

Why Is a Known Sexual Predator Being Honored in California Schools?

The American Family Association (AFA) is asking why a known sexual predator was celebrated in California schools last week.

Thursday was Harvey Milk Day in California, and kids were taught to look up to a man who preyed on teens and young men. The day honoring the former city councilman who fought to gain public approval of the gay lifestyle was observed in California's K-12 public schools.

Milk's claim to fame was that he was the first openly gay politician to run successfully for public office in California, but his sordid story goes beyond politics.

"Behind parents' backs, children as young as 5 years old will be made to participate in commemorative exercises that celebrate a known sexual predator," says AFA President Tim Wildmon.

"It's no secret that Milk sought out and preyed upon impressionable minors, specifically young boys, to gratify his sexual fantasies," Wildmon says. "Regardless of anyone's beliefs about sexual practices between adults, for the state of California to sanction teaching children to honor a man who might very well have preyed upon them is a twisted definition of *education* by any standard."

Based on a 2009 law passed in Sacramento by Democrats and signed by then Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Harvey Milk Day is a so-called special "day of significance" for all California government schools.

Because there is no parental notification or consent for Harvey Milk Day, the only way for parents to protect their children from ideals that may not be in keeping with the values they want their children to learn is to keep them home from school. Organizers at have created a page to equip California parents to take action. Those who don't have children in public school can still take action via the page.

The U.S. Postal Service recently unveiled a new Harvey Milk stamp, which was officially presented for circulation Friday at a White House ceremony.

According to Milk's biography, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, written by his friend and fellow homosexual activist, Randy Shilts, "Harvey always had a penchant for young waifs with substance abuse problems." Shilts adds that Milk had a relationship with a 16-year-old boy who was "looking for some kind of father figure. ... At 33, Milk was launching a new life, though he could hardly have imagined the unlikely direction toward which his new lover would pull him."

Milk is the first openly gay politician to be featured on a U.S. postage stamp. He served as a city councilman in San Francisco in the 1970s and was gunned down by fellow lawmaker Dan White in 1978.

Popular TV Show the Latest Victim of Pakistan's Blasphemy Law

With several Christians on trial awaiting potential death sentences for allegedly committing blasphemy, tensions are

increasingly high across the nation with a record-breaking amount of blasphemy charges being waged against both non-Muslims and Muslims alike.

Commonly known as the blasphemy law, Pakistan's Penal Code Section 295C's death penalty went into effect in 1986 for the "use of derogatory remarks in respect of the [Islam's] Holy Prophet." In 1990, the Federal Shari'ah Court ruled that the penalty should be a mandatory death sentence, with no right to a pardon.

May is especially unique with regards to this law, because never before has it caused so much upheaval as has been witnessed this month.

On Saturday, May 17, three cases of blasphemy were registered in different parts of the country. The first was against a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested for handing out their organization Watchtower leaflets; the second was against a 20-year-old Muslim youth for allegedly setting the Quran-Islam's sacred book-on fire; the third was against Pakistan's biggest media tycoon, Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, a morning show host, a film actress and the actress' husband for allegedly airing a show with blasphemous content on the nation's Geo TV morning show titled *Utho Jago Pakistan (Get up, Wake up, Pakistan)*.

The four Jehovah Witnesses—Javed Younus, his wife, Nazia Javed, Sri Lankan national Carol David and Rose Marry—were arrested for distributing Watchtower outreach leaflets in a Christian colony in Mirpurkhas.

Talking to World Watch Monitor, Jam Zaffar, the senior superintendent of Police of Pakistan Railways in Mirpurkhas, said the distribution of Watchtower leaflets was noticed by a member of Ahle Sunnat wa-al Jamaat (ASWJ), considered one of the most violent organizations carrying out terrorist activities inside Pakistan, who

responded by alerting other ASWJ activists to the scene which resulted in the group of four being surrounded by hundreds of protestors.

Zaffar said the protesters were especially angry, so there was fear of violence and bloodshed.

Francis Khokhar, who is legally representing the group, told World Watch Monitor, "As soon as I came to know that the police have taken them in custody without formally registering a complaint, I filed a [motion for] habeas corpus."

Pastor Samson Shukardin also spoke to World Watch Monitor, saying, "After the police had registered the case, they were unsure about Jehovah's Witnesses because they knew only about Protestant and Catholic branches of Christianity."

The three women were released on bail, but Younus was sent to jail.

Zaffar said that during the process ASWJ had surrounded the police station. "They seemed to have planned to halt the city and descent to violence," he said.

Jehovah's Witnesses are a sect established in 1870, in Pennsylvania. The Watchtower Society was started by Charles Taze Russell. Jehovah's Witnesses refer to themselves as Christians, but their beliefs differ from those of orthodox Christians, who do not consider them to be Christian, since there are many inconsistencies in their beliefs alongside fundamental teachings of the faith.

On the same day, but 900 kilometers northeast of Mirpurkhas, a 20-year-old Muslim youth allegedly set the Quran ablaze.

In a fit of anger, Nazir Ahmed set the book on fire in Arifwala. His mother was furious and cried out for help; neighbors gathered and started to beat him. He was reported to have been beaten so severely he was close to death, but police

intervened and took Ahmed into custody.

