

~Other Speakers A-F: Discernment Research Articles:

What an exhilarating scene--an arena jam-packed with thousands of sincere men standing together to declare their allegiance and devotion. Before the main event ever takes place a crescendo of praise erupts. Everyone is caught up in the evident power of the moment and they sense that they are part of an invincible force. Men who had previously been cool or lackadaisical in their worship are invigorated, renewed in their devotion, and leave with new determination to be faithful in their vows and worship.

Can you place this event? It occurred in Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey. But if you guessed this was describing a Promise Keepers conference, you would be right as well. Promise Keepers (hereafter referred to as PK) is a mushrooming mens' movement begun in 1990 by former football coach Bill McCartney of the University of Colorado. His burden was to restore strong male leadership to our homes and churches. A noble goal in light of the sad facts that 22% of white children and 68% of black children in our country are born to unmarried mothers and 5.6 million children under the age of 15 are being raised without a father (Edward Gilbreath, "Manhoods Great Awakening," Christianity Today, 39, No. 2, Feb. 6, 1995, p. 25).

So what could possibly be wrong with an organization whose purpose is to develop Christian men? Who can fault the Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper? Read them for yourself:

1. A PK is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. A PK is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises.
3. A PK is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.
4. A PK is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values.
5. A PK 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 PK is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.
7. A PK is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission (Mike Betancourt, ed., "Promise Keepers: Should Fundamentalists Get Involved?" O Timothy, 12, No. 4, 1995, p. 8).

Isn't that tremendous? Shouldn't every pastor rejoice and throw his support behind PK? In a word No. In the next few pages, observe the many fatal flaws in the foundation of this movement--flaws that we will call **THE SEVEN FALSE PREMISES OF THE PROMISE KEEPERS**.

FALSE PREMISE #1 - If it works, it must be right.

This is the philosophy of pragmatism. One of the key defenses of PK is its claim of results. Men return from the conferences changed, committed, and actively involved in their churches and families. They have committed themselves to the Seven Promises, yet God declares that vows should not be made hastily because God holds us accountable for every vow we make (Ecclesiastes 5:2,4,5). In addition, the "need" to be held accountable to "brothers" who are "to help him keep his promises" is an unscriptural, humanistic addendum to the vowing process. Rather, every member of the Body of Christ is to consider one another to provoke one another to good works (Hebrews 10:24). Surely, committing to vows during a highly emotional mass rally of "pumped" men is questionable at best and dangerous at its worst.

The results from such a gathering have all the marks of being short-lived, shallow, and humanist. Mob psychology rules. The atmosphere is anything but spiritual. Published reports relate the prevalence of Frisbees, paper gliders, beachballs, and footballs being tossed throughout the stands. Blaring rock music pounds to increase the hype. In some meetings, popular new evangelical leader Chuck Swindoll has ridden in on a

motorcycle to the accompaniment of the rock song, "Born to Be Wild" (Gilbreath, "Manhoods Great Awakening," p. 23). One pro-PK observer noted that "at times the... crowd seems excited not so much by what is being said as by the opportunity to 'hang' with other men" (Gilbreath, p. 23).

With all this hype, glitz, and gimmickry, isn't it clear that PK has substituted what God can do through the Word for what man can do through worldly means? It is virtually impossible to achieve true lasting spiritual results through the artificial, ungodly means of men.

Regardless of the results, pragmatism has never been the measure of spiritual success. If any men are truly changed to lives of solid commitment rather than to lives of flash-in-the-pan decisions, it will be in spite of, not because of, PKs methods.

