

# Lutheran Critique: Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*

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Respectfully Submitted to the Pastors of Circuit 33, The Texas District

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## Introduction

In the world of Neo-Evangelicalism, it appears that devotees are destined to jump endlessly from one Christian fad to the next. From the *Left Behind* series<sup>1</sup> to the *Prayer of Jabez*<sup>2</sup>, Evangelicals are always looking for the next “big thing” which will help them stay “on fire for Jesus.” Without a doubt, the latest product sweeping through Evangelical circles is Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Life*<sup>3</sup>.

Inasmuch as Warren’s book has recently risen to prominent status within The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod [LCMS], this paper will examine his work in the light of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, with a specific eye toward how Martin Luther’s Small Catechism may act as a corrective to Warren’s book.

## Purpose of the Book

From the outset of his work, Warren sets rather high expectations for his book. Indeed, he even contends that it is God’s will that consumers read his specific product: “Before you were born, God planned *this moment* in your life. It is no accident that you are holding this book. God longs for you to discover the life he created you to live—here on earth, and forever in eternity.”<sup>4</sup> In the book, Warren seeks to help individuals discover their basic purpose in life: “This is more than just a book; it is a guide to a *40-day spiritual journey* that will enable you to discover the answer to life’s most important question: What on earth am I here for?”<sup>5</sup>

The work is divided up into forty sections, with the intention that readers ponder just one portion of the book each and every day. Why forty days? Citing the examples of Noah, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David, Elijah, Nineveh, Jesus, and His apostles,<sup>6</sup> Warren explains: “The Bible is clear that God considers 40 days a spiritually significant time period.”<sup>7</sup> So,

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<sup>1</sup> Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Italics in original, Warren, Dedication.

<sup>5</sup> Italics in original, *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

for the next forty days, Warren urges readers: “Don’t just *read* this book. *Interact with it.*”<sup>8</sup> To help individuals along on their forty day journey, Warren includes a contract that readers may fill out and sign, along with a partner, pledging to do what the book prescribes.<sup>9</sup>

## Initial Observations

Many have wondered about the startling success of Warren’s book, especially across denominational boundaries. How can a book, for example, written by a Southern Baptist pastor enjoy success, even in the LCMS? The answer is simple: Warren has some good things to say! This, of course, doesn’t mean that the book should be read without caution. On the contrary, there are many problems with the book and discerning Lutheran readers will soon discover that Warren’s doctrine is simply incompatible with their own. Still, the author fills an obvious void in the Evangelical world.

For example, many of the works ravenously devoured by Evangelicals are little more than self-help books built upon pop-psychology. Warren decries such methods, asserting that these books generally yield very little fruit and “That’s because we typically begin at the wrong starting point—ourselves.”<sup>10</sup> To Warren’s credit, he argues that “you won’t discover your life’s meaning by looking within yourself.”<sup>11</sup> He lays out the following analogy to help readers understand his contention: “If I handed you an invention you had never seen before, you wouldn’t know its purpose, and the invention itself wouldn’t be able to tell you either. Only the creator or the owner’s manual could reveal its purpose.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, Warren’s answer to the dilemma is “*revelation*,”<sup>13</sup> inasmuch as “If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.”<sup>14</sup> The Bible, Warren claims, “is our Owner’s Manual, explaining why we are alive, how life works, what to avoid, and what to expect in the future.”<sup>15</sup>

While conservative Lutherans would likely object to Warren’s designation of the

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<sup>8</sup> Italics in original, *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Italics in original, *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Scriptures as an “Owner’s Manual” (and rightly so!<sup>16</sup>), they should also recognize that Warren has stumbled upon something missing in many Evangelical works—the absolute necessity of beginning and ending with the inspired Word of God. The question is, does Warren actually fulfill his stated purpose? As the remainder of this paper will attempt to demonstrate, the answer is simply “no.”

