

The End of the Discipleship Era

“Discipleship resulted in unhealthy submission resulting in perverse and unbiblical obedience to human leaders... For the injury and shame, I repent with sorrow and ask for your forgiveness.”
—Bob Mumford

For many years Bob Mumford was looked upon as one of the most respected teachers and leaders in the charismatic movement.

In 1974, at a teaching conference at Montreat, North Carolina, sponsored by Christian Believers United (CBU), Billy Graham called Mumford “my favorite Bible teacher.”

Few teachers were able to command the respect that Mumford had among all Christians.

Then something happened that changed all that. Believing the charismatic movement lacked substance and needed accountability, Mumford and four other well-known Bible teachers—Derek Prince, Charles Simpson, Ern Baxter and Don Basham—formed an organization designed to call the movement into accountability. Although officially known as Christian Growth Ministries, critics immediately dubbed the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida-based group the “discipleship” or “shepherding” movement.

Thousands of men and women—mostly young Christians—joined the movement. They were eager to be “discipled,” to be held “accountable” by these mature teachers. But the movement quickly became elitist, exclusive. Operating on the basis that everyone needs to be accountable to a pastor, “sheep” were assigned to various “shepherds”—many of whom were young, imma-

ture, sometimes arrogant and often proud of their new authority.

The leaders published a popular teaching magazine called *New Wine*. Their tapes were sold and circulated by the millions. Great conferences were held in key American cities, attended by thousands eager to be “discipled.”

Havoc followed and horror stories abounded. Families were sometimes forced to relocate from one city to another at the whim of a shepherd. Churches split. The entire charismatic movement was thrown into turmoil.

Mumford and Simpson in particular took the heat from the critics, who charged they dominated those under them. They were accused of setting up a spiritual chain-letter in which everyone was under someone, who was under someone, who was finally under “the Ft. Lauderdale Five”—forming a sort of charismatic episcopacy.

Critics cited numerous examples of “shepherds” who required their “sheep” to ask their permission before they dated, changed jobs or made major decisions.

Mumford and his friends responded that they were teaching a renewed biblical understanding of God’s government, delegated authority and covenant loyalty.

National leaders took sides. Pat Robertson called Mumford, Simpson and Prince false teachers. On a live “700 Club” broadcast, he likened the discipleship movement to the cult led by Jim Jones, saying the only difference was the shepherds had not yet served Kool-Aid (a reference to the mass suicide of more than 900 people caused when Jones told his followers to drink poisoned Kool-Aid). *Cont. on page 48*

by Jamie Buckingham

In a widely circulated memo, Robertson banned the five men from his 54 radio and television outlets across the country and ordered his employees to erase all tapes featuring these men or "risk serious consequences."

When Logos International invited Mumford to speak at its Second World Conference on the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem in October 1975, Kathryn Kuhlman refused to attend unless the invitation was withdrawn. Mumford backed out.

After discovering some of her followers were tithing their incomes to Derek Prince, Miss Kuhlman used her national radio program to call Prince a false prophet.

Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International president Demos Shakarian decided none of the Ft. Lauderdale men could speak at any of the FGBMFI conventions.

What began as a needed emphasis—calling believers into personal accountability—quickly turned into a disaster.

Robertson wrote Mumford an eight-page letter attacking the discipleship teaching point by point, then made the letter public.

Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel in California, also fired off an angry letter: "When I see the confusion and the division in the body of Christ, not only here but in Sweden and Hawaii and wherever the message has gone, I feel this is ample evidence to cause me to reject the so-called truth as another deception of Satan."

A number of "summit meetings" were held and the discipleship/shepherding leaders were confronted by national Christian leaders—many of whom had worked closely with them before the movement became exclusive. The teachers grew defensive, building higher walls of exclusivity.

The center of emphasis shifted when Simpson moved from Ft. Lauderdale to his hometown of Mobile, Alabama. Mumford, Baxter and Basham followed. Prince refused to make the move and in 1983 became the first to break from the group.

The base was crumbling.

But except for a letter to a few personal friends, Prince did not make a public statement. The other discipleship leaders covered up his departure, simply saying God had called him to a broader ministry.

New Wine was losing huge amounts of money and despite a frenzy of last-minute activity trying to keep it solvent, the magazine finally closed shop in December 1986. In one of its last issues, Simpson printed an apology for the excesses of the discipleship movement, but did not admit that it (or he) had been wrong.

Basham, disillusioned and sick, left Mobile and moved to Ohio. He died in March 1989.

Baxter moved to the San Diego area of California.

Mumford, in an effort to break from the bondage brought on by the movement, moved near San Francisco.