Elsewhere in Pakistan, on the same day, the media tycoon Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, the morning show host Shaista Lodhi, film actress Veena Malik, and her husband Assad Khattak Khan, were charged with allegedly airing a blasphemous show on Geo TV.

Three days before, Geo TV channel's morning show had aired the re-enactment of the actress Malik and her husband's marriage. During this re-enactment, a Sufi song was sung that captures marriage between Ali, the fourth caliph of Islam, and the Islamic Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima.

Presenting Malik as a bride while the religious song was played infuriated many Pakistanis. Other private TV channels repeatedly telecast the program, further fueling anger toward Geo TV, which receives nearly half of Pakistan's viewership and is often dubbed as foreign-funded and called 'Jew' TV rather than 'Geo' TV.

The Margala Police Station registered a case against them under the blasphemy and anti-terrorism laws. The Sunni Ittehad Council, an organization that represents 160 million Pakistani Sunni Muslims, separately started a petition on Saturday against the TV show presenters in the Supreme Court.

Muslim attorneys are no longer safe

The country does have some natives who are trying to fight the abuse of blasphemy prosecution, at the risk of their own lives.

On May 7, a prominent human rights lawyer, Rashid Rehman, representing a teacher accused of blasphemy in Multan, about 550 kilometres southwest of Islamabad, was murdered.

Rehman is the first lawyer to be killed for taking on a blasphemy case.

Rehman was shot by gunmen posing as clients in his office for representing Junaid Hafeez, an English professor arrested in March 2013 after being accused by his students for insulting the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook.

Hafeez had been in prison for nearly a year before Rehman agreed to represent him; his case became one of Rehman's 228 blasphemy cases, including Sherry Rehman, who was Pakistan's ambassador to the United States when charged with defaming Islam.

Rehman joins a list of Pakistanis killed while opposing the country's widely popular anti-blasphemy laws. Two elected officials, Salmaan Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti, were killed while trying to pass an amendment in the Penal Code to end abuse of the laws.

The U.S. State Department and the Human Rights Watch have urged the Pakistani government to investigate Rehman's killing.

In a separate incident on May 14, a criminal case of blasphemy was lodged against 68 Muslim lawyers. The lawyers were arrested for arranging a protest against a police officer who had illegally detained one of the group's colleagues.

The penalty for blasphemy in Pakistan is death, though no one convicted under the law has been executed. Most are freed on appeal, often to face mob justice. Several people are thought to have been murdered while on trial, and more than 50 have been murdered in extrajudicial killings.

The original blasphemy law dates back Britain's colonial rule over India, prior to the 1947 partition that created Pakistan. It was intended to prevent Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs from using provocative religious language against each other.

However, under Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq, in power from 1987-1988, the law was changed to protect only the Sunni

version of Islam. It has since increasingly become a pretext to pressure Pakistan's religious minorities.

Oprah Tackles Charismatic Christianity's Belief in Casting Out Demons

The first episode of the final season of Lisa Ling's *Our America* will feature charismatic churches and the practice of casting out devils.

For the show, which airs on Oprah Winfrey's network OWN, Ling will visit charismatic churches in Georgia and Florida to observe the practice of deliverance, "where faith and the power of Christ are called upon to cast Satan's demons from the emotionally tormented," a press release says.

Ling, who has co-hosted *The View* and reported for CNN, first broadcasted *Our America With Lisa Ling* in 2011. Last year, in an episode titled "God and the Gays," she featured former Exodus International President Alan Chambers, who apologized to "a group of survivors of the condemned and damaging practice of 'reparative (or conversion) therapy.'"

Click below to watch a preview for the episode "Fighting Satan," which airs Thursday at 10 p.m. EST/PST.

Playing God, UK Will Offer Sex-Change Drug to 9-Year-Olds

The United Kingdom's National Health Service is planning to offer sex-change treatment to children as young as 9, using a controversial drug that will block the onset of puberty.

Known as hypothalamic blockers, the drugs prevent the development of sexual organs so that less surgery is needed if the patient decides to change sex after reaching adolescence.

The treatment, aimed at youngsters who claim they feel trapped in the wrong body, has come under severe criticism, with Conservative MP Andrew Percy accusing the clinic offering the drug of "playing God."

Percy says, "I think many people will be horrified at the thought of a 9-year-old being provided with a drug that effectively stops them developing and maturing naturally."

Speaking on LBC Radio, Christian Concern's Andrew Marsh highlighted his reservations, saying, "It's tragic that children, perhaps as young as 9, are going to be confronted with a choice to take the first step on a journey that could have huge consequences on their lives. It is deeply irresponsible that children as young as 9 are at risk of ideologically driven experiments."

[Click here to listen to the full interview.](#)

Child Sex Abuse Akin to 'Satanic Mass,' Pope Says

Pope Francis said on Monday that he will have his first meeting with a group of sex abuse victims at the Vatican early next month and said he would show zero tolerance for anyone in the Catholic Church who abused children, including bishops.

