

# BUCKINGHAM REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE BY AMERICA'S FOREMOST  
CHRISTIAN ANALYZER OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE, &  
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S SPIRIT-LED LEADERS

## CHANGING ATTITUDES AMONG DISCIPLESHIP LEADERS

36 lines

Few people have stirred as much controversy among Christians as Charles Simpson, Bob Mumford, Don Basham, Derek Prince and Ern Baxter with their teachings on "shepherding" and "discipleship."

Back in the mid-70s Pat Robertson banned the "Ft. Lauderdale Five," originally known as the Holy Spirit Teaching Mission, from the Christian Broadcasting Network and sent out word that any tapes of Simpson and gang were to be erased. He used his national TV network to link the teaching with "witchcraft" and said the only difference between discipleship and Jonestown was the kool-aid.

The late Kathryn Kuhlman called their teaching false doctrine and in a well-publicized sermon in Youngstown, Ohio, called Derek Prince a "false prophet." She sent word to Dan Malachuk (at that time president of Logos International Fellowship) that if he did not cancel Bob Mumford from the program of the 1975 Conference on the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, she would back out. It was a sad day for unity in the Charismatic movement when the LIF board asked me to contact Mumford and tell him he had been dropped from the program. (That entire episode is covered in my biography of Kathryn Kuhlman, *Daughter of Destiny*, Bridge Publishers, N. Plainfield, New Jersey).

Demos Shakarian and the directors of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship sent out word that Simpson, Mumford, Prince, Basham and Baxter (and all their friends and supporters) were *persona non grata* at FGBMFI meetings and conventions. Since I had refused to take a stand against these men, even though I had publicly questioned the application of their teachings, the FGBMFI lumped me into the "shepherding" fold.

Former Southern Baptist pastor Bill Ligon, one of the founding directors of the National Leadership Conference and a respected Charismatic leader of leaders in Brunswick, Georgia, wrote a strong book outlining the dangers of the "shepherding" teachings and warning people to stay clear of this dangerous doctrine. (An interesting note: While a number of my friends thought I was lined up with the "shepherding" teachers, I was actually consulting with Bill Ligon and writer Robert Paul Lamb on Ligon's book, urging them to be moderate but encouraging them to publish this needed message.)

Other respected leaders such as Dennis Bennett, Ken Sumrall (under whose ministry Simpson had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit), Thomas Zimmerman and even the venerable David du Plessis spoke publicly against what had become known as "the Discipleship Movement." In an effort to bring some kind of unity and understanding Dan Malachuk and I (I was at that time editor of the now defunct *Logos Journal*) hosted a forum involving the two of us and the men of Christian Growth Ministries in which we discussed the issues and tried to correct misunderstandings. We



simultaneously published the results of that forum in special sections of *Logos Journal* and *New Wine*, the teaching magazine published by Christian Growth Ministries in Ft. Lauderdale. All it did was create more division. The schism was so deep and wide that nothing short of a miracle could bring healing.

### HORROR STORIES CIRCULATE

48 lines

Simpson moved from Ft. Lauderdale to Mobile. One by one the others joined him—with the exception of Prince. Many suspected Prince was marching to the sound of a different drummer, although he still maintained his high profile as one of “the Five.” However, Prince did not make the move to Alabama, along with the others, preferring to keep his house and his headquarters for his own tape and book publishing company in the Ft. Lauderdale area.

When other leaders from around the nation, such as Charismatic teacher Joseph Garlington from Pittsburgh, moved to Mobile, many of their church members moved with them. Other groups of people—house churches, primarily, under the authority of a sub-shepherd who was in submission to one of the five primary leaders—also moved from one location in the nation to another, following the directions of their shepherds. These mass movements of people from one city to another as they followed the direction of a strong shepherd added fuel to the fearful, but unfounded, accusations that the shepherding movement was actually a cult. Horror stories of people who had submitted their wills to earthly shepherds abounded. Most of these were highly exaggerated or at least taken out of context.

