

The Purpose Driven Church – A Critique

By

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Note to the reader: I took a class where we had to read *The Purpose Driven Church* by Pastor Rick Warren, and write a book report on it. The first 8 pages contain a summary of the entire book. My critique begins on page 9.



The author of the book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, is Rick Warren, who is the pastor of the 10,000-member church, Saddleback Community Church. He attended Southwestern Seminary in Texas, and upon graduation relocated to California to launch Saddleback Community Church.

The main purpose of the book is to share with the church at large the principles that made Saddleback Community Church a fast-growing church. The foreword, written by W.A. Criswell, notes, “...*this book explains the convictions, principles, and practices that have been used mightily by God in building one of the most effective churches on the North American continent...Rick discourages churches from trying to become “photocopies” of Saddleback. Rather, he encourages local churches to penetrate our materialistic, humanistic society with the transforming message of Christ by using contemporary and relevant methods without compromising the truth of the Gospel. That’s what this book is all about.*” (Warren, pp.11-12)

Here is a brief summary of each part and each chapter of the book:

Five Parts

The book is broken down into five parts. Part one is about seeing the big picture. Here we discover the Saddleback story, and are warned about some false understandings about growing churches.

Part two describes the steps necessary to become a purpose driven church. We learn to determine what it is that drives the church, what the foundation for a healthy church is, and the need to define, communicate, organize around, and apply our purposes.

In part three we are presented with the need to reach our community. We must define the target and determine who it is that we can best reach, and the need to develop a strategy to accomplish that.

Part four is where we see the real seeker-sensitivity, so to speak, come full throttle. There is discussion on how Jesus attracted crowds, worship, and things such as how to design a seeker sensitive service, music selection, and preaching is discussed.

Part five turns back into the church, and discusses things that must be done to build up the church. We are presented with how to turn attenders into members (Congregation), how to develop mature members (Committed), how to turn members into ministers (Core), and finally God's purpose for the church.

Chapter Summaries

Introduction: Surfing Spiritual Waves – Pastor Warren here stresses the need for the church to be sensitive to see where God is leading, and wherever God is leading, we need to get in on it. He likens this to surfing and catching waves.

Chapter 1 The Saddleback Story – Pastor Warren tells the story of how he began the church. Of particular interest is the whole chain of “coincidences” that occurred that resulted in him establishing the church in Saddleback. He speaks of how the church struggled, and surprisingly even notes that “*very little of Saddleback's ministry was preplanned.*” (Warren, p. 27). He describes what his vision was, what kind of church Saddleback would be, and provides the basic vision of Saddleback. Pastor Warren also speaks of the story behind the methods they use now, and that it is critical to understand the context in which those methods were employed, because if not, they won't work. Pastor Warren encourages us to look beneath the methods to any transferable principles, which he identifies throughout the book.

Chapter 2 Myths About Growing Churches – Pastor Warren sets forth eight myths concerning growing churches:

1. The only thing that large churches care about is attendance. Here Pastor Warren says that church growth is, “*the natural result of church health. Church health can only occur when our message is biblical and our mission is balanced.*” (Warren, p. 49) Pastor Warren then sets forth the five dimensions of church growth: churches grow warmer through fellowship, churches grow deeper through discipleship, churches grow stronger through worship, churches grow broader through ministry, and churches grow larger through evangelism. (Warren, p.49).
2. All large churches grow at the expense of smaller churches.
3. You must choose between quality and quantity in your church.
4. You must compromise the message and the mission of the church in order to grow.

5. If you are dedicated enough, your church will grow.
6. There is one secret key to church growth.
7. All God expects of us is faithfulness.
8. You can't learn from large churches.

Chapter 3 What Drives Your Church – Pastor Warren sets forth the different things that drive some churches: tradition, personality, finances, programs, buildings, events, and seekers (Warren says, “*The church should be seeker sensitive, but it must not be seeker driven*” (p.80)., Warren then sets forth what he considers to be the biblical paradigm: purpose-driven churches, and tells us that there are two essential elements in this paradigm: a new perspective, and the requirement for a process for fulfilling the churches purposes. Pastor Warren says, “*The starting point for every church should be the question, “Why do we exist?”*” (p. 81)

Chapter 4 The Foundation For a Healthy Church – Pastor Warren discusses the need to lay a strong foundation, which helps build morale, reduce frustration, allow concentration, attracts cooperation, and assists evaluation. He speaks of the need for the church to have a vision, define roles and set goals, and for churches not to get distracted by less important things, and not to try and do too much, thus the need for the church to be efficient.

Chapter 5 Defining Your Purposes – Pastor Warren encourages pastor's to lead their church by defining its purposes. This is done by studying with the congregation what the Bible says about the church. Then they are to put their findings into writing and summarize the conclusion in a sentence. Warren then gives guidance on what makes an effective purpose statement. A purpose statement must be biblical, specific, transferable, and measurable. Warren identifies what he calls two great Scriptures related to this: The Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40), and the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). Warren comments, “*A great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a Great Church!*” (Warren, p.102). Warren then defines the five purposes of the church:

1. Love the Lord with all your heart.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself.
3. Go and make disciples.
4. Baptism.
5. Teaching them to obey.

From there Warren provides the Saddleback purposes and purpose statement:

1. Magnify
2. Mission
3. Membership
4. Maturity
5. Ministry

“Saddleback’s Purpose Statement: To bring people to Jesus and membership in His family, develop them into Christlike maturity, and equip them for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world, in order to magnify God’s name.” (Warren, p. 107)

Chapter 6 Communicating Your Purposes - Pastor Warren describes the different ways to communicate vision and purpose. These include symbols, slogans, stories, and specifics. He then sets forth the responsibility each member has in bringing the purposes of the church into reality. Warren provides a helpful chart on page 119 designed to help explain the church’s purposes.

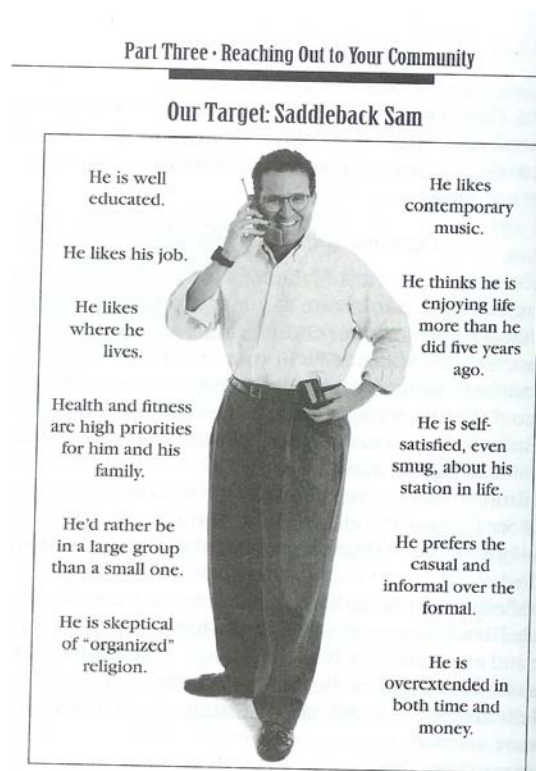
Explaining the Church’s Purposes								
Purpose	Task	Acts 2:42-47	Objective	Target	Life Component	Basic Human Need	The Church Provides	Emotional Benefit
Outreach	Evangelize	“...added to their number daily those who were being saved.”	Mission	Community	My Witness	Purpose to Live For	A Focus for Living	Significance
Worship	Exalt	“They devoted themselves to ... breaking of bread and prayers... praising God.”	Magnify	Crowd	My Worship	Power to Live On	A Force for Living	Stimulation
Fellowship	Encourage	“...devoted to the fellowship...all the believers were together...they ate together.”	Membership	Congregation	My Relationships	People to Live With	A Family for Living	Support
Discipleship	Edify	“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”	Maturity	Committed	My Walk	Principles to Live By	A Foundation for Living	Stability
Service	Equip	“They gave to anyone as he had need.”	Ministry	Core	My Work	Profession to Live Out	A Function for Living	Self-expression

Chapter 7 Organizing Around Your Purposes - Pastor Warren speaks of the need to have a system and structure to balance the purposes of the church. He speaks of five kinds of unbalanced churches, i.e., paradigms (the soul winning church, the experiencing God church, the family reunion church, the classroom church, and the social conscience church), and also five major para-church movements (lay renewal, discipleship/spiritual formations, worship/renewal, church growth, and small group/pastoral care). While all these emphasize good things, they

obviously do not capture the whole purpose of the church. Warren then sets forth the need to have balanced churches, and describes what he calls 5 circles of commitment (community, crowd, congregation, committed, and core), and the life development process, a baseball diamond illustrating different levels of discipleship training. One cannot help but notice that the number 5 is extremely prevalent throughout Warren's book.