"Sexual abuse is such an ugly crime ... because a priest who does this betrays the body of the Lord. It is like a satanic Mass," he said in some of the toughest language he has used on a crisis that has rocked the Church for more than a decade. "We must go ahead with zero tolerance," he said, adding that three bishops were currently under investigation.

Francis said he would meet with eight victims and Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley of Boston, who is head of a commission set up to study ways of dealing with the crisis.

Speaking to reporters for nearly an hour on the plane taking him back from a visit to the Middle East, the pope looked alert despite the gruelling three-day trip and overruled his spokesman who suggested the airborne news conference should be cut short to allow him to rest.

The 77-year-old pontiff fielded questions on a range of topics, including Vatican finances, priestly celibacy, his concern for the environment, and whether he himself would one day retire like his predecessor Benedict XVI instead of serving for life. The concept of a "pope emeritus" could someday become normal in the Church, he said.

During his trip he invited Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the Vatican next month.

He said that the meeting would not be a mediation but a prayer meeting that he hoped could encourage the stalled peace

process.

The pope also said he believes that Roman Catholic priests should be celibate but the rule was not an unchangeable dogma, and “the door is always open” to change. It was something he has said before his election but it was the first time he made the remark as pope.

Why We Don't Like to Admit Our Sin One to Another

For a couple of years, “finding beauty in brokenness” has been my tagline, my motto. The problem with brokenness is that some people identify with it while others find it offensive.

Much of my writing is about disability, and I can understand how someone unfamiliar with my writing would mistakenly think I am referring to people with disabilities. So let me make something very clear: I am not talking about people with disabilities. I am actually talking about myself. So in order to be more clear, I have now made the sentiment say “finding beauty in *my* brokenness.”


I do not think people with disabilities are broken. To say that would imply I think they need healing. If you have read enough of my posts, you know I do not believe that people with disabilities need healing, and one of my greatest passions is to help the church embrace disability and move past the idea of healing.

So why, exactly, do I talk about brokenness? More than a wife, a mother, a disability advocate, a friend and a daughter, I am first of all a child of God. I belong to Him completely. This

is my faith, the foundation of my beliefs, of my being, of my actions, of my life. All of it revolves around a personal God that loves me despite the fact that, yes, I am broken. A God who pours out His grace and mercy even when I do not deserve it. A God who saved me from my sins, from a heart that is capable of so much selfishness, jealousy, anger, bitterness and meanness. I am not just imperfect or flawed—I am broken! And I offer all of it to God to use, to mend, to transform. “Take these broken pieces, Lord. They are Yours. Use me any way You want.”

“God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. It is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever.” –Vance Havner

Life is messy. In the middle of the joy, celebration and goodness of life, there are strokes of pain, loss, heartache, foolish choices, unrealized dreams and wrecked relationships. I call this brokenness. And this is life. Broken is real, and there is beauty in brokenness!

“It is the pain we walk through that defines the women we are. ... It hones the difference we make. It isn't something that we achieve by strength and character and virtue and strength and savvy. It is something we receive with open hands by God's grace. And that happens most when we feel broken and humbled and empty and totally inadequate—and we make that choice to trust that God will make His difference in us and through us, right in the midst of our brokenness.” –Leslie Parrott, *You Matter More Than You Think: What a Woman Needs to Know about the Difference She Makes* 

I know for some people, it is not easy to embrace the idea of brokenness. It feels so personal, so broken! And thinking of ourselves as broken might seem like a terrible thing to do. But when I look at my reality before God, I find great beauty

in my brokenness, because this amazingly loving God sees me as beautiful, and He finds joy in me, and He cherishes me, and He still uses me, despite it all. This is indeed the great beauty that surrounds my life!

Brennan Manning, in his book *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* 

So, friends, if you ever found my “finding beauty in brokenness” offensive, I apologize. But I cannot apologize for being broken, and I cannot apologize for the incredible work that God has done in my life because of it. I journey in this life with Christ by my side. In my brokenness, God reminds me He is present, He is near, He’s got my back, He loves me unconditionally, and He can handle life for me when I can’t.

Adapted from Ellen Stumbo’s blog at . Ellen is a pastor’s wife, and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real—sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly—aspects of faith, parenting, special needs, and adoption. She has been published in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone, and Mamapedia among others.

United Methodists May Split Over Same-Sex Marriage Doctrine

Will the United Methodist Church soon have to drop the “United” part of its name?

A group of 80 pastors is suggesting that the nation’s second-

largest Protestant denomination is facing an imminent split because of an inability to resolve long-standing theological disputes about sexuality and church doctrine.

But more than lamenting the current divisions, the pastors indicated there is little reason to think reconciliation—or even peaceful coexistence—could be found. Like a couple heading to divorce court, the pastors cited “irreconcilable differences” that can’t be mended.

“We can no longer talk about schism as something that might happen in the future. Schism has already taken place in our connection,” said the Rev. Maxie Dunnam, a retired president of evangelical Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, who joined the statement.

It’s a marked shift in tone from 10 years ago, when conservatives rejected a proposal for an “amicable separation” as premature. “I don’t want us to talk about separation,” Dunnam said after the church’s 2004 assembly, before the same-sex marriage issue swept the nation. “That’s not a game where our energy needs to be focused.”

