

What Rick Warren Did To Our Church

by Mark Duckworth

'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of,' (2Pet.2:1,2).

Bible-believing Christians are well-aware that Satan manifests himself in astounding ways in the world today, not only in Corporate Mysticism, Heathen Religions, Clairvoyants, Cults and New-Age teachings, but he often infiltrates so-called Christian churches. I've lived and worked in countries where this trickery is rampant and I'm thankful to be able to call Australia Home!

Having studied the activities of cults in the last 22 years, my wife and I have successfully brought several vulnerable people out of their grip. The letters of thanks received from numerous people in gratitude for our assistance and the books we published, are testimony to the fact that the adversary is alive and well in the times we are living today.

For several years we enjoyed sweet fellowship at our little church in a quiet suburb. Ours was a Gospel-oriented church where we looked forward each Sunday to doing our little part to make our worship service a blessing to our visitors and members alike. As the years passed we witnessed changes of leadership, but our main drive was that we held to Biblical principles as laid down in God's Word.

In recent years however, a new dimension seemed to create interest among our church leadership. There were brochures and pamphlets advertising a new American system of evangelism known as the '*Purpose-Driven Life*' by Rick Warren. His campaign was said to have recruited thousands from the unsaved world. Warren was referred to as the renowned Pastor of a Mega-church in the USA, where his '*Purpose-driven Growth Seminars*' were filling pews at an unprecedented rate.

According to the media-material that advertised this campaign, Rick Warren was a sincere man, and his book was full of important practical truths and ideas that most Christians tend to ignore or forget. For example, he draws the attention of his readers to the fact that time on earth is short and that our fruitfulness here and now will count for eternity. Our little church accepted Warren's '*Purpose-Driven Life*' as advertised, and we invested in his Teaching Manual with Audio-Visuals known as '*Our Spiritual Journey*'. The program took off on schedule and as the lessons unfolded, many changes progressively took place in our church in the months that followed.

The first cracks that seemed to appear took place soon after we had completed Warren's '*Purpose Driven Life*', when there was disunity over the issue of women preachers. This ended in hot words and vitriolic arguments before we experienced a mini exodus from our church. Filling the vacuum caused by these vacancies in the leadership and other roles of the church was a mammoth task, and so we had to make do as best we could with the available man and woman power in the church.

As the months passed it was evident that yet more people left as they found the Sunday messages were not satisfactory. Some of those that left complained that 'worldliness' was

creeping into our worship service in the form of irreverence, over-done light humour and flippant banter from the pulpit, including references to segments of the previous nights footy match.

The choice of music was another factor that was referred to by our visitors from traditional churches who were shocked to hear the Pastor use the phrase 'silly old hymns' from the pulpit! Yes, indeed Hymns in our church were gradually being replaced by songs that seemed to focus on self rather than glorifying God. These often involved repetitious verses and lyrics that sounded more like emotional romanticism rather than words that gave reverence and honour to the God of the universe.

In the height of the summer it was customary for some women to turn up in 'fashionable' (low neckline) clothing that could be described as provocative, and it was not uncommon to see young people exposing their navels, or lying on the vacant pews at the back of the church playing with their videophones during the sermon. According to the church leadership, this was quite in order, and no one had the right to point this out. They considered it 'judgemental' if anyone brought this to the notice of the Church!

By now we found that the tone of our Sunday messages seemed to contain less of uplifting Biblical content. Some who left our church referred to our sermons as 'light and fluffy stuff'. Our little prayer-group of eight persons prayed about this irreverence in the church for six months, and, believing it was the right thing to do, requested a discussion with the church leaders in order to reason together, to find some way to restore reverence and respect in the church we loved so much. All we asked for was an opportunity to discuss these matters, but we were to be shocked beyond belief to receive a very unkind letter from the leadership instead of an opportunity to talk things over. This letter was signed by members of the leadership and the Pastor.