### Christ According to Warren

When discussing the person of Jesus Christ, Warren is essentially correct. He confesses Christ to be the eternal Son of God,<sup>17</sup> the second Person of the Trinity,<sup>18</sup> who is both God and Man.<sup>19</sup> Here, of course, Lutherans may wholeheartedly concur with Warren’s conclusions, inasmuch as they are simply an expression of the teachings of Scripture as codified in the Nicene Creed, summed up by Luther in his *Small Catechism*: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten from the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.”<sup>20</sup>

Sadly, however, Warren doesn’t seem to evidence the same clarity when discussing the work of Christ. In fact, Warren often misses the mark entirely, making statements like: “Jesus came to earth so we could fully understand God’s glory.”<sup>21</sup> This, of course, is not the reason why the Son of God took upon Himself a human nature and dwelt among us. As Jesus said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10) by “giv[ing] His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). In the words of Paul, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15) by living, dying, and rising again in their stead.

Regrettably, in the three hundred plus pages of Warren’s book, he never even comes close to a comprehensive presentation of the gospel.<sup>22</sup> Readers would be better served by returning to Luther’s *Small Catechism* and reading his magnificent exposition of Christ’s work, since it presents a Savior:

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<sup>16</sup> The Holy Scriptures, of course, are principally a record of God’s action in reconciling the world to Himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, Scripture testifies primarily of Jesus (John 5:39), and shouldn’t be viewed as a book of guidelines designed to help individuals live well-rounded lives.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 24; 160.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>20</sup> SC, II.III in *Concordia Triglotta* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 545.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>22</sup> While the gospel is alluded to occasionally throughout the book (pp. 58; 86; 97; and 132), Warren only attempts to express it clearly in one place (pp. 112–113). Even this presentation, however, is woefully inadequate.

...who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be [wholly] His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.<sup>23</sup>

Warren is absolutely clear that man may only realize his purpose in life through Christ: "You discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ."<sup>24</sup> Yet, he never actually defines how union with Christ takes place. While Warren repeats various traditional formulas (by grace, through faith, etc.<sup>25</sup>) he never expounds upon the meaning of such phrases (something a book attempting to spell out the meaning of life should *definitely* be concerned with) and readers are simply left to fill in the soteriological gaps on their own.

Unfortunately, even when Warren does attempt to address what Christ has done for us, the chief benefit of our Savior's suffering (namely, the forgiveness of sins) is conspicuously absent. Warren contends that because of Christ we will "live forever with God," "be completely changed to be like Christ," "freed from all pain, death, and suffering," "rewarded and reassigned portions of service," and receive a "share in Christ's glory."<sup>26</sup> Where is the message of Christ crucified for sinful mankind? Where is the mention of forgiveness?

The specific things Warren mentions are indeed fruits of the atonement, yet the explicit purpose of Christ's work is wholly glossed over. Of course, in *The Purpose Driven Life*, it almost *has* to be! Throughout the course of Warren's book, the law occupies a prominent place, but it is always the *third* use of the law, while the *second* use is wholly missing.<sup>27</sup> There is absolutely no pointed presentation of the law directed at convicting sinners of their status before God, thus, Warren's presentation of the gospel need not prominently feature the biblical themes of forgiveness, redemption, and atonement.

## Conversion—Man's Work or God's?

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<sup>23</sup> SC, II.II in *Triglotta*, 545.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 112–113.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Even in the third use, Warren badly misconstrues the law's purpose. According to Article VI of the *Formula of Concord*, the law has no power to sanctify. It serves to convict Christians of their sins (even in the third use—*lex semper accusat*) and reveal the shape of the Christian life in order to keep believers from inventing their own self-appointed works. Still, Christians only obey God as empowered by the gospel, inasmuch as the law does not give what it demands (namely, obedience).

Warren makes a similar blunder when presenting his theology of conversion. As noted above, Warren is unmistakably clear *that* an individual must place his faith in Christ, but he falls short of presenting the biblical position on *how* a person attains such faith. He writes: “The only way to get into God’s family is by being born again into it. You become part of the human family by your first birth, but you become a member of God’s family by your second birth.”<sup>28</sup>

So far, Lutheran readers can agree. The question is, how does one become born again? In Scripture, the new birth is depicted as coming through baptism. So, Jesus says to Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3; 5). In the first century, it was a common practice for Jews to baptize Gentile converts and their entire families, who were thereafter referred to as newborns.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Christ’s language is unmistakably baptismal.