What was true, was that, as the shepherding movement embraced a large number of Catholics who had different scruples about beverage alcohol, the consumption of liquor in some groups—especially in the home base in Mobile—became a real problem. Simpson, a former Southern Baptist and now recognized leader of the discipleship movement and the senior pastor of the Gulf Coast Fellowship, moved quickly to restore purity in the camp. This, however, along with an expensive battle with the IRS (defense lawyers cost them more than \$100,000) who used documents purloined from Simpson’s file to try to destroy them, proved to be spiritually draining.

### EFFORTS OF UNITY

The huge Charismatic gathering in Kansas City was the beginning of a number of efforts on the part of those in the discipleship movement to re-establish fellowship with the “mainstream” of the Charismatic movement. Bob Mumford, on several occasions, went out of his way to seek out a number of middle-of-the-road leaders (including myself) in order to have personal fellowship. I cherish the memory of the several times when we spent a couple of days alone in a beach house on the east coast of Florida—swimming, talking, praying and seeking to work out any difficulties which might have separated us in the past.

When Karl Strader, Quentin Edwards and Roy Harthern founded the Idea Exchange, Don Basham and I both accepted invitations as main speakers for that first conference in Houston. Basham’s presence was even more controversial since he spoke on “deliverance”—a subject as highly volatile among classic Pentecostals as discipleship was among Charismatics. His openness and his willingness to answer all questions assured him a warm reception, however, even by those who disagreed with his doctrine and methods.

It was obvious that the leaders in the discipleship movement were making a strong effort to return to unity with others. In subsequent meetings of the Idea Exchange, Simpson and Sumrall re-



established fellowship.

Du Plessis and Mumford hugged each other at a John 17:21 Conference in Dallas.

All five of the men remained active in the Charismatic Leaders' Conference held annually at Glencoe, Missouri, under the auspices of the Charismatic Concerns Committee.

Mumford accepted invitations to speak at the big November CBU (Christian Believers United) Conferences at Montreat, North Carolina—a platform he had backed away from earlier.

Prince accepted an invitation from the directors to speak at the National Leadership Conference at Ridgecrest, North Carolina. (Bill Ligon was a member of that board.) Prince was specifically requested to stay away from the discipleship controversy and limit his message to the role of Israel in modern society, which he graciously did.

Authors, other than those in the discipleship movement, began appearing in *New Wine*. These included men such as Larry Christenson, Kenneth Copeland and Terry Law. Others, such as Houston Miles, were invited to Mobile to speak to the pastors of the Gulf Coast Fellowship.

Mumford quietly released most of his "disciples" to give full time to public teaching. Scott Ross, who has a nationwide radio and speaking ministry before moving to Ft. Lauderdale to become a Mumford disciple, was released and gradually drifted back—of all places—to his genesis at the Christian Broadcasting Network under Pat Robertson. Dick and Minnie Coleman, who had pastored Westside Baptist Church in Leesburg, Florida, where the first discipleship meetings were held, and later submitted themselves to Charles Simpson, were "released" back into ministry. With the help of Karl Strader, Dick found a job as an associate pastor with Quentin Edwards at Cypress Cathedral in Winter Haven, Florida. The Colemans have now accepted a senior pastor's position in North Carolina.

Perhaps most significant of all, however, was the move by Ken Sumrall, long a discipleship opponent, to re-open his old friendship with Simpson by driving over once a week from Pensacola to play golf.

Yet there was a missing ingredient. Trust could not be restored until there was some kind of explanation and apology of past error.

### PRINCE BREAKS FROM SHEPHERDING

Part of this came last year when Derek Prince sent a "confidential" letter to a number of his closest associates telling them he had broken all official ties with the discipleship movement. Prince, who has built a house in Jerusalem where he spends about half his time, stated he disagreed with a number of concepts espoused by those in shepherding, including that of extra-local authority, which is at the heart of the movement. He pointed out that, while he wanted to maintain his personal relationship with Simpson, Mumford, Basham and Baxter, he was no longer part of their "organization." (See the full write-up in *Charisma* "News and Views," August 1984).

