several reasons to believe it is not.

First, the gospel of Promise Keepers does not encourage Roman Catholics to flee their works-oriented religious system. One denomination that has openly backed Promise Keepers has stated the following:

They [Roman Catholics] are not asked to leave the Catholic Church, but are asked to go back and practice biblical Christianity as members of their parish.²⁵

Remember that the Protestant Reformation began over the issue of the Gospel. When Rome said, “Salvation includes adherence to the Roman Catholic Church and its sacraments,” the Reformers said, “Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.” But now these differences do not seem to matter much to Promise Keepers. Catholics “are not asked to leave the Catholic Church” but now are “asked to go back and practice biblical Christianity as members of their parish.” This view is supported by Promise Keepers’ founder Bill McCartney who says, “Promise Keepers doesn’t care if you’re Catholic. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God?”²⁶

Second, Promise Keepers includes Roman Catholics as part of their leadership team. They have appointed Michael Timmis, a Roman Catholic, to the board of Promise Keepers.²⁷ Jim Berlucchi, a Catholic evangelist, has spoken at several Promise Keepers rallies. Why would Catholics believe there is a need to leave their religious system when some of the Promise Keepers leaders are also Roman Catholics?

Third, Promise Keepers has held meetings at Roman Catholic churches. For example, on March 16, 1996, a Promise Keepers Evangelism Training Session was held at Queen of Apostles Catholic Church in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The featured speaker was Dave Wardell, co-founder of Promise Keepers. What does this say about the Promise Keepers' view of Roman Catholicism when they hold their meetings in Catholic churches?

Promise Keepers has also revised the wording from its original statement of faith, removing language that would exclude the Catholic view of salvation. Originally, in the Promise Keepers' statement of faith, statement #5 included the traditional Protestant stance "That alienation [from God] can be removed only by accepting, through *faith alone*, God's gift of salvation, which was made possible by Christ's death" (emphasis mine). After several objections, though, by Catholics, Promise Keepers removed the "alone" after "faith." Statement #5 now says,

We believe that man was created in the image of God, but because of sin, was alienated from God. Only through *faith*, trusting in Christ alone for salvation which was made possible by His death and resurrection, can that alienation be removed (emphasis mine).

"Faith alone," the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation, was changed to "faith," to please the Roman Catholics involved in Promise Keepers. Roman Catholics are comfortable with this change because while they believe that faith is important, they do not believe salvation is *only* by faith. To Catholics, salvation comes by *faith plus* the sacraments and adherence to the Roman Catholic church's teachings and traditions—or in other words, faith plus works.

Also, as mentioned earlier, Promise Keepers has boldly endorsed the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* document which clearly states that Catholics and Evangelicals are "brothers and sisters in Christ." No doubt exists that Roman Catholics are welcomed with Promise Keepers, not for evangelism, but for inclusion as "brothers and sisters in Christ."

The Judaizer Error Revisited

By embracing Roman Catholics, Promise Keepers has confused the message of the true Gospel of Christ. Some may think this is theological nit-picking and may say the differences between Protestants and Catholics are not that important. The Bible, however, clearly teaches that salvation is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:21-25). The Roman Catholic Church denies salvation by faith alone. In fact, official church documents pronounce a curse on those who say that salvation is by faith alone and not by works:

If anyone says that the faith which justifies is nothing else but trust in the divine mercy, which pardons sins because of Christ; or that it is that trust alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema (Council of Trent).²⁸

According to official Roman Catholic dogma, which has never been revoked, those who believe that salvation is by "faith alone" are "anathema" which means "cursed."

Paul took this issue of the purity of the Gospel seriously. He soundly rebuked the Galatians for accepting the Judaizers who added works to the Gospel, thus perverting it. The Judaizers were Jews who said believing in Christ was necessary for salvation but that circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law were also necessary to be saved. Thus, they added works to the Gospel. Now, Paul probably had more in agreement with the Judaizers than differences. In fact, Paul probably had more points of agreement with them than he would have had with most people of the Roman Empire of his time. He also had more in common with the Judaizers than he did with the average Roman who was involved with a prostitute as part of his religion or was worshiping the Roman emperor as a god. Paul could have said, "We need to get together with the Judaizers. After all, they believe the Old Testament is the Word of God; they claim one has to believe in Christ to be saved. We have more in common with them than the rest of society." Though all those things may have been true, he realized that his disagreements with the Judaizers over the Gospel were more important. Notice the rebuke he had for the Galatians who had accepted the false teachings of the Judaizers:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called

you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

This is one of the strongest rebukes in the entire Bible. Paul was “amazed” that they would associate with those who advocated a “different gospel.” The word “different” means “another of a different kind.” This false gospel of the Judaizers was not similar to Paul’s Gospel—it was totally different—it was a false gospel. Paul did not care about any similarities he may have had with the Judaizers. Their gospel was not related to his in any way. In fact, he twice pronounced a curse on those who espouse a different gospel. That is how serious the matter of the Gospel is.