As 19 states and the District of Columbia now allow same-sex civil marriage, the debate has consumed America’s mainline denominations, with the outcome ranging from bitter divisions to agree-to-disagree compromises.

The issue is especially heightened within Methodism, where holiness—the beliefs and practices toward Christian purity—is foundational in its theology. And as Methodist membership plateaus at home and grows in parts of Africa, overseas delegates have helped hold the line against growing pressure to liberalize church policy on gay clergy and same-sex marriage.

Amid a wave of open defiance over rules that prevent pastors from presiding at same-sex marriages, and a host of high-profile church trials that have largely upheld church policy,

some UMC pastors say the 11.8 million-member church has reached an impasse. Many feel that the sexuality debates simply touch on larger issues of how Methodists understand Scripture and how leaders uphold church teaching.

Frank Schaefer, a former Pennsylvania pastor, was found guilty of violating church law when he officiated at his son's 2007 wedding, though his appeal will be heard on June 20. Schaefer was told he could keep his clergy credentials if he recanted his support of gay marriage, but he refused.

The tipping point for many conservatives came, however, after Bishop Martin D. McLee of New York announced in March he would drop a case against a retired seminary dean who officiated at his gay son's 2012 wedding and called for an end to church trials for clergy who violate the denomination's law on ministering to gays.

The pastors saw McLee's move as failing to uphold agreed-upon church teaching. He should have gone through proper means of changing the church's stance on sexuality, they say, rather than declining to uphold the church's Book of Discipline, or constitution.

"Tensions are reaching a point where it's become a destructive scenario," the Rev. Larry Baird, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Grand Island, N.Y., said in an interview. He noted that leaving the denomination is not the group's first option. "We're hoping there's a win-win way out for those in profound disagreement."

Hailing from the UMC's five jurisdictions, the group of 80 pastors and theologians released a statement May 22 outlining the crisis they see emerging within the UMC. They pointed to pastors who violated the Book of Discipline, a lack of subsequent punishment, a crisis over the authority of Scripture and differences in how leaders are teaching the practice of holiness.

Traditionalists believe the Scriptures are clear in prohibiting same-sex relations, while progressives see full inclusion as a matter of God's love and justice, they note in the release.

Most recently, the UMC decided to expand benefits of its agencies' employees to include same-sex spouses who live in states that allow same-sex marriage, even though same-sex partners can't get married within the UMC.

"Talk of a 'middle-way' or of 'agreeing to disagree' is comforting and sounds Christ-like," the statement states. "However, such language only denies the reality we need to admit. Neither side will find 'agreeing to disagree' acceptable."

Other mainline denominations have already gone through many variations on same-sex ordination and marriage, moving more quickly on the issue than the UMC, which has a global, more conservative membership; about one-third of the church's members are found in Africa, Asia or Europe.

"Can we not learn from the pain that other mainline denominations have experienced and find a way forward that honors (Methodism founder John) Wesley's rule that we do no harm?" the statement says. "A way where there are no winners and losers, but simply brothers and sisters who part ways amicably, able to wish each other well?"

The UMC declined to provide an official response.

One of the biggest challenges will be whether the UMC can find a way to remain the same home to people who hold radically different views. Delegates to the Methodists' quadrennial General Conferences have resisted one option embraced by the Presbyterian Church (USA) that essentially allows regional bodies to set their own ordination standards.

For at least two decades, the UMC has strived to find ways to

maintain the status quo without alienating either traditionalists or liberals. Despite its insistence on unified rules and standards, the church is nonetheless a diverse theological tent that counts everyone from former President George W. Bush to Hillary Clinton as members.

“The UMC is a pluralistic church with radically different points of views,” said William Abraham, a professor of Wesley studies at Southern Methodist University. “It shows how you can live with differences until it begins to bite into the practices of the local church.”

‘Health and Wealth’ or Signs and Wonders? Will The Real Charismatic Church Please Stand Up?

This article covers one of the most vital, misunderstood and controversial topics of debate in modern Christianity—the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit. I pray that the following words cause you to rethink the evaluations people have made concerning the charismatic expression of the faith, writing off an entire move of the Holy Spirit due to the grievous error and, yes, downright heresy of a few.

Yes, there is a major difference between those who ascribe to a shallow “health and wealth” ideology (not even worthy of being called a theology or gospel) and those who hunger for a resurgence of authentic, supernatural, New Testament Christianity in a day of gimmicks and self-help sermons.

My heart burns to see all believers encounter a glorious Person—Jesus Christ. The supernatural is not about mankind simply using God to get what we want out of Him. Rather, it is about God’s character being revealed to the world, the supremacy of Jesus being displayed and the livingness of the Holy Spirit being made known to a people (and a church) who are often convinced that God is detached and disinterested. Such could not be further from the truth!

Knowing This Difference Will Transform the Way You Live

The following article gives you a clear idea of why it is absolutely vital for all Christians to know the **one fundamental difference** between those who embrace a “health and wealth” ideology and those who legitimately want to see God move with New Testament signs, wonders and miracles once again. Merging the two perspectives is costly because it buys right into the lie that all charismatic Christianity is created equal. Not so. Discernment is not writing off an entire movement due to imbalance; it is learning to separate the authentic from the counterfeit.