FALSE PREMISE #2 - If it moves me, it must be right

The reason PK is so entrenched in experiential influence may well be traced to the charismatic roots of its founder and leadership. Founder Bill McCartney and PK president Randy Phillips are both affiliated with the Vineyard Christian Fellowship (Betancourt, "Promise Keepers: Should Fundamentalists Get Involved?" p. 12). At least one third of the 15 men on the PK Board of Directors are openly charismatic (Martin and Deidre Bobgan, "Promise Keepers Board Members and Church Affiliation," Psychoheresy Awareness Letter 3, No. 3, May-June 1995, p. 8). Strang Communications, publisher of Charisma magazine, "the official voice of the Charismatic movement," publishes New Man magazine as a partnership endeavor with PK (Betancourt, p. 9). Charismatic speakers such as Jack Hayford and Greg Laurie are often featured (Rick Miesel, "Promise Keepers, Ecumenical Macho-Men for Christ?" Biblical Discernment Ministries Notebook, Nov. 1994).

While not dedicated to converting its participants to charismatics PK is committed to creating unity based on a common experience at least as heady as the "signs and wonders" of the charismatics.

FALSE PREMISE #3 - If it combines Gods truth with mans truth, it must be right

There is a burgeoning market for PK-endorsed books on ways to revive the role of "Christian manhood." The views and methods may differ but they share the flaw of attempting to combine Scripture with the psychological theories and methods of man. Robert Hicks book, *The Masculine Journey*, is a prime example. Hicks twists the meaning of six Hebrew words for "man" to fit his own psychological theories of manhood. He "follows the predictable pattern of the integrationist. He takes a psychological theory, believes it to be valid... and then considers what the Bible might add" (Martin and Deidre Bobgan, "Promise Keepers and Psychoheresy," Psychoheresy Awareness Letter 2, No. 4, July-August 1994, p. 4).

He blasphemes the Lord Jesus by declaring that He was tempted to be homosexual and that He lusted sexually (Albert James Dager, "Promise Keepers: Is What You See What You Get?" Media Spotlight, 1994, p. 6). He speaks of man's need for "celebrating the experience of sin" in adolescence as a "rite of passage" (Bobgan, "Promise Keepers and Psychoheresy," p. 6).

Additionally, PK finds itself on the horns of a dilemma in regard to its treatment of homosexuality. PK officially declares that it "shares the same historic and biblical stance taken by Evangelicals and Catholics (Fax, "Promise Keepers Statement," sent to Pastor Greg Dixon, Indianapolis Baptist Temple, Dec. 8, 1993).

Yet in trying to placate as many people as possible they conclude just as officially that this abomination is "a complex and potentially polarizing issue to be understood in the context of psychology and genetic research" (Ibid.).

They state that "homosexuals are men who need the same support, encouragement and healing we are offering to all men.... We, therefore, support their being included and welcome in all our events" (Ibid.).

Whatever happened to condemning sin and calling for repentance and receiving the Gospel?

FALSE PREMISE #4 - If it brings us all together, it must be right

Their conference speakers are indicative of their ecumenical position: Chuck Swindoll, president of Dallas Theological Seminary; Luis Palau, ecumenical evangelist; Bill Bright, director of Campus Crusade for Christ; E.V. Hill, ecumenical charismatic pastor aligned with the National Council of Churches (Rick Miesel, "Promise Keepers," pp. 5-6); Joseph Stowell, president of Moody Bible Institute; and Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church (National and International Religion Report, 8, No. 13, June 13, 1994, p. 2) to name a few.

No fundamentalist in his right mind would ever associate with the hodgepodge of men and ministries involved with PK. God has declared for us to come out from among them and be ye separate (11 Corinthians 6:17).

FALSE PREMISE #5 - If it reconciles us to Rome, it must be right.

The outcome of the previous premise of ecumenicity is the acceptance of Roman Catholicism along with new evangelical and apostate Protestantism. Martin and Deidre Bobgan quote Father Christian Van Liefde's evaluation of PK in an archdiocese periodical, *The Tidings*:

"... there is no 'doctrinal issue which should cause concern to the Catholic Church.' Promise Keepers places a very strong emphasis on returning to your own church congregation or parish and becoming an active layman.... There is no attempt at proselytizing or drawing men away from their faith to another church" (Martin and Deidre Bobgan, "Promise Keepers, Catholics, and Mormons ... Together," *Psychoheresy Awareness Letter* 3, No. 3, May-June 1995, p. 3).