Roman Catholicism consistently teaches that works contribute to salvation. If Roman Catholics are comfortable with Promise Keepers—and they are—what does this say about the Gospel message being proclaimed with Promise Keepers? As one evaluator said, “Is the fastest growing movement in America led by men who won’t, or can’t, define what the term ‘Christian’ means?”²⁹

Promise Keepers and Mormons

The Roman Catholic Church is not the only group outside of biblical Christianity that is comfortable in sending their people to Promise Keepers. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Mormon stake president Chip Rawlings as saying, “The movement’s ‘Seven Promises’ are like something straight out of the men’s priesthood manual for the church.” This should show that keeping the “Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper” does not necessarily make a man a godly man. Mormons can hold to these seven promises, yet Mormons are not godly men in the biblical sense. One must be truly born again to be godly. Certainly in the case of Mormons, we have “Promise Keepers” who are not saved. Rawlings also indicated that several Mormon leaders would be attending the then upcoming Los Angeles Promise Keepers convention.³⁰ Not only do Mormons not see Promise

Keepers as contrary to Mormonism, some Promise Keepers literature is carried in official Mormon bookstores. I once received a letter from a couple that said,

We went into the Desert Book Store (which is the main Mormon publisher) near Temple Square and we could not believe our eyes. . . . We saw the Promise Keepers handbook *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*. We were quite surprised by this—the Promise Keepers handbook at the Mormon headquarters.

The Bible is clear that Christians are not to be joined with unbelievers. Paul said, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). While Promise Keepers includes groups who hold to false gospels, one must wonder whether we are seeing true unity or great compromise on the most important issue of all.

CHAPTER FIVE

Promise Keepers' Leadership

One important factor in evaluating any movement is the doctrine and teaching of its leaders. In this area of qualified leadership, I have serious reservations about Promise Keepers. I must say up front that my concerns with those leading Promise Keepers comes from their stated convictions and beliefs. I do not doubt the salvation or the integrity of these men, and I do not question that many of them are godly men who sincerely love the Lord Jesus Christ. But I do have serious concerns about the doctrine of these leaders who have such a great impact on such a large number of men.

The CEO of Promise Keepers, Bill McCartney, is a former Roman Catholic who switched over to the Vineyard movement. McCartney admits that the significant spiritual influences in his life include Catholic apologist Ralph Martin and the teachings of the Vineyard.³¹ Bill McCartney, who never really renounced his Catholic beliefs, is sympathetic to Catholic doctrine and often claims God speaks to him directly. At Promise Keepers rallies he often speaks as a man who has received direct revelation from God. McCartney was a successful football coach, but is this man fit to be a spiritual leader?

James Ryle, who is Bill McCartney's pastor at Boulder Valley Vineyard and a member of the Promise Keepers' board of directors, also believes God speaks directly to him with dreams and visions. Ryle's book, *Hippo in the Garden*, chronicles many of these supposed revelations from God. In his book, Ryle shares one example when

God supposedly revealed to him the failures and successes of the Colorado Buffaloes football team, including omens through the horn of the Colorado Buffalo mascot, Ralphie.³² This is just one example of many incredible and absurd accounts given by Ryle in his book.

In November 1990 at a Vineyard Harvest Conference in Denver, Ryle made the following statement concerning the “Beatles” and the Holy Spirit:

The Lord appointed me as a lookout and shown me some things that I want to show you. . . The Lord spoke to me and said, “What you saw in the Beatles—the gifting and the sound that they had—was from me . . . It was my purpose to bring forth through music a worldwide revival that would usher in the move of my Spirit in bringing men and women to Christ.”³³

According to Ryle, the Lord gave the Beatles an anointing to bring in worldwide revival. But according to Ryle, “The four lads . . . went AWOL and did not serve my army.”³⁴ Now, I grew up in the era of the Beatles, but never did I connect their “beatin’ it out” on Ed Sullivan with God’s plan for worldwide revival. Yet here is a leader in Promise Keepers who claims God speaks to him concerning football games and the Beatles. Is a man who believes these things qualified to be a leader of millions of Christian men?