All the men except Simpson and Baxter "released" their disciples to find their own way without the benefit of a shepherd. Simpson remained in Mobile, quietly building his local church with about 150 "branch churches" around the nation still following the old discipleship line, but without the extremes. The "discipleship heresy," for all intents and purposes, was dead.

Yet no official word of apology or repentance had been spoken. That is, until Bob Mumford issued his moving statement of repentance in late November 1989.

Mumford's "repentance" began in mid-1988 when he visited Jack Hayford during a time of personal crisis. Hayford told Mumford the reason he was having problems was that he had never been reconciled to Jesus. Hayford felt Mumford's problems were a projection of the problem he was having with God over unresolved aspects of the discipleship movement. Mumford took this to heart and in early November contacted Hayford again, asking if he could attend the annual pastors' conference at The Church on the Way for the purpose of reading a

statement of repentance.

Although Hayford was convinced of Mumford's sincerity, he did not believe he should allow Mumford to read the statement the opening night—which was the only night Mumford could attend since he was scheduled to speak later that week at the CBU Teaching Conference at Ridgecrest, North Carolina.

"I felt he was doing the right thing," Hayford says, "but did not feel the statement should be read at the beginning of the conference. He left it with me and trusted me to read it (or not read it) in his absence."

Roy Hicks Jr. was the speaker at the last session. He had already planned to speak on breaking down walls. When Hayford told him he wanted to read Mumford's statement just before he spoke, Hicks asked him to read it at the close—as an illustration of what he was talking about.

There were 1700 pastors and spouses in attendance. They represented 700 churches and 34 denominations in 41 states and 17 nations.

Hayford says: "I read it at the close of the meeting with sensitivity since I felt I knew Bob's heart. I made two initial observations: First, I had occasion to deal with Mumford prior to the 1974 problem and felt disposed to assist him on the way back. Second, many don't know the history of this but many do. It was a distressing thing which happened, causing huge problems in the body.

"I then said, 'In light of the message you've just heard [from Hicks], this is an illustration of God breaking down walls. His agenda is to break through and remove walls as we end this decade.'"

Hayford says the statement was received with "general murmurs of agreement."

The next night at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, Mumford was on the platform at the CBU Teaching Conference—the oldest and largest teaching conference in America. As one of the principal speakers, he had requested personal privilege to

read the same statement Hayford had read the night before in California—a public apology for his part in leading people into deception.

Derek Prince was scheduled to speak that night. Among the 3,500 packed into the auditorium was Alice Basham—widow of the late writer/teacher Don Basham.

Mumford was visibly shaken when he came to the platform to read his statement just before Prince spoke.

As Mumford finished speaking, the audience rose to applaud. But Derek Prince stepped forward, silenced the crowd and followed with his own statement—not of repentance but of explanation.

Although admitting he had been an integral part of the discipleship/shepherding movement, Prince said, “I never was involved in asking people to submit to me...I tend to let people go their own way...I don't be-

lieve it was ever God's intent to start a movement. All of us have to share the responsibility, however, of failing God and failing the body of Christ.”

Prince went ahead to say, despite his involvement with the movement, “It was not long before I began to feel uncomfortable. But I felt God had put us [the five men] together.” He concluded by saying, “*I allowed loyalty to my fellow ministers to supersede my loyalty to God.*”

Alice Basham told *Ministries Today* that she commended Mumford—“with all my heart.” She said that had Don Basham still been alive, he would have echoed the same words. ■

Editor's Note: *The audio tape from the Ridgecrest Conference of Bob Mumford reading his statement plus Derek Prince's response is available for \$5.00 from CBU, P.O. Box 1000, Montreat, NC 28757.*

MUMFORD'S FORMAL REPENTANCE STATEMENT TO THE BODY OF CHRIST

The following is the text of the Mumford apology:

In 1974, Jack Hayford and two other brothers expressed concern about the concepts of discipleship. Others also gave similar counsel.

While it was not my intent to be willful, I ignored their input to my own hurt and the injury of others.

This statement of apology has two known motivations. First, I feel as though I have offended the Lord Himself, resulting in His resistance and continued conviction. Second, I am deeply convinced that only by my stating the truth can those who have been adversely affected be healed and released. The following statement represents my personal convictions and I do not presume to speak for any other person.

The independent part of the charismatic renewal was, in my opinion, much in need of the principles I taught in the early '70s, namely spiritual authority, discipleship and shepherding care. The absence of those needed biblical guidelines and the loss of personal sanctification were evident at that time.

Predictably, the extremes and injuries began to appear where they always do, that is, in the widening gap between what was taught (orthodoxy or right doctrine) and what was actually happening (orthopraxy or right practice). The distortion and self-serving application of these principles were wrong and injurious.

