

Purpose Driven Life

The “Purpose Driven Life” by Rick Warren (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002) has gained immense popularity. The 5 section and 40 chapter format has allowed it to be used by many churches as a study book (for example, see pages 130-151 and 160-167 on fellowship). Just because a book is popular should not exempt it from critical scrutiny. Even popular books deserve to be checked against the Bible(see I Thessalonians 5:21),

Three major problems exist with the book. Although the Bible is held up to be the final authority in both doctrine and practice(pages 185-192), the book fails to promote studying history, culture, and linguistics of the Bible. Research consists of asking questions about the text and writing down insights(page 189).

This approach fails when analyzing a text properly. Page 28, for example, talks about Cain’s sin and being disconnected from God’s purpose. Yet, the following review(<http://www.tektonics.org/books/warrenr01.html>) properly shows that the Ancient Near East at the time of Cain was a collectivist society. It is a mistake to try to force Western notions on texts that do allow for

this interpretation. This does a disservice to believers when the texts are not understood in their proper setting.

Secondly, the issue of leadership accountability occurs when error appears not to be addressed adequately. Although rational thinking is supported in the context of surrender (page 80), it is not pursued in the critical area of church unity and using the Bible as the final authority. Chapters 21 (pages 160-167) and 24 (pages 185-192) have unresolved tension in this area.

Page 162 best summarizes Rick Warren's approach to church unity. He states, "Conflict is usually a sign that the focus has shifted to less important issues, things the Bible calls 'disputable matters' [quoting Romans 14:1 and 2 Timothy 2:23, page 330]. When we focus on personalities, preferences, interpretations, styles, or methods, division always happens. But if we concentrate on loving each other and fulfilling God's purposes, harmony results".

This approach fails to address key questions. What happens if the pastor and elders engage in unscriptural doctrines and practices? Can the leadership be approached and issues resolved? Will the person be expelled simply because necessary issues must be faced (compare pages 165-167 about Saddleback's covenant)? Can the standard of truth

be upheld(pages 185-192)? Can truth and love co-exist together(Ephesians 4:11-16)? The book does not answer these questions.

Finally, the book recommends some additional resources(like Warren's "Journal", "Scripture Keepers", "Album", and "Video Curriculum" to name a few on pages 323-324) to be used once "Purpose Driven Life" is completed. Yet, these materials ultimately make believers dependent upon these same resources as well as the initial book. Pages 11, 307, 310, and 320-324 all focus on Warren's materials. Where is the quest to learn and study the historical, textual, cultural, and geographical contexts of the Bible? Doesn't the recommended material keep believers at the "milk" level(see page 186 quoting I Peter 2:2)? Doesn't the Bible admonish believers to grow (see Hebrews 5:11-14)? The book and the recommended resources keeps the believers at very elementary level.

"The Purpose Driven Life" remains popular. However, this book will ultimately be replaced by something else(Ecclesiastes 12:12). Believers need to be focused on their Bibles.