Randy Phillips, the president of Promise Keepers, is also associated with the Vineyard movement and spoke at Robert Schuller’s 1994 International Men’s Conference. Robert Schuller’s ministry, however, has nothing to do with biblical Christianity.³⁵

The influence of the Vineyard and Charismatic leaders in Promise Keepers is cause for great concern. The Vineyard movement is known for its subjective and unsound theology that includes bizarre visions, dreams and other revelations. The examples given are just samples of the many incredible and sometimes bizarre teachings of this movement.³⁶ McCartney, Ryle and Phillips, three foundational leaders of Promise Keepers, are all associated with the Vineyard. One magazine stated the following:

Alternatively, the Vineyard movement and its charismatic orientation has a commanding influence on PK. McCartney; his pastor, James Ryle; and PK president Randy Phillips are all part of the Vineyard movement. Indeed, the wellsprings of PK’s

approach to ecclesiastical and theological issues come in part from its leaders' association with the Vineyard, brought to prominence by author and pastor John Wimber.³⁷

Promise Keepers also has many other leaders and speakers who are not characterized by sound doctrine. Well-known Charismatic and Promise Keepers leader, Jack Hayford, had this to say about the Lord's Supper in his book, *Setting a Sure Foundation*:

Whether your tradition celebrates it as Communion, Eucharist, the Mass, or the Lord's Supper, we are called to this centerpiece of Christian worship.³⁸

But does the Lord's Supper, as given in Scripture, have anything to do with the Roman Catholic mass that sees Christ's sacrifice as so incomplete that He must be offered repeatedly as Roman Catholicism dogmatically teaches? I once received a call from a pastor on the East Coast who was considering taking some men in his church to a Promise Keepers gathering. Before he went, though, he saw an advertisement for the communion service that Promise Keepers would hold at the meeting. When he called Promise Keepers, they told him that the service would be in line with Jack Hayford's view that the communion service was whatever you wanted it to be—including the mass for Catholics. When he called me, he told me that never again would he consider taking his men to a place where such a compromise of the truth was taking place.

What About the Good That Is Done?

I have had people tell me that they have heard good messages proclaimed at Promise Keepers. Granted, not every speaker at Promise Keepers rallies is associated with the Vineyard movement, and not all the speakers say unbiblical things. Many messages have been sound and the Gospel presented. I am concerned, though, with the mix. One man can get up in front of the men and speak a good, biblical message. Another speaker, however, will get up and his message will be laced with psychology. Yet another speaker will get up and talk about his dreams, visions and direct revelations the Lord has given him. How much of a mix does it take to become dangerous? If you took a gallon of pure milk, for example, and added a drop of cyanide poison, what would the result be? The result would

not be 99% pure milk—the result would be poisoned milk! One of the Devil's greatest deceptions is to combine truth with error. Likewise, if you had a plate of food where 90% of the food was good and 10% was spoiled, you probably would not root around trying to separate the good from the bad. Why should we do the same when it comes to biblical teaching?

When the leaders of our church recommended that our people not become associated with Promise Keepers, this issue of qualified leadership was an important factor. One qualification of leadership in the church is sound teaching (see Titus 1:9). The leadership of Promise Keepers, though, does not promote sound doctrine. Why would any pastor who is charged to preach the pure milk of the Word and shepherd the church of God, send his men to meetings where there will be a mix of good and bad teaching? As a pastor I could not, with good conscience, recommend that the people of our church go where they would be exposed to unsound teaching.

There are accounts of men who have gone to Promise Keepers and, as a result, have been saved and helped. We should praise God for any ministry of the Word that has taken place and for those who have truly been saved. Obviously good things have happened with Promise Keepers or they would not be affecting us the way they are. We must be careful, though, that we do not fall into the trap of thinking “the end justifies the means.” My mother was saved under Kathryn Kuhlman's ministry. Kathryn Kuhlman, however, was a faith healer whose doctrine and practices were unbiblical. Because of my mother's being saved, my dad and I eventually believed in Jesus Christ. Our salvation, though, did not justify Kathryn Kuhlman's ministry. Even today we see people saved who sit under the teachers in the Prosperity Movement (also known as the Health and Wealth Movement). The salvations that take place do not justify *their* ministries, either. We must be careful then that we do not accept everything just because some good may come from it. That is pragmatism. Pragmatism is accepting something because it works. We see pragmatism with the so-called Seeker Services that many churches are promoting today. Many of these churches are growing because they are giving people what they want. If you judged their ministries by numbers, they would be deemed successful. What they are doing, however, is not biblical. That is why we have to come back to the Word of God. I praise God for all those

who have been saved at Promise Keepers, but that does not change the fact that their ministry is not according to God's plan as set forth in the Bible.

