



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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A BIBLICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE “ALPHA COURSE” (PART 2)

Thirdly, the Alpha course has a **strong predominant charismatic orientation**. It recommends to its readers to read books by charismatic writers (like the late John Wimber and questionable men like John Stott, p. 31 of *The Alpha Initiative*), and one part of the course requires a filling of the Holy Spirit, interpreted as a second experience after conversion, taught during a weekend session of the course.

In fact, most of the leaders who conduct it are charismatic leaders in their own churches. Although they have said they will allow non-charismatics to conduct the course, the materials themselves are dangerously loaded with unbiblical contents, questionable references, and charismatic doctrines. Separation from such methods, men, materials is the key for purity and holiness (2 Cor. 6:14–18).

For example, from pages 32 to 38 of *The Alpha Initiative*, Gumbel dwelt at length on the supernatural display of the power of the Spirit, and taught that as the disciples of old, we should also heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons. He openly proclaimed that he believes that these supernatural sign gifts have not ceased but are still continued even today (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8). We quote him here from pages 35 and 37,

... such signs, wonders and miracles are part of the kingdom which was inaugurated by Jesus Christ and continues to this day. Hence we should expect today to see the supernatural display of the power of the Holy Spirit as part of his kingdom activity and as an authentication of the good news... we see the dynamic effect of the coming of the kingdom of God accompanied by conversions, miraculous signs, healings, visions, tongues, prophecy, raising the dead and casting out evil spirits. The same God is at work today among us. Evangelism can still be dynamic and effective.

He gave the example of Charles Finney (1790–1875), a questionable character, who purportedly “have the Holy Spirit going through him like a wave of electricity and liquid love and fan him like immense wings” (exact words of Charles Finney, cf. p. 39).

Billy Graham was also quoted favourably as someone to be admired and emulated because he was filled with the Spirit (pp. 23, 41–42), and Billy Graham had publicly denied that Christ is the only way to salvation in his interview with Robert Schuller on 31 May, 1997 (Reynolds, *Foundation*, May–June 1997, pp. 22–25). The word of Jehu in 2 Chronicles 19:2 says, “*Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?*” Arsenic on its own is deadly but not palatable and deadly enough, but arsenic sweetened with milk and honey is a greater hazard. A **half-true seductive gospel is 10 times deadlier than an overtly false one**. The Alpha course has this same fatal potency and many are flocking to it today. Paul warns in Acts 20:29–32,

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*For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous **wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock**. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore **watch**, and **remember**, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

Then on page 143, he taught of how to pray to receive the gift of tongues. This is one of the most important session of the whole Alpha course. On pages 144–145, he gave details of those whom he believed were filled with the Spirit. We quote from page 142 here,

When praying for people to receive the gift of tongues I have found the greatest barrier is a psychological one—making the first sound. Once a person has made the first sound the rest usually follows quite naturally. In order to help people to get over this barrier I explain this difficulty and suggest that they start by copying what I or one of the other prayers is saying. Then I start to speak in tongues slowly so that they can follow. Once they have made the first sound they are usually away praying in their own language. I encourage them to try and concentrate on their relationship with God and try, as far as possible, not to be self-conscious. Rather they should concentrate on praising God with the new language he has given to them.

He said, some were filled with joy that they burst out laughing. Others are so overwhelmed by the Spirit that they found it hard to remain standing, and started falling. We are all for evangelism, but not at the expense of gospel truth. These were the same phenomena as that of the Holy Laughter phenomena, commonly called the “Toronto Blessing,” brought about by Ronnie Ho-ward Browne some years ago, which had misled many and done great harm to the name of evangelical Christianity.

On page 198, he outlines the model of healing prayer, which is *Question of Life*, pages 213–214. The emphasis is on the physical and tangible and not the spiritual and eternal. A new doctrine of “sympathy pains” is introduced (p. 148): someone sense pain in his body which is not really there. It presents an alternate “gospel” that is devoid of saving faith, surrender, denial, sacrifice and repentance, but strong on experience and emotional feelings.

In section 13 of the Alpha training manual, Gumbel teaches that the difference between the Protestants and Catholics are totally insignificant compared to things that unite them. He said that it is wonderful that the Spirit always bring churches together and at all cost. The Alpha course is given to **spiritual compromise and accommodates Catholics without a need for conversion**. This is undoing the work of the God-initiated 16th Century Protestant Reformation, in **promoting ecumenism disguised as Christian unity without any biblical doctrinal foundation**.