PK rallies "have attracted a significant number of Catholics, including some priests" (Carl Crawford Schmidt, "Promise Keepers, Message to Men," *Christian Century*, Sept. 7-14, 1994, p. 806). McCartney himself has said, "Hear me: Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Catholic" (Dager, "Promise Keepers," p. 12).

Was Paul mistaken, then, when he declared: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"? (Galatians 1:9).

Of course not. Active evangelism--the proclamation of the true Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ--referred to above as proselytizing, is the duty of every believer. Catholics are still one of our mission fields. We can never reconcile with the false gospel of Romanism.

I am told that when "oleo" was first sold it came in white, bland-looking sticks. A separate packet of yellow dye was included with your purchase and had to be kneaded into the oleo to give it a "butter" color. PK is like that old oleo. It is totally colorless regarding any true doctrinal substance. Anyone involved with it can add whatever doctrinal coloring in whatever amount they choose in order to make it personally palatable. But no matter how much you attempt to color it, PK still isn't butter. It is simply a bland carrier for ecumenical and Catholic dialogue and cooperation.

FALSE PREMISE #6 - If it purports to help the church, it must be right

PK declares that its purpose is to "celebrate biblical manhood and motivate men toward Christlike masculinity." But doesn't Ephesians 4:11-16 tell us that God has provided for these things and all else we need by the ministry of the church? Is it not the church's responsibility to feed the flock (Acts 20:28) rather than relinquish such areas of ministry to "parachurch" organizations?

What pastor doesn't appreciate encouragement in the midst of his trials and disappointments? In some PK rallies, thousands of pastors are called to the front to receive applause and great swelling cheers of "WE LOVE YOU! (David Halbrook, "Promise Keepers Looks Ahead," *Ministries Today*, March-April 1995, p. 61). Pastors

exposed to this attention are often moved to tears as roars of affirmation reverberate from the sea of men around them. How exciting! How uplifting!

But wait a minute. Think about it. Do these pastors understand the condescending connotations of these mammoth pity parties? PK purposes to do what churches and their leaders have failed to do. PK is in effect saying,

"You poor guys. You have beaten yourselves silly trying to do this job. We truly appreciate your efforts, but you are so tired and ill-equipped. Why don't you just step aside and let us handle the job? We love you because your failure to do your job effectively has given us a reason to exist."

These pastors were also being cheered for renouncing their "denominational barriers" as sin (Mark Nispel, "Promise Keepers 1994," Christian News, 32, No. 34, Sept. 19, 1994, p. 7). This indicates that PK not only embraces the false doctrine of inclusivism, but strongly opposes the Bible doctrine of separation. This is blatant blasphemy against God's Word. God pronounces woe on those who are guilty of it (Isaiah 5:20).

McCartney has said "that he thought perhaps the Lord's main purpose for Promise Keepers was to gather his clergy" and in 1995 he hopes "to gather 75,000 of them in Denver." Pastors, if you love the Lord and honor His Word, keep yourself and your men far from PK.

FALSE PREMISE # 7 - If anyone disagrees with us, they must be wrong.

Albert James Dager, in a special report on PK, describes "its militant in-your-face challenge to accept sexual perversion or risk being called 'unloving'" (Dager, "Promise Keepers," p. 6).

This same attitude pervades all of PK as it grows: 4,200 in 1990; 22,000 in 1991; over 52,000 in 1993; 234,000 in 1994; and projections of over 750,000 for 1995. Next year PK hopes to gather one million men for a rally in Washington, D.C.

With its pragmatic approach, its emotional hype, its snowballing attendance, its ecumenical appeal, and its condemnation of separation, the PK juggernaut seems intent on steamrolling its opposition. Although some of its goals, if interpreted within a separatist context, may be commendable, PK fails (in the same way as have the Moral Majority, Concerned Women for America, Right to Life, and other crusading movements) to meet the Bible's criteria for a Christian's involvement.

Any movement that leads men away from their need to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ and draws men to any other means of reform, religion, or referendum is wrong, regardless of its size and strength. Brethren, we stand opposed to Promise Keepers. Where do you stand?