What is your opinion of the Promise Keepers movement?
Scripture: Romans 4:5; Galatians 1:8–9
Code: QA63

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There's no denying that the Promise Keepers (PK) movement has been instrumental in turning unbelievers to Christ and stirring Christian men out of spiritual lethargy. Many men who have participated testify that they have found a new excitement about their responsibilities in the family. Wives have given equally enthusiastic testimony of the change in their husbands and their homes. We are grateful to God for whatever eternal fruit has resulted from Promise Keepers and the rallies the movement has sponsored.

We also believe there is a legitimate place for men's gatherings. Men need to be challenged spiritually *as men*, to be faithful in the headship of home and church. This is particularly crucial in a culture such as ours, which is overtly hostile to biblical standards of masculinity.

Nonetheless, some aspects of Promise Keepers are troubling. Chief among our concerns would be the *overt ecumenicism* of the movement. Promise number 6 in "The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper" is this: "A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity."

And the phrase "any ... denominational boundaries" clearly is being used to obliterate any difference between the gospel of Roman Catholicism and the biblical message. In the PK manifesto, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper,* founder Bill McCartney states:

Can we look one another in the eye—black, white, red, brown, yellow, Baptist, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God, Catholic, and so on—and get together on this common ground: 'We believe in salvation though Christ alone, and we have made Him the Lord of our lives'? Is that not the central, unifying reality of our existence? ... Can we not focus on that and call each other brother instead of always emphasizing our differences? [*Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper,* (Colorado Springs: Focus On The Family), pp. 161-162.]

Writing in the same volume, Jack Hayford added, "Redeeming worship centers on the Lord's Table. Whether your tradition celebrates it as Communion, Eucharist, the Mass, or the Lord's Supper, we are all called to this centerpiece of Christian worship" [19]. At the 1994 Promise Keepers "Seize The Moment" conference in Portland, McCartney announced, "Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Pentecostal. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God? Hear me: Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Catholic. Do you love Jesus; are you born of the Spirit of God?"

All of this has the effect of virtually nullifying the importance of doctrine altogether. Promise Keepers doesn't care what you believe: "Do you love Jesus?" is the sole test of faith.

But remember that Scripture is filled with warnings against those who come in Jesus' name and claim to "love Jesus"—but who preach a different gospel.

Roman Catholicism errs from Scripture at precisely the point of the gospel. Scripture teaches that we are justified by the grace of God through faith *alone:* "To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Roman Catholicism, however, insists that divine grace is dispensed though various rituals, including baptism, the Mass, and penance.

And adding ritual requirements to faith as instruments of justification is the very essence of the Galatian heresy. The strongest words of condemnation in all the New Testament are directed at such teaching:

But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9).

This is poles apart from the notion that we should receive all who say they love Jesus.

Inherent in Promise Keepers' ecumenical thrust is *a tendency to downplay the importance of sound doctrine.* If the goal is to unite all who say they love Jesus, then doctrinal distinctives must be downplayed. The doctrines that divide us cannot be mentioned. This means, for example, that the doctrine of justification by faith alone—the chief point of contention between Catholicism and Protestantism—cannot be plainly declared in Promise Keepers rallies.

The same is true of other important, yet controversial, doctrines. The role of the Holy Spirit; the inerrancy and absolute authority of Scripture—those are all doctrines that are virtually off limits for discussion in Promise Keepers meetings, because the goal is "unity," not clarity of doctrine.

But this kind of thinking eliminates any hope for real unity because it makes agreement the foundation and truth the expendable commodity. In other words, truth becomes disposable if it divides people.

It is no surprise that Promise Keepers views doctrine in this light since PK leadership has always had strong ties to the Vineyard movement. Weak doctrine and the "unity at all costs" mentality have long been characteristics of the Vineyard. Any continued involvement with the Vineyard will certainly mean a further eroding of sound doctrine for PK.

In light of these and other concerns, we must ask ourselves whether it is spiritually profitable to be involved with Promise Keepers. We share PK's commitment to teach and train men as disciples of Jesus Christ, and to build into the fabric of their lives the qualities of godly leadership. And to the degree that PK accomplishes these goals, we are grateful to God. If, however, the movement continues in its present course, the long-range impact on evangelicalism will be far more detrimental than positive.

For further study, see David Hagopian and Douglas Wilson, *Beyond Promises: A Biblical Challenge to Promise Keepers*, (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996).

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