Accountability, personal training under the guidance of another, and effective pastoral care are needed biblical concepts. True spiritual maturity will require that they be preserved. These biblical realities must also carry the limits indicated by the New Testament. However, to my personal pain and chagrin, these particular emphases very easily lent themselves to an unhealthy submission resulting in perverse and unbiblical obedience to human leaders. Many of these abuses occurred within the spheres of my own responsibility. For the injury and shame caused to people, families and the larger body of Christ, I repent with sorrow and ask for your forgiveness.

May I personally encourage everyone directly affected by these doctrines to re-examine how they are presently being applied. We all need the courage to take whatever steps necessary to return to a Christ-centered life.



Bob Mumford
San Rafael, California

Mumford Explains Why

“Seeing
discipleship
distorted was
the greatest
pain in my life.”
—Bob Mumford

The morning after Bob Mumford read his statement of apology and repentance to the 3,500 people at the CBU Teaching Conference at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, Jamie Buckingham interviewed him for *Ministries Today*. The following is a transcript of the exact interview with minor edits for space.

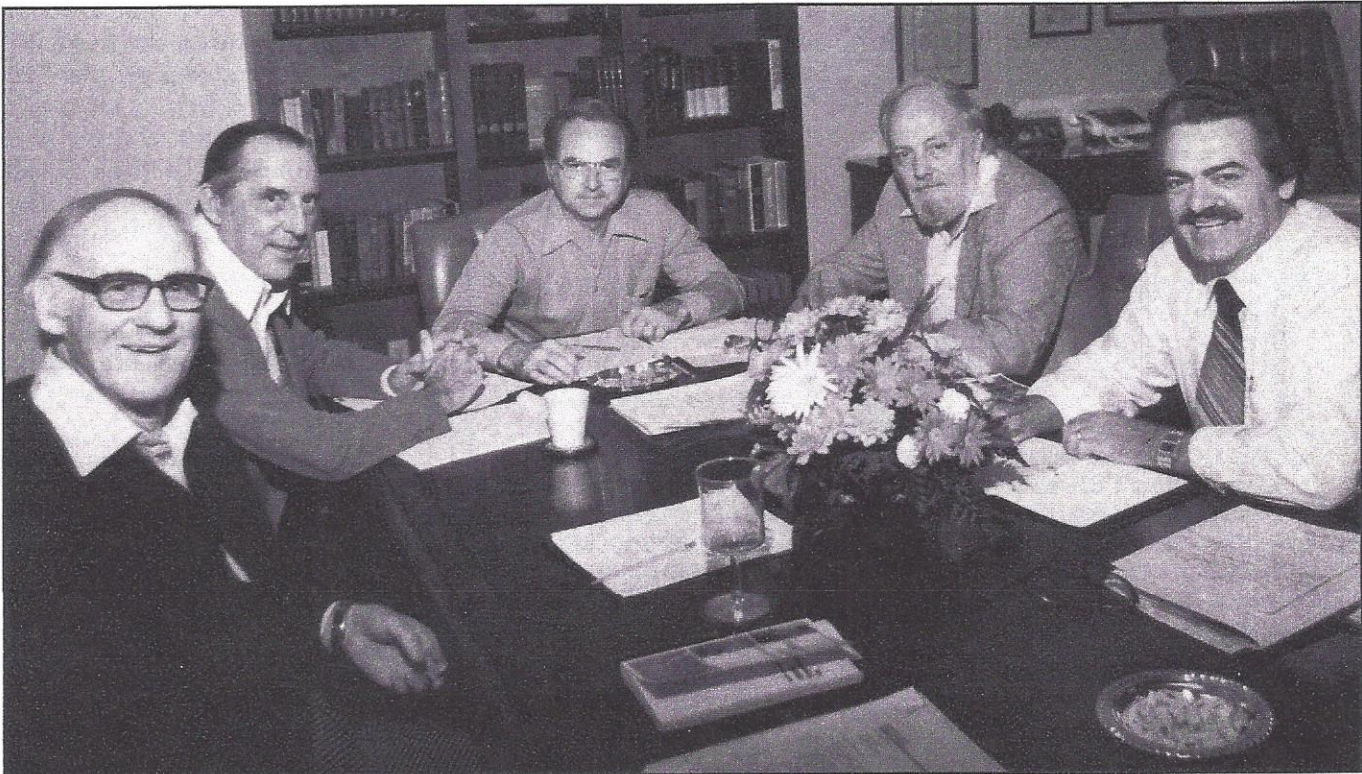
Jamie: One of the charges thrown at recently erring leaders is they never repent. They say they are sorry, but never say they are wrong. Are you saying you were wrong?

