

# **A Theological and Pastoral Critique of the Teachings of John Wimber**

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We want to make it clear right from the outset that we believe God can and does do miracles today. We have seen God work in that way from time to time in our different areas of work and witness. We are all too well aware of the danger of grieving the Holy Spirit through unbelief and we wish to be open to any genuine work of the Holy Spirit in our own times.

Furthermore we are grateful for the ways in which Wimber improves on some common thinking (for example, Colin Urquhart and Paul Yonggi Cho) and takes the problems connected with divine healing much more seriously than some. He shows evidence of seriously grappling with the issues (for example, chapter 8 'Not everyone is Healed' in *Power Healing*, Hodder & Stoughton, London). However in the movement that has become associated with him we see tendencies that are far from helpful and which we believe are in fact dangerous. It is these concerns which we wish to raise in this article.

There is no question that the Wimber seminars in Britain have had a huge following and that he has touched a raw nerve with many Christians who want to think through the whole area of healing. Because of the euphoria and enthusiasm surrounding these seminars it is not always easy to encourage rigorous Biblical thinking on the issues. We think that Jonathan Edwards, who himself was involved in a great revival, has a cautionary and helpful word that needs to be taken seriously:

They looked upon critical enquiries into the difference between true grace and its counterfeits, or at least being very busy in such enquiries and spending time in them, to be impertinent and unseasonable; tending rather to damp the work of the Spirit of God than promote it; diverting their own minds and the minds of others, as they supposed, from that to which God at such an extraordinary time did loudly call them more specially to attend. The cry was, 'Oh, there is no danger, if we are but lively in religion and full of God's Spirit and lively faith, of being misled! If we do but follow God there is no danger of being led wrong! Let us press forward and not stay and hinder the good work by standing and spending time in these criticisms and carnal reasonings! This was the language of many, until they ran on deep into the wilderness, and were caught by the briars and thorns of the wilderness.

As Douglas McBain says in his book *Eyes that See*, the need for discernment is a pressing need for our church today.

We are all concerned about the secularism and decline of Christianity in our Nation, and in the Western world generally. We long to see God break into the lives of many people and revive His work. Are Wimber and his teaching the answer? If we adopted it, would it change the Christian scene in Britain for good? This is a crucial question and we must answer it with careful thought, with much prayer, and above all with reference to the teaching of Scripture. It is our conviction that unless things are grounded clearly in the Word of God they have no

lasting good effect for God on the Church or the Nation. It is pointless to build eternal hopes on foundations of sand.

### **Key Theological Issues**

Wimber's theology is not always easy to grasp as he tends to make fairly extreme statements and then attempts to retreat from them. For example, (*Power Evangelism*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, p.55): 'Today we see hundreds of people healed every month in Vineyard Christian Fellowship services . . . the blind see; the lame walk; the deaf hear. Cancer is disappearing!' This methodology causes problems as it is difficult to be sure where he stands on some key issues.

The most significant defect in Wimber's teaching appears to be a failure to appreciate the sovereignty of God and its implications. The theme of God's dominion over all aspects of human life is very prominent throughout Scripture and it is an essential foundation of Biblical Christianity. Although Wimber claims to be Biblical, sometimes his use of Scripture shows how this theme of God's sovereignty is avoided within his teaching. For example, 'It's God's nature to heal not to teach us through sickness. Sickness is generally not beneficial' (*Healing Seminar Course Book*, Vineyard Ministries, p.21, 63); 'There is no indication in Scripture that suffering means or includes sickness' (*ibid.*, p.21, 61).

There is a tendency in Wimber's thinking towards the kind of dualism where God is seen as the author of all good and Satan of all bad—two gods battling it out with the kingdom front being extended by miracles and power encounters etc. This needs more precise and careful expression. Is it possible to have a cold in peace without it being a *spiritual* issue?

