

PROMISE KEEPERS: A Perspective
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Promise Keepers (hereafter, PK) began in 1990 through the vision of then Colorado University football coach, Bill McCartney. Aimed at discipling men, PK "is a Christ-centered ministry dedicated to uniting men through vital relationships to become godly influences in their world" (from their purpose statement). They have an orthodox, though brief, statement of faith. They have attracted ever-increasing crowds of men to stadium-filled rallies around the country. They also provide leadership seminars for pastors and lay leaders, along with various training materials (video & audio tapes, a monthly magazine, and various printed materials).

At the core of the movement are the seven promises that every Promise Keeper commits himself to:

1. Honoring Jesus Christ through prayer, worship, and obedience to His Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit;
2. Pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises;
3. Practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity;
4. Building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values;
5. Supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor and by actively giving his time and resources;
6. Reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity;
7. Influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Except for one statement that needs further clarification, every evangelical pastor would subscribe to and promote these commitments. That statement concerns the extent to which the "denominational barriers" statement is taken. Would this include not making any vital distinctions between Protestants and Roman Catholics? While some Catholics are truly saved, the official teaching of the Catholic Church contains numerous serious heresies which should be problematic for any Bible-believing Christian. Are we supposed to "reach beyond" the beliefs of liberal Protestant denominations which would deny the absolute authority and inerrancy of Scripture? (PK's statement of faith includes belief in the Bible as authoritative and without error.) Some of these denominations tolerate the denial of Jesus' miracles, bodily resurrection, and literal second coming. They deny the reality of hell and the need for genuine conversion. They also allow for practices that the Bible clearly condemns, such as homosexuality, sexual immorality, abortion, lax views of divorce and remarriage, etc. PK needs to clarify what they mean by "reaching beyond denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity." I am quite uncomfortable with proclaiming to the world that I am one with the above-mentioned beliefs and practices.

"Reaching beyond denominational barriers" is proper and, I believe, commanded by our Lord, if it means putting aside minor doctrinal differences such as the mode of baptism, the validity of the sign gifts (tongues,

healing, etc.), views of the end times, etc., for the sake of fellowship and public witness. It is dangerous and wrong, however, if it means downplaying crucial biblical truth for the sake of "unity."

It also is dangerous if it leads men in the direction our society has already headed, namely, to believe that there is no such thing as absolute truth; or, to believe that doctrine is both divisive and irrelevant and that it doesn't really matter to the common man. Scripture puts a major emphasis on the crucial importance of God's absolute truth. See, especially, Paul's emphasis on "sound doctrine" in his final letters (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus).

Coupled with this potential de-emphasis of doctrine is the danger of the PK movement to foster the emotional at the expense of solid theology. The stadium rallies produce an emotional experience, as almost every man who has attended will testify. Don't misunderstand: There is nothing wrong with being caught up in our emotions before God. We are to worship and love Him with our total being, which includes emotions. But I would argue (I'm indebted here to the late Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* [Eerdmans], pp. 51-62, "Mind, Heart and Will") that we must always appeal to the heart and will through the mind first, and that any other order is bound to produce anemic Christianity. He argues forcefully (based on Rom. 6:17) that the total man must be involved, beginning with the mind grasping God's revealed truth. It is wrong, he contends, to approach the heart or the will directly without going through the mind first. To get men hyped up emotionally and to make decisions based on mass euphoria, without engaging their minds in solid doctrine will disappoint and not sustain men in the long run.

What I'm saying is this: If a man who is marginal in his daily Christian experience goes to a rally like PK and gets emotionally high, he's still got to come back to face reality. He will have the same daily hassles, family problems, and personal sins to deal with. What the man needs is daily discipline unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). He needs to learn to be in the Word and walk in the Spirit each day, living by faith and obedience whether he feels up or down. But what he got at PK was the impression that Christianity is a good feeling that he had when 50,000 men got together at a rally. When this feeling wears off and his problems don't go away, he's going to be tempted to think, "I tried Christianity, but it doesn't work for me like it seems to work for everyone else." The sad reality is, he never tried biblical Christianity at all. He was just exposed to an emotional Christian pep rally.

This is why God ordained the local church, not para-church organizations, as the place where Christian discipleship is to be worked out in daily life. It may not be as exciting on the surface, but it's where we live. If a man is truly walking with God in the daily grind, serving in the local church, living the life at home, then a thing like PK can be an encouraging gathering of men from many backgrounds and locations to come together in an affirmation of our common faith. But if a man looks to something like PK as that which "pumps him up," he's looking in the wrong place. I think even PK would agree with this assessment.

In addition to the above dangers, my main concern is that PK is shot through with the psychologized Christianity that has flooded into the American church. Many of their main speakers at the rallies and authors they promote are psychologists who mingle many false teachings of the world with God's Word. PK handed out the awful book, *The Masculine Journey*, by Robert Hicks, at its 1993 Boulder, Colorado, national conference. The book is nothing short of blasphemous, although it purports to be based on the Hebrew words for "man." (I can provide reviews with damning quotes from the book.) PK was confronted with this and, instead of admitting the unbiblical nature of the book, they issued a statement standing behind it. They are clearly committed to psychologized Christianity. (See my booklet, "Christians & Psychology: Some Common Questions Answered," for more on this topic.)

Beyond this, I have concerns that PK is simply another example of Christians watching the world and saying, "We need to imitate what they're doing." The world has a feminist movement; Christians develop their own version. The world gets into encounter groups; the church promotes a Christianized version. The world is into 12 Step groups; Christian versions spring up everywhere, complete with verses and even a "Recovery" Bible, showing that this was "Christian" all along. The world gets into the men's movement; here we go with our Christian version. Couldn't the church set the pace for the world instead of vice versa? I'm not saying that Christian men shouldn't get together and form vital relationships. Obviously, Scripture says we should. But let's not imitate the world. Even the major national news magazines recognize PK as an evangelical version of the secular men's movement. Unfortunately, it's often not a whole lot different, especially when it promotes getting in touch with our feelings rather than learning to obey sound doctrine.

Because of these concerns, as a pastor I'm not comfortable with PK being promoted as a church-endorsed function for our men. If some of our men choose to go, it's between them and the Lord. They are free in the Lord, under the biblical guidelines, "Does it edify? Does it promote healthy, biblical Christian living?" I encourage each man to be a "Berean" by comparing everything with Scripture (Acts 17:11). If you think the positives outweigh the negatives, then participate with discernment. If the negatives outweigh the positives, then abstain. Each of us will answer to the Lord. We are accountable to Him to become men of God.