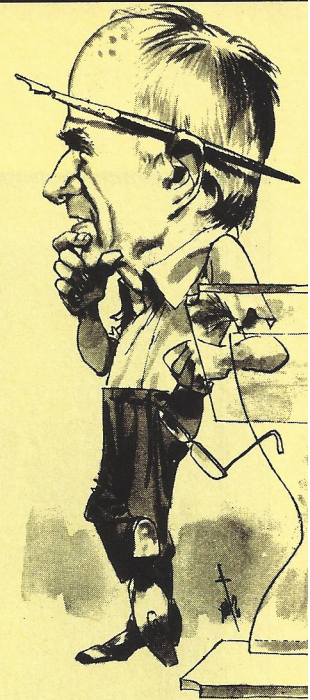


BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE & EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS



HEARING GOD TOGETHER

Following last summer's bout with cancer, my wife and I, besides praying together, started reading together. We began with Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*. I've had the book on my bookshelf for years. In fact, I have three copies. But I had never committed to reading it through on a daily basis—much less reading it with my wife.

Last September we started reading it out loud to each other, either early in the morning or late at night as we lay in bed together. Chambers' brief devotions, first given to a group of students at the YMCA huts in Egypt almost a century ago, dig deep into the mine of spiritual truth. Some are almost too painful to read. But truth is always like that. Yet as Jackie and I have submitted to the knife of the Spiritual Surgeon, we have begun to experience healing at a wonderful new level of our lives.

The book, interestingly, remains high on the list of best sellers, even after all these years. Here are some of the truths that have remolded my thinking about God—and myself. To get their full impact, read them as I do—slowly and out loud.

- "Jesus has no tenderness whatever toward anything that is ultimately going to ruin a man in the service of God."
- "Our Lord never puts personal holiness to the fore when He calls a disciple; He puts absolute annihilation of my right to myself and identification with Himself—a relationship with Himself in which there is no other relationship."
- "If you are hard and vindictive, insistent on your own way, certain that the other person is more likely to be in the wrong than you are, it is an indication that there are whole tracts of your nature that have never been transformed by His gaze."

SUCCESSFUL PREACHING

For years I have measured the success of my preaching by how people responded. The same

measure of success was applied to what I wrote. If my book sold many copies—both my publisher and myself deemed it successful. If scores of people responded to my sermon, weeping, laughing, crowding to the altar, commenting afterward what a humdinger it was—then I had succeeded in "preaching a good one."

Now, walking out a new relationship with God, I realize my old way was humanistic. I was measuring success at preaching the same way the owner of a professional football team judges his coach. Not, Does he build character? Not, Is he challenging evil and holding up the banner of good? Rather, Is he "winning"?

Sermonic success is to be measured by one standard alone: Was I obedient to God? Did I say what He wanted me to say—regardless of man's response?

Hudson Taylor once wrote: "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them."

Yet I must never justify lack of response on the part of others by saying, "I spoke/wrote what God wanted," when the real reason no one responded was my sloppiness, my undisciplined preparation or my lack of excellence in presentation.

While God wants obedience, He does not want obedience alone. He wants a disciplined life. He wants all things done with as much excellence as we can muster.

Obedience is no excuse for sloppiness, lazy preparation or strange mannerisms that make it difficult for the ordinary man to hear God's Word. A musician may sing what God wants him to sing; but if he waits until he is in front of the microphone to tune his guitar, refuses to rehearse and gets lost in the middle of the song, he cannot blame

the lack of response on his "obedience."

Obedience covers far more than what we say or write—it also covers how we say it and how we write it.

ATTACKS CONTINUE AGAINST MIKE BICKLE, JOHN WIMBER AND THE KANSAS CITY FELLOWSHIP

Although most of the earlier voices opposing the Kansas City Fellowship have quieted to a whisper, others have taken up the slack. One of the papers now being circulated was published by Burl Wells of Go Ministries in San Jose, California. Wells likens the ministry of John Wimber, the Vineyard churches, and Kansas City Fellowship to the New Age movement and "one world" religion. Interestingly, he has his facts all mixed up. He states that both Pat Robertson and Derek Prince are promoters of the Kansas City Fellowship—although both men have issued strong statements of opposition to KCF. Wells also attacks most of today's charismatic leaders, likening them to occultists, voodooers and New Agers.

Another attack has been mounted by Albert J. Dager who publishes *Media Spotlight*, and John Goodwin, pastor of Calvary Chapel of San Jose. Dager is a vocal opponent of many charismatic leaders. While these attacks were mounted prior to the reconciliation meetings between Wimber/KCF and their earlier opponent Ernie Gruen, a fellow pastor in Kansas City, they are still being reproduced and mailed around by various people who are just getting in on the controversy.