I do not believe this is a trivial matter. In fact, how we respond to the topic at hand will dictate what we expect from our Christian lives. Our concept of who the Holy Spirit is and what He does actually defines what dimension of power we actually walk in. I dare say, it is not up to God. There is no outpouring left to release out of heaven. The Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost. If you are born again, congratulations—God Almighty lives inside of you! There is no upgraded Holy Spirit. I believe in fresh fillings and fresh touches (Acts 4:31, Eph. 5:18); I do not believe in asking for a new Pentecostal outpouring. We don’t need God to send a new Pentecost down from heaven; instead, we need to begin living like the first one we received is a precious inheritance, sufficient for the task at hand. Stewardship is the key issue here. Unfortunately, we will neglect certain aspects of stewarding the Holy Spirit’s presence and power when we

believe they are heretical, fanatic and self-consumed. This is not the Holy Spirit!

If we continue to demonize all forms of supernatural activity, lumping it together as “health and wealth” or “name it, claim it” me-centric heresy, we will never place an appropriate biblical demand on the faith that has been miraculously entrusted to us by God Himself (Eph. 2:8-9). If our vision of the supernatural is tainted by the gross misrepresentations we see from certain TV preachers, we will probably ignore anything to do with the power of the Holy Spirit.

On the flip side, if we sit down and become honest—with ourselves, with the biblical text—and accurately observe these two contrasting groups in modern Christianity, we will reap a powerful reward. What is this reward? Depending on how you respond to the challenge, it is highly likely that you will bring your Christian expression into agreement with every miraculous possibility that Scripture has made available to you. You will launch out on the greatest quest of any believer—the quest for more of God.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is living within you. You are not getting more of God out of heaven; you are experiencing more of the One who has made your body His dwelling place on earth. If Scripture says the Holy Spirit’s supernatural power is legal for us to experience, steward and release, I want us to press in for everything that is available.

Open Your Mind—But Don’t Throw Out Your Brain

I just ask you for one thing: an open mind. I am a student of theology, currently pursuing my Master of Divinity degree. When I say “open mind,” I am not inviting you to toss thinking out the door to embrace some flighty experiential faith. I do ask that you open your mind to the facts as they are presented clearly and contextually in Scripture. I encourage you to temporarily press “pause” on some of the prejudices you may

have embraced from a denomination, church, Christian TV or theological viewpoint before you continue reading. Above all, I humbly ask that you invite the Holy Spirit to come and reveal Jesus in all of this. At the end of the day, He is what this is all about.

There is a vast chasm separating those who pervert Bible principles to simply enhance their quality of life on earth and those who desire to see Jesus' prayer fulfilled—"on earth as it is in heaven"—through the release of signs, wonders and miracles as the gospel is proclaimed (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

So, what is the one key difference between the two camps? Simple. You will know the genuine based on how they **respond to Jesus**.

Camp 1: The Health-and-Wealth Brigade

Where do we begin?

1. "Sow your seed" me-ology. "Just sow your \$1,000 seed *right now*—come on, that's right! Run right on up here to the altar and write that check! There is a strong anointing flowing here for \$1,000 donations!" This is tame language compared to some of the gimmicks being used to manipulate people into giving money to a church or ministry. Talk about the exact opposite of the apostle Paul's perspective on giving! He wrote, "Let each one [give] as he has made up his own mind and purposed in his heart, not reluctantly or sorrowfully or under compulsion" (2 Cor. 9:7, AMP). Compulsion and manipulation are not godly.

I am sure you may have run into some of these shenanigans while channel surfing at night. Boom! You hit a Christian TV channel where they are hosting a giving telethon or pledge drive. I do not believe fundraising is wrong or sinful, but I am strongly opposed to people using the Holy Spirit, God, Jesus or promises of blessing and anointing to hype people up to make financial contributions—often well beyond their means to give. This is not Christianity. This is the Steve Martin

huckster evangelist of the film *Leap of Faith* being personified.

2. Vending machine Christianity. The “health and wealth” teachings emphasize acquiring more stuff, tithing to increase personal financial wealth, and walking in physical health while ignoring what they consider to be more elementary subjects, such as intimacy with God, sin, repentance, taking up your cross and giving all for the cause of Christ. God becomes a cosmic vending machine, and the Bible is handled like a divine blueprint for pressing the right buttons in order for heaven to deliver on mankind’s demands.

This perspective sells books, sells out conferences and peddles teaching series all while grossly misrepresenting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are these people heretics? Some, maybe. Many do boast orthodox statements of faith and preach an accurate salvation message.

This is not my effort to engage some type of witch-hunt, calling out who is going to heaven and who is hell-bound. Rather, this is all about helping you experience clarity on the difference between two contrasting perspectives.

3. Extreme, imbalanced and dangerous. When it comes to extremism in the area of “health and wealth,” I have seen and experienced a lot (although I am sure some of you have seen and personally experienced worse than I have). This camp promises much but delivers little. Confess it and possess it. Name it and claim it. Blab it and grab it; doubt it and live without it. If you are not part of the “confession clique,” you are basically a less-than, immature Christian who needs special enlightening. Oh, how backward this line of thinking truly is!