Chapter 8 Applying Your Purposes - In this chapter Pastor Warren presents ten ways to be purpose driven: assimilate new members on purpose, program around your purposes, educate your people on purpose, start small groups on purpose, add staff on purpose, structure on purpose, preach on purpose, budget on purpose, calendar on purpose, and evaluate on purpose.

Chapter 9 Who Is Your Target – Pastor Warren speaks of the need to be specific in terms of an evangelistic target. The target can be defined geographically, demographically, culturally, and spiritually. Once all of this information has been determined, we are then told to create a composite profile of the average unchurched person that the church wants to reach. Warren provides the example his church used of Saddleback Sam:



Chapter 10 Knowing Whom You Can Best Reach – Here Pastor Warren encourages us to first reach those that we already have something in common with. He then speaks of the various

barriers to church attendance (theological, relational, emotional, lifestyle, and cultural), and focuses in on the cultural barriers. To figure out the kind of person our church can best reach, we are encouraged to ask questions such as: who already attends our church, and what kind of leaders do we have? If it happens that our church doesn't match the community, we can build on our strengths, reinvent the congregation (which Pastor Warren does not advise), or start new congregations (which is the one that Warren does recommend). Finally, we need to recognize the spiritual receptivity in the community. This will require planning by the church because we want to be wise stewards. Warren says that best prospects are people in transition, and people under tension.

Chapter 11 Developing Your Strategy – Pastor Warren provides insight into effective evangelistic methodology (and recommends Christ's methodology). This entails knowing what we are fishing for, going to where the fish are biting, and learning to think like a fish. Warren then details the four basic complaints of the "fish" (Church is boring, Church members are unfriendly, the Church only cares about money, and the quality of the Church's child care). Warren then sets forth his plan to overcome these obstacles, saying that we must catch fish on their terms by understanding and adapting to their culture, letting the target determine our approach, beginning with the felt needs of the unchurched, understanding and responding to the hang-ups of the unchurched, and changing methods whenever necessary. To catch the fish then, we must use more than just one hook, and it is costly to reach our community.

Chapter 12 How Jesus Attracted Crowds – Pastor Warren advises that the way to attract a crowd is the same way Jesus did; by loving unbelievers. This, says Warren, is the most overlooked key to church growth. In order to do this, Pastor Warren says we must create an atmosphere of acceptance (without approving), and the Pastor must be loving. He must convey this by memorizing names, personally greeting people, touching people (hugs, handshakes, pats on the back, etc.), and using a warm personal style in writing to visitors. Warren then says for a church to attract a crowd, they must, as Jesus did, meet the needs of people, teach in practical, interesting ways (where we begin with people's needs, hurts, and interests), relate truth to life, and speak in an interesting style (use stories, simple language, etc.). This is the one place where Warren stressed the most that he realizes some Christians will disagree with him. He then speaks of the differences between a "go and tell" or a "come and see" mindset in evangelism, and responding to culture, where Warren speaks of two extremes: imitation and isolation.

Chapter 13 Worship Can Be a Witness – Warren attempts to establish the need for seeker sensitive services, and outlines twelve convictions about worship: Only believers can truly worship God; you don't need a building to worship God; there is no correct style of worship; unbelievers can watch believers worship; worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers if God's presence is felt and the message is understandable; God expects us to be sensitive to the fears, hang-ups, and needs of unbelievers when they are present in our worship services; worship services don't have to be shallow to be seeker sensitive; needs of believers and unbelievers often overlap; it is best to specialize your service according to purpose; a service geared toward seekers is meant to supplement evangelism, not replace it; there is no standard way to design a seeker sensitive service; it takes unselfish, mature believers to offer a seeker sensitive service.

Chapter 14 Designing a Seeker-Sensitive Service – Having, in his opinion, established that seeker sensitive churches are needed, Pastor Warren now sets forth practical ways to go about designing the seeker service. This is done by planning the service with the church's target in mind, making it easy as possible for people to attend, improve the pace and flow of the service (no "dead time!"), make visitors feel comfortable, brighten up the environment, create an attractive atmosphere, print a simple order of service, and minimize church announcements.

Chapter 15 Selecting Your Music – Warren encourages the use of contemporary music and provides a biblical basis for it, and then provides rules for selecting a music style. This includes previewing all music that is used (no surprises!), using a more upbeat tempo, updating lyrics, encourage members to write new songs, replace the organ with the MIDI band. He then cautions not to force unbelievers to sing, and then says that the way to accomplish this is to use more performed music than congregational singing.

Chapter 16 Preaching to the Unchurched – Pastor Warren provides ideas on how to make sermons relevant to the unchurched. According to Warren, we must adjust our style to the audience, make the bible accessible to unbelievers, provide an outline with Scriptures written out, plan titles to appeal to the unchurched, preach in series, choose guest speakers carefully, and preach for commitment.

Chapter 17 Turning Attenders into Members (Congregation) – Pastor Warren sets forth his paradigm of church assimilation here. The first step is to have a plan of assimilation. In the plan, Warren provides 12 essential questions that must be answered. From there, the importance of membership must be communicated to the people. Warren then recommends establishing a

required membership class, and provides a membership covenant. The importance of relationships is then greatly stressed, and Warren sets forth the small group paradigm to facilitate this.

Chapter 18 Developing Mature Members (Committed) – Pastor Warren addresses the myths about spiritual maturity (spiritual growth is automatic, spiritual growth is mystical and attainable only to a select few, spiritual maturity occurs instantly, spiritual maturity is measured by knowledge, spiritual growth is a private matter, and all one needs is Bible study to grow). Warren then discusses the six truths that he has identified in contrast to the myths to facilitate spiritual maturity. Warren teaches that spiritual growth begins with commitment, is a gradual process, involves developing habits, is measured by five factors, is stimulated by relationships, and requires participation in all five purposes of the church. He concludes by providing five questions that be asked about any Christian education program, and then provides a copy of the Saddleback 2020 vision for a mature church.

Chapter 19 Turning Members Into Ministers – Warren stresses the importance of releasing members for ministry, and then discusses the things necessary to turn an “audience into an army...” Among those things listed are teaching the Biblical basis for every-member ministry (where he identifies four pillar truths drawn from Rom 12:1-8), streamlining the organizational structure, establishing a ministry placement process, providing on the job training, always starting a ministry with a minister, establish minimum standards and guidelines, etc.

Chapter 20 God’s Purpose for Your Church – This is the conclusion. Pastor Warren stresses that we aren’t to worry about growth, but about fulfilling the purposes of the church. He then encourages us to be purpose-driven people, where he uses King David as an example (Acts 13:36), and then tells us that a successful ministry is one that is built on the purposes of God in the power of the Spirit and expecting the results from God.

My Assessment

In terms of technique, lay out, and the ability to communicate clearly and concisely, the book is well written, and I really can't see how the book could be improved from that standpoint. It is well organized and easy to follow.

Pastor Warren has provided many helpful things for the church in terms of its organization, and I agree that the church should be "purpose driven." I agree that we must establish what it is that drives our church, what the foundation for a healthy church is, the need to be balanced, and the need to give attention to our purposes. Too many churches seem to lose sight of these things. We need to, as Pastor Warren encourages us, define, communicate, organize around, and apply those purposes (Warren, pp. 75-152).