As an example of this we may take Wimber's interpretation of Paul's 'thorn' in 2 Cor. 12. In *Power Healing* (p.34 and p.280, footnote 15) he seeks to show that this 'thorn' cannot be a physical illness, but is an expression describing opposition from other people. His study of how the word 'thorn' is used in Old Testament Scripture is irrelevant to this particular text, because the opposition Israel encountered was due to their rebellion against God. Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' is clearly not caused by the same problem. Wimber also fails to answer the question of why Paul speaks specifically of it being a 'thorn in my *flesh*'. Wimber's interpretation of this text is an attempt to avoid the implications of the sovereignty of God for the Christian who is suffering illness. Nowhere does Wimber take seriously the possibility that it may be God's will for a Christian to suffer. There is no clear grasp anywhere in Wimber's writings of the kind of truth that the book of Job teaches us. There God is seen as sovereign over all that happens to Job (chapters 1 and 2). Satan is the agent of sickness and disaster but it has been permitted by God, and Satan is limited in what he can do—for example, he is unable to take Job's life. (An interesting and important point in the light of one of Wimber's team declaring on radio that David Watson was a casualty of Satan in the war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.) God used everything that befell Job for good, and used it to bring Job through testing to a more mature and deeper faith. We see this in Job 42 vv.5-6 when he ends with a deeper understanding and personal knowledge of God, in which he rejoices. Everything was under God's control. To understand this is to find sanity in the Christian life. We need to see that release from problems and illnesses is not always His loving will for us. We should be reminded of Joni Eareckson's words 'God could have done a miracle in healing me. He did a greater miracle in enabling me to sit in this wheelchair and smile'. This question of the sovereign will of God in sickness is crucially important. At a ministers' seminar led by one of Wimber's team, one of us asked the question 'Is it ever in the loving will of God to allow his children to suffer for a greater good?' *We*

*received no reply.* Wimber's conclusion towards the end of an otherwise helpful chapter is staggering—"There are many reasons why people are not healed when prayed for. Most of the reasons involve some form of sin and unbelief (*Power Healing*, p.164). Yet he can *still* say 'I never blame the sick person for lack of faith if healing does not occur' (*ibid.*, p. 186)!

This lack of an appreciation of God's sovereignty is also revealed by another area of Wimber's teaching. He believes that miracles play a crucial part in bringing people to faith in Christ. This indeed is the main thrust of the book *Power Evangelism*. The phrase 'Power Evangelism' is intended to convey the conviction that, when the preaching of the gospel is accompanied by signs and wonders, more people will be led to faith in Christ. On p.107 of *Power Evangelism* we read that 'When first-century Christians came to a new town signs and wonders followed'. This assumption undergirds all that he says and he therefore concludes (*ibid.*, p.117): 'Signs and wonders resulted in dramatic church growth. They were the catalyst for evangelism'.

This idea is often repeated today but needs questioning. Jesus himself performed spectacular miracles in front of thousands of people—but how many disciples did he have at the end of his earthly ministry? About 120. Miracles do not in themselves produce faith. At best they cause interest and give the gospel preacher a hearing (Acts 14 v.1-20). But it is the Gospel itself that is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1 v.16)—that is what God uses to bring people to saving faith. In 1 Cor. 1 v.18 the Gospel is defined as the message of the cross, which is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Romans 10 v.17 reminds us that 'faith comes from *hearing* the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ'. We all rejoice when God sovereignly testifies to the truth of the Gospel with signs and wonders—but we must not fool ourselves that miracles persuade the sceptical mind. Nothing but the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit at work through the Gospel message proclaimed can do that. Often the only sign given to an unbelieving and sceptical generation will be the sign of Jonah (that is the Resurrection, see Matthew 16 v.4) which stands as a sign in every generation until the Lord returns.

If the book of Acts is studied carefully it is this pattern which we see. When Philip visited Samaria (chapter 8) Simon Magus was so impressed by the miracles he saw that he 'believed and was baptized' (v.13). Yet later on we are made aware that Simon is not a true believer at all because his 'heart is not right with God' (v.21). In Pisidian Antioch (chapter 13) Paul preached without accompanying signs and wonders, yet 'all who were appointed to eternal life believed' (v.48) and 'the word of God spread through the whole region' (v.49). In Lystra (chapter 14) a miracle of healing performed by Paul had distracting consequences for the gospel in that place. The book of Acts is not a testimony to the way signs and wonders make evangelism powerful. It is rather a record of how the preaching of the gospel of Christ's Cross was used by God to spread Christianity all over the Roman world. On certain occasions miracles accompanied that preaching, but their occurrence was according to the sovereign will of God. The power of God for conversion lies in the Gospel not the Gospel plus miracles or anything else (Romans 1 v.16).