In section 4, Gumbel says of the church as having a party with feast and celebration, where there is fun and laughter, and everyone having a good time, including people getting “drunk with the Spirit.” He uses the celebration in the parable of the Prodigal Son and the marriage supper of the Lamb to support his claims. The church is far from a party of frivolous drunken people. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 14:17–19,

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

1 Chronicles 16:29 and 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40 describe worship as,

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him:

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worship the Lord in the **beauty of holiness**... For God is **not** the **author of confusion**, but of **peace**, as in all churches of the saints... Let all things be done **decently and in order**.

The believers are exhorted to be sober (1 Pet 5:8) and watchful and vigilant, not frivolous, flippant and fun-loving and frolicking with worldly pleasure and entertainment. The analogy betrays a shallow and irreverent attitude and shows disrespect for the churches of Jesus Christ.

The Bible never taught the need for a second post-conversion experience. We are baptised with the Holy Spirit at the point of regeneration (Mark 1:8; Titus 3:5), and we do not need a special course to learn how to be empowered or filled with the Spirit again. We need to daily obey and submit to the teaching of the infallible Word of God, walking in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

Fourthly, the Alpha course, though teaching some truth, has **introduced error subtly in the name of sharing the gospel**. The wooing of people using the superficial and truncated gospel message is a wily method, enticing them into believing a lie together with some half-truths. Alpha course participants are taught that being filled with the Spirit involves speaking in tongues, and is part of salvation at a post-conversion experience that we should seek. There is no warning of the need to test the Spirit, that is constantly mentioned in the Bible (1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Tim 4:1–7; Acts 20:27–31; Matt 24:24). Participants are vulnerable to all forms of suggestions and false teaching. It presents an experiential, superficial and sensational view of Christian living, rather than a biblically sound understanding of saving faith, repentance and discipleship founded in the Word of the God alone.

A relationship with God is referred to as an experience of the baptism of the Spirit leading to external manifestations. The Bible teaches us that salvation comes through a saving faith in Christ alone, and is not accompanied by external signs and manifestations (Matt 11:28–30; Rom 10:9–10; John 1:12; 1 John 1:9; Acts 16:31; Titus 3:5). The filling of the Spirit does not lead to tangible and physical signs but reverential joy and worship and a fear of God (Eph 6:18–21), an illumined mind and a hunger for the Word and prayer (John 14:26; 16:13). Consider the testimony given on pages 115–116 of the book,

Then came the Alpha weekend, which was unbelievable. It felt as though we were developing real fellowship among the group and getting closer to the Spirit of God all the time. Nicky asked the Holy Spirit to come and fill us while we were all standing up. He said, "He's working around the room," and I heard and felt a blowing in my left ear. About two minutes later my knees started to buckle and I collapsed into my chair. I received the gift of tongues and at the end of the weekend I was full of joy and love for everyone.

We went to church that night and I was in the front row. I felt the presence of the Spirit all through the service. After the sermon we started to sing a song and I immediately felt God's presence and started to cry. Sandy [Miller, vicar of Holy Trinity] asked people to come forward for physical healing and I went forward for healing on my back. Sandy then asked the new Alpha people to help heal. A man called Ray came up to me and asked me what I wanted healing for. I said, "My back," and he asked if there was anything else, as my eyes were red from crying. I said "No." A husband and wife named Miek and Di from the Alpha task force came to help. I was taken to the side chapel and they started to pray for me. I felt the Spirit start from my feet and "wash" through my body. I then felt the most unbelievably complete joy and began laughing uncontrollably. When it was all over I felt completely reborn. When I got home I prayed in tongues in the car for half an hour and slept like a log that night.

In the sessions, Nicky Gumbel make reference to the late John Wimber of the Vineyard...

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ministries, who apparently had the word of knowledge and supernatural revelation. This is undermining the doctrine of the **sufficiency of the Scriptures, an important touchstone for the Reformers** of the 16th Century Reformation. (Wimber is notorious for his book on *Power Evangelism*, with heavy emphasis on signs and wonders.)

