

The Alpha Course: Ecumenism, Romanism, and an Empty Gospel

by Jeremy James



"It was a great honor to be presented to Pope John Paul II, who has done so much to promote evangelism around the world." – Nicky Gumbel

The Alpha Course is undoubtedly the most successful and most widely used means today of instructing non-believers in the basic truths of Christianity. It was designed to help Christians evangelize their community and its principal goal is the salvation of souls.

According to its own website, over 27 million people have completed the Alpha Course, which is now running in 169 countries and has been translated into 112 languages.

The course normally comprises an introductory session, ten weekly sessions, and a closing event. Each of the weekly sessions starts with a meal, followed by a prepared talk or video. The participants then break into groups to discuss the issues addressed in the talk or video. The closing event comprises a set of four sessions over a day away (or a weekend away) at an attractive venue (The structure and content of the course are outlined in **Appendix A**).

The purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to determine whether the Alpha Course teaches the true gospel, the true Jesus, and the true Spirit, or whether it teaches what the Bible calls "another gospel," "another Jesus," and "another spirit" (2 Corinthians 11:4)

At the outset we would emphasize that, as far as we can tell, the vast majority of those who organize and present the Alpha Course, or who support the Alpha program in their local community, are well-intentioned and sincere Christians. Their zeal and commitment is not in question, nor their desire to evangelize non-believers, both effectively and Biblically. We are concerned only with the course itself, specifically with whether it teaches the true gospel and whether it gives a scripturally accurate account of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Definition of *Evangelical*

Throughout this paper we hold an 'Evangelical' believer to be someone who professes to be born-again in Christ; who believes in the complete sufficiency of the substitutionary atonement of Christ; who believes that Christ was fully God and fully man; who accepts the Bible as the verbally inspired and inerrant word of God and the sole and sufficient authority in spiritual matters; who holds that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone; and who rejects idolatry and sacramentalism in all their forms.

History of *Alpha*

Since many of the concerns that we identify later in the paper are grounded in its historical development, it will help if we first examine the origin of the Alpha Course.

It was developed during the 1970s by Anglican curates attached to Holy Trinity, Brompton, in London. The person most closely identified with its development in its current format is Nicky Gumbel, a clergyman in the Anglican tradition.

The Anglican Church is the officially established church in England, which means it is the state-approved version of Christianity in that country. Its head is none other than the official head of state, Queen Elizabeth II. Since the British royal family has long endorsed Freemasonry and has long been linked to British ceremonial Freemasonry, any involvement by the Anglican Church in the spread of Evangelical Christianity must be viewed with suspicion.

The Masonic nature of the Queen's personal philosophy, as expressed in her annual Christmas addresses, is indisputable. Like most of her royal contemporaries, she does not believe that Jesus was anything more than a good man who tried to preach a message of peace and good-will. (For more detailed information on this subject, see our earlier paper, *Freemasonry and the British Monarchy: Why the Queen of England Pretends to be a Christian.*)

The heir apparent to the British throne, Charles, Prince of Wales, is well known for his New Age beliefs and shamanic convictions. In the person of Laurens van der Post, he even had his own New Age guru. The Duke of Kent, who at his birth was seventh in line to the throne, has long served as the official head of British Freemasonry.



Former Archbishop of Canterbury, being inducted at a Druidic ceremony in Wales.

The former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was inducted into an order of traditional Welsh paganism known as the Gorsedd of Bards. Wearing full Druidic regalia, he was initiated at sunrise in a ceremony conducted within the Gors Fawr circle of sixteen standing stones in Pembrokeshire, similar to that of Stonehenge. A more pagan activity in a more pagan setting would be hard to imagine. Yet, as official head of the Anglican church in England, he was the person with overall responsibility for the Alpha Course in the period 2002-2012. He was also an avid supporter of Alpha for many years as bishop of Monmouth and archbishop of Wales, before his appointment to Canterbury

The political power structure in England incorporates the established or Anglican church to an unusual degree. Of the 44 diocesan archbishops and bishops in the Church of England, 26 are permitted to sit in the House of Lords. Freemasonry, New Age liberalism, and homosexuality are endemic among the Anglican clergy, to the extent that many ordained priests are openly homosexual. The Anglican Church does not oppose the annual murder of 185,000 unborn children in England and Wales through abortion. In short, where hypocrisy and double-speak are concerned, the Church of England has few equals.