With regard to the purpose of the church, Warren focuses on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, and with regard to applying those purposes, I found the Life Development Process outlined on p. 144 to be beneficial. Thus, I find many valuable things to glean in pages 75-152.

I also found much of what Pastor Warren stated with regard to turning attenders into members (I liked, for the most part, the Saddleback Membership Covenant, p. 321), and Warren's call for the church to develop mature members helpful (Warren, pp. 331-364). Thus, there are some good elements in the book from which a church could glean.

Unfortunately, the book fails in a variety of fundamental and critical ways. If I had to sum it up, I would say that basically, I don't think I have ever read anything that is so overtly man-centered and unbiblical in terms of its overall methodology as this book. Thus, I find myself largely critical of it. If the author were going to update the book, I would hope that he would take note of the things I will humbly yet straightforwardly (and passionately) mention henceforth.

In chapter two, Pastor Warren addresses some myths about growing churches, and he speaks about the myth of choosing between quality and quantity in the church. He goes on to state "*A church full of genuinely changed people attracts others. If you study healthy churches you'll discover that when God finds a church that is doing a quality job of winning, nurturing, equipping, and sending out believers, He sends that church plenty of raw material.*" (Warren, p. 51). Now in one sense I agree with Pastor Warren. The church should be a place where we discover genuinely changed people, and the church is tasked with Great Commission. However,

the key to the Great Commission is *Jesus*. Jesus begins the Great Commission by saying, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...*” (Matt 28:18), and ends by saying, “*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” (Matt 28:20) The emphasis in the Great Commission is on the *One* who is empowering and building His church, *Jesus Christ*. The emphasis in Pastor Warren’s statement though is solely on the church. It’s as if God were standing on the outside of the church, an innocent bystander watching the church “*winning, nurturing, equipping, and sending out believers...*” God here is not the *primary* cause of winning, nurturing, equipping, and sending out believers, the church is. The statement reads as if God were totally detached from those activities, and by chance stumbles upon a church doing those things. All God does is send the raw materials so that this church can develop them, seemingly through their own power and wisdom. God is not the hero, the church is.

Secondly, Pastor Warren never, unless I overlooked it, doesn’t define what he means by “*raw materials*,” and third, there is no Biblical support offered for his analysis. When we do turn to Scripture, what we discover is that a church that is serious about the Great Commission, and church members who have had their lives changed, are for the most part anything but attractive to the unbeliever. Instead, as it regards those who are perishing, we are, as the apostle Paul says, “*...the aroma of death leading to death...*” (2 Cor 2:15-16) The apostle Peter tells us, “*But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. **For to this you were called**, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps...*” (1 Peter 2:20-21, emphasis mine), and “*If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*” (1 Pet 4:14). What usually happens is that the unbeliever, offended by the message of the cross (1 Cor 1:18), begins to do all he can to avoid church, or partner with others who will help him persecute the church (2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:14). One need only examine the lives of the apostles, those listed in the “hall of faith” (Hebrews 11), and Jesus Christ Himself, to see what *kind* of attraction they brought to themselves. All of the apostles, save one, suffered a martyr’s death, many of those listed in Hebrews 11 “*were tortured...had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawn in two, were tempted, and slain with the sword...*” (Heb 11:35-37), and Jesus was brutally tortured and put death!

Besides this, saying that it is the lives of genuinely changed people that attracts people puts the focus once again on man, instead of on the Holy Spirit and His effectual working through God's primary appointed means to bring people to Himself: His Word.

As a matter of fact, the whole concept that our Christianity is supposed to be "attractive" to unbelievers can be misleading at best. What is so attractive about losing your life for Christ? What is so attractive about persecution and suffering? Have we forgotten that there is none who seeks God? There is no such thing as a depraved unbeliever being attracted to the Gospel or the church, and if there is, then maybe the church is doing something wrong. The message of the cross is offensive. If that is the case (and it is), one might ask how it is that people will be brought to our churches. The answer is by the sovereign working of God's amazing grace, through the faithful preaching of the Gospel. Does this mean that we shouldn't be concerned about seeing people come to Christ? No! It just means that we recognize that *we* don't give the increase, God does, and God has simply tasked us with being faithful to Him by proclaiming His Gospel to every creature, and leaving the results with Him. The whole focus on quality in the church isn't that we might be more attractive to a sinner, but that our worship might be more pleasing to God. We worship an awe-inspiring God, and our worship and the quality of our ministries should reflect that, not because of the cares of the creature, but because of the glory and majesty of the Creator.

Pastor Warren then identifies another myth as being that we must compromise the message and the mission of the church in order to grow, and says, "*Jesus' ministry attracted enormous crowds. Why? Because the Gospel is good news! It has an attractive power when clearly presented.*" (Warren, p. 53) It is true, Jesus attracted large crowds, but the reason wasn't because of the good news of the Gospel, it was because the people were excited to see yet another miracle from the hands of the *prophet* from Nazareth (John 6:2; Luke 23:8). When people were presented with the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners, and the demands that the Gospel (i.e., repent, lose your life, trust in Christ alone, etc.) placed upon its hearers, we read time and again of people actually leaving Jesus! (John 6:66; Matt 19:16-22; Luke 9:57-62).

As a matter of fact, the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22, sounds very much like Pastor Warren's "Saddleback Sam." He was no doubt well educated, well adjusted, self-satisfied, and evidently skeptical of organized religion (hence he comes to Jesus and not the Pharisees). The only difference is that Jesus didn't placate His "Saddleback Sam" by asking him

what his felt needs were, or by giving him a survey about what he liked and disliked about Jesus, and how Jesus could change to make it easier for him to worship Jesus. Instead, Jesus told His “Saddleback Sam” to “*sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me.*” (Matt 19:21). Jesus’ “Saddleback Sam” **left** Jesus. The point is that brother Warren seems to bend over backwards to appeal (or, as he puts it, to be attractive) to Saddleback Sam, but never, as far as I can tell, challenges Saddleback Sam with the cost of what it means to follow Jesus. From the very start everything is done to placate Saddleback Sam so that he might feel comfortable in church; and of course, he will feel comfortable now since **his** ideas, **his** wants, and **his** desires serve as the entire **basis** for the worship service! (I will touch on this a bit later).

Pastor Warren’s response to anyone who criticizes churches that attract large crowds is to simply accuse them of “*ministerial jealousy.*” (Warren, p. 53) Did it ever occur to Pastor Warren that it may not be ministerial jealousy, but ministerial **concern** over some of the unbiblical methodology that much of the seeker-sensitive movement employs to “*attract large crowds?*” Pastor Warren conveys an unwillingness to accept any correction regardless of how constructive it might be because he sees the numbers and then reasons that it must be blessed of God, and therefore biblical. Pastor Warren tries to short-circuit any kind of criticism that might be directed toward him by employing the Word of Faith movement tactic of “*don’t touch God’s anointed,*” only Warren’s version of it is, “*Never criticize any method that God is blessing!*” (Warren, p. 156). How does one determine if God is blessing the method? According to brother Warren, by looking at how full the church is, of course! What Pastor Warren does not accept is that the determining factor as to whether or not a method is blessed of God isn’t by looking at numbers, but looking at God’s Word. Any method that does not have the Bible as its foundation, focus, and sole sufficient guide, regardless of how many people are brought into the church, should not only be criticized, but also rejected. If the method is not biblical, then that means that the message runs a severe hazard of not being biblical (at the very least it will be deficient), and if the message is not biblical, then that means that the truth is not being proclaimed, and if the truth is not being proclaimed we will be found to false witnesses proclaiming a false “gospel” that is really no gospel at all.