Conclusion

We are living in a confused and deceptive world today, even in the ecclesiastical scene. Fakes, counterfeits, charlatans and fanatics are everywhere, and many gullible and credulous friends have fallen prey to them. Many are desperately trying to seek God but found “Him” in all the wrong places. Others are looking for a convenient Saviour, without the need for repentance and discipleship, and Alpha presents that to them. Others are sincerely misled. Jesus says in Matthew 7:20–23,

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Alpha’s support base is suspect. It finds encouragement from those who opposed the true evangelical faith. Even liberals, Catholics and New Agers, who have abandoned the evangelical faith, find much good in Alpha. (For the record, the greatest user for the alpha course are the RCs today) This assent and appreciation by the enemies of the gospel speak eloquently for itself, concerning the questionable content of the Alpha course. Paul reminds us in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”* The attractiveness and creativity of the Alpha course are not denied. Admittedly, some elements may be useful and practical, but, being tainted with unsound theology, it renders it altogether suspect and questionable. After some study and investigation, it is my humble submission that the Alpha course, with its **defective views on the gospel**, has **erred substantially** and is not acceptable as a tool for evangelism no matter how appealing or enticing it is to the people in the unbelieving world. We appeal for **spiritual discernment** and godly **prudence** from the redeemed community. The words of Chris Hand, Co-founder of Christian Research Network and author of *Signs and Wonders Movement Exposed*, are quoted here for our concluding thoughts (*Falling Short—The Alpha Course Examined*, Surrey: Day One Publications, 1998, 100–101):

*There is no magic wand to be waved. Our task is to use the opportunities presented to us as vigorously as possible, but never to lose the true essence of the gospel which we preach. **We are not at liberty to offer anything else.** If the gospel, preached as carefully, prayerfully, seriously and lovingly as God enables us to preach, does not save people, we have nothing else that we can offer them. If people refuse the message of life, there is no other message that we can give them. **If they cannot be brought to listen to the truth, we have no mandate to tell them something else.***

*However helpless we may feel in the face of such overwhelming apathy, we have no licence to produce **another gospel** and use something that seems to “work.” If people will not hear the gospel, then they will not hear anything else. As the rich man, suffering the torments of hell, is told when he remonstrated about the need for signs and wonders to convince his five brothers, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31).*

Somehow, the church has lost confidence in the fact that the Lord will not allow His Word to be broken. What He has said, He has meant. If, having discharged the responsibility given to us, the results are still meagre, that has to be left to the...

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*sovereignty of God. Unfortunately, in practice, there is a marked reluctance to believe in this doctrine. If the means that God has appointed are not bearing the fruit that we should desire to see, that is not the signal to change the means. Perhaps if the church was more careful and faithful in the discharge of the duties given to her, there would by now have been more to show for our efforts. Carelessness may have robbed the church of much of its blessing. God has not undertaken to bless shoddy work. While casting around to find “something that works,” we may have missed some very obvious matters closer to home that have been overlooked. Perhaps it is time for some to biblically and prayerfully **examine again the gospel that is preached** today for their pulpits or classes and to review the evangelistic literature and methods that we employ today.*

*By Rev (Dr) Jack Sin, Maranatha B-P Church, S'pore
(adapted from Evangel Weekly dated 13 July 2008)*

YOUTH CONTEMPORARY ISSUES BY DR JACK SIN Q&A – TRANSCRIBED BY KEENE CHEN (PART 3)

7. I needed a track suit but I did not buy it. Instead I borrowed it from a male friend in college. My friends told me that since I need it for 2 years in college, I might as well buy one. However, I had since used the track suit which I borrowed from this male friend. Until now, I have not returned it to him since he did not ask me to do so. Are my actions correct?

What you can do is to let this person know, saying that I still have your track suit. Do you want me to return it to you, or keep it for good, or pay you for it? Be honest and reimburse him if he asks for it. Once I borrowed a book for my friend and I accidentally put it in my library. Then one day, I discovered it and was shocked and quickly returned it to the person and apologised. He said I could have it. If he gives it to you, it's okay. However, let's say you quietly keep it, then it's wrong. Honour God and owe man nothing, that is a good principle in life.

8. There are differences in human opinion on how God guides His people today, for example, dreams, circumstances, peace in one's heart, feeling 'led' to do something, or simply following the moral guidance of the Bible without a personal word from God.