Anglican bishops in the House of Lords.

This is the liberal institutional environment in which the Alpha Course was developed. It would be naïve to believe that a major initiative to promote the true gospel could be launched by the Anglican Church. It would be even more naïve to imagine that such an initiative could be endorsed at the highest level if it posed any serious threat to the Masonic, unitarian ethos that has dominated the Church of England for centuries. However, on the other hand, the same Masonic elite would have every incentive to promulgate a course that offered a counterfeit version of the gospel, a gospel in name only.

Praise for *Alpha*

In step with its growing popularity, we have witnessed a veritable cornucopia of praise for *Alpha* from many influential sources. These include many notable figures whose own teachings are steeped in apostasy and error. Consider the following examples:

Rick Warren: "One of the most effective evangelism tools for the 21st century."

Tony Campolo: "The Alpha course is intelligent, biblically based, and incredibly interesting...For the inquiring mind, there is nothing better around than the Alpha course."

Jack Hayford: "I see Alpha as a strategic tool, sensitively crafted to address today's secularized seekers with satisfying answers to their spiritual hunger. I recommend Alpha to all pastors wanting to equip their people for new-millennium effectiveness in evangelism."

David Yonggi Cho: "The Alpha course is an excellent program for all churches everywhere."

Richard Foster: "Alpha is one of the best ways I know to introduce your neighbours and friends to the life-giving message of Jesus for all peoples. I recommend it highly."

Luis Palau: "Alpha seems especially blessed in that the Lord is using it to reach all sorts of people in all sorts of spiritual condition."

High praise indeed, but it comes from people whose own credentials are highly suspect:

Rick Warren endorses *The Message* 'bible' (which replaces God's Word with that of man) and teaches that Allah is the God of the Bible. His 'purpose-driven' church, which is built on management techniques taught by Peter Drucker, teaches an ecumenical version of Christianity similar to that of *Alpha*. When the current Pope was appointed, he famously tweeted, "Welcome Pope Francis, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, #Habemus Papam. You have our prayers." (*Habemus Papam* is the traditional Roman Catholic way of proclaiming the appointment of a new Pope.) Warren also promotes many New Age practices, such as visualization, meditation, and yoga. He even endorses the wicked occult healing technique known as Reiki. [See our earlier paper, *Beware of Warrenism and the False Theology of the Purpose-Driven Church*.]



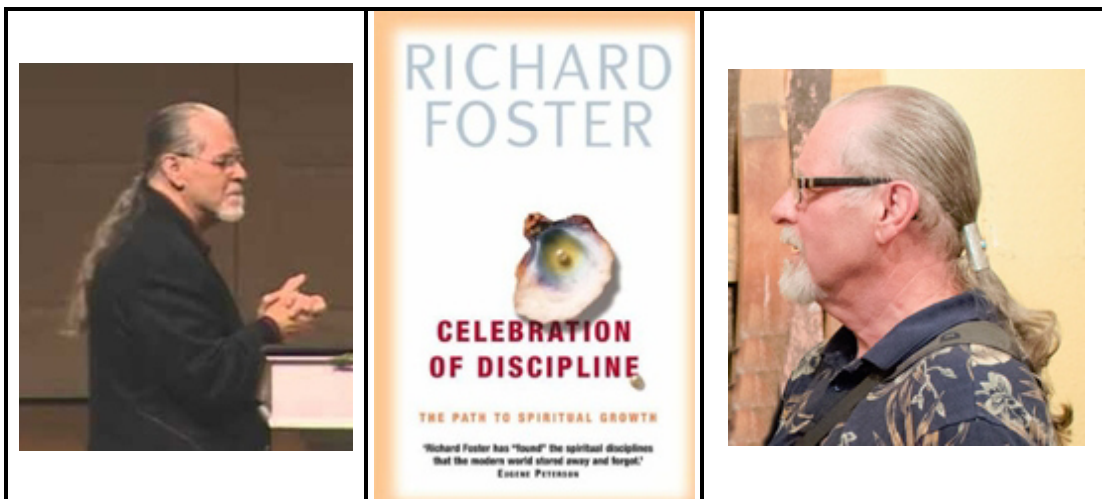
Rick Warren speaking at an ISNA (Islamic Society of North America) conference, promoting the dangerously heretical view that Allah is the LORD God of the Bible.