One should recognize that anyone is able to attract a large crowd. The Mormons attract a crowd. Islam attracts a crowd. The Word of Faith teachers attract a crowd. Are we to then

suppose that they have the blessing of God upon them? Maybe instead of looking at a large crowd, and reasoning that because the crowd is large, God is therefore blessing, maybe seeing a large crowd flock to hear us should cause us to take stock of our message. Yes, God does send large crowds to some who truly preach the Gospel, but that seems to be the exception and not the rule. People are more attracted to the sensational and things that appeal to their fleshly desires and temporal concerns than they are to anything that seriously challenges their presuppositions and/or comfort level. *“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.”* (Gal 1:10, 11)

One more thing here to note as well with regard to ministerial jealousy: though Pastor Warren uses this to besmirch those who would offer criticism of his methodology, the charge seems to indicate who it is that Pastor Warren thinks is really responsible for growing the church: his methods, not God. The principle that Pastor Warren knows full well, yet seems to forget, is that he is merely one who plants or waters, but it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:5-7). This is all the more ironic when one considers that Pastor Warren, after completely undermining this principle with his seeker sensitive approach, actually says that the church shouldn't worry about the growth of the church, but simply remain focused on the purposes of the church, i.e., we must just keep watering and fertilizing, etc., and God will grow His church to the size He wants to! (Amen Pastor Warren! (Warren, p. 394). Yet, how can we take brother Warren seriously here in light of everything he has written prior to page 394? How can we take him seriously after he has told us, *“Church growth is the natural result of church health...”* (Warren, p.49), and *“A church that has no interest at all in increasing its number of converts is, in essence, saying to the rest of the world, “You can go to hell...”* (Warren, p. 52) Let me see if I've got this straight...we **should** be concerned about the health of our church. The way we judge the health of the church is by numerical growth. But, we aren't supposed to worry about numerical growth. But, if we don't worry about numerical growth, then basically that means that our church isn't healthy and to top it off we are telling the world to go hell. So, brother Warren has written a book telling us the methods he used to facilitate the numerical growth that we shouldn't be worried about!

In any event, just making the accusation he does concerning ministerial jealousy makes it clear that at a fundamental level, Pastor Warren does not seem to understand this, for how can one be jealous over something that ultimately they did not and cannot ultimately produce? I'm

not saying there is never ministerial jealousy. However, if Pastor Warren were going to make this charge, I think it would be wise if he: 1. Offer clear evidence to the fact, and 2. State in no uncertain terms that people should not be jealous of his ministry, because in the final analysis, he is just an instrument in the hands of an absolutely sovereign God who always accomplishes His foreordained purposes through His own appointed means. He should, in a word, exalt in God who gives the increase (and exalt in Him alone), instead of exalting himself and/or his method.

I would further argue that church growth is not the natural result of church health. Again, does this mean that the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses have healthy churches? Or what about all of those Word of Faith churches that completely distort the nature and attributes of God, and distort the Gospel if not altogether deny it? Some of those churches have thousands in attendance (T.D. Jakes, Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, etc). Are we to believe that those churches are “healthy”? Of course not! A healthy church is not gauged by its numbers, but by its adherence to and practice of the truth. A healthy church is a place where, among other things, the truth of God is faithfully proclaimed and taught, the sacraments/ordinances are faithfully administered, worship is conducted in spirit and truth, church discipline is administered, and the saints are being equipped for the work of ministry, taught to love one another, and are engaged in service to God and to others. As a matter of fact, I can’t think of any place in Scripture where growth in numbers is actually promised to a “healthy” local church. Now, the church universal will grow in numbers as the Lord causes His Great Commission to be accomplished, and the Lord sovereignly adds to the church universal all those who are appointed to eternal life, but a healthy local church simply is not promised growth in numbers. The Scripture, as far as I am able to discern does not teach, “if you’re a healthy church, then God *promises* to increase the numbers of your church roll.” Now, that may happen, and obviously we want and pray that God would in fact provide numerical growth to healthy local churches. I’m just saying there is not a one-for-one corollary, and it is not *promised to a healthy local church*. What is promised for healthy local churches is growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ unto spiritual maturity, and persecution and suffering:

“...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all

things into Him who is the head --Christ-- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (Eph 4:13-16, emphasis mine. Notice, in context the growth that is promised is spiritual maturity). *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”* (Phil 1:29-30). I wonder if Pastor Warren shares these things with the highly educated and well-adjusted Saddleback Sam? My guess is no, because these aren't the kind of things that “attract a crowd.”

One might cite the instances where we see exponential growth, such as the day of Pentecost, where 3,000 people were added, and shortly thereafter where even more were added (Acts 2:41; 4:4). However, what is the historical context of that growth? It was in the redemptive historical context of Pentecost and its aftermath, wherein God declared to the world the salvation that was in Christ alone. Notice, the people that were added to the church weren't added because the church had a good music program, or a thriving singles ministry, or a state-of-the-art nursery. They were added by the sovereign grace of God working effectively in the hearts of unbelievers through the preached Gospel (Acts 13:48; Acts 16:14). We should further note that not long after this we see where the church was scattered abroad as it endured persecution (Acts 8:4). It would seem that faithfulness to the purity of the Gospel more frequently results in suffering and persecution than it does in positive attraction and numerical growth:

“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra -- what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Preach the Word I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and

the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Tim 3:10-4:5). Many more Scriptures can be cited. Here are a few: Acts 7; 1 Thes 3:13-16; 1 Pet 1:3-16, 2:11, 3-4, etc.

One of the key problems in Pastor Warren’s approach is that he confuses the church service with the evangelistic outreach of the church, and his evangelistic approach itself has many problems. In chapter 11, *Developing Your Strategy* (Warren, p. 185), he talks about catching the fish, and how to go about doing that. He then mentions how that in order to catch fish, you have to think like them, and the way to do that is by talking with them. The method Warren developed and employed to communicate with them was going door-to door to survey people. His idea came from a book by Robert Schuller (who by any objective standard can only be a heretic), where Schuller related how he began his church by asking two questions: 1. “*Why don’t you go to church?*” and 2. “*What do you want in a church?*” (Warren, p. 190) Surveys aren’t the problem (I have developed and used one myself); it’s the content and the goal of the survey that can be. Anyone who is even vaguely familiar with the Bible’s description of man can answer those questions posed by Schuller without having to administer that particular survey. The Holy Spirit of God has already surveyed the human heart. The result: it is totally depraved, it is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and its thoughts are only evil continually. It suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, and does not seek God. It does not receive spiritual things because it is unable to do so. (Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; Pr 20:9; Eccl 9:3; Jer 13:23; Jer 17:9; Mt 7:16-18; Mt 12:34; Mk 7:21-23; Jn 3:19, 6:44, 6:63, 65, 8:34, 8:43-44; 15:5; Rom 3:10-12, 5:6, 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:14; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 2:1-2; Eph 4:17-19; Col 1:21; 2:13; Titus 1:15; Titus 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; 2 Pet 2:14; Rev 3:17). The answer to the first question then of why they don’t go to church is because they don’t have any desire to go to church because they are **God-haters** (not God-seekers), and the answer to the second question of what they want in a church is that they would like it to be less God-centered and more man-centered, and they would like to see it conducted according to their own vile wants and desires (2 Tim 4:3-4). If they are going to go to church, they want a place where they go and “worship” God according to the

dictates of their own feeble and fallen will and flesh. Pastor Warren, building on those questions, developed five questions of his own (Warren, p. 190):

1. *What do you think is the greatest need in this area?*
2. *Are you actively attending a church?*
3. *Why do you think most people don't attend church?*
4. *If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for?*
5. *What could I do for you? What advice can you give to a minister who really wants to be helpful to people?*

Again, there should be no mystery here. What do we suppose a sinner is going to say in response to these questions? Well, if we take Pastor Warren's advice and "think" like the fish, how about these answers (note: I am not trying to be disrespectful with the answers below, and my apologies in advance to anyone who may be offended. However, I am trying to get real with this. I have run across many "fish" that I know would find these answers as a most satisfy representation of what they might say):

Answer to question 1: *"How about a new bar with a satellite dish, and strip club!"*

Answer to question 2: *"No!"*

Answer to question 3: *"Because it _____!"* (supply any pejorative you like)

Answer to question 4: *"I'm not looking, but if I were, how about a snack bar with a cappuccino machine, a cool band, some big screen TVs, and some dancing chicks in skimpy "casual" outfits!"*