I ask you, please do not equate this imbalanced camp with those who are pursuing the authentic, Jesus-exalting move of the Holy Spirit. Even though the “health and wealth” group

might mention the Holy Spirit, the supernatural, signs and wonders, or miraculous power, this does not confirm that they are legitimate representatives of Jesus. Remember the sobering words of our Messiah: “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 in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you’” (Matt. 7:22-23, NIV).

Recognize the Counterfeit

Be warned: This perspective is out there—and often in a grossly public spotlight. But also be encouraged: This fringe movement does not accurately represent the thrust of true supernatural Christianity that is making significant headway throughout the nations. For too long, we have approached counterfeits the wrong way. Counterfeits are evidence of the genuine artifact. The devil is incapable of creating anything new; all he can do is malign and pervert what is true, pure, holy and God-originated. It is actually irresponsible for the body of Christ to respond to counterfeits by throwing out all forms of the truth.

There is nothing representative of Holy Spirit in extreme “health and wealth” ideology. I am not saying that all Word of Faith churches, teaching or preachers are bad; they are not. Also, I am not offering some blanket statement, saying that in order to be spiritual, we need to be poor and sick or healthy and wealthy. I do not believe this either. Financial prosperity, in and of itself, is not wrong. Physical health is not wrong; healing is actually an extension of the kingdom of God. These things become dangerous pursuits when they become the driving force of an entire movement.

At the end of the day, you will know a leader, church, book, teaching or televangelist is off when the road they present does not lead to Jesus Christ receiving all the glory. Jesus is not a side issue. His glorious name is not some secret code

that we insert at the end of our prayers to ensure that we “signed off right.” He is the Lord of all. He is the Son of the living God. He is the worthy Lamb slain for the sins of the world.

Camp 2: Signs and Wonders That Point to Jesus

Consider the approach of pastor John Piper, who famously denounces the prosperity gospel, but also hungers for a resurgence of authentic New Testament signs and wonders in the church today.

In his sermon “Are Signs and Wonders For Today?” Piper states, “We ought to be open to the real possibility that this too might be a unique moment in history, and in this moment it may well be God’s purpose to pour out His Spirit in unprecedented revival—revival of love to Christ and zeal for worship and compassion for lost people and a missionary thrust with signs and wonders.”

I specifically reference Piper because of my great respect for his integrity, consistent humility, spiritual hunger and unceasing devotion to the sacredness of Scripture. While he makes his disdain for the “health and wealth” perspective abundantly clear, he is likewise a proponent of the Holy Spirit’s authentic supernatural activity in the modern church. This perspective is possible! Not only is this possible, but Scripture paints a clear picture of a faith community where signs, wonders and miracles are normative elements of the Christian experience (Acts 5:12; 9:34-35, 40, 42).

Sadly, the world is often denied a church that hosts God’s presence and releases His power because of incorrect information circulating throughout the Christian community. Many have bought into the lie that you cannot walk in supernatural power and maintain your integrity. Their response to the “health and wealth” perversion is strong: “The last thing I want to do in life or ministry is be like *that* guy!”

Fair enough. However, that guy or that lady who appears to be perverting the gospel for personal gain is not an accurate representative of the true supernatural New Testament community.

I could list leader after leader whom I have not only heard from the pulpit but have known behind the scenes and am absolutely convinced that they are examples of the real deal. They are not perfect, nor do they claim to be. However, they exhibit the one characteristic that definitively separates the "health and wealth" crew from those longing to walk in authentic signs and wonders: They are hungry to experience and glorify *Jesus*.

What Is Jesus' Rightful Place?

Health and wealth ends with man, but signs and wonders end with Jesus Christ. He receives the glory. He is where the signs are pointing. He is the One whose miracles stir us to awe. It is true foolishness for any of us to worship a sign. Such a response is downright contrary to the fundamental purpose of a sign. Signs point to something beyond them.

Think about it. Could you imagine what would happen if people all gathered around an exit sign, stared at it, but never actually followed where the sign was leading them? That area would become severely congested by a people pileup. However, the incorrect response from the people's end is not the sign's fault. The sign functions according to design; it is man who chooses whether or not he is going to respond to it appropriately.

Such was the case when Israel was miraculously delivered out of Egypt. Their eyes witnessed a consistent flow of signs and wonders, but Scripture makes it clear that, in the end, the people did not properly respond to what their eyes beheld (Ps. 78:11, 42; 106:7). They kept on complaining. There was a disconnect, and ultimately the testimony of God's mighty acts

did not pass on to future generations as it should have (Judg. 2:10-15).

Likewise, this was the case when Jesus walked the earth. There were many who responded to Him because of the miraculous signs He performed, but others' hearts hardened even more. Just because people respond correctly or incorrectly to signs and wonders does not negate their purpose and value.

The basis for our faith is never signs, wonders and supernatural phenomena—it is always the Person and truth of Jesus Christ. Yes, the Bible validates the reality and availability of miracles. No question that Jesus invites all of us into a lifestyle of faith where such supernatural demonstrations should be normative, not unusual or uncommon. Nevertheless, when we start celebrating the signs for the sake of the signs instead of being rightly awestruck by the glorious One whom every authentic sign and wonder points to, we are heading into dangerous territory. Jesus is eternally the cornerstone of our faith, our theology and our experience. Any person or any experience that does not lead me toward the truth of Jesus Christ should be avoided like the spiritual plague.