Tony Campolo approves of homosexual relationships and teaches the false social gospel, frequently quoting Marx, Tillich and Buber, as well as the Jesuit priest, Teilhard de Chardin. He is strongly Jesuit-oriented: "I learned about this way of having a born-again experience from reading Catholic mystics, especially *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*." – *Letters to a Young Evangelical*. He is also a 'red letter' teacher, maintaining that the words of Jesus, as recorded in the four gospel accounts, supersede those of the Epistles. His many books include frequent statements that question the basic gospel truth that Christ alone is the way and that all other paths are false.

Jack Hayford is well known for his hyper-charismatic teaching, his ecumenical outlook, and his intense dislike of denominational distinctions. For several years he led the church founded by the famous stage healer, Aimee Semple McPherson, and has appeared on the same platform on many occasions with such false teachers as Robert Schuller, John Wimber, David Yonggi Cho, and Paul Crouch.

David Yonggi Cho is a leading figure in the Word Faith movement which teaches visualization and similar occult techniques for attaining prosperity and personal goals. His Korean brand of Pentecostalism incorporates elements of Asian shamanism and teaches that the so-called 'fourth dimension' can be influenced by positive thinking.

Richard Foster is a Quaker whose best-selling book, *A Celebration of Discipline*, is an uncritical showcase for the false theology and practices of the Roman Catholic mystics. Foster was the founder of Renovaré, an interfaith organization dedicated to bringing all Christian denominations under the umbrella of Rome. Toward this end it teaches 'spiritual formation', an unbiblical philosophy grounded in the false theology of the Catholic mystics. Throughout his writings Foster equates Catholicism with true Christianity.[See our earlier paper, *The Deadly, Sweet-tasting Poison Known as Lectio Divina*.]



Luis Palau is another intensely ecumenical 'evangelical' who is doing all he can to bring Bible-believing Christians closer to Rome. He has described his 'friend' Jorge Bergoglio – Pope Francis – as a "very Bible-centered man." Promise Keepers is among the many ecumenical causes that he champions, an organization rooted in secular psychology and Catholic/charismatic theology. Palau is also a member of the Coalition on Revival, founded in 1984, whose members made a binding public covenant to replace democracy with a theocracy. Through political activism it aims to apply Christian theology to 17 spheres of life and ministry including economics, business, education and medicine. This dominionist agenda has since been appropriated by the apostate New Apostolic Reformation, headed by the late C Peter Wagner, another member of the Coalition on Revival.

Given that *Alpha* has been unconditionally endorsed by Christian leaders whose credentials are flagrantly ecumenical, who have strong links to Rome, and whose theology is suspect, to say the least, we are justified in asking whether *Alpha*, too, has been formulated by leaders who share the same outlook.



Franciscan priest, Raniero Cantalamessa (with beard) and Pope Francis.

The latter is holding the famous "broken cross" or twisted cross that all Popes have used since the Second Vatican Council.

The twisted cross is a vile mockery of Christ.

[See *The Broken Cross* by Catholic insider, Piers Compton.]

Perhaps the most surprising endorsement of all has come from the Roman Catholic Church! Here is what Raniero Cantalamessa has said:

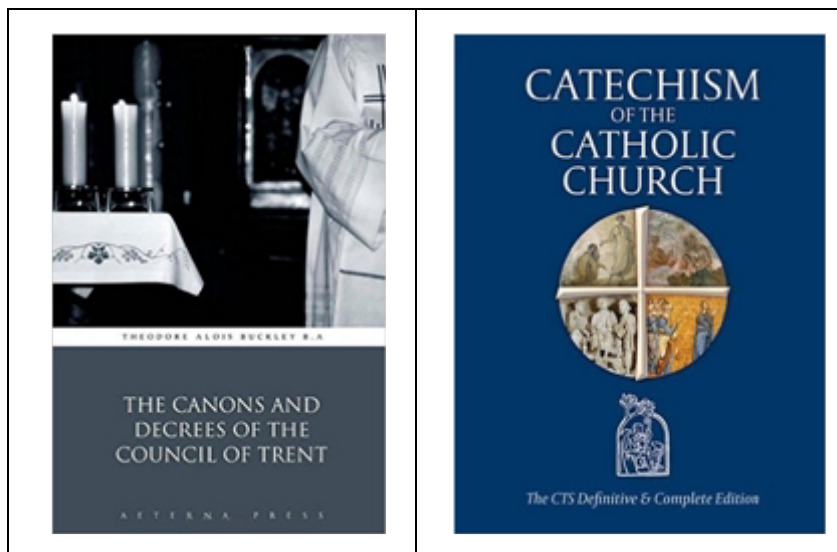
"In my opinion Alpha accomplishes an incredible task, in making people interested in faith and in making faith relevant to the modern man. I especially appreciate the ecumenical spirit of the Alpha course: There is no pressure on anybody to join a different denomination, but just to join Jesus and to put Jesus at the centre."