Accusations from abroad. The attacks are not limited to America. Due to John Wimber's influence in England, many U.K. leaders have taken sides in the controversy. Several books have been written about it. Some, like David Watson, have been highly supportive of the prophetic ministry. But the opinions of Clifford Hill, editor of *Prophecy Today* and one of England's most respected prophetic teachers, have been highly critical.

Last year, Wimber and Paul Cain met with Hill while they were in England on an extended ministry trip. They attempted to answer his objections, and Cain told me that he and Wimber left the meeting hoping (and feeling) Hill was no

longer a critic.

Shortly afterward, I entered into an exchange of letters with an old friend, Mick Oxley of Crescent City, Florida. Oxley wrote that I had been too gentle with the Kansas City "heretics" in my earlier analysis in this column. He stated that respected leaders such as Derek Prince and Clifford Hill were actively combating the Kansas City prophets. I had not heard anything—at the time—of Prince's involvement, but I had just finished talking to Paul Cain about Clifford Hill. I wrote Oxley back, hoping to pour oil on troubled waters.

Oxley replied: "I see psychic powers at work here [in KCF]." He then set me straight on Clifford Hill's stance by sending me a copy of a letter he had received from Hill's associate, David Forbes, written in early December:

"There is absolutely no way that Clifford Hill has retracted anything from what he has said about the Kansas City prophets. As far as he is concerned there are many non-biblical areas in their doctrine and prophecy."

Corrected, I then suggested it would be good if those opposing Wimber, Bickle, Cain and others first meet them face-to-face. That, it seemed, would be more in the spirit of Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18 than making blatant public accusations. How, I wanted to know, can you judge a man unless you know his spirit as well as his words?

Oxley's reply was historic in that it echoed the thinking of many of God's defenders across the years: "As for your remarks about me speaking with these men before I condemn them: I do not condemn them; the Word of God condemns them, Jamie! I am here to 'contend for the faith....'"

Derek Prince enters the fray. The most damaging accusations, however, have come from noted Bible scholar Derek Prince. In a paper issued in July 1990—following KCF's submission to the ministry of John Wimber and the Vineyard Fellowship—Prince said "a mere change of label or of leadership, by itself, is not sufficient" to correct the "occult element." Prince is one of the founders of the "discipleship movement," which drew even more charges of heresy than the "prophecy movement."

Although Prince gathered much of his information from Ernie Gruen's published

accusations against KCF, he had met with Mike Bickle and other KCF leaders on several occasions, the last being March 1990. At that meeting he confronted Bickle and told him he was "receiving and propagating error." He urged KCF to make changes—advice he now feels was not heeded.

Prince now concludes that "the material circulated by KCF contains many statements which have no basis in Scripture and are frequently contrary to Scripture." He calls some of the revelations "absurd and even blasphemous," and says that "much of the material is permeated by what I consider to be occult influence." He also maintains that the material published by KCF is designed "to divert attention away from Jesus Christ and the Scriptures and toward subjective experiences and human personalities."

Prince says his statement is "fulfilling my obligation to many people in the U.S. and other nations who respect my judgment on biblical issues."

Ironically, his charge that "the material from Kansas City Fellowship has exposed the body of Christ to much error and confusion" is the same charge others leveled against him and the discipleship movement just a few years ago.

My conclusions. I have hesitated to step into this rock-throwing fracas for fear of getting bopped myself. (At this stage in my life, I don't need any more people—especially Christians—putting curses on me.) Last year, I met privately with Mike Bickle and Paul Cain. In the company of the board of the National Leadership Conference (I was president at the time), I also met several times with KCF's most vocal and valid critic, Ernie Gruen, who eventually published a 233-page book listing many of the "errors" of the Kansas City Fellowship and its band of prophets. Gruen, who pastors a large Kansas City church, felt betrayed and confused by both the teachings and the inconsistencies that followed his earlier attempts to bring correction face-to-face with Bickle.

(Despite the fact that Gruen, Wimber and Cain have all sat down and smoked a peace pipe, some of these inconsistencies remain. For instance, a recent issue of Wimber's magazine *Equipping the Saints* reports that Bickle

acknowledged that KCF prophet Bob Jones "should not have been placed in a pulpit ministry." Then, in a full-page ad in the back of the magazine, the announcement is made that Jones will be "sharing in the prophetic ministry" in the next Vineyard conference.)