Bob: That's what provoked this statement. Jack Hayford's conference and the CBU conference at Ridgecrest have been ministry bases for many years. I felt that even in my *Charisma* statement (August 1987) I was not clear in what I wanted to say. For fear of polarizing friendships or injuring those who were doing well in discipleship, I waited until my own motives were clean. Now I need to say I was wrong. I apologize for my part in discipleship. I ask forgiveness of the body of Christ.

Jamie: Why now?

Bob: I felt God's continued resistance in my own life. It wasn't that God turned His face from me,

The Ft. Lauderdale Five—in their power days. (l-r) Ern Baxter, Derek Prince, Charles Simpson, Don Basham, Bob Mumford.



but I knew I had not responded properly. I had taught others the need to repent, but I had not done so myself. When I wrote that paper a new degree of joy was released in my life, my home, and everything I was doing. It felt good to make a straight acknowledgement of personal sin and failure regarding the shepherding movement.

Jamie: What led up to it?

Bob: In 1984, I withdrew from the discipleship movement and moved to California. It was difficult for me. I couldn't get my bearings. I didn't know how the Lord wanted me to approach ministry. A year ago, the Lord told me to cease traveling and listen. I took a year off from public ministry to seek God and re-examine my life. When people perceived that I had withdrawn from discipleship/shepherding they began to write me from all over the world, expressing how they had been hurt and injured by the movement. For the first time I began to realize the depth of hurt the movement had caused others.

Because of this and the crisis in my personal life, I entered into an extensive fast. Every time I would bring this subject to the Lord, He would say, "When you get clear I'll heal you, too."

I talked with Jack Hayford. He confirmed I needed to clear myself with God and those I had hurt. The only way to do that is through repentance.

Jamie: Jack Hayford had profound input into your life during this healing period, didn't he?

Bob: Jack had come to me in 1974, saying even though the truths [of discipleship] were real, he felt the momentum was wrong. Many other leaders, including yourself, said the same thing. I refused to listen. As confusion built in my own life over this past year, I returned to Hayford. He gave me godly counsel that helped form my intent to issue a statement of repentance.

Jamie: Someone once described heresy as "truth taken beyond reason." Using that definition, was discipleship heresy?

Bob: I'd like to define heresy as "self-willed opinion," meaning it's more than doctrine. It's always frustrating when someone apologizes on one hand then defends himself on the other. I don't want to do that. I do want to say the concept of discipleship and covenant relationships is biblical—not heretical. However, the application of those truths lent themselves in a particular way to heresy. I now see the biblical warnings: "Don't lord it over the flock." But I did. In my own heart, I got this triumphal feeling of being in charge. People, on the other hand, felt handled and pressured. We wrongly gave the impression you could not fellowship with any of us unless you did things our way. That was wrong.

Jamie: Richard Dortch said, after he left PTL, that the television camera turns little men into demagogues. Was there a sense of that which ran through discipleship, as immature men were given authority?

Bob: Killian McDonnell, one of the world's leading Catholic charismatic scholars, told me in 1976, "Bob, there are two things about discipleship which scare me. First, you are going to be successful. You're touching something badly needed in the charismatic movement. Second, I see no way for you to bring your leaders into maturity. These young men will run wild with the authority given them and you are going to suffer."

The demagoguery came when our young leaders, unchecked, took their spiritual authority into the flesh.

Jamie: So much of the problem was your inability to hold your young leaders in check.

Bob: If that sounds like an

excuse, I'll just have to suffer with it. But that is literally what happened. I simply missed how rapidly—and perversely—it would grow. I thought every pastor would put discipleship into operation and it would become the way of the church. We didn't start out to have a five-headed pyramid, but that's what came forth. And none of us factored in what I call the "Adam Factor"—meaning what would happen when flesh was given authority.

Jamie: Luther faced the same thing when his peasants, set free from Catholic control, rebelled against their land barons, and thousands were slaughtered in the Peasants' Revolt.

Bob: It's a similar situation. Had we had a broad base of leadership—a larger governmental body—involved, our methods would have been modified. But since there were only a few of us leading, we quickly turned inward and the movement became perverted.

Jamie: Derek broke in 1983. Why didn't you make your break then?

Bob: Out of loyalty to my friends. I am basically a loyal person. I felt I could stay and steer the movement to be biblically balanced. But it didn't steer. The direction was too strong and I was caught between my loyalty to men and my conscience. I finally had to leave.

Jamie: What will this do to your relationship with Charles Simpson since he is still operating in a type of discipleship?