CONCLUSION

Taking a stand that many perceive as negative is not enjoyable, but we, as Christians, need to be every bit as positive as God is in His Word and every bit as negative. I have no doubt the leaders of Promise Keepers have good intentions, but good intentions are not enough. Paul did not say he appreciated the good intentions of the Judaizers—he went right after their false teaching. The Promise Keepers' plan for producing godly men is turned around. Many areas they have as their goals are the result of Spirit-produced godliness in the life. Godly men do not pursue pornography, mistreat their wives or ignore their children. But godliness is not created by getting men to commit to not doing these things. We cannot take the results of godliness and make an external set of rules or promises and tell men they will be godly by keeping them.

My greatest concern with Promise Keepers is that its plan for godliness is not in line with God's plan, as given in His Word. Godliness is not produced by joining a group outside the church with men of differing beliefs and then committing to seven promises. It does not come from joining a group that compromises the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by including those who hold to different gospels. Godliness does not come from putting people under the influence and teaching of men characterized by unsound doctrine.

What is God's plan for being godly? Being godly involves being born again. That means believing in the pure Gospel of Christ—a salvation that is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It also includes being a part of a local church where the Word is taught faithfully and the leaders are morally and doctrinally qualified. It involves submitting to the Word of God in a context of the church where people are using their spiritual gifts. As this is done, godliness will be produced.

For the pastor, this means showing your people the whole counsel of God. Pastors are called to shepherd the church of God which Christ purchased with His own blood (see Acts 20:28). Pastors should not have to take their men to teachers outside of the church with various doctrinal beliefs so they can become godly. When I look at Promise Keepers I ask myself, "Why do I, as a pastor, have to take the men of our church to Promise Keepers to learn how to be godly?" That is the pastor's job! That is the church's job! If a pastor is unable to show men from Scripture how to be godly, he should be removed from being a pastor.

I praise God for all the good that has come about through Promise Keepers, but the Promise Keepers' way is not in line with the biblical pattern for producing godliness. It is my prayer that Christians not substitute man-made programs for God's glorious plan.

NOTES

1. Anon., *The Promise Keepers Mission*, Promise Keepers Leadership Press Release--950528g.
2. Anon., "Promise Keepers Fact Sheet (11/97)," p. 2.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *The Promise Keepers Mission*.
5. *The Promise Keepers Mission*.
6. "Promise Keepers Fact Sheet (11/97)," p. 1.
7. "The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper," from the *Official PK Web Site*.
8. Anon., "What is Promise Keepers?" *Men of Action*, Fall 1993, p. 5.
9. Randy Phillips, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994), pp. 206-07.
10. *Ibid.*
11. "Promise Keepers Fact Sheet (11/97)," p. 1.
12. For more on this issue see *Demonization of the Believer: An Unbiblical Teaching Exposed* (Lincoln: Sound Words Press), by Gil Rugh.
13. Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Hayesville, N.C.: Schoettle Publishing, 1996), p. 318.
14. Joe Maxwell, "Will the Walls Fall Down?" *Christianity Today*, November 17, 1997, p. 63.
15. For a critique of this document see *Reversing the Reformation: The Catholic/Evangelical Accord Examined* (Lincoln: Sound Words Press), by Gil Rugh.
16. *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*, p. 5.