It is often a misinterpretation of John 14 v.12 which leads people to misunderstand the place of miracles in evangelism. 'Greater works' is wrongly taken by Wimber and others to be similar things or greater things in degree than Jesus did (*Power Evangelism*, p.60). But what is greater than raising the dead? (What *verified* cases of that do we know?). Jesus is not talking in John 14 of greater in degree but greater *in extent*. His ministry was geographically limited to Israel because he was going to his Father; the Church would go out to the whole

world. Furthermore John 6 v.29 reminds us that the key work of God is ‘to believe in the one he has sent’. The work of bringing larger numbers of people to faith in Christ is surely therefore what Jesus envisaged in John 14, as the disciples proclaimed the message throughout the world.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28 v.18-20) does not mention healing, so ministers in particular need to think carefully about where Wimber’s theology is leading them. Clearly a request to elders for healing’ ministry must not be neglected and all God’s people are called to pray for one another (James 5 v.13ff), but is this what is distinctive about the Christian pastoral ministry?

The answer to this question is found in 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul’s silence on the subject of healing in his instruction to Timothy is very eloquent. These are books which bridge the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages. How is Timothy to minister and what are to be his priorities when his mentor dies? Paul is clear: ‘Preach the Word’ (2 Timothy 4 v.2). He also warns about times when men will not put up with sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4 v.3); and in 1 Timothy 4 v.13 Timothy is instructed to *devote* himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. In the end the absence of a firm grasp of the sovereignty of God in Wimber’s teaching leads to a complete distortion of the essential nature of Christian pastoral ministry. Even Jesus himself had a priority in his ministry. According to Mark 1v.38 that was preaching. Thus we find that not all who came to Him *were* healed (Mark 1 v.33-39; also John 5 where Jesus healed only one at the pool of Bethesda). Compare this with what Wimber asserts ‘He healed all those who came to Him’ (*Healing Seminar Course Book*, p.11 D2).

It is our heartfelt concern that what Wimber sees as a redressing of the balance in favour of a healing ministry is causing Christian ministers to be distracted away from the preaching of an eternal Gospel, to the temporary healing of ailments. If God has called someone to a ministry of healing, that is fair enough—but the primary duty laid on *every* minister is to teach and preach God’s Word. We must not be distracted from that priority. G. Campbell Morgan once said that ‘sermonettes produce Christianettes’. Today there is a dearth of real Biblical preaching in our churches. This movement will not help here.

### **A Look at Phenomena**

It is not only important to look at the theology which Wimber teaches and about which he writes: it is also crucial to examine how his practice relates to that theology. It seems to us that the words of caution which he expresses in his writings are cast aside in actual practice. He may happily admit that every Christian is not healed but at his meetings the expectation is that God will meet the felt needs of all present. For example at ‘ACTS 86’ every woman with a lump on her breast was asked to stand in the auditorium. We do not think this is evidence of a wise pastoral heart. If the expectation of the average Christian is frequently too low in relation to what God will do, sometimes the atmosphere at Wimber’s meetings is such that expectations are too high. God is expected to work miracles, and we are even told in advance that he will. This can be dangerous and contrary to letting God be God—that is, sovereignly to choose to do miracles or not as the case may be. No teaching, as far as we have observed, is given to those who are not healed. We do not doubt that God can and does use Wimber in healing, but we are far from happy with the way things are handled pastorally. (There are going to be a lot of broken pieces for churches to pick up!)

The consequences of this are seen in the terrible disappointment that many Christians felt when David Watson died. The great expectations which were raised for his healing were sadly not fulfilled. Despite a discussion of this case in *Power Healing* there has still been no satisfactory explanation by Wimber of what happened. He says (p. 14) that 'I decided long ago that if I pray for one hundred people and only one is healed, it is better than if I never pray at all and no-one is healed'. But we must ask 'what about the disappointed expectations of the ninety-nine who were not healed'?