Answer to question 5: *"Nothing; go back where you came from! But if you insist on staying, then my advice to you is to tell us that we're not really that bad, and give us what we want!"*

Not only that, but with regard to questions 3 and 4, our primary concern should not be what the sinner thinks about the church, but what God thinks. **God** owns the church, and the church should be humbly coming before its Master and asking how it can worship God in spirit and in truth; not trying to make it into a place more cozy for the complaining sinner. Pastor Warren then cites four primary complaints that the people he surveyed had. (Warren, pp. 191-192) I will cite and address each one since this really lays at the heart of the method that Warren developed for the Purpose Driven Church:

1. *Church is boring, especially the sermons. The messages don't relate to life."* Surprise, surprise! Of course church is boring to an unregenerate sinner! Of course they especially hate

the sermons! It is in the sermon (if it is a proper sermon in that it is a faithful exposition of the text of Scripture) where the God of the universe, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is speaking, and it is the Gospel that is the power of God to salvation. It is where the omnipotent God of the universe alone exerts the power necessary to explode through hard hearts of stone through His ordained means: the glorious Gospel of Christ. No sinner *wants* to hear that, and the reason they say that those sermons don't "*relate to life*" is because God's Word is turning their wretched lives upside down.

2. *Church members are unfriendly to visitors. If I go to church, I want to feel welcomed without being embarrassed.* Yes, the church should be friendly to its visitors. I have attended many a church service though, from a variety of traditions, and I must confess I have never seen one where the people were by and large unfriendly. Sure, there are always some who look like they've been sucking on sour lemons, but I contend that these are the exception and not the rule in the majority of Evangelical churches. This complaint is really just a copout that unbelievers use to not go to church, much like the tired charge that the church is full of hypocrites.

As for not being embarrassed, well, I can empathize with that. Though it is not mentioned, I never did like services that would ask visitors to stand and introduce themselves. However, Pastor Warren notes that the people who made this complaint felt like the church was a clique, and that they felt foolish and that the congregation was looking on them in judgment if they didn't know the "inside" terminology, songs, or rituals (Warren, p. 192). Well, brother Warren, what do you expect? Isn't there a real sense in which the church is in fact a "clique"? Isn't it the place where the "called out ones" come to worship God? And the inside terminology that they don't like, if it is a Bible-believing church, is the very Word of God. That is, after all, where we read of propitiation, justification, sanctification, glorification, the blood of the Lamb, election and predestination, divine sovereignty, grace, sin, wrath, creation, law, righteousness, wickedness, adultery, fornication, witchcraft, dissensions, saved, lost, good, evil, resurrection, ascension, intercession, The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit, prophets, prophecy, apostles, spiritual gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, bondage, freedom, etc., etc., etc. Are we supposed to stop reading and quoting our Bibles now in our churches because Saddleback Sam doesn't know the "inside" terminology?

As for the songs and rituals, did it ever occur to anyone that the songs and "rituals" the church engages in are an integral part of the worship of God, and as such we are to discover what

songs and rituals are prescribed and/or pleasing to God? Of course Saddleback Sam doesn't like the songs and rituals of most healthy, Bible-believing, Evangelical churches, because those songs and rituals are God-prescribed, God-centered, and God-magnifying, and they put Saddleback Sam in his place—he is the creature, not God, and *if he is going to worship God, he must do so on God's terms, not his!*

3. *The church is more interested in my money than in me.* Once again, more often than not this is just another weak excuse used by sinners to stay away from church. As an unbeliever, I never felt this way about the church. Most people understand that the church has to pay the light bill, and they must do so based on the giving of the people, since we don't have a state-run church. What they don't like is the begging for funds that many do, particularly the Word of Faith churches, and, of course, the televangelists. Again, this is just an excuse used by Saddleback Sam to not attend. We shouldn't shy away from encouraging people to give because we fear that the Saddleback Sam might be offended. Let him be offended, let God be true and every man a liar, and let us encourage God's people to give cheerfully as a means God will use for the building of His Kingdom.

4. *We worry about the quality of the church's childcare.* I am all for, as Pastor Warren states, earning the trust of parents (Warren, p. 192), and the church must have stringent guidelines as it concerns childcare safety. This is especially true in today's society where we read of child abuse occurring within the very walls of the church. If a church is engaged in that, regardless of how much Biblical truth they are preaching, they should not only be avoided, but those involved should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

As for quality childcare, of course I agree that there should be quality childcare. However, what folks usually have in mind with regard to that is the facility, not the quality of education or the character of those watching and teaching the children. The concern more often than not seems to be whether or not the church has a “nice” nursery and state-of-the-art crying rooms. Sadly, many Christians make decisions on where they will worship based *primarily* on such things, instead of whether or not the truth is being preached and taught, and are willing to go to places that are weak theologically, if not altogether heretical, just because the church has nice programs and a high-tech facility. This maybe more than anything else most pointedly exposes how spoiled American Christians are. Do we think that quality childcare (as defined by purely aesthetic qualities) made it on the list of things that concerned the early church? Do we

think that Christians in China and the Sudan, where believers are being persecuted on a frequent basis (and in the Sudan were literally being crucified), are concerned about how nice the nursery is?! I wonder what they must think when they look at us hold such trivial things in high regard, and even worse, I wonder what God thinks (Rev 2:4; Rev 3:15-22).

Based on this survey and the comments received from the sinner Saddleback Sam, Pastor Warren embarked on developing a church service that would for all intents and purposes cater to the whims of this one whom the Bible describes as a child of the devil and an object of God's wrath (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; Eph 2:1-3). On page 193, Pastor Warren talks about the initial letter he sent out to the community that he crafted in response to the concerns of "**Sinnerback**" Sam. He speaks of having a "*church for the unchurched,*" and that the appeal of the letter was to appeal to what the unchurched were looking for, not what other Christians wanted. He then notes how he received angry letters from Christians because his letter didn't mention Jesus or the Bible, and then shares with us that as a result of that letter, 205 people attended the first service at Saddleback (Warren, p. 193). Pastor Warren then states, "*The results were worth being misunderstood by some Christians. You have to decide who you want to impress.*" I agree Pastor, but just who is it that we should try to impress? Pastor Warren makes it clear that it is the **target** that he is trying to impress, and not the God who created the target.

Before addressing this letter, it must be understood just who it is that Pastor Warren views as the target within the church. Brother Warren says that if a person judged Saddleback on the basis of sermon titles only, we might conclude that they are pretty shallow. He then says the reason though is because Christians **aren't** his target, and thus they aren't being shallow, but strategic (Warren, p.300). Listen to what Pastor Warren is saying. In the church, the very place where God's people assemble to worship the Lord God Omnipotent and be **fed** the Word of God (John 21:15-17; Eph 4:11-14), Pastor Warren says that God and Christians are **not** the his target!

Simply put, the church is **for the believer**; it is the place where **God's people** come together to corporately worship and magnify the Lord (Heb 10:25; Heb 12:1-29). Now we must ask, to whom do we inquire as to what is acceptable worship? Who do we seek to **impress** with our church service? If the answer is the unchurched, then we have not only gotten on the slipper slope, we're already at the bottom of it! The proper "target" of the church service isn't "**Secularback**" Sam or Samantha, it is the glory and majesty of God and the edification, exhortation, and equipping of the people of God. The target of our **outreach** certainly is the

unchurched, but Sunday is the time that God’s people come together to magnify the Lord in spirit and in truth, that they might be edified, exhorted, and equipped to go out and make an impact for Christ in whatever sphere of life they find themselves.

This confusion is what defines *The Purpose Driven Church*, and is clearly articulated in Pastor Warren’s introductory letter that he sent to the Saddleback Valley community. I provide it here, with my comments, again because it so crystallizes the core of the Purpose Driven Church. Pastor Warren’s words are italicized, and my comments are below them in regular type: *Hi Neighbor!*

A new church designed for those who have given up on traditional church services!