The reaction on the part of those outside the movement was deep and moving. Many said Prince, through his public confession, had restored their confidence. The basic feeling was "Welcome home, old friend!"

### SIMPSON'S PUBLIC APOLOGY: SLOWLY TURNING THE BIG SHIP OF DISCIPLESHIP

Then, in the June issue of *New Wine*, Charles Simpson did what many of his friends outside the discipleship movement had been praying he would do. In the "open letter" he issued a frank explanation of how things had come to the place they are and climaxed it with a sincere apology.



“On behalf of Don Basham, Ern Baxter, Bob Mumford, myself and the churches that have tried to follow our leadership, I acknowledge that we have often missed the mark and fallen short of the goal.... We have often miscalculated our influence.... There have been occasions of authority being exercised in a carnal fashion. We have often failed to address these situations soon enough or adequately.... Our teaching on liberty has sometimes been construed to be libertarian and brought offense to other Christians.... The degree of our emphasis upon men has appeared to disdain the valid role and ministry of women....”

The apology could not have been more sincere, or have touched the areas of hurt and offense more clearly.

“We are sorry,” Simpson said. “We are not only sorry for our mistakes, but we are sorry for the condition among God’s people that weakens the Church in the face of its mission. We desire and ask for the forgiveness of those who have been offended.”

It was accompanied by a prayer that “we and those with us can apply [our] convictions in such a fashion that carnally motivated or immature persons will not abuse God’s people and override personal priesthood.”

Even Robertson and Shakarian could not ask for more.

### WHAT’S THE OUTCOME?

The sincerity of Simpson’s *New Wine* statement has been evident in his lifestyle as well. In the fall of last year, prior to being one of the speakers at the November CBU Conference at Montreat, North Carolina, (Mumford, Ken Sumrall and I were the other speakers) Simpson asked CBU president Jim Jackson to convene a “reconciliation” meeting with me at Sumrall’s home in Pensacola. I was not aware Charles felt I held “aught” against him. However, because of some things I had written in the past, because of a personal exchange of letters a number of years ago, and because of several reports which had appeared in *Charisma*, he wanted to make certain the air was clear before he appeared on the same conference program with me. I viewed the meeting as a noble offensive move on the part of a man who had every reason to feel “defensive.” It helped bond us together once again as brothers in the Lord.

Simpson and Mumford both were in good form at the Montreat meetings with no reference to the discipleship controversy being mentioned. In December, Simpson accepted an invitation to speak at Sumrall’s large Liberty Church in Pensacola—the first time he had been back to speak in a number of years. He was warmly received.

Simpson has also agreed to serve on a 50-member advisory board for the formation of a new Network of Christian Ministries along with a broad assortment of other leaders which include James Beall, Ken Copeland, Paul Crouch, David du Plessis, John Gimenez, Charles Green, Wally and Marilyn Hickey, Houston Miles, Earl Paulk, Tommy Reid, Morris Sheats, Bob Weiner, Sumrall and a host of others.

In our meeting in Pensacola, Simpson stated he no longer believes, as many of us understood him to say when the discipleship controversy was boiling, that every Christian needs a human pastor. “Anyone who reads the New Testament realizes that’s not what the Bible teaches,” he told me. Charles also emphasized to me—and I believe him—that the discipleship movement is not a pyramid—at least the kind you find in Amway. Rather it is a fellowship of churches around the nation who are loosely joined by a common bond. His title is that of pastor of the Gulf Coast Christian Fellowship in Mobile and his authority ends with the perimeters of that body—although his influence, through *New Wine* magazine, his tapes and conferences, is world-wide.

Mumford, no longer trying to disciple men, is moving back to the bay area of California which



will become his home base as he travels and teaches. Baxter has already returned to the San Diego area, leaving only Simpson and Basham to tend the store in Mobile.