This dilemma in Wimber's practice seems to us to arise from a misuse and misinterpretation of certain religious phenomena. It is good that Wimber sees the need to discern God's will for healing. However, his answer is to emphasise 'words of knowledge' to describe specific conditions that need healing. On the one hand we have seen people ignored at his meetings who wanted prayer because a 'word of knowledge' had not identified their problem—this is not helpful. On the other hand too much is made of the 'words of knowledge'. Some occasionally are very specific but most are not very impressive at all, being far too generalised. Many of the examples of 'words of knowledge' (mentioned specifically only once in the New Testament) are little more than sanctified intuition. We are reminded of Jonathan Edwards's warning to George Whitefield 'Beware of living your life by impressions'. It does not seem to trouble Wimber that some of these 'words' do not appear to prove true, unlike the Old Testament's concern about false prophecies! It is not so much that we do not believe that 'words of knowledge' can and do take place occasionally—we question the excessive use and dependence on an ill-defined New Testament gift. Also Wimber appears to encourage *all* Christians to have 'words of knowledge'. This is not following Scripture and opens the floodgates to delusion.

Wimber also attaches considerable importance to physical phenomena as demonstrations of the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus (*Power Healing* p. 14):

David [Watson] experienced the sensations and presence of the Holy Spirit that on similar occasions I had observed to occur in the bodies of those who were eventually healed of cancer. He felt heat and tingling, what he described as 'energy' coming into his body.

Thus according to Wimber the signs of healing were there, yet he was not healed. Wimber discusses the whole subject of these and other phenomena at some length in chapter 12 of *Power Healing*.

He seeks to justify the phenomena which occur in his meetings by citing Scriptural examples. Some of these are very questionable. Phil. 2 v.12 is used to justify physical shaking and trembling. But 'work out your salvation in fear and trembling' does not refer to that at all. A spiritually euphoric state called 'drunkenness' is justified by reference to 1 Samuel 1 v.12-17. But it hardly needs pointing out that Hannah was far from euphoric, and in fact deeply troubled.

In addition it must be emphasised that even if there are examples in Scripture of certain phenomena, that does not necessarily imply that the phenomena in Wimber's meetings are works of the Holy Spirit. They may or may not be. There is a great danger in assuming that because bodily writhings and distortions occurred in Jesus' ministry, then any such occurrence today must be a work of the Holy Spirit. It is even worse when an unscriptural term such as 'being slain in the Spirit' is read back into certain events in Scripture. It is very hard to equate this practice as it is found in Wimber's meetings with the experience of Paul

on the Damascus road, since Paul was blinded in this experience rather than healed! Yet Wimber does make precisely this equation (*Power Healing*, p.227).

He is well aware that ‘Satan can and does counterfeit genuine Christian experience’ (*ibid.*, p.223), yet he refuses to face up to the implications of this statement. All he says is ‘I have seen too many people who had no prior knowledge or experience of these phenomena begin to shake, cry or fall over when the power of the Holy Spirit came on them’ (*loc. cit.*, p.223). The fact that a person has no prior knowledge of a particular phenomenon is no defence whatsoever against Satan’s counterfeiting activity.

It is crucial that Christians today appreciate the importance of testing religious experience and phenomena. The fact that a supernatural event occurs is no guarantee that it is from God. There is good and evil in the supernatural world. All the supposed evidences of the Holy Spirit’s presence—fluttering eyelids, involuntary muscle movements, warm sensations—are never mentioned in Scripture. Why? Because either they did not take place or because even if they did they were not important. They may be psychological, and perhaps even demonic, as well as possible evidences of the Holy Spirit. The Bible pays no great attention to them—neither should we—they do not demonstrate anything clearly. Lloyd-Jones’s warning (*Prove All Things* p.97) needs to be heeded:

You will find in the case of spiritist healings that there is always emphasis on the physical element. People will testify to a feeling of heat as the hand of the healer came upon them, or of a sensation like an electric shock, or something like that—the physical is always very prominent . . . There is nothing corresponding to that in the New Testament . . . They do not talk much about their physical sensations but about their Lord and his love for them, and their love for him . . . I feel that it is not there because it is something which is unimportant!