-- We must ask, is this a proper “design” for a church? Of course not! This might be acceptable to unregenerate Sam and Samantha, but it is an offense to the sovereign King of the universe, who alone “designs” the church according to His infallible, inerrant holy Word, and what Warren labels as “traditional” has been in vogue with God for at least 3,500 years (counting Old and New Testaments). It is interesting as well that Warren attacks traditional church services, and aims to replace them with what? *His own tradition—a “seeker-sensitive” service.* The problem is that the starting point for Warren’s tradition is the wicked heart of sinful man, while the starting point for most Bible-believing, Evangelical churches (i.e., traditional) is God and His Word. Also, since when was a church service to be designed around *unbelievers*? It simply does not get any more crass and blatantly unbiblical than this.

Let’s face it. Many people aren’t active in church these days. WHY? Too often...

** The sermons are boring and don’t relate to daily living*

-- Again, what do you expect the sinner who has not been had his heart sovereignly opened by God’s grace to say? I would also argue that the sermons *do* relate to daily living; the sinner who lives after the flesh just isn’t listening because they don’t have ears to hear. Our task is to keep faithfully teaching and proclaiming God’s Word, and leave the results to Him as the Holy Spirit sovereignly makes application to the hearts of people as He sees fit.

** Many churches seem more interested in your wallet than you*

-- First of all, we need to understand when Pastor Warren say, “*many churches*,” it is clear that he means *many Bible-believing, Evangelical “traditional” churches*, since these are the ones that he has diagnosed as being the problem. Here Warren has decided to unfairly judge and minimize these churches to those who read this letter, not based on any objective criteria, but

solely on the observations of the depraved heart of Saddleback Sam that, bottom line, hates God and hates His church! The truth of the matter is exactly opposite; most Bible-believing churches are more interested in reaching their communities for Christ than they are about the wallets of the community! One only need examine the average salary of the average Pastor today—they are certainly not in it for the money! In trying to reach Saddleback Sam, Pastor Warren basically condemns “many” other churches, and in essence brings accusation against godly Bible-believing pastors, many of whom must be bi-vocational just to make ends meet (another irony since Warren dedicates his book in part to bi-vocational pastors), and in the process exalts his own church formed and characterized by an unbiblical focus (the sinner’s wants and desires, not God’s glory, etc.) and methodology (appealing to the sinners wants and desires, not faithfully proclaiming and expounding the Scriptures, etc.) as the model church.

** Members are unfriendly to visitors.*

-- As I mentioned earlier, I have never been in one church (and I’ve been in many), either as a believer or an unbeliever, where this is true. And here again Warren has decided to impugn thousands of churches and the character of their people for the sole purpose of filling the pews of his new church. The primary source of his information is the sinner Saddleback Sam who has pointed to a speck in our eye, and Warren has magnified the speck that was pointed out to him by this God-hater, then affirms Saddleback Sam, and all for his own gain (he can now fill his pews and “grow” his mega church and tell the whole world how smart and creative he was in doing it, and that if we were smart, we’d jump on the “practical” bandwagon as well).

** You wonder about the quality of the nursery care for your children*

-- Here’s a valid reason for starting a church! Forget about the truth of Scripture and the Gospel, and the glory of God...what’s really important is that your kiddies have a nice crib to lay in while you’re listening to those new, exciting, and, let’s not forget, **practical** sermons.

Do you think attending church should be enjoyable?

-- I can hardly believe this. Since when was God concerned that church be “enjoyable” **to the sinner who despises Him**? The primary purpose of the church is to glorify its Lord and Master, and the way that it is to be enjoyed is on the terms that the LORD has decreed, not the terms that man in his vain, sinful, and warped imagination dreams up!

We’ve Got Good News For You! Saddleback Valley Community Church is a new church designed to meet your needs in the 1980s.

-- So, the good news isn't that there is a place dedicated and committed to proclaiming the absolute truth of God's Word, the Gospel of grace, and God's glory in all things? Nope. According to Pastor Warren, now it's all about meeting the needs of those who do not seek God (since there are *none* that seek Him), suppress the truth in unrighteousness, and are the objects of God's wrath! And what are the "needs" that this church is being intentionally designed to meet? Is it that people might be told of the need to repent before an absolutely holy and sovereign God, or that they are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, etc.? Oh no, nothing as trivial as that. Here is what Pastor Warren tells us:

** Meet new friends and get to know your neighbors.*

-- There is something that sinners "need!" Since when was the church to be concerned about being a place where people could meet friends! Isn't the greatest "felt need" that sinner has is that he or she meet the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

** Enjoy upbeat music with a contemporary flavor*

-- I love music, even some of the contemporary stuff (if you can find some that actually has some biblical content to it, and is focused on God and not on man). However, much of it is like Warren's approach here: shallow and man-centered. This is completely irrelevant as to why a church should be started in the first place. What Warren is saying here basically amounts to saying, "*hey everybody, we know all those churchy songs about God being immortal, invisible, wise, and holy, and being a mighty fortress, and all of that kind of nonsense are humdrum and don't get you're feet tappin! Not to worry though! You can come to our place to sing some songs that are light on all the God talk, heavy on what we want to do, don't require us to think (who wants to think when you're tryin to get your groove on!), and we can even do it all to some really cool beats! After all, why should the devil have all of the fun!*"

** Hear positive, practical messages which encourage you each week*

-- Is "*Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near...*" a "*positive, practical*" message?! People don't need to hear about the seven principles on anger management, or the five steps to experiencing a good marriage during the Sunday morning sermon. What they need to hear is the Scripture being faithfully expounded week after week by men of God who have labored in their study to exegete the Sacred text.

** Trust your children to the care of dedicated nursery workers.*

-- I've already commented on this.

All of the reasons that Pastor Warren has cited for beginning this church are:

1. Irrelevant to the true purpose of the church, and

2. Unbiblical in their emphasis, because they are not based on the Scripture, but on the God-hating and sinful concerns, ideas, and desires of sinners whom Warren has labeled as Saddleback Sam and Samantha. In light of all of this, we are forced to ask, where is the concern for God and His glory in all of this? Where is the concern for the Gospel and its glory in all of this? It's nowhere to be found, and maybe the greatest irony of all is that now the man who wrote that letter which speaks nothing about these things, and which served as the basis for launching this "church," has written an entire book called *The Purpose Driven Church*; and maybe sadder than anything else is that Evangelicals are swallowing it hook, line, and sinker.

Moving on from here, Warren then comments that, "*to penetrate any culture you must be willing to make small concessions in matter of style in order to gain a hearing. For example, our church has adopted the casual, informal style and dress of the southern California community we minister in.*" (Warren, p. 196) In the context of personal evangelism, we must be flexible and maintain the ability to empathize with those with whom we are attempting to share the Gospel, and we must not be offensive in our manner and actions. The cross is enough of an offense without us adding to it by purposely flouting local customs and courtesies when we are out and about among the society. The problem is that Pastor Warren makes this statement in the context of the local church. He specifically mentions the dress of the people. I have no problem with that either. However, based on all Warren has said, it seems clear that he has made many more "*small concessions in matter of style to gain a hearing...*" That was the whole point of his introductory letter to the community that he sent out which we find on page 194. He was creating a whole new kind of "church" that had a new style based on the cares and wants of sinners. His entire approach was nothing more than a concession to the things that Saddleback Sam said he wanted in a church.

I am reminded of Israel and when they entered the Promised Land. The holy God of heaven and earth had given them precise instructions on how He was to be worshipped, and how they were to conduct themselves, and God specifically told them, in so many words, not to make small concessions with the pagans around them, because this would be the very thing that would lead them astray (Deut 6-7). We see the same thing in the New Testament, where church after church is rebuked for its "concessions," i.e., compromise of the truth. The churches at

Pergamos, Thyatira, and Laodicea mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation especially come to mind. And in the same letter where Paul speaks of becoming all things to all people that he might win some (1 Cor 9:19-23), he also rebukes the church and provides correction for its many unbiblical and false thinking and practices which they had simply brought in from the pagan culture around them (the first 15 chapters address a host of issues, from sectarianism, lawsuits, sexual immorality, marriage, idols, and abuse of the Lord's Supper, to Spiritual gifts and even the doctrine of resurrection). They were in essence allowing the culture to transform the church instead of the church transforming the culture. The church is *never* told to make concessions with the pagan society around them in order to “*gain a hearing,*” rather, that “*friendship with the world is enmity toward God.*” (James 4:4).