In a nutshell, the contents of that letter seemed to be saying: 'Mind your own business and do not interfere with the running of the church'. Not knowing which way to turn, we discreetly spoke to well-known ministers and Bible students, who could not believe their ears when they heard of this. So we showed them the documents and all of them without exception, reckoned this was a matter that defied credence, coming from a Christian Leadership! This was our once happy Bible-believing church!

The letter from the leadership quoted Romans 14:4 and referred to us as being judgemental...for merely requesting a discussion on the matter of reverence. As we read and re-read that reply, we did some research and checked with all the Bible scholars we knew, as it was quite evident that the reasoning of our church leaders was strange. We also went through past copies of the Australian discernment newsletter, *Diakrisis (Australia)*, and discovered several warnings about Rick Warren. Then after reading the recommended Booklet '*An Analysis of Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life*' we discovered that the words and phrases used in this unfortunate reply were almost verbatim with Rick Warren's teaching in his '*Purpose-Driven Life*'.

Rick Warren's '*Purpose-Driven Life*' P.164 states: 'God warns us over and over not to criticise, compare or judge each other. (Rom.14:13; James 4:11; Eph.4:29; Matt.5:9;

James 5:9). When you criticise what another believer is doing in faith and from sincere conviction, you are interfering with God's business. What right do you have to criticise someone else's servants? Only their Lord can decide if they are doing right, (Rom.14:4 CEV)'.

Warren's use of various and some poor Bible 'translations' to prop up his convictions is most noticeable. A wide range of translations are used to match whatever his particular premise is. Many of his references actually bear no credence to the premise he is building upon. The deception is that many readers will not check the scriptures to see if they indeed match what he is teaching.

We noticed that this hostile letter received from our church leadership bore all the hallmarks of Rick Warren's teachings - the spokesman for our church leadership was a Rick Warren fan. This somewhat explained the reply we received and his understanding of the word 'judgemental'.

That was indeed a gross misrepresentation of the scriptures since Romans 14 is speaking of Christian liberty in '*doubtful disputations*' (vs.1); foods (vs.2,3,6,14,15); and honouring various days (vs.5,6). Rick Warren makes no distinction between the positive and negative references to judging in Scripture. The Bible says not to judge hypocritically (Matt.7); or judge in matters of personal preference. But the Bereans tested everything taught by the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). The Bible also says '*he that is spiritual judgeth all things*', (1Cor.2:15). We are to try the spirits, (1Jn.4:1) and '*prove all things*', (1Thess.5:21). Jesus judged the Pharisees as hypocrites - Peter judged Ananias and Saphira as liars - and Paul judged the Galatians as fools. And Jesus Himself said: '*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*', (Jn.7:24).

Christians take the Bible as their standard in moral judgement. To make a judgement we recognise there are absolutes, and when we find a person or a body who claims to be Christian but doing the work of the adversary, we are well within our Christian right to expose it. '*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron*', (1Tim.4:1,2).

One Sunday, six of us finally took our stand. We jointly bade goodbye to our friends and left the church we loved so much. Now we can only pray that those who offended and hurt us will realise what they have done and seek God's forgiveness - as for the six of us, we bear no malice against them. Following our departure, we met at least 22 people who had left in the recent past, all of whom are now attending other churches. All of them agreed that the lack of reverence, the quality of the Sunday messages, and brusque attitude of the leaders were the chief reasons for their leaving.

We did more research and discovered to our relief and satisfaction that Bible students and Christian institutions all over the world are now writing extensively, exposing Rick Warren's deceptive teachings. These are some of the things we learned:

Warren's mentor: '*Peter Drucker (Famous secular motivational speaker)...he's my mentor. I've spent 20 years under his tutelage learning about leadership from him.'*

Warren on Ecumenism: '*Who's the man of peace in any village - or it might be a woman of peace - who has the most respect, they're open and they're influential? They don't*

have to be a Christian. In fact, they could be a Muslim, but they're open and they're influential and you work with them to attack the five giants. And that's going to bring the second Reformation. Last week I spoke to 4,000 pastors at my church who came from over 100 denominations in over 50 countries. Now, that's widespread. We had Catholic priests, we had Pentecostal ministers, we had Lutheran bishops, we had Anglican bishops, we had Baptist preachers'.