Bob: I believe relationships always transcend structure. Charles is an anointed man of God. Derek handled his withdrawal carefully. I've tried to handle mine in a way that will allow me to walk with Charles even though I no longer conceptually agree with him. I want, very badly, for my relationship with him to remain strong.

Jamie: It seems your physical move to the West Coast was an effort to break the strong covenant tie you once had with Simpson and the movement. Is that accurate?

Bob: My move to California was intentional. I needed to sort through my own position. I believed God had called us to walk together in a model of covenant relationship that would help others. Now I see it was "for a season."

Jamie: Do you think your statement of repentance will help restore your relationship with Pat Robertson, who once described you as a false teacher?

Bob: I've never criticized Pat. I respect him. I'm hoping the Lord will now heal that broken relationship.

Jamie: What's your relationship with those men who directly related to you—including Scott Ross, who is now back at CBN and working closely with Pat?

Bob: As the pressures began to build, I recognized this [discipling men] was not something I was called to do. Those men recognized it as well. I've withdrawn—not relationally, but structurally—from all my former "disciples."

Jamie: Did you set your disciples free in a formal way?

Bob: That's a penetrating question. I did tell each of them that I wanted to be their friend but they were free to pursue God's will apart from my oversight. We've remained friends at a distance, but I think they all wish—as I do—that it hadn't taken place to begin with.

Jamie: Many of us felt the principles of discipleship were right. We saw the charismatic movement as a balloon with no tether cord. Where did it all go wrong?

Bob: There's a pre-Watergate and a post-Watergate mentality. In the pre-Watergate stage you're triumphalistic. You can't do anything wrong. Post-Watergate means no one wants to take the blame. No one knows what happened. It's the "I-didn't-order-it-did-you?" mentality. I want to avoid that. I don't want to put the blame on anyone else.

I didn't have an alternative plan if discipleship failed. I put my whole life into it, which is one of the reasons I was so defensive when others began pointing out why it wouldn't work. I was committed to truth and believed the larger body of Christ would see things as I saw them. When that didn't happen, I was more disillusioned than anyone looking from the outside. I was devastated.

Jamie: Derek Prince once said every seventh wave was larger than all the others, and discipleship was the seventh wave.

Bob: I'm glad we're back to the third wave.

Jamie: What do you hope to accomplish by issuing this statement of public repentance?

Bob: I did it for three reasons: (1) as a sincere desire to obey God; (2) to find a personal release from the Lord over my lack of courage to admit my own mistakes; and (3) with a prayer that anyone still involved in this doctrine will either find a release in healing or re-examine how those doctrines are being applied.

God is still calling people to accountability and into shepherding care. I believe He is going to give us back these principles in resurrected form.

Jamie: Do you believe there are still people suffering from injuries caused by the excesses?

Bob: I read my statement last night at the CBU conference

just before Derek spoke. Then I stayed to pray for the sick. But I never got a chance to pray for the sick. More than 100 people came to me, most in tears, expressing release and cleansing because I had the courage to say, "I was wrong, please forgive me."

Jamie: Charles wrote an "apology" statement in *New Wine* magazine just before it went out of business. Why wasn't that sufficient?

Bob: (*chuckling*) Boy, you really go for the jugular, don't you? I wrote a statement for *Charisma* which wasn't sufficient either. Why? Because neither Charles' statement nor mine contained the words: "I repent. I ask for forgiveness. Discipleship was wrong."

Jamie: Does this represent a change in your stance?

Bob: I have been careful not to come out of discipleship into some new fad. There is in me but one insatiable desire: to find out how to more effectively follow Jesus. A year ago the Lord told me to minimize my time in the Epistles and get into the Gospels. I've been digging through the Gospels for a year—reading, living, studying the life of Christ. That's my call. That's who I am. That's all I want to do the rest of my life: Teach people how to follow Jesus.

Jamie: Several leaders, including Jack Hayford, have indicated you need men to stand with you.

Bob: I agree. I am personally accountable to the elders at Elim Fellowship in Lima, New York, where I am an elder and where my ordination to the ministry took place. Those men often challenged me while I was involved in disciple-

ship and are now standing with me as we move into the future.

Jamie: You once said everyone needs to be accountable to someone. Do you still believe that?

Bob: With all my heart. The principle of being accountable is true, but it must be in the Spirit. Accountability does not mean someone else should make my decisions for me. It means I'll never have to make another decision alone. That's a great privilege. Seeing that principle distorted was the greatest pain in my life. Accountability simply means allowing my friends to challenge me to make sure I'm walking the things I'm talking. In discipleship it became oppressive and coercive. But if you discard accountability, maturity is an empty dream. ■