As the controversy heated and spread, others got into the fight (most of them critics). *Ministries Today* finally sent Lee Grady, one of America's top Christian news analysts, to Kansas City to interview all parties. Lee wrote two outstanding stories for this magazine, which I really hoped would put the issue to rest (see our September/October 1990 issue).

Not so. Like pulling crabgrass, all we had done was snip off the surface weeds while the roots continued in all directions, breaking out in various places with scathing accusations. To his credit, since his meeting with Wimber and Cain, Ernie Gruen has withdrawn distribution of his book and has made a valiant effort to re-establish fellowship with the saints across town. Kansas City Fellowship has aligned with Wimber's Vineyard Ministries and has even changed its name to Metro Vineyard of Kansas City in an effort to move on into the future. Yet shots continue to be fired, many from those who don't know the war is over and the generals have signed a peace agreement.

My conclusions, like my theology, are simple.

- All parties involved love Jesus—although all are serving in different sectors in the kingdom (and using different methods). It is time to put this particular controversy to rest.

- It is time to join forces with our brothers, despite the weird ways they act, and stand together in these last days before the return of Christ.

- For Jesus' sake, I urge all to stop our accusations—and our defensiveness (and the offensiveness that goes with it). Call off the fragging and "friendly fire" that kills our own troops serving loyally on the front lines.

- Despite what Pogo once said, we have met the enemy and he is not us—he is Satan. He is the one who is dividing the church of Christ, not the saints. There is a far bigger enemy out there than those with whom we disagree in doctrine and method. He is determined to destroy the lives and even the salvation of the saints.

- Focus on evangelism—winning the lost rather

than correcting the saints—and leave the ministry of correction to the Holy Spirit, who is a far better disciplinarian than any of us.

Note: Last year at Ernie Gruen's request I published the address where his book of accusations could be ordered. In fairness I now urge our readers to write for the fall 1990 issue of the Vineyard Fellowship magazine, *Equipping the Saints*, which contains Wimber's response to Gruen and an interview with Paul Cain answering his critics. To receive the issue write: *Equipping the Saints*, P.O. Box 65004, Anaheim, CA 92815.

THE LAST HEARTBEAT OF AMERICA

In a recent issue of his newsletter, *Perspective*, U.S. Senate chaplain Richard Halverson writes: "In my 10 years as chaplain of the Senate, I cannot remember a time of greater frustration among members of Congress and their staffs, or more expressions of anger from the people."

Halverson then quotes an 18th-century historian, Alexander Fraser Tytler, who wrote a book titled *The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic*.

Tytler wrote: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the Public Treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the Public Treasury with a result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy always followed by dictatorship. The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence:

"From bondage to spiritual faith;
from spiritual faith to great courage;
from courage to liberty;
from liberty to abundance;
from abundance to selfishness;
from selfishness to complacency;
from complacency to apathy;
from apathy to dependency;
from dependency back into bondage."

Reading Tytler's analysis of history, written long before America began her decline, I conclude our nation has now entered the first phase of the last step. I personally believe we have crested the

wave of God's grace and that only three things prevent us from being totally vanquished:

- the prayers and dreams of our founding fathers, which I believe God is still honoring through faithful citizens holding on to the original dream of a free nation;
- the prayers of Christians today—many of them overseas—who are pleading with God to spare America;
- the fact that the churches of America are funding most of the missionary projects across the world.

If we cut any one of these remaining threads, the great American web will collapse.

Does this mean it is time to stop manning the pumps and devote all our energies to getting people into the lifeboats? Almost, for I believe that even though we can keep America afloat for a while longer, the ballast of sin is so heavy that we as a nation are as doomed as ancient Greece and Rome. We have already eaten our seed corn for the next harvest, and like cannibals we are now devouring one another in a selfish effort to look out only for number one.

Congress is hopelessly ineffective, strangled in the quicksand of a bureaucracy of its own making. The judiciary is overwhelmed by rampaging crime and is no longer just, simply handing out sentences at the whim of judge and jury. On any given Sunday morning, there are almost as many people in prison as there are in church. The presidency is nothing more than a paper tiger, its hands bound by the red tape of Congress and a bungled foreign policy that is choking our nation economically.

Yet I contend this is the greatest time in history to be alive—and in the ministry of our Lord. There are signs everywhere that Jesus will return soon. Miracles are reappearing in magnificent abundance. Reports of angel sightings are coming from all sectors. Men and women are turning to Christ in great numbers. The church is being cleansed and purified.

Hold fast, my brothers and sisters. God is in control.