Yet Warren does not believe that the new birth is given through baptism. In fact, he explicitly denies this proposition: “Baptism doesn’t *make* you a member of God’s family...Baptism *shows* you are part of God’s family.”<sup>30</sup> For Warren, this “ritual”<sup>31</sup> or “beautiful act”<sup>32</sup> merely “signifies your inclusion in God’s family.”<sup>33</sup> Warren reduces God’s powerful means of rebirth to a bare symbol: “Like a wedding ring, it is a visible reminder of an inward commitment made in your heart.”<sup>34</sup> Evangelical readers, of course, should not be taken aback by such affirmations. After all, Warren is himself a Southern Baptist and they have long been on record as rejecting God’s saving deed accomplished in and through baptism. Lutheran readers, however, should be shocked by such denials of biblical truth.

It is through baptism that we are born again, as Paul testifies: “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). In baptism, we receive new birth (John 3:3–5), forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), union with Christ (Rom. 6:1ff), salvation (1 Pet. 3:21), etc. The *Small Catechism* nicely sums up the blessings and benefits of baptism: “It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and

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<sup>28</sup> Warren, 118.

<sup>29</sup> Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism* translated by Herbert Bouman (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 12–21.

<sup>30</sup> Warren, 120.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”<sup>35</sup>

This, of course, guarantees that salvation is, and *must be*, by grace alone.<sup>36</sup> In baptism, Jesus comes to a helpless infant who is unable to even say His name, much less do any works pleasing in His sight. There, our Lord gives to the little child what He won for all men in His life, death, and resurrection—eternal life, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins. The fact that baptism is Christ’s work, and not ours, makes it a powerful means of assurance. How do we know that we are saved? We are baptized! Christ surely won salvation for all men on the cross and He just as surely gives it to us in baptism. Since the benefits of baptism are grounded outside of the believer, in the words and promises of Christ, it remains unshakable. Thus, Luther criticized those who grounded the legitimacy of baptism upon faith<sup>37</sup> and not the external mandate of Christ the Lord:

True, one should add faith to baptism. But we are not to base baptism on faith. There is quite a difference between having faith, on the one hand, and depending on one’s faith and making baptism depend on faith, on the other. Whoever allows himself to be baptized on the strength of his faith, is not only uncertain, but also an idolater who denies Christ. For he trusts in and builds on something of his own, namely, on a gift which he has from God, and not on God’s Word alone. So another may build on and trust in his strength, wealth, power, wisdom, holiness, which also are gifts given him by God.<sup>38</sup>

Yet Warren takes this comfort away from Christians, replacing it with uncertainty and introspection, which will ultimately lead to despair.

For Warren, individuals must “accept Jesus”<sup>39</sup> and “offer [them]selves freely to him.”<sup>40</sup> How is this done? Through a means of grace of man’s own devising: the so-called “sinners prayer.” Thus, Warren invites readers to “bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: ‘Jesus, I believe in you and receive you.’”<sup>41</sup> So Warren rules out the truth that God monergistically delivers what He promises in the saving waters of baptism, but he allows our initiative in prayer to receive what God never

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<sup>35</sup> SC, IV.II in *Triglotta*, 551.

<sup>36</sup> *Favor Dei propter Christum* (the favorable disposition of God toward man on account of Christ).

<sup>37</sup> As does Warren, 121.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Luther, “Concerning Rebaptism, 1528,” in *Church and Ministry II*, vol. 40 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1958), 252.

<sup>39</sup> Warren, 34.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

promises to deliver therein: the forgiveness of sins.