Where does this leave the discipleship controversy? As far as I can tell the controversy is dead—although the movement lives on. It has stabilized—partially due to the extreme persecution it has been through—into what might be called a “sort-of” denomination (although all the discipleship leaders are adamant that was not their purpose nor has it materialized.) Simpson, a gentle man who drew some immature men around him who in some cases were both arrogant and ambitious, has made every effort to purge both his system and his soul of that which would divide the body of Christ. It is my hope that those hurt by earlier misunderstandings will now bury the hatchet, re-establish fellowship, and join ranks with these good men to build the kingdom of God and fight the common enemy.

### AFTER NOTE

No analysis is ever complete. In this case I confess I am viewing the discipleship movement from my own limited perspective—neither as an insider nor as a studied antagonist. I realize the movement’s leaders are gun-shy. After fighting off attacks on every side for a number of years they tend to be like the Jewish people who quickly accuse anyone who dares wrinkle a forehead as being “anti-Semitic.” To them I admit that this analysis, like any analysis, is incomplete. In this case it is limited to my own research, observation and opinion. However, it is written by a loving friend who deeply believes in the basic principles originally espoused by the leaders of the discipleship movement: covenant relationships, submission to authority, involvement in social affairs, holy living and a radical lifestyle patterned after the example of Jesus.

### PERSONAL

I am grateful for the generous feedback I’m receiving from the nation’s Christian leaders. Oral Roberts writes: “You are a truly God-gifted writer and communicator.” Ken Hagin, Jr. writes: “I feel you are meeting the issues head-on as well as sharing valuable insights in areas where we as ministers need to be informed. Keep up the good work.” And Ted Smith from the Church of the Living God in Traverse City, Michigan, writes to “commend you for handling this subject (immorality among church staff, January 15) in a loving and open manner.” He recommends (and so do I) Don Baker’s excellent book *Beyond Forgiveness*, Multnomah Press, Portland, OR 97266, which goes into this subject in much greater detail.

### TRAVEL TIPS

Don’t get caught short of camera film if traveling overseas. Film in Israel, for instance, can cost three times as much as the same roll of 35mm film purchased in the United States. The same is true, even more so, when it comes to batteries for cameras. Carry spare film and spare batteries with you—even if you don’t think you’ll need them.

Remember: Color prints can be made from slides for about the same price as the prints alone. And you get to see the slide first to determine if you want the print. Therefore, it’s not necessary to carry Kodacolor film unless you are only interested in prints.



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## CHANGING THE RULES

When hiring a new staff member, or making an assignment to one of your current staff persons, make all contracts up front.

A common mistake made by even the most seasoned senior leaders is to start a person at lesser responsibilities, then, at some later date, add jobs or additional responsibility—at the same salary.

The wise manager knows to spell out all that will be expected before hiring or making an assignment. If more is to be required, then make it plain that both salary and time requirements will be renegotiated.

### Case Study

A pastor hires (or, if the terminology sits better, the church calls) a minister of music. A job description spells out all duties: choir director, worship leader, worker with children's choirs, handbell choir director, orchestra coordinator, music librarian, etc. After the staff person arrives it is obvious he/she has a tremendous appeal to the young people. One day the pastor calls the minister of music into his office and adds the responsibility of "youth director," but makes no mention of a salary adjustment or where the ministry of music/youth is to find the additional time.

Or, the additional duties may be "singles' pastor" or perhaps an assignment to research a recreational program, or lead a mission tour (complete with enlisting people and acting as travel agent).

The result: an outwardly submissive staff member who feels—and rightly so—he has been treated unfairly. And someplace down the road that will manifest itself in some kind of major problem if it is not faced.

ALWAYS consult with the staff member far in advance of springing an announcement of change which will affect his/her life.

ALWAYS be open to renegotiate salary if additional responsibility is added.

ALWAYS consider how the additional responsibility will affect the staff member's personal life.