It Is Legal for You to Desire and Cry Out for Miracles!

In Acts 4, the early church actually prays for God to stretch out His hand and perform signs and wonders. Read their bold prayer:

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30, NKJV).

I would be more apt to accept the whole “It’s not biblical to pray for signs, wonders and miracles” idea if the Holy Spirit responded to this prayer with a rebuke; He did not. On the

contrary, we see that “when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (v. 31).

I feel like the building shaking was God’s amen to the disciples’ prayer. I am confident that almighty God is able and willing to move through His people in great power—greater than we have seen or experienced. However, He is looking for a people that He can trust with the miraculous. While this mandate does not demand absolute perfection, it does require a lifestyle of integrity and relentless commitment to make Jesus Christ front and center. The disciples were not about putting on a “miracle show” for the sake of spectacle; they were driven to see signs and wonders done through the name of Jesus. Jesus was their pursuit and delight. May the same be said of us and our generation.

As mentioned earlier, what separates the “signs and wonders” camp from the “health and wealth” proponents is simply what they do with Jesus. “Health and wealth” ends with man; “signs and wonders” end with Jesus.

Are You Ready to Reconsider Normal?

Scripture constantly summons us to live a supernatural life. The statements made by Jesus and, later, the apostle Paul are nothing short of stunning. When responded to correctly, these ancient words call us into lives of ever-increasing hunger to experience every miraculous inheritance we have received in the Holy Spirit.

Feast on these two final truths. I know they are familiar passages, especially to those in the charismatic movement. But truly consider their radical implications. Meditate on what they are summoning you into:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these

he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12).

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).

In John 14:12, Jesus describes what normal Christianity looks like, and then, in Romans 8:11, Paul explains how you can experience it. Let’s not allow the “health and wealth” abuses to distract us from pursuing the life of greater works. This is what we have been authorized and empowered to walk in through the power of the Holy Spirit, all for the glory of the name of Jesus.

For more information about how to experience and activate the authentic power of God in your life, you can check out my new eBook, *Breakthrough Healing*.

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Pope Francis: Making Sense of

a Whirlwind Middle East Tour

After two intense days of religious ceremonies in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials, unscheduled photo opportunities and debilitating traffic arrangements, Israelis and interfaith relations experts are trying to attach the appropriate symbolism to Pope Francis' visit to the region.

Nearly every stop made by the pontiff was subjected to simultaneous scrutiny and praise. While long-term tensions between the Jewish people and the Catholic Church were made apparent by the trip, some experts are acknowledging a thaw in Israel-Vatican relations.

"The Jewish people and the Catholic Church in recent years have found that their 30 years of dialogue have paid off and friendly relationships have resulted," says Betty Ehrenberg, executive director of the North American branch of the World Jewish Congress and chairperson of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, an umbrella organization representing prominent Jewish organizations in discussions with leaders of other faiths.

Ehrenberg, who attended a meeting between the pope and Israeli President Shimon Peres, told that there is "a friendship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people that should be nurtured" and that there "certainly was a warmth to this visit, and you can't deny that."

"We have to realize that we have problems in common, and we have to work together on these problems," she said.

Also important, in Ehrenberg's estimation, is the message that the visit sends to Middle East Christians who find themselves under the constant threat of attack.

"There has been very little outcry [on Christian suffering] by

the United Nations; there has been very little outcry by other international organizations," Ehrenberg says. "We haven't heard enough of an outcry, not from the Catholic Church and not from any of the Christian denominations. In fact, it has been the Jewish people that have been decrying this phenomenon."

But by visiting the Middle East, the pope "has shown that he is present and that he cares, and gives Christians here in the region strength," she says.

"Hopefully we can work together with the Catholic Church to help ensure religious freedoms for everyone around the world, and for protection," she says.

Pope Francis planted roots for improved interfaith relations even before being elected pontiff, says Giuseppe Platania, founder of Italy's Israel Allies Caucus, an alliance that fosters cooperation and dialogue between the Italian Senate and the Israeli Knesset.

"He is a friend of the Jewish people, probably more than others before him," Platania told . "He appears to be very open to dialogue with the Jewish community. Back in Argentina, the pope had a strong relationship with the Jewish community. So he grew up with a strong, positive relationship with the Jewish community from before he became pope."

Platania says Francis made a "significant" symbolic gesture during his first week as pope by making a phone call to the chief rabbi of the Jewish community in Rome.

"When you become a leader of over a billion people, what you do carries tremendous weight," Platania says.

Appropriately, then, every stop by Pope Francis on his Israel trip—planned and unplanned—was scrutinized for its symbolism.

"His itinerary is very significant," Platania says. "What he

goes to visit first was very well thought out. The actual order of the people he sees and shakes hands with and the sites he visits is very significant.”