True, in prayer, we are invited to confess our sins and seek forgiveness (Matt. 6:12; 1 John 1:9), yet as Pieper points out, prayer “does not ignore the means of grace, nor does it displace them, but on the contrary it makes Christ’s perfect merit and the means of grace the grounds on which it stands. The Christian prays that God would remit his sins for Christ’s sake according to His gracious promise in the Word.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, when we ask for forgiveness in prayer, our faith relies not on the prayer itself, but on the promises contained in the divine Word, based upon Christ’s perfect work of reconciliation. In this way, both prayer and the means of grace are given their proper place.

Warren, however, misses this distinction, inviting new converts to place their hope in the prayer itself: “If you sincerely meant that prayer, congratulations! Welcome to the family of God! You are now ready to discover and start living God’s purpose for your life.”<sup>43</sup> In this way, new believers are invited to ground their hope in a good work: prayer. Likewise, even this is taken from them, when Warren adds the requirement of sincerity to the prayer. How sincere must a person be? Can anyone ever be completely sincere? Even the Apostle Paul affirmed that when he willed to do good, evil was always present with him (Rom. 7:21).

Thus, Warren leaves new believers on shaky ground, asking them to ground their hope of forgiveness in their own work of prayer, coupled with their own disposition of sincerity; all of this, of course, in opposition to Christ’s sure and certain work in the waters of baptism! Here, Walther’s words of warning are especially appropriate:

Here you have a verdict condemning all fanatical sects. No matter what other false doctrines they may teach, they all have this grievous error in common, that they do not rely solely on Christ and His Word, but chiefly on something that takes place in themselves.<sup>44</sup>

Of course, all of this is simply the logical extension of Warren’s position on the freedom of the will. Warren writes: “The moment you open yourself to Christ, God gets a ‘beachhead’ in your life.”<sup>45</sup> Sinners must first open themselves to God, and in response, God forgives believers and works in their lives. So, for example, Warren contends that “the first disciples chose to follow Jesus.”<sup>46</sup> As noted above, if sinners must freely “accept

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<sup>42</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 217.

<sup>43</sup> Warren, 59.

<sup>44</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* translated by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 207.

<sup>45</sup> Warren, 218.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

Jesus” as their Savior before God begins to work in their life, all manner of works are liable to be taken as the ground of a believer’s hope.

Scripture, of course teaches no such thing. Sinners are dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), unwilling to come to God (Matt. 23:37), hostile to Him (Rom. 8:7), and unable to receive the things of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14). It is God who draws sinners to Himself. Therefore, Jesus says “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day...no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father” (John 6:44; 65). As Paul concludes, “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Faith is a gift (Eph. 2:8–9), and as such, believers do not open themselves up to God, as the account of Lydia’s conversion demonstrates: “Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). Since man is incapable of faith, the disciples didn’t take the initiative in choosing Christ, as our Lord explicitly states: “You did not choose Me but I chose you” (John 15:16).

Not surprisingly, Luther was intimately acquainted with Warren’s position, inasmuch as it simply reflects the semi-Pelagian position of Medieval Roman Catholicism. Indeed, in his treatise against Erasmus, Luther even dubbed the issue of man’s inability to come to God by his own free will the chief issue at stake in the Reformation, congratulating Erasmus for cutting to the chase and attacking the issue upon which the Reformation truly turned:

Moreover, I praise and commend you highly for this also, that unlike all the rest you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and have not wearied me with irrelevancies about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like trifles (for trifles they are rather than basic issues), with which almost everyone hitherto has gone hunting for me without success. You and you alone have seen the question on which everything hinges, and have aimed at the vital spot.<sup>47</sup>

Luther’s instruction on the matter, as presented in the *Small Catechism*, is eminently biblical:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther, “The Bondage of the Will,” in *Career of the Reformer III*, vol. 33 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1972), 293.

<sup>48</sup> SC, II.III in *Triglotta*, 545.

In this way, man's salvation is absolutely out of his own hands. Sinners cannot come to Christ on their own, and even after they have been granted faith by the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament, they are not able to maintain their faith: salvation is a gift of God from first to last.

