

Promise Keepers: A Fundamentalist Evaluation



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Introduction

Contemporary American society is splintered into many one-issue organizations, groups composed of people who are diverse in their views on many subjects but who are united on one single issue.

This method was so successfully used by the civil rights movement in the 1950s that soon Americans saw the rise of groups advocating women's rights, gay rights, etc. As a reaction, certain conservative religious leaders formed their own one-issue groups. In the 1996 updated version of his book *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, George H. Nash has an epilogue entitled, "Conservatism Ascendant: The Age of Reagan and Beyond." In it he states, "While New [Religious] Right leaders ... generally shared the foreign policy and economic perspectives of other conservatives, their guiding preoccupations lay elsewhere, in what became known as the 'social issues': abortion, school prayer, pornography, drug use, crime, sexual deviancy, the vulgarization of mass entertainment, and more. Convinced that American society was in a state of vertiginous moral decline, and that secular humanism—in other words, modern liberalism—was the fundamental cause of this decay, the New Right exhorted its hitherto politically quiescent followers to enter the public arena in defense of traditional moral values." (*The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* by George H. Nash. Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996, page 331.)

While all Fundamentalists would agree with these traditional moral values, many would hesitate to impose them—public school prayer, for example—upon an unbelieving society.

An even greater problem for Fundamentalists is the New Right's willingness to make the church rather than the individual Christian as a citizen the agent for bringing society back to earlier held values.

The greatest problem for Fundamentalists, however, is the New Right's uniting of religious groups which teach conflicting views of the gospel. One organization identified with the New Right is called Promise Keepers.

The Promises of Promise Keepers

Those who join the movement make seven promises: "A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit,...to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises,...to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity,...to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values,...to supporting the mission of the church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources, ...to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity,...[and] to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (see Mark 12:30,31) and the Great Commission (see Matt. 28:19,20)."

The Problems of the P K Promises

Fundamentalists agree with the first commitment of the Promise Keeper: to honor "Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit." Writing about this commitment, Promise Keeper leader Jack Hayford writes, "Redeeming worship centers on the Lord's Table. Whether your tradition celebrates it as Communion, Eucharist, the Mass, or the Lord's Supper, we are all called to this centerpiece of Christian worship. Jesus, the builder of the church, commanded that this regular practice be laid in the foundations of our observance as worshipers (see I Cor: 11:23–26). The power of the redeeming blood of Christ not only saves our souls, but it is also the foundation of all redemptive, recovering, renewing works of God." (Jack Hayford, "Setting a Sure Foundation," in *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, page 19).

Fundamentalists reject the notion that Roman Catholic theology honors Jesus Christ in its worship when it teaches, "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #1364).

Furthermore, Catholic theology teaches, "The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit....The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice:... 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner... on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.'" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1366–1387).

So the first problem with the P K promises is the failure of Promise Keeper leaders to articulate clearly what it means to honor Jesus Christ through worship. Failure to distinguish carefully between the biblical teaching about Christ's once-for-all sacrifice almost 2000 years ago (Hebrews 10:10–18) and the false views of that sacrifice which promote a different gospel is a serious matter. The second problem with the P K promises involves the willingness of Promise Keeper leaders to welcome Roman Catholic participants in an uncritical manner. According to one Catholic newspaper, the Promise Keepers organization "has estimated that 70,000 of the 720,000 men who attended its 13 rallies last year are Catholics." (The Catholic Mirror: newspaper of the Des Moines diocese, July 19, 1996, page 11).

Furthermore, news reports of the Promise Keepers Clergy Conference held in the Georgia Dome February 13-15, state, "As a planned act of symbolic unity, a communion service followed. The elements were already prepared and then distributed in just a few minutes by capable volunteers." (Dr. Ralph G. Colas, Fundamental News Service, The ACCC Challenge, April 1996, page 3).

In light of the above, there is a third problem with the P K promises. Their commitment to "reach beyond any ... denominational barriers" requires disobedience to the Biblical command to "come out from among them" (2 Cor. 6:17). Although there is a P K promise to support one's church by honoring and praying for its pastor, the ecumenical activity of Promise Keepers eliminates the possibility of keeping this promise when one's church and pastor preach and practice separation from those who proclaim false gospel.

Finally, there is a fourth problem with the P K promises. One does not build strong marriages by a husband "pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises." Instead, the Bible exhorts husbands to pursue vital relationships with their wives so that the two really become one. Lack of communication between husbands and wives is killing marriages. This is where the Bible places the accountability factor.

Conclusion

Let our churches take their responsibility for helping marriages succeed rather than passing that task off to others who compromise the Christian faith.