On the Gospel: In the video that accompanies the '*Forty Days of Purpose*', Warren leads his listeners in prayer at the end of the first session. The prayer goes like this: '*Dear God, I want to know your purpose for my life. I don't want to base the rest of my life on wrong things. I want to take the first step in preparing for eternity by getting to know you, Jesus Christ. I don't understand how but as much as I know how I want to open up my life to you. Make yourself real to me. And use this series in my life to help me know what you made me for*'. Warren goes on to say: '*Now if you've just prayed that prayer for the very first time I want to congratulate you. You've just become a part of the family of God*'.

Warren would be hard-pressed to find biblical backing for this presentation of the gospel. We find nothing here about sin, grace, repentance, the person of Christ, Calvary, faith, judgment or the resurrection. This is a mutilated, seeker-sensitive gospel: the seeker comes to Christ in order to find his purpose in life, not to receive forgiveness for sin and the righteousness of God. Then, to pronounce someone a fully-fledged member of the family of God because he prayed such a prayer (based on minimal, if any, understanding of the person and work of Christ), is tragic.

On Music: '*Rick Warren at his Saddleback Church's 25th anniversary 'did something he had 'wanted to do for a long time'. He sang Jimi Hendrix's drug drenched song 'Purple Haze' to his congregation, accompanied by his 'praise and worship band'! There has never been anything innocent and pure about Rock-'n'-roll (not to speak of holy). From its inception it has had two grand themes: licentiousness (sex, drugs, etc) and rebellion, and this is nowhere more evident than in the music of Jimi Hendrix..*' ('*O Timothy*', No.5, 2005)

On Separation: '*I see absolutely zero reason in separating my fellowship from anybody*'. Rick Warren has positioned himself in direct opposition to Holy Scripture which tells us in 2Corinthians 6:17, '*Come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing*'. Scripture also tells us, '*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them*', (Ephesians 5:11). Rick Warren is in gross disobedience and worse, is leading millions astray. (Source: *Apostasy Alert*, July-August/2005)

The '*Purpose Driven Life*':

The '*Purpose Driven Life*' and the '*Forty Days of Purpose*' programs are based on Warren's premise (P.9,10) that '*The Bible is clear that God considers 40 days a spiritually significant time period. Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days: Noah's life was transformed by 40 days of rain. Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mt. Sinai. The spies were transformed by 40 days in the promised land. David was transformed by Goliath's 40 day challenge. Elijah was transformed*

when God gave him 40 days of strength from a single meal. The entire city of Nineveh was transformed when God gave the people 40 days to change. Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness. The disciples were transformed by 40 days with Jesus after the resurrection. The next 40 days will change your life...

But how many readers will test such claims?:

'Noah's life was transformed by 40 days of rain'?:

There is absolutely nothing in Genesis to support this statement! The flood was more than 40 days, (Gen.7:24). Where was Noah's life 'transformed' by the 40 days of rain?

'Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai'?:

Moses was arguably 'transformed' at Mt. Sinai but not in those 40 days! It was actually during his first encounter with God before he returned to Egypt. Moses spent 80 days on the Mount the second time.

'The spies were transformed by 40 days'?:

Ten of the spies came back fearful! Only two were arguably 'transformed'.

'David was transformed'?:

David was there confronting Goliath for more like 40 minutes than 40 days! And the Israelites were 'transformed' into fearful wrecks!

'Elijah was transformed...40 days of strength from a single meal'?:

Elijah had two meals. He was hardly 'transformed' when he ran from Jezebel.

'Nineveh was transformed'?:

Arguably true? But judgement fell on that city not too much later?

'Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness'?:

Where was Jesus 'empowered'? He was hungry and returned from the wilderness 'in the power of the spirit', (Lk.4:14).

'The disciples were transformed'?:

Arguably they were 'transformed' after Jesus' ascension.