### **Sanctification—Man's Work or God's?**

Not surprisingly, Warren views man's sanctification as being God's chief objective: "God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is...character development."<sup>49</sup> Our goal, therefore, is to become like Jesus. Of course, we can't do this without God's help, as Warren testifies: "You cannot reproduce the character of Jesus on your own strength."<sup>50</sup> Thus, "We do not serve a distant and detached God who spouts encouraging clichés safely from the sideline."<sup>51</sup> Rather, Warren believes that God must be intimately involved in our sanctification, actually working within us to conform us into the image of Christ.

This, of course, is absolutely biblical. Just as man does not justify himself, so he can not sanctify himself. The good works accomplished by the redeemed were ordained before the foundations of the world (Eph. 2:10), and are the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Unfortunately, Warren seems to take away with his left hand what he has already given with his right.

He claims that man cannot reproduce the character of Jesus on their own strength, yet he also affirms that "God waits for you to act first."<sup>52</sup> He tacitly affirms that "Obedience unlocks God's power."<sup>53</sup> Yes, God is involved in our sanctification, but only insofar as He helps us complete what we *already* begin on our own strength: "The Holy Spirit releases his power *the moment* you take a step of faith."<sup>54</sup> This, of course, is also a return to Medieval Roman Catholicism, which taught that God helps believers do good only after they have already done what lies within them (*facere quod in se est*). Thus, as in justification, sinners are also invited to take the initiative in their sanctification: "Put Jesus Christ in the driver's seat of your life and take your hands off the steering wheel."<sup>55</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions, however, make it quite clear that such a view is unbiblical:

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<sup>49</sup> Warren, 173.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>54</sup> Italics in original, *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

From this, then, it follows that as soon as the Holy Ghost, as has been said, through the Word and holy Sacraments, has begun in us this His work of regeneration and renewal, it is certain that through the power of the Holy Ghost we can and should cooperate, although still in great weakness. But this [that we cooperate] does not occur from our carnal natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Ghost has begun in us in conversion, as St. Paul expressly and earnestly exhorts that as workers together with Him we receive not the grace of God in vain, 2 Cor. 6, 1. But this is to be understood in no other way than that the converted man does good to such an extent and so long as God by His Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him, and that as soon as God would withdraw His gracious hand from him, he could not for a moment persevere in obedience to God. But if this were understood thus [if any one would take the expression of St. Paul in this sense], that the converted man cooperates with the Holy Ghost in the manner as when two horses together draw a wagon, this could in no way be conceded without prejudice to the divine truth.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, man cooperates in his sanctification, but only insofar as he is involved in it. God begins, continues, and completes His work in the redeemed. We do not take the initiative, nor are we even equal partners in the endeavor. Instead, our cooperation is passive, inasmuch as “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

For Warren, however, man-initiated obedience is the key to fellowship with our Lord: “However, Jesus made it clear that obedience is a condition of intimacy with God.”<sup>57</sup> It is important, according to Warren, “Because it proves you really love him.”<sup>58</sup> So the biblical saints, such as Mary, act as examples for us: “God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus, not because she was talented or wealthy or beautiful, but because she was totally surrendered to him.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, we are told, if we want God’s blessing on our lives, we must likewise be obediently surrendered, manifesting the beatitudes: “If you want God’s blessing on your life and you want to be known as a child of God, you must learn to be a peacemaker.”<sup>60</sup> Failure to do so may result in judgment: “I lose fellowship with God...I set myself up to be judged by God.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> FC, SD, II.65–66 in *Triglotta*, 791.