But these things are not unimportant to Wimber.

Jonathan Edwards has some helpful advice about discerning a true work of God, and his balance is just right (*The Religious Affections* p.57):

Religious affections being in a very high degree is no evidence that they are not such as have the nature of true religion. Therefore they do greatly err who condemn persons as enthusiasts, merely because their affections are very high. And on the other hand, it is no evidence that religious affections are of a spiritual and gracious nature because they are great.

We need to learn to test our experience by Scripture and refuse to emphasise what Scripture is silent about; we need to avoid reading our experiences *into* Scripture and dwelling overmuch on them to the detriment of Scripture. What is important is the *object* of our faith, the Lord Jesus himself, not subjective ‘evidences’. It is insufficiently appreciated that the phenomena of a Wimber meeting are paralleled in Eastern religions, in paganism, and in occult practices, as the book *The Seduction of Christianity* (D. Hunt and T.A. McMahon) documents. Credulous Christians often assume that because some religious experience has a Christian label attached to it then it must be of God. We must heed the warnings of Scripture: ‘Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”’ (Matthew 7 v.22-23). And: ‘False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible’. (Matthew 24 v.24).

The novelty of many of the phenomena associated with Wimber should also raise serious questions about their validity. Wimber is rightly concerned that the Western world has in the recent past been very anti-supernatural, and he sees the signs and wonders of some third-world churches (for example, Paul Yonggi Cho's in South Korea) as providing a better model of early Christianity. His is a timely warning against the secularism of the Western church. However it is also possible to interpret the concerns associated with Wimber's ministry as a mirror-image in Christianity of current Western secular preoccupations with health and wholeness. Until recently Western thought was very dismissive of the supernatural, but there are now clear indications that the pendulum is swinging to the other extreme of being excessively credulous about the supernatural. The popularity of Wimber's ministry may simply be a Christianised reflection of this.

Wimber's case would be more impressive if he could show that his ministry is not novel but that it has existed in the church ever since the days of Christ. He seeks to establish this in Appendix A of *Power Evangelism*, but his attempt must be adjudged a failure and a complete misrepresentation of Church history. He uses early church fathers such as Novatian and Tertullian with no reference to their orthodoxy. His quotation which refers to the Huguenots (p.163 in *Power Evangelism*) is about the prophets of the Cevennes and is wholly unrepresentative of French Calvinism. Luther, Ignatius of Loyola, Wesley and Lourdes are all dragged in without any discussion of the beliefs associated with them. Luther and Loyola may have agreed on the existence of the supernatural, but they would have agreed about little else. Church history is not the final judge of religious phenomena, only Scripture can be that, but it is foolish to ignore almost two millenia of Christian experience and that provides a very sobering perspective on a lot of present-day Christianity.

Our concern here is not to criticise for the sake of criticising. We believe earnestly that a misunderstanding of religious phenomena can often lead to false claims of healing being made which later prove untrue. This in time leads to the gospel being discredited and the people concerned becoming disillusioned or hardened. Professor Verna Wright tells of a frightening example:

I think of a general practitioner who was a great friend of mine, a fine Christian lady who had led many people to Christ, but she suffered from severe depression. Fortunately her depression was controlled by medication. Her counselling ministry was one that I valued so much that I would often send my depressed patients to her for help. Unfortunately she fell in with a group who majored on this miraculous healing teaching, and she was informed that she had been healed. She therefore abandoned her medication, but three weeks later she hanged herself. (*Sword and Trowel* 1987 No. 1 p. 12).