Cantalamessa is a Roman Catholic priest (Franciscan Capuchin) and 'Preacher to the Papal Household' for 36 years. In this capacity he has provided meditations to three Popes, as well as many senior prelates, and is the only person who may officially 'preach' to the Pope.

The Roman Catholic Church has gone even further and approved the Alpha Course for use by Catholic churches around the world. The *same* course. Please pause for a moment and reflect on this. The course is meant to share the gospel through which all born-again, Bible-believing Christians have come to faith in Christ. And yet, here we have the greatest enemy, historically, of the Evangelical Church professing to teach and believe the *same* gospel. A few hundred years ago the church of Rome was raising large armies to hunt down and slaughter Bible-believing Christians across Europe, and yet today – even though her theology has never changed – she is claiming to teach the *same* gospel.

By any gauge or standard this must surely qualify as one of the most preposterous exercises in misdirection and mind-control in history. We are seriously expected to believe that the church of Rome, which proudly boasts that she never changes – and even proclaims her immutability with the Latin slogan, *Semper Idem!* – has now abandoned the gospel taught by her since the days of the first Pope or Pontifex Maximus, Gregory I in 590 AD.

Lest there be any doubt or confusion over this issue, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) confirmed the continuing application of *all* of the doctrines promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1645-1663. Catholics were also given a further reminder that the doctrines of Romanism have never changed when the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published in 1982, a document which set out, clearly and comprehensively, the idolatrous theology and false gospel of Rome.



Rome hates Evangelical Christianity

The great preacher, C H Spurgeon, never ceased to warn about Roman Catholicism. Here is what he said in 1880: "Under its influences a system of religion was fashioned, which beyond all false religions, and beyond even Atheism itself, is the greatest hindrance to the true gospel of Jesus Christ."

Another great preacher, Dr Marytn Lloyd-Jones, was just as vehement in his condemnation of Rome and her false gospel. In an impassioned address of May, 1963, he said:


She does not say that she is changing, and she never will. The Church of Rome remains the same. If anything, she is even worse. She has "added" things to what she taught in the 16th century, such as Papal Infallibility, etc. No, there is no change in the Church of Rome. And if ever there is one great world Church it will be because the Church of Rome has absorbed all the rest and swallowed them in their ignorance!

There is no difficulty about this; this is a counterfeit, a sham; this is prostitution of the worst and most diabolical kind. It is indeed a form of the Antichrist, and it is to be rejected, it is to be denounced; but above all it is to be countered.

Lloyd-Jones was noted for his sober preaching style, so when a man of his stature uses words like *counterfeit*, *sham*, *prostitution*, *diabolical* and *Antichrist*, we should listen! He even warned that, if "one great world Church" were ever to form, "it will be because the Church of Rome has absorbed all the rest and swallowed them in their ignorance!"

Today we find that Rome is doing exactly that, building a one world Church by absorbing all the rest. Central to this is her active promotion in all parts of the world of a "gospel" which accommodates her own doctrinal position while at the same time seducing and subverting evangelical churches – which are being swallowed up "in their ignorance", just as Lloyd-Jones predicted.

The Alpha Course is a key part of this worldwide ecumenical program.