<sup>57</sup> Warren., 95.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

So, if believers can't sanctify themselves, but are expected to take the initiative, what role does God play? Seemingly, a mere advisory role. He gives principles for godly living in His Word and man must glean from these principles in order to live a purpose-driven life. So Warren presents readers with the following "simple" instructions: discovering the three insights into your purpose,<sup>62</sup> ascertaining the five reasons to live a purpose-driven life,<sup>63</sup> applying the three metaphors of God's view of life,<sup>64</sup> learning God's five purposes for your life,<sup>65</sup> living God's five plans for your life,<sup>66</sup> enacting the five acts of worship that make God smile,<sup>67</sup> uncovering six secrets of friendship with God,<sup>68</sup> developing the four characteristics of the kind of worship that pleases God,<sup>69</sup> performing the three important truths of fruitful fellowship,<sup>70</sup> six reasons for being committed and active in a local fellowship,<sup>71</sup> discovering the four principles of real fellowship,<sup>72</sup> learning the four steps to cultivating community,<sup>73</sup> creating a covenant using the nine characteristics of biblical fellowship,<sup>74</sup> following the seven steps to restoring broken fellowship,<sup>75</sup> promoting six ways to ensure unity,<sup>76</sup> following the three steps to conflict resolution,<sup>77</sup> uncovering the three responsibilities in becoming like Christ,<sup>78</sup> practicing the three activities necessary to abide in God's Word,<sup>79</sup> carefully following the three specific steps in overcoming

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 61; 115; 169; 225; 279.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 139–143.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 146–151.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 161–167.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

temptation,<sup>80</sup> learning the four keys to defeating temptation,<sup>81</sup> avoiding the five impediments to growing in Christ,<sup>82</sup> enacting the four steps to cooperate with God in the process of Christian growth,<sup>83</sup> participating in the six types of experiences God uses in molding us,<sup>84</sup> discerning the three steps to clarifying what God intends you to be and do,<sup>85</sup> finding the six steps to becoming a true servant,<sup>86</sup> developing the five attitudes of a true servant,<sup>87</sup> taking the four steps to allowing God to work through your weaknesses,<sup>88</sup> establishing the six steps to discovering the importance of your mission,<sup>89</sup> discerning the four parts of your life message,<sup>90</sup> discovering your seven life lessons,<sup>91</sup> implementing the four principles for thinking like a world-class Christian,<sup>92</sup> participating in the four important activities for purpose-driven living,<sup>93</sup> learning the five vital signs of worship,<sup>94</sup> realizing the five steps to discovering your purpose statement,<sup>95</sup> and remembering life's five greatest questions.<sup>96</sup> By following these one hundred and sixty-four simple steps, readers may initiate their own sanctification and live purpose-driven lives.

In fact, upon this very basis God will ultimately judge believers: "One day you will stand before God, and he will do an audit of your life, a final exam, before you enter

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 221–223.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 250–252.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 258–264.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 273–278.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 282–286.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 299–304.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

eternity.”<sup>97</sup> One of the questions He will ask is “What did you do with what I gave you?”<sup>98</sup> A frightful picture, to be sure! Conservative Lutherans are no doubt reminded of Paul’s cutting question to the Galatians: “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh” (Gal. 3:3)?

The law, of course, has no power to sanctify, whether it be Warren’s home-spun practical wisdom, or even God’s commandments themselves. In fact, the law primarily serves to reveal sin, always convicting its hearers of their shortcoming (*lex semper accusat*—Rom. 7:7). Thus, Warren’s one hundred and sixty-four simple steps to living a purpose-driven life, if taken seriously, will only aggravate sin and make matters worse: “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead” (Rom. 7:8). For this reason, the *Formula of Concord* testifies: “For the Law says indeed that it is God’s will and command that we should walk in a new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin and do it.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, this power is given by the Holy Spirit only through the gospel, precious little of which is found in *The Purpose Driven Life*.