Warren starts with a premise, then goes to Scripture to find supporting verses. But if the reader accepts Warren's premise ('WHENEVER God wants to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days')...then what about Abraham, Job, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, Paul - were they 'transformed' by 40 days also? What about the generation of Israel that were dead after 40 years in the wilderness?

There is nothing wrong in encouraging people to set aside 40 days, but *why misinterpret scripture*, (2Tim.2:15)? Warren's material is popular because of the way it is put. There are many 'strawmen' and much extra-Biblical thinking which 'tickles the ears' of people. The popularity of Rick Warren's teaching says much about the state of the Church!

The Root of the Problem:

Warren's exegesis of scripture is deceptive. An example of this is a sermon by Warren: '*What the Bible Says About the Role of Women*'. In Genesis 3:16 Warren exchanges the word 'rule' for 'dominate'; he says Lydia in Acts 16 'hosted a church in her home'; Chloe (1Cor.1:11) was a 'small group leader'; Phebe (Rom.16:1) was a 'leader in the church'. All these claims cannot be derived by exegesis of the texts. Warren turns 1Timothy 3:11 completely on its head and says: 'it sounds like the wives of deacons should have these qualifications [for a deaconess]'. Yet the passage is clearly referring to *qualifications for husbands!* Warren later flatly contradicts himself when he says 'women cannot

be elders'! Yet the qualification of 'husband of one wife' is the same wording for both elders and deacons! Amazingly he then says '*There were obviously women leaders in the church...*' But this premise has been derived at by *speculation and false interpretation!*

There are many other examples of where Warren manipulates the scriptures to prove his various beliefs. Many years ago authors were warning of his poor interpretation of scripture. One author wrote: '*We find a similar story in Rick Warren's stimulating and helpful book, 'The Purpose Driven Church'. It is hard not to be impressed by this book; it is inspiring, challenging and full of practical ideas for ministry and evangelism. Yet it is interesting to again find that the use of the Bible in it is almost universally poor.*' ('Briefing', 7/99)

Associations:

Rick Warren promotes and quotes from a wide range of ecumenists and unbelievers, including New Agers and universalists from a variety of religions. In 2005 Rick Warren teamed up with new Age guru, Ken Blanchard, (*Diakrisis (Australia)*, 2005/7/8). Blanchard believes in the benefits and use of mantra meditation, yoga and has no trouble borrowing from Buddhism. He wrote the foreword to such books as Franz Metcalf's '*What Would Buddha Do At Work?*' Blanchard makes no apology when he says much can be gained from Buddhism. He and his wife both encourage the practice of yoga and mantra meditation. Ken Blanchard, Rick Warren and Bill Hybels (Willow Creek) became team players at the '*Lead Like Jesus*' conferences, which take place across North America. The three also have an audio set they co-authored together.

The majority of Rick Warren's e-mail newsletters have at least one contemplative or emerging quote of endorsement or recommendation. Some of these weekly promotions include Youth Specialties, Leonard Sweet, Thomas Merton, Ken Blanchard, Laurie Beth Jones, Jim Wallis, etc. Basically, Rick Warren believes that contemplative/emerging spirituality is great and will lead many people closer to God! These letters to pastors also promote his P.E.A.C.E. plan - from which the American Fox News cable TV channel derived much material for it's recent week of programmes titled '*Can Rick Warren Save The World?*'

Conclusion:

In the strongest terms I urge the readers to beware of Rick Warren and the Purpose Driven philosophy. The fruit of his teachings are now being seen nationwide and there are many reports of churches being weakened and reduced in their doctrinal stance. In many churches the gospel and standards of holiness have been watered down. Rick Warren's books are accepted by the world (e.g., his '*Forty Days of Purpose*' has been used by Coca-Cola, Ford, Wal-Mart, the NBA, LPGA, NASCAR, professional baseball teams, etc.), because they are of the world.

Friends in Christ, beware. This deluded but popular false teacher is a dangerous spiritual guide.

'Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them', (Eph.5:10,11).

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