 <p>Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury.</p>	<p>In a 'Common Declaration' on 5 October 2016, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Pope, Francis I, agreed to pursue the mutual efforts being made by the Vatican and the world-wide Anglican communion to achieve "full unity."</p> <p>Mark those words, "full unity." The one world religion is forming from this false Catholic-Anglican gospel.</p> <p>[Anglicans in the US are known as Lutherans or Episcopalians.]</p>
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Three possibilities

Let's examine the evidence before us. If Rome is now endorsing the Alpha Course, then one of the following propositions must be true:

- (1) Rome really has converted to true Christianity and abandoned her multitude of heresies and wicked idolatries;
- (2) The gospel taught by Evangelicals and the one taught by Rome are, despite some 'superficial' differences, really the same gospel; or
- (3) Evangelicals have been tricked by Rome into believing she has changed.

If (3) is the case – as Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones and many others have warned – then the Alpha Course is a deliberately ambiguous piece of work, allowing born-again Christians to naively think it contains the true gospel, while at the same time affording Rome enough room to import and expand her mischievous doctrines, as and when required.

In the remainder of this paper we will endeavor to show that proposition (3) is the correct one.

We will not explore (in this paper) the option that Rome herself wants us to believe, namely proposition (2), which states that the gospel taught by Rome has always been the same gospel taught by Evangelical Christianity. She is making great efforts, through many different forums and initiatives, to convince the world that the Reformation was a tragic mistake, that Luther and Calvin went too far, and that all churches which profess to believe the core tenets of Christianity should set aside their differences and come together under the umbrella of Rome.



The public execution of Bohemian nobles after the Battle of White Mountain, near Prague, in 1620.

The Protestants of Bohemia were brutally persecuted by Rome as she tried to stamp out the Reformation.

The Jesus of *Alpha*

When Christians examine *Alpha*, they usually look at it solely through the eyes of a believer. It seldom occurs to its supporters to look at it also through the eyes of a non-believer. In other words, if you had not already come to faith, would you find a clear presentation of the gospel in the Alpha Course?

I was saved in 2008. The following year I read through a lot of material relating to the Alpha Course, including Nicky Gumbel's, *Questions of Life*. However, I didn't find the gospel there. There was nothing in it that would have made any difference to me before I was saved. This puzzled me greatly and I did a lot more research. Along the way I discovered that a number of Evangelical Christian leaders had expressed concerns very similar to mine.

Let's begin our examination with the session called, *Who Is Jesus?* This is presented at the start of the course and lays the foundation for everything that *Alpha* teaches in later sessions. If the gospel is anywhere, we would expect to find it here. A philosopher could talk about Jesus and omit the gospel, but a Christian could not.

The main elements of this session are given in **Appendix B**. Can you find the gospel there? Can you find anything that comes even remotely close to the gospel? [A complete transcript of this and other Alpha sessions may be found on the Internet.]

Nicky Gumbel has just painted a portrait of Jesus in this session that differs little from traditional accounts of the ascended masters and avatars of Hinduism, the bodhisattvas of Buddhism, or the god-men and shaykhs of Sufism. It even accords broadly with the Masonic concept of Jesus. He is portrayed as a man with a very close connection to God, with a high standard of ethics and the power to perform miracles, who "[laid] down his life for his friends." He is presented as a cool guy to hang out with (Shamefully this is achieved by treating his miracles in a flippant manner). Along the way Gumbel manages to list or quote a great many atheists, humanists, a Roman Catholic 'saint', a rock star, a homosexual, a film star, and even refers twice to the possibility that Jesus may have been evil. He also quotes C S Lewis on two occasions – Lewis was a closet occultist who preached a paganised version of Christianity (See our earlier paper, *Lupus Occultus: The Paganised Christianity of C S Lewis*).



C S Lewis
(1898 -1963),
who developed his
own version of
Christianity.



Owen Barfield
(1898-1997),
well-known occultist
and student of
Rudolph Steiner.

Lewis was greatly influenced by Owen Barfield whom he described as “the best and wisest of my unofficial teachers.” Barfield was an internationally recognised authority on Anthroposophy, an occult off-shoot of Theosophy, founded by the Austrian magus, Rudolph Steiner, in 1912.

***The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* was written for Barfields' daughter, Lucy.**

The Gospel of Alpha

Perhaps we were expecting too much from one session, so we'll look instead at the session that comes immediately after it – *Why Did Jesus Die?* [See our summary of the main elements in **Appendix C**].