### Antinomianism?

With all of Warren’s evident emphasis upon the law, it might be strange to suggest that he is simultaneously an antinomian. Yet, this is the case, as he consistently neuters God’s holy and righteous law. Over and over again, Warren posits that “God doesn’t expect you to be perfect, but he does insist on complete honesty.”<sup>100</sup> From the perspective of law and works, where does Scripture ever even hint at the fact that God doesn’t expect perfection? On the contrary, Jesus Himself demands just that: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Thus, the *Small Catechism* states: “God threatens to punish all that transgress these commandments. Therefore we should dread His wrath and not act contrary to these commandments.”<sup>101</sup>

In suggesting that God does not demand perfection, Warren has lowered the divine standards of God’s law, yet he nevertheless insists on perfect honesty! Is this somehow more attainable than perfect obedience in Warren’s estimation? It would seem so: “He knows you are incapable of being perfect or sinless...What God looks at is the attitude of your heart.”<sup>102</sup> The heart? The very thing Scripture describes as being “deceitful above

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> FC, SD, VI.11 in *Triglotta*, 965.

<sup>100</sup> Warren, 92.

<sup>101</sup> SC, Conclusion in *Triglotta*, 543.

<sup>102</sup> Warren, 76.

all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9) and out of which “proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19)? Our actions merely reveal what is already in our hearts (sin), yet Warren asserts “If perfection was a requirement for friendship with God, we would never be able to be his friends.”<sup>103</sup>

This, of course, is the point! Sinners can't be friends with God; not apart from Christ. Jesus alone lived the perfect life which sinful mankind could never live, died to take upon Himself the penalty we all so richly deserve, and rose again to justify the wicked. No, to neuter the law, as Warren does, actually neuters the work of Christ. For this reason, Walther writes: “Now, inasmuch as the Lord had to fulfill every law and every commandment in our stead, it is shocking in any man, poor, sinful worm that he is, to want to dispense with a single law of God and to treat it as a matter of no importance.”<sup>104</sup> To minimize any of the law's demands minimizes what Christ has done for us in keeping the law for us, and no Christian should tolerate such irreverence.

## Conclusion

Martin Luther dubbed the doctrine of justification the “first and chief article” of the Christian faith.<sup>105</sup> Out of this singular article flows all Christian doctrine. Since Warren woefully misunderstands the doctrine of justification, it is no wonder he also badly distorts Scripture's teaching on sanctification, as well as a number of other subjects.<sup>106</sup> His errant doctrine of justification winds its way through all of his theology, leaving virtually no single doctrine untouched. Should readers expect anything less from a Southern Baptist who quotes everybody from Martin Luther<sup>107</sup> to St. John of the Cross<sup>108</sup> and William James<sup>109</sup> to support his views? Perhaps not, but his errors are no less appalling on this account.

Readers desirous of focusing on the biblical pattern of the Christian life would do well to turn to Luther's *Small Catechism*. Here, Luther proclaims the undiminished law in his exposition of the Ten Commandments, convicting Christians of their sins. He then presents the answer to sin, Jesus Christ, as the perfect redeemer from death and hell in his exposition of the Apostle's Creed. Afterwards, he teaches Christians to call upon this Savior in prayer, imploring His aid, which is given in baptism, absolution, and the Lord's

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93.

<sup>104</sup> Walther, 326.

<sup>105</sup> “*Hic primus et principalis articulus est.*” Smalcald Articles, II.1 in *Triglotta*, 460.

<sup>106</sup> Chief among which is his doctrine of the ministerhood of all believers, 228–244.

<sup>107</sup> Warren, 67.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

Supper. This is the rhythm of the catechism because this is the rhythm of the Christian life as presented in Scripture. Let him who thinks he must advance beyond these truths hear the words of Dr. Luther afresh:

To this there is added the shameful vice and secret infection of security and satiety, that is, that many regard the Catechism as a poor, mean teaching, which they can read through at one time, and then immediately know it, throw the book into a corner, and be ashamed, as it were, to read in it again...But for myself I say this: I am also a doctor and preacher, yea, as learned and experienced as all those may be who have such presumption and security; yet I do as a child who is being taught the Catechism, and every morning, and whenever I have time, I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, etc. And I must still read and study daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and am glad so to remain.<sup>110</sup>

May we all have such an attitude as we seek the divine truths of Scripture distilled in the catechism.

**Soli Deo Gloria!**

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<sup>110</sup> LC, Introduction, 5; 7 as found in *Triglotta*, 567; 569.