The pope referred to Palestinian Authority-controlled territory as the “Palestinian state,” a move that contradicts the U.N. status of the Palestinian Authority as a nonmember observer state. Francis also landed first in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem a day before his official state welcome by Israel at Ben-Gurion International Airport.

According to Platania, Francis is not the first pope to visit Palestinian-controlled territory before setting foot in fully sovereign Jewish territory, and the order of the pope’s itinerary may have had more to do with religion than politics. The New Testament identifies Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus.

“Maybe there is a stronger Christian connection to start [the trip] by going to Bethlehem than by going to the Kotel,” Platania says.

Ehrenberg says there is nothing new about the Vatican’s policy toward Palestinian statehood.

“The Vatican recognized a Palestinian state many years ago already,” she says. “So anyone surprised by this doesn’t remember when this first happened in the ’80s.”

The pope then surprised many by making an unscheduled prayer stop at concrete sections of a wall separating Bethlehem from Jerusalem, erected in 2002 to prevent terror infiltrations into Jewish population centers. He prayed in front of graffiti that read “Free Palestine” and (in broken English) “Bethlehem look like Warsaw Ghetto,” leading to widely distributed photos.

Ehrenberg says the photo-op in front of the Israeli security

fence “can be interpreted as some kind of a PR coup for the Palestinians” but that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the issue when he spoke to the pope “and explained that the fence was built particularly to prevent the acts of terror that the international community is so against.”

“It’s not because Israel wanted to build it there,” Ehrenberg says of the fence. “It was forced upon Israel by terrorist attacks. [Netanyahu] showed the Pope the plaque remembering the horrific terrorist attacks that were perpetrated [at the AMIA Jewish center] in Buenos Aires, which the pope knows only all too well.”

Platania says, “This pope is coming across as very charismatic, very people-oriented. Some people think that’s great. Other people think he has an agenda. Praying at the security wall was a sign of peace, but I wonder if he wanted to come across as exposing the wall and Israeli policy.”

Even “the best of our friends, eventually even with the best intentions, may want to use that friendliness, the diplomatic efforts, smiles and phone calls to rabbis to help promote their own agendas,” Platania explains.

A longer-term issue between Israel and the Vatican relates to valuable Jewish artifacts dating back to the period of the First Temple in Jerusalem and believed to be held in Vatican archives that have been off-limits to Jewish leaders.

“The issue of artifacts is a big deal,” Platania says. “Many people have asked to visit the archive and have been denied. It is believed that there are a lot of items that belong to Jewish heritage on all levels—things that could potentially be from the Temple, but even if they are not, still belong to the Jewish people and could be given back.”

Returning the items, according to Platania, would be an “amazing act of reconciliation and friendship.”

Yet the Israeli government appears patient on the artifacts issue and is hopeful that there is much to be gained by improving relations with the Vatican. Peres and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, accepted an invitation from the pope to pray for peace at the Vatican. That gathering is scheduled for June 6.

“The relationships certainly will continue and will deepen,” Ehrenberg says. “Shimon Peres is going to visit the pope in two weeks, so let’s see where that leads.”

For the original article, visit .

2 Keys to Prayers That Deliver Results

“Then said the Lord ... I am alert and active, watching over My word to perform it” (Jer. 1:12, AMP).

Notice God watches over *His Word* to perform it. This is a key to accurate, effective prayer—to pray God’s Word or to pray in agreement with God’s Word, for His Word is an expression of His will.

Let’s assume you are praying for a person who needs healing.

In 3 John 2, God says in regard to healing and well-being, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in every way and [that your body] may keep well, even as [I know] your soul keeps well and prospers.” According to this verse, it is God’s desire that your physical body be well, just as your soul (your mind, will and emotions) is well.

In 1 Peter 2:24, Peter says of Jesus, “By whose stripes you

were healed" (NKJV).

You can tune in to many Christian TV programs any day of the week and hear someone give a testimony of praying for healing for a loved one. They say they believed God for the person's healing, yet they included in their prayer, "If it be Thy will." Their loved one died, so they assume that was God's will.

No! To pray "If it be Thy will" when the will of God is known—that you be healed and whole—is a wishy-washy, wavering prayer. Pray the Word with boldness: "Father, thank You that Johnny is healed by the stripes of Jesus. Refuse to move off of the Word. Also, do the natural things that the doctor recommends.

As my pastor used to say, "We're not against doctors, hospitals, medicine, vitamins or orange juice!" The motive of doctors and medical professionals is like that of Jesus: They are working to see their patients healthy and whole.

Several years ago, even before I fully understood the value of praying the Word or praying in line with God's Word, a teenager in another state had been severely injured in a car accident, and he was in a coma. Doctors' prognosis gave little hope of survival, indicating that if he did live, he would most likely be a vegetable.

I felt led to go to a friend who was a student at a local Bible school at the time to pray in agreement for this young man's recovery. Unknown to me, she had a friend in Sweden who was in a coma at that same time.

So together we came into agreement with God's Word from Ephesians 5:14 for this young man and for her friend in Sweden: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." Within a matter of days, both of these people awoke from a comatose state. Then, over a period of time, each fully recovered.

To see success in your prayer life, find an appropriate Scripture for the prayer need, then boldly pray God's Word or in agreement with God's Word.

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