The true gospel ought to be here, surely. In fact Gumbel claims that it is, but we look in vain. In essence, *Alpha* describes the 'gospel' in this session as follows: Man has sinned, but Jesus paid our sin debt on the cross; if we acknowledge this and have faith in what Jesus did on our behalf, we will receive the free gift of salvation and enter into a proper relationship with God.

Even if we assume that these elements are correctly explained, a description of this nature will not suffice. Key elements are missing. It falls far short of conveying what the good news, the gospel, is really about and what it means to be saved.

A born-again Christian and supporter of *Alpha* will probably 'fill in' the missing elements in the *Alpha* gospel himself, without being conscious that he is doing so. Meanwhile, the non-believer, someone who has not yet come to Christ, will not realize that anything is missing. This is what we meant earlier when we said that "the Alpha Course is a deliberately ambiguous piece of work, allowing born-again Christians to naively think it contains the true gospel, while at the same time affording Rome enough room to import and expand her mischievous doctrines, as and when required."

So, what *has* been left out?

In order to see this clearly it may help to back-track a little, to the start of the session. Gumbel refers to six people who "wear a cross" – Madonna, Elton John, Jennifer Aniston, Naomi Campbell, Robbie Williams, and the Pope. By saying this he is implying that these six people are Christian. But this is ridiculous. There is ample evidence to show that none of them can possibly be Christian.



**Cabalist Madonna, wearing her "cross".
Madonna is a transgender (born male, raised female - see our earlier paper, *The Wicked Transgender Agenda*.) Her commitment to the occult has been evident right from the start of her career. All of her jewellery, including the "cross", has occult significance.**

Madonna is a longtime practitioner of the occult and has publicly endorsed the wicked teachings of the Cabala. Elton John is a 'married' homosexual who pursues a hedonistic lifestyle and attends drug-fuelled parties with the super-wealthy Masonic elite who control Britain. Aniston and Campbell move in similar circles and have never given any plausible evidence that they are Christian, or that they have even read the Bible. Robbie Williams is famous for his lecherous behavior and serial drug-binging. And the Pope is a Roman Catholic who worships "the queen of heaven," which the Bible condemns as rank idolatry (see Jeremiah, chapter 44).

Gumbel's interpretation of the gospel is so shallow that he can speak of people like these as though they were Christian. Later in his talk, he places another Roman Catholic, Mother Teresa, at the pinnacle of spiritual attainment. He then goes on to compare the selfless act of Maximilian Kolbe, a Roman Catholic priest – who offered his life for another person at Auschwitz – with the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. In doing so he quoted the Pope and even described an event that took place in St Peter's Square in Rome on 10 October 1982.

Incredibly he didn't mention that the event in question was the 'canonization' of Kolbe, when, with great ceremony, the Pope declared the priest to be an official 'saint' of the Roman Catholic Church. Gumbel would hardly mention that 26 Cardinals attended this event unless he had a personal interest in the proceedings. By making a direct connection between the gospel and the canonization of a Catholic 'saint', Gumbel is clearly implying that (a) Catholics are true Christians and (b) the gospel taught by Rome is the true gospel.



It should be obvious where this is leading. Gumbel's gospel is the "broad way" gospel of the Catholic and Anglican churches. As we have already noted, very little separates these churches. Indeed, Gumbel himself said in an interview in *The Guardian* in August, 2009: "Probably one of the strongest movements of the Holy Spirit is in the Roman Catholic Church, so there's not a huge theological difference between the official teaching of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church..." It is a little known fact that when an Anglican clergyman crosses over to the Catholic Church, he is deemed to be a full priest of Rome, with equivalent sacerdotal powers and prerogatives.

Alpha teaches a gospel message that fits comfortably with Roman Catholic theology. The "broad way" gospel is designed to bring as many 'Evangelical' churches as possible under the umbrella of Rome. This is all part of the Ecumenical initiative that began in earnest with the Second Vatican Council and which has been prosecuted with great vigor ever since. Most if not all of the senior prelates in the Anglican church in the UK are marching in step with this program – they would not have been appointed to their high positions if they weren't.

The "broad way" gospel glosses over, omits or distorts the following: the wrath of God, the awful destructiveness of sin, the wickedness of the world, the rebelliousness of man, the ongoing work of Satan and his angels, the sufficiency (and even the inerrancy) of the Bible, the reality of eternal damnation, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, and the fact that all who have not yet been born-again are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

Please note – dead! Not handicapped, not burdened, not defiled, but dead.