What does the Bible say? What is qualified as/meant by “the leading/guidance of the Holy Spirit”? What form of guidance would be considered extra-biblical revelation?

God does not speak to us through dreams and visions anymore. Heb 1:1-2 says “God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;” However, God speaks to us through His preaching or reading of his word, by answers to prayer, His people especially those who are godly, prevailing circumstances, and the peace in the heart, but not dreams and visions.

The canon is complete and there is no necessity for additional supernatural revelations. But read Prov 3:5-7, Psa 37:1-7 and Eph 5;15-17 for a better understanding of biblical guidance, and the article I wrote for the Maranatha Messenger in the MBPC website for a deeper study.

In conclusion:

Finally, one very good question in general if you don't know if something is right or wrong is to ask yourself: “If Christ were to be present with you, would you be comfortable doing that thing in the presence of God? Read 1 Cor 6:12,8:9 and 10.23,31. If you can say that with a clear conscience, go ahead. If not, be careful and stop it before it is too late. Remember that God is always with us hope this helps.

*Dr Jack Sin
Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore*

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

| Worship Services | | | WELCOME |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Morning | <i>Today: 17/08/2008</i> | <i>Next Week: 24/08/2008</i> | We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. |
| <i>Chairman:</i> | Pr Mok Chee Cheong | Jonathan Kim | |
| <i>Preacher:</i> | Pr Mark Chen | Pr Mok Chee Cheong | <p style="text-align: center;">NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray for Journey Mercies: Josh & Hannah (Jul/Aug, UK & Europe), Evelyn (Jul/Aug, Ghana), Sophia & Grace (Jul-Sep, Singapore), Rachel (Singapore & China), Constance (Aug/Sep, US), Daniel & Maureen & Anthony & Helen (Aug/Sep, Malaysia & Singapore), Mok & Carol (Aug/Sep, Israel & Singapore). • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Constance (shoulder pain), Josh's grandma (stroke), Hazel (wrist injury). • Those serving on the Lord's Day for both morning and evening worship services: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer. • Family Worship: For those who would like to open up their homes for family worship, please contact Pr Mok. • Sabbath School: Leaflets are placed on the book table to encourage children of ages 6-12 to attend Sunday School. Please feel free to distribute those leaflets to any child, especially yours, who may be interested in joining in. Please note that class will be held at the Library after the morning worship service. • Book Table: Please feel free to browse the book table for materials that are of interest to you, especially some new books that have just been displayed. Please note that materials without price tags are free. |
| <i>Message:</i> | From Bread Basket to Death Basin | Giving to Build God's House | |
| <i>Text:</i> | Ruth 1:1-6 | 1 Chronicle 29:1-19 | |
| <i>Organist:</i> | Anthony | Pr Mark Chen | |
| Evening | | | |
| <i>Chairman:</i> | John Poh | Pr Mark Chen | |
| <i>Preacher:</i> | Pr Mark Chen | Pr Mok Chee Cheong | |
| <i>Message:</i> | Provoking Unto Love and Good Works | Tba | |
| <i>Text:</i> | Hebrews 10:24-25 | Tba | |
| <i>Pianist:</i> | Hubert | Joy | |
| Other Duties | | | |
| | <i>Today: 17/08/2008</i> | <i>Next Week: 24/08/2008</i> | |
| <i>Ushers</i> | John / Josiah | Josiah / Sharon | |
| <i>Sunday Sch:</i> | Hui Min | Carol | |
| <i>Lunch:</i> | Volunteers | Volunteers | |
| <i>Washing-up:</i> | Volunteers | Volunteers | |
| <i>Bible Study:</i> | Catechism Class | Catechism Class | |
| Appointments of the Week | | | |
| Fri 22 Aug | 7.30pm | Young Adults Fellowship: Led by Pr Mark Chen | |
| Sat 23 Aug | 4.00pm | Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok | |
| Last Week's Worship Service Collections | | | |
| | Offering: £382.13 | Lunch: £32.54 | |
| | Hospitality: £602.90 | | |
| Memory Verse | | | |
| <i>Last Week (August 08 Wk 2): Psalm 139:15</i> | | | |
| My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. | | | |
| <i>This Week (August 08 Wk 3): Psalm 139:16</i> | | | |
| Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. | | | |