Pastor Warren then says he will do whatever it takes to reach more people for Christ. (Warren, p. 200). One thing that no one can ever accuse Pastor Warren of is a lack of concern to see the lost come to Christ, and in that I do commend him--would that more of our churches had the same evangelistic fervor that Pastor Warren evidently has. However, there is a very fine line that can become blurred when our desire to see people come to Christ results in the church compromising with the culture and catering to the whims of sinners. The end does not justify means. The most important thing is that God's Word and Gospel be faithfully and obediently proclaimed to every creature, regardless if anyone “accepts” it or not, because in the final analysis, we know that His Word will accomplish whatever God intends for it to accomplish: In one it will work unto salvation (John 10:27; John 17:9-19; 1 Pet 1:23); to another, it will work to harden and to demonstrate who Christ's sheep are and are not (Rom 9:14-28; Rom 11:4-10; John 10:26; John 11:37-41). And every one that is appointed to eternal life will believe (Acts 13:48). All those that were given to Jesus by the Father *will* be saved (John 6:37-40). And God alone will receive all of the glory (1 Cor 1:27-31).

In chapter 12 Warren speaks about bringing in the crowd, and says that we must show that the Gospel is both “good” and “news.” (Warren, p. 224) He then tells us that the Gospel “*is about what God has done for us and what we can become in Christ; it's about a personal relationship with Christ being the answer to our deepest needs. The Good News offers lost people what they are frantically searching for: forgiveness, freedom, security, purpose, love, acceptance, and strength...*” (Warren, p.224)

Again, there are some good things here to be sure, however, what Pastor Warren seems to not understand is that one can never understand the Good News unless they first understand the bad news. Brother Warren seems to have an aversion to stating anything related to an absolutely holy God being offended by sin and sinners, and that His wrath burns hot against the unrepentant. People must know the bad news.

Secondly, unbelievers are *not frantically seeking* the things Pastor Warren says they are. Warren's words directly contradict Paul in Romans 3:10-18:

"As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Pastor Warren has an unbiblical understanding of human nature. In the final analysis, his outlook is nothing more than unbridled Pelagianism. Grace is ok, but really not necessary...Saddleback Sam is basically a good guy anyway, and if we just appeal to his "felt needs" then surely he'll be able to see how much better his already "good" life can be, and he will surely make the right, educated decision and sign up for Team Jesus. He'd be a dummy not to, and we've already established that he is a very educated barbarian. It's all academic--just come up with the right sales pitch for this guy, and we can move on to building our mega church and writing and selling our books that tell everyone just how *we* did it. Away with such fanciful notions that would attribute so much esteem and honor to the intentions of the human heart, to even imply that it is desperately seeking something so grand and good as God and His perfect will!

Warren again encourages us that *"crowds always flock to hear good news. There is enough bad news in the world that the last thing people need is to hear more bad news when they come to church."* (Warren, p.225) Can you imagine the apostle Paul talking to Saddleback Sam? Would it sound anything remotely like what Warren has said? If Paul were to tell Saddleback Sam to stop being conformed to the pattern of this world, or that they are storing up for themselves wrath for the day of judgment, or that God has mercy on whom He will have mercy and hardens whom He will harden, I'm sure Warren would tell Paul that his "strategy" for

reaching Saddleback Sam was too “traditional!” It is too negative! Paul, you just don’t understand...Saddleback Sam hears negative stuff all day and the last thing he needs to hear about is those harsh concepts you mentioned.

Again, Pastor Warren fails to adequately understand the nature of the Gospel itself, as well as the true nature of the human heart. Not only that, as I noted earlier, the reason crowds were attracted to Jesus wasn’t because of the message, but because of the miracles. The good news doesn’t, as Warren contends, offer “*lost people what they are frantically searching for.*” Rather, it declares that the wrath of a holy God has been assuaged by the sacrifice of Christ, and all men are now commanded to repent of their sins and come to Christ as the only grounds upon which they escape the wrath to come.

Pastor Warren is big on practical sermons. He states, “*Sermons that teach people how to live will never lack an audience.*” (Warren, p.230) Again, notice where Pastor Warren’s emphasis is: ***man and what matters to him.*** And what Warren is saying is really no different than what the self-help gurus are doing and making a fortune off of. All Warren is doing is taking the methodology of the self-help gurus and dressing it up in Christian garb (not too much Christian garb though, lest Saddleback Sam be turned off).

Pastor Warren says that the deepest kind of teaching is that which makes a difference in people’s day-to-day lives. I agree that the teaching from the pulpit should make a difference in people’s day-to-day lives. However, the deepest kind of teaching is that which faithfully exposes the Scriptures and focuses on the glory and majesty of God and Christ in all things and exhorts us to live in view of those things, and we must never forget who it is that gives us ears to hear in the first place, and who it is that causes us to do His will (Phil 2:13).

Pastor Warren then wants us to understand the importance of teaching God’s Word in a way that captures and holds the attention of the unchurched, and he believes it is a sin to bore people with the Bible (Warren, p. 231). I wonder if Pastor Warren finds everything in the Bible interesting? How about the genealogies? How about all of the detailed laws found in the book of Leviticus? Have I mentioned the numerous lists in 1 and 2 Chronicles? Is God Himself guilty of boring us with His Word? God’s Word was never intended to entertain us and keep us enthralled moment by moment, but to declare to us who He is and what He requires to relate rightly to Him. It’s not a matter of “boring,” but of absolute truth, and God providing us all that

we will need *“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that we might be equipped and thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (2Tim 3:16, 17)

Pastor Warren says that we slander God’s character if we preach with an uninspiring style or tone. Well, what does that say about the apostle Paul? Paul was famously not a gifted a speaker and we read of how his preaching actually caused someone to fall asleep and fall out of a window! (Acts 20:7-12) I guess poor Paul was slandering God. Once again, the apostle Paul himself directly contradicts Warren. It isn’t about inspiring styles and tones (gee, who’s the focus there?). Rather, the concern of every preacher should be, as Paul said, *“...to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.”* (1 Cor. 1:17), and *“...when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”* (2 Cor. 2:1-5). I wonder whose method is more slanderous?

Maybe most puzzling of all is how Pastor Warren tries to show us how to respond to the culture. He warns against imitation and isolation, and believes we need to infiltrate the culture (Warren, p. 235-238). So far, so good...the problem seems to be that Warren condones imitating the culture to do that! He even uses Jesus as an example: *“He walked among the people, spoke their language, observed their customs, and sang their songs, attended their parties, and used their current events (see Luke 13:1-5) to capture attention when He taught. But He did all these things without compromising His mission.”* (Warren, p.237) While there are elements of truth to what Warren says here, he has embellished a bit, and, if I may dare say *as usual*, has left out some important information. It is quite true that Jesus did engage His culture, and related to them. However, He did not observe all of their customs (because many of those customs were sins! Matt 15:1-9), He did not sing all of their songs especially when it came to worship (cf John 4:24 with Col 3:16), and He certainly did not condone everything that they did (John 8:11)! The holy, sovereign, Lord God omnipotent revealed in human flesh was not a carefree, partying Ancient Near East yuppie who was knowledgeable of current events and said some really profound and deep things.

The whole thrust of Warren's approach essentially conforms the church to the culture so that the culture might do us the honor of visiting us, and if we have enough in common with them, they may even want to join us and get in on the Life Development Process (which I for the most part like by the way), touch all the bases, and make it to home plate.