We could do no better than to end this section by quoting the words of Dr. Lloyd-Jones on one aspect of what we have been discussing:

I would lay down the principle that if we find people beginning to claim special and immediate guidance over practically everything they do, I think we are entitled to have our suspicions aroused. You will find that it comes into their talk. They say that they have been 'led' to do this or that. I have sometimes heard preachers do this and they obviously regarded it as being a mark of unusual spirituality: they prefaced the giving of the text by saying, 'The word to which the Spirit has led me . . .' Thank God that does happen. But when a man gets into the state and condition in which he always waits for that and will do nothing without it, then I say he is on the verge of fanaticism (*Prove All Things*, pp.91-92).

### **True Christian Spirituality**

A third area of Wimber's understanding which we would wish to question is his view of Christian spirituality. We are unhappy with the way he views certain aspects of the Christian life. The manner in which he regards faith and prayer is an example of this. A typical expression of Wimber's understanding is found on p. 186 of *Power Healing*:

Usually I ask the person for whom I am praying, 'Do you believe Jesus can heal?' If he or she answers positively, then I ask, 'Do you believe Jesus will do it now?'. If the answer is 'Yes', or if a witness or I have a strong sense that God wants to heal, I go ahead with healing prayer.

It is important to emphasise that in the Bible faith is directed towards a person, Jesus Christ. It is not that we must have faith that God will act in a particular way in a particular situation. Rather the Bible encourages us to put our faith in the person of Christ and in his control over the situation in which we find ourselves.

A superb example of this is seen in Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who, when threatened with the fiery furnace, responded to the king:

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up (Daniel 3 v.17-18).

That is vibrant Biblical faith! 'You can Lord, but we won't dictate that you must. Either way we will obey the Lord and do what is right'. Faith is not believing God *will* do it now, but that he *can* do it now.

A fashion has emerged recently of commanding God and claiming answers to prayers which may not be in God's loving will to grant. We need to grasp the Biblical balance—God can do miracles (to deny that, is unbelief), but He knows best (to deny that, is to exalt ourselves to the place of God). As we learn from the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' prayer 'Not my will, but yours be done' is the highest and greatest prayer we can utter. Here is Jesus the man, perfectly obedient to his Father's will—something that should always be our desire in healing, as in everything else.

Much modern Western Christianity can be described as a 'Big Dipper' spirituality! It depends for life and blessing on the big event and neglects the daily discipline and joy of walking with the Lord under his Word. It is event-orientated; it measures spirituality by excitement and God's activity by perceived miracles. It is too often carnal and feeble, looking at the outward appearance rather than the substance and the truth. The Wimber movement will not help correct this tendency.

Wimber appears to affirm that each person can have every gift, for example 'Any Spirit filled believer may exercise healing' (Healing Seminar Course Book, p.32 B2). This is patently unbiblical (I Cor. 12 v.30), and a tendency to over-emphasize the place and use of gifts in the Christian life can lead to much instability in a believer. It can lead to a mentality in which someone is easily discouraged when something 'exciting' is not happening. Sometimes gifts are sought after as a means of assurance about the believer's standing with God, or of the value of his ministry.



It is interesting that Wimber arrived at his present ministry after a spiritual crisis over his relationship with God. He felt that he lacked ‘personal experience of God such as that described in scripture and by many of the great saints of church history’ (*Power Healing* p.49). Being open to any gift which God gives, as He determines (I. Cor. 12 v.11), it is right that we should want to give our very best to God and that we should examine our lives and our service to the Lord.

However there is a great temptation in such an evaluation to seek reassurance through the world’s criteria for success. What are the real signs of God’s power in our own lives and our churches? The Bible does not see the power of God so much in spectacular gifts but rather in the obedience and holiness of the Christian. It is the elective purpose of God that the believer is to be conformed to the likeness of his Son (Romans 8 v.29). Gifts are not a mark of spiritual maturity. Paul addresses a very gifted church as ‘worldly, mere infants in Christ’ (I Cor. 3 v.1).

Mark’s Gospel can be seen as a Gospel form of the Corinthian message which counters the view that the Christian way is a way of spectacular manifestations of gifts and unmitigated ‘sunshine’ (see Ralph Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian*). It reminds us that the way of Christ is the way of the Cross, the way not only of the joy of knowing the Father and doing His will, but the way of suffering and pain and rejection. The final glory awaits us in Heaven, thank God, but it is only *there* that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21 v.4).