17. "The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper," from the *Official PK Web Site*.
18. Anon., "What is Promise Keepers?" *Men of Action*, Fall, 1993, p. 4.
19. *Ibid*, p. 5.
20. By this I do not mean that churches should not be concerned about offering friendly, convenient and clean facilities or programs that are helpful to people. However, the church must foremost be concerned about what God says a church should be.
21. Pastor Oscar J. Anthony, "You Had To Be There," *Men of Action*, Fall 1993, p. 15.
22. *The Catholic Mirror*, July 19, 1996, p. 11.
23. Joe Maxwell, "Will the Walls Fall Down?" *Christianity Today*, November 17, 1997, p. 63.
24. Mike Nelson, "Promise Keepers Promises Spiritual Renewal for Men," *The Tidings*, March 31, 1995, p. 3.
25. Men's Ministries Department, Assemblies of God, *A Response to Criticism of Promise Keepers*. (1445 Boonville Avenue, Springfield, Missouri, 65802).
26. 1994 PK rally at Texas Stadium in Irving, Texas.
27. *Christianity Today* reported how some Latinos have been opposed to formal involvement of Catholics in Promise Keepers (CT, Feb. 6, 1995, p. 46).
28. *Council of Trent*, Session 6, "Decree on Justification," Canon 12.
29. *The Dallas/Fort Worth Heritage*, June 1995.
30. John Dart, "'Promise Keepers,' a Message to L.A. Men," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1995, p. B4.
31. *Christianity Today* reported, "McCartney's Vineyard-inspired understanding of a congregation views it as a dynamic entity, operating under the power of the Holy Spirit. PK carries on in much the same way." See, Joe Maxwell, "Will the Walls Fall Down?" *Christianity Today*, November 17, 1997, p. 64.
32. Ryle says he saw "something like an energy field" surround the Colorado Buffaloes football team of 1989. Ryle then heard a voice say, "This will be their golden season!" This revelation supposedly signified that Colorado would experience a golden season and win the national championship of college football. This golden season, though, would be thwarted when the Lord revealed to Ryle that Colorado would lose

the national championship game to Notre Dame. How did the Lord reveal this to him? He revealed it by the broken horn of the Colorado team mascot, Ralphie. When Ryle noticed Ralphie's broken horn minutes before the game, it became known to him that the power of the Holy Spirit had departed from the team. The following season, Colorado would again play Notre Dame. This time Ralphie's horn was healthy, thus signifying to Ryle that Colorado would win. See James Ryle, *Hippo in the Garden* (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1993), p. 13.

33. James Ryle, "The Beatles' Anointing Story: The Sons of Thunder (A New Generation of Worshipping Warriors)," June 1990, audiotape.
34. *Ibid.*
35. For more on the ministry of Robert Schuller see Gil Rugh's booklet, *A Different Gospel: An Evaluation of the Teachings of Robert Schuller* (Sound Words Press: Lincoln), 1996.
36. For an excellent critique of many of the teachers involved in the Vineyard, including Ryle, consult Hank Hanegraaff's work, *Counterfeit Revival*, Word Publishing, 1997.
37. Joe Maxwell, "Will the Walls Fall Down?" *Christianity Today*, November 17, 1997, p. 64.
38. Jack Hayford, *Setting a Sure Foundation*, "Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper," (Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994), p. 19.

Other Books by Gil Rugh

Assurance: Our Seal and Pledge
Baptism: Truth or Tradition
Bible Study Tools for the Layman
(The) Bible Workbook: What Is It All About?
By Faith: Abraham
By Faith: Noah
Calvinism & Arminianism
(The) Church: God's Program for Ministry
Church Discipline—An Evidence of Christian Love
Deliverance Workbook
Demonization of the Believer: An Unbiblical Teaching Exposed
(A) Different Gospel: An Evaluation of the Teachings of Robert Schuller
Division & Diversion
Divorce on Trial
Election: Whose Choice?
Endurance: Standing Firm in a Throw-Away World
Evangelism: Treading the Roman Road
Freedom From Addiction
Giving: A Result of Grace
Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective
Instruction to Husbands, Fathers & Their Wives
Instruction to Wives, Mothers & Their Husbands
Living the Life
Marks of the True Believer
Prayer
Promise Keepers and the Rising Tide of Ecumenism
Prophecy Update
Provision or Penalty
Psychology: The Trojan Horse
Rendering to Caesar
Reversing the Reformation
Revival and Revival Meetings
Spiritual Gifts
Statement of Faith and Constitution
To Earth With Love: A Study of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ
To Tie the Knot or Not: A Biblical Study of Marriage and the Single Life
When the Bible Doesn't Say
Willing to Pay the Price

Other Tracts and Brochures by Gil Rugh

How To Study Your Bible
Lordship Question: What Does a True Believer Believe?
Pare! Y Piense A Donde Va (Spanish tract)
Statement of Faith
Stop! And Think About Where You Are Going
What About Tongues?