To top all of this off, Pastor Warren seems to intimate that those who do not follow his seeker-sensitive method are the Pharisees, while he, of course, is following in the vein of Jesus (Warren, p. 237). He quotes Matt 15:2-3, and warns that we must be willing to put God's purpose over our traditions. He then says that we shouldn't be surprised if some of today's religious establishment accuse those engaged in the seeker sensitive movement of selling out to the culture and breaking traditions (Warren, p. 238). Of course, throughout the book Warren has been talking about the impotence of the traditional church. What Warren seems oblivious to is the fact that he hasn't come up with something new (even though he says he realizes he hasn't). There have been others in the history of the church that pandered to their own version of Saddleback Sam and Samantha. In Europe, those churches are now museum pieces, and in this country, the liberal mainline denominations beat Warren to the proverbial "relevant and practical" punch by at least 100 years.

Warren attacks traditional churches, calls them "isolationists" and "judgmental," and then has the audacity to basically call himself a trailblazer (and they always get arrows shot at them!) (Warren, p. 238). These trailblazers, according to Warren, in their attempt to "*translate the truth into contemporary terms*" are engaged in "*dangerous business*," and that we should remember folks like Wycliffe, whom Warren says was burned at the stake for it! (a historical error here by Dr. Warren; Wycliffe was not burned at the stake). So now Warren likens himself to Wycliffe. Forgive me brother Warren; you're no John Wycliffe. Wycliffe was trying to point his "Saddleback Sam" to the Bible, and the Bible was his sole infallible rule for faith and practice. In Pastor Warren's case, it seems clear that the sole infallible rule for faith and practice isn't Scripture alone, but the vain imaginations of Saddleback Sam and Samantha alone. Pastor Warren's approach throughout has more or less been "*we'll take what you guys think and like, and then try to fit the Bible around that*," instead of saying, "*The Bible says...now you need to be transformed by the renewing of your mind and stop conforming to the world.*"

In chapter 13, Pastor Warren moves on to discuss how worship can be a witness, and states that there is no correct style of worship, and that we are to worship God in spirit and in

truth. Isn't this a bit of a contradiction? If we are to worship God *in truth* that means that there is a true and a false way to worship God. If style is not important, then why did God give us instruction on the proper way (or style) He was to be worshipped in both the Old and the New Testaments? Or, let's simply ask this: what if my "style" of worship is to stand on my head naked? Is that a correct style of worship? Or, what if I decide to sing songs while reclining in my pew? Better yet, since we are shooting for the casual approach here (so as not to offend sinner Sam and sinner Samantha), why don't we replace all of the pews (those traditional benches can be a bit uncomfortable, and certainly don't look modern) with recliners. That way, everyone can recline back, prop up their feet, and sing "Just As I Am" while sipping on a glass of Iced Tea! Or maybe we can just dance around a golden calf! Oh, wait, that was already tried, and those folks didn't fair so well. What if we decide to bark like dogs and roar like lions? Who's to say that isn't a correct "style" of worship?

To say that style doesn't matter is to be completely ignorant of what the Bible teaches concerning worship and to introduce a relativistic mindset into the church that says "*You have your way of worshipping, and I have my way of worshipping, your ok, and I'm ok, and God, the dotting Grandfather figure He is, certainly won't mind as He sees us just being ourselves and doing what feels comfortable to us in His presence.*" The Bible tells us that we are to teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col 3:16), and when we gather for corporate worship, there is a certain style that is prescribed. Throughout the Scriptures we read of the various postures for worship and how the congregation that was gathered together conducted themselves corporately (Psalms; 1 Cor 12-14; Heb 12-13, etc.). The fact that churches engage in these things to lesser, or greater, degrees does not mean that there is no biblical style of worship. It means that sinful people in the church refuse to worship God in the "style" that He has prescribed.

Pastor Warren then completely obliterates Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost by saying that people were attracted to a worship service, and because God's presence was so evident, and they felt God's presence (whatever that means), and they understood the message, that 3,000 people were converted! (Warren, p. 241) What took place on Pentecost was not a worship service. Secondly, the reason 3,000 souls were saved that day was because of the sovereign grace of God, who worked powerfully through the faithful preaching of Peter. And when one examines the content of that sermon, one doesn't see much of the methodology that Pastor Warren has

prescribed throughout his book. I mean; Peter even had the audacity to talk about the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, accuses his hearers of murder, and tells them they need to repent! Then to say that, “*This ability to understand caused them to be converted*” is so utterly false that I’m not sure if it should be branded as incorrect thinking, or just plain heresy. The cause of conversion is not human understanding, *it is God and His grace alone!* Yes, if one is to be converted, they must understand the Gospel. But even the atheist can understand the Gospel. The devil and his demons understand the Gospel. Warren has completely robbed God of any glory for the salvation of the sinner, all in the name of being “seeker-sensitive.” When brought to its logical conclusion, what Warren has stated here is another Gospel, pure and simple.

In chapter 14, Pastor Warren then tells us to design one worship service to edify believers, and another service to evangelize the unchurched. Again though, this completely misses the point of what a “service” is to be about. The church service was never supposed to be about evangelism. That is what believers do with their time when they are not in worship services.

Warren then says it takes “*unselfish, mature believers to offer a seeker sensitive service.*” (Warren, p. 248) I’m sorry, but doesn’t this sound a bit prideful? It could be that it takes immature believers to offer a seeker sensitive service, because they are more concerned about the likes and dislikes of sinners over and against the likes and dislikes of God, and they simply refuse to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit working effectively through the means of the faithful preaching of the Gospel to bring lost sinners to Himself. Not only that, but does this mean that every church that doesn’t have a seeker sensitive church is filled with spiritually immature people? Makes one wonder how the church ever survived for 2,000 years without Rick Warren and seeker sensitive churches.

Conclusion

Pastor Warren says, “*Unless the driving force behind a church is biblical, the health and growth of the church will never be what God intended. Strong churches are not built on programs, personalities, or gimmicks. They are built on the eternal purpose of God.*” (Warren, p. 83) This is great, and I couldn’t agree more with Pastor Warren. The problem is that he then introduces us to a *program* on how to grow a church! It’s called a Purpose-Driven Church, and the gimmick is to take a survey to see what the unchurched sinner likes and dislikes about the

dreaded “traditional” church, and then tailor a church and worship service around those responses!

To hammer home his point, Warren then tries a bit of just old-fashioned guilt tripping. He says, *“I’ve often said to the members of our congregation, ‘Imagine dying, and fifty years from now somebody in heaven comes up to you and says, “I want to thank you.” You reply, “I’m sorry, I don’t know you.” Then they explain: “You were a lay minister at Saddleback. You served and sacrificed and built the church that reached me for Christ after you died. I’m in heaven because of you.” Do you think your effort is worth that?”* (Warren, p. 392). I’m sure brother Warren is a wonderful Christian man, but I just have to tell like it is: rarely have I encountered such blatant disregard for the blood of Christ and His perfect work in salvation. Here’s a news flash:

Jesus Christ is the only One who made the only sufficient sacrifice for sinners and Jesus Christ is the One who builds His church! There is only one Savior, and it is Jesus Christ alone! People are in heaven because of Jesus Christ alone!

If a person did approach me in heaven and began to spout such things, which can only be described as nonsense (to put it mildly), I would suspect that the place we would be in would not be heaven, because when we are there we will all be too consumed with the Lord of Glory, and we will certainly understand that there is only *one Savior*, the Lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world who sits on the throne high and exalted! *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God..”* (Rev 7:9-12 12)

May the one holy, sovereign, triune and blessed God, and Him alone, receive all the honor, glory, praise, adoration, and exaltation, *both* now, and forevermore!

As noted earlier, Pastor Warren does say some good things in the book that might be helpful to the church. However, the book is simply too flawed on too many levels. In the final analysis, the book has helped me to first of all discern what not to do: compromise God ordained principles of worship for the sake of reaching “Saddleback Sam.”

If one were compelled to read the book, there are some beneficial things to glean from the book, however, as noted earlier, the helpful things in the book are, by Pastor Warren’s own admission, nothing new. Since that is the case, and since the book is flawed in so many important areas, the evangelical community should not uncritically embrace, nor should it give its stamp of approval to The Purpose Driven Church. If anything, we should be *warning* Christians concerning it instead of recommending it.