The real danger of the ‘Wimber spirituality’ is that the unusual is exalted into the usual and normal activity of God, and hence the Christian’s experience is meant *constantly* to display the miraculous. This was not the case even in Bible times and it will not be the case now. We need to remember that the miracles mentioned in the Acts were over a period of some 30 years. Not to grasp this is to have a false, rather than a godly expectation regarding Christian life.

Wimber’s spirituality tends to provide inadequate answers to hard pastoral questions, and has little to say to those who suffer tragedies and face long term problems.

### **Conclusion**

We are very aware that the ministry of John Wimber is a sensitive and controversial subject. We are sorry if in any way we have misjudged his teaching or have been unfair about his practice. Nevertheless we believe that the points which we have raised in this article need an adequate answer.

Our main concern focusses on three areas. *First*, there is the issue of the sovereignty of God. This doctrine must be appreciated if we are to understand how it is that the most saintly of Christians have often been allowed to suffer for some higher purpose (Romans 8 v.28; II Cor. 1; Hebrews 12). It is crucial to our spiritual sanity that we grasp this clearly. *Secondly*, there is the question of the use of Scripture and the discernment of religious experience. If we wish to claim the name of evangelical then we must study our Bibles closely and pay attention to the whole message which Scripture conveys. Unless we do this our Christianity can be easily sidetracked into practices which are not central to the gospel. We must ensure that we sit under the authority of Scripture and that we evaluate our religious experience according to God’s Word.

*Thirdly*, we believe that the ministry of John Wimber should make us think about how and where our religious enthusiasm and zeal should be directed. We must never quench the Spirit and such zeal is very important, but we should beware of a tendency towards a thirst for the supernatural rather than a thirst for the living God in all His ways.

What we really need is a more mature Biblical spirituality—open to God, confident in His power, but submissive to His will. We need to have the godly conviction that He knows best and that He is not in our pocket to do miracles when we please. Straight Gospel witness by ‘gossiping the Gospel’ and proclaiming God’s truth should not be under-valued. ‘Power encounters’ are not necessary to successful evangelism anymore than ‘words of knowledge’ are necessary to prayer for healing being answered. We need to listen seriously to Paul’s words ‘In evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults’ (I Cor. 14 v.20).

We need discernment. We need confidence in the Gospel as the power of God. We need to proclaim the ‘sign of Jonah’ to a lost generation, in the power of the Spirit. We need to thirst after the living God and look to Him to testify to His truth as He sees fit. Only then will we see a work of God less open to that which can mislead.

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John Wimber is the leader of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, also known as The Association of Vineyard Churches, headquartered in Anaheim, California. Wimber, with co-author Kevin Springer, have written several books, including *Power Evangelism* (1985, 1992), *Power Healing* (1986), and *Power Points* (1991). That Ladd's view of the kingdom of God formed a theological basis for Wimber's "power evangelism" is further evidenced in the *Signs & Wonders & Church Growth* syllabus which Wimber distributed at a conference he held in Seattle in the mid 1980's. Section 2 in the syllabus is titled, THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION: THE KINGDOM OF GOD. A Theological and Pastoral Critique of the Teaching of John Wimber. illness, but is an expression describing opposition from other people. His study of how the word 'thorn' is used in Old Testament Scripture is irrelevant to this particular text, because the opposition Israel encountered was due to their rebellion against God. Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' is clearly not caused by the same problem. Wimber also fails to answer the question of why Paul speaks specifically of it being a 'thorn in my flesh'. Wimber's interpretation of this text is an attempt to

The notion of revelation  
The status and interpretation of the Bible  
The identity and significance of Jesus Christ  
The doctrine of the Trinity  
The critique of miracles  
The rejection of original sin  
The problem of evil  
Wiley-Blackwell 2010

• Romanticism and the renewal of the theological imagination

• Appeals to human intuition and imagination

• Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), *The Christian Faith*

• Marxism: an intellectual rival to Christianity

• Karl Marx (1818-83)

• Marxism in Russia and Europe

• Marxism and Latin American liberation theology

• The crisis of faith in Victorian England