The doctrine of sin that Gumbel describes in Session 2 is the "broad way" doctrine of sin. As he says, "The root and result of sin is a broken relationship. It's like a parent and child who've fallen out." Oh, that it were so! But the truth is far more disturbing. The effects of sin have been devastating. When Adam and Eve rebelled, and passed on the same rebellious nature to each one of us, they cut themselves off completely from God. This was not a "broken relationship," but death itself!



Death came into the world through sin and through sin all are dead, both spiritually and (in due course) physically. And unless we are born-again while we are still alive here on earth, we will spend eternity in hell.

This fundamental truth of Christianity cannot be found in Sessions 1 and 2, or anywhere else in *Alpha*. And because of this awful omission, the most important element of all is forgotten – repentance!

In his conversion prayer, Gumbel includes the statement: "I'm sorry for the things in my life that have been wrong." That's what a little child would say when he has disobeyed his mummy and daddy. But it does not even begin to capture the shock we experience when we see for the first time the sheer wickedness of our sinful nature, the unquantifiable damage we have caused by our sins, and our shocking rejection of the wonderful God who made us.

The "broad way" gospel is linked to what many Bible scholars call 'easy-believism'. Why? Because the broad-way gospel is easy to believe! It requires only the sorrowful admission of our fallen human condition and our sincere mental acceptance of the gospel.

But is that enough? *If* sin is simply doing the wrong thing, as *Alpha* suggests, then maybe it *is* enough. But if sin is such that its very entrance into the world brought death as the universal destiny of all living things, then obviously it is not enough. It doesn't even begin to touch upon the terrifying wretchedness of our fallen human condition or our desperate need for salvation by the only means possible, through God Himself!

This is why John the Baptist preached the essential message from the very beginning: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2). And when Christ began his ministry, he preached exactly the same message: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)

This was the great lesson that Job had to learn. Despite his righteousness, he had to arrive at the point where he saw his true spiritual condition: "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:6)



This is not simply a question of mental assent. In our sin-damaged state we are humanly unable to repent, or even to recognize our need for repentance. Unless the Holy Spirit leads us to that conviction, we will never arrive at it by our own resources. Of course, we must be willing to follow Him as He opens this vista before us. If we refuse to heed what He is telling us, our hardened hearts will never find repentance.

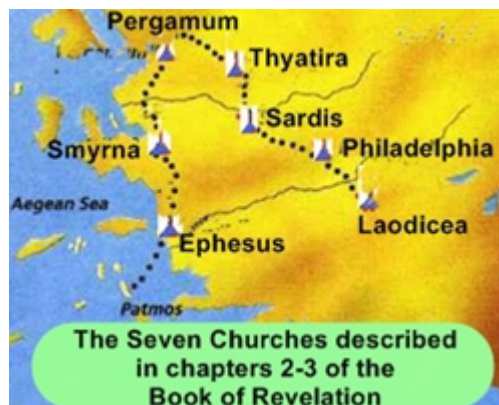
Repentance is the awful recognition that we are lost, that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, and that there is not a single thing we can do to help ourselves; that, unless we turn from the world and appeal to God with our whole hearts, we are lost forever. This is not a message that anyone wants to hear! Our fallen human nature will come up with every possible excuse, every conceivable rationalization and evasion, every imaginable means of mitigation and self-justification, to avoid doing this. Look at the lengthy inner journey that Job undertook before he finally recognized his true inner condition – which was many times worse than his outer physical condition. Only then could he say, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

This is entirely missing from *Alpha*, the broad gospel, and easy-believism. Indeed, it is hard to find this message anywhere in the church today. *Alpha* echoes and refines the worldly message that no-one is without some intrinsic spiritual value, and that if we could only learn to love ourselves as Jesus loves us, we would find true inner peace. Alas, this false message drives us even further from repentance, from a heartfelt recognition of our true spiritual condition. It makes it virtually impossible for us to see that, in the eyes of God, we are each as pleasing to behold as a dung-soiled rag or a menstrual cloth (Zechariah 3:3 and Ezekiel 36:17)

If we do not come to that state, to a state of true repentance, we will die in our sins: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3)

I stand at the door and knock

We went carefully through the next session of Alpha – ***How Can We Have Faith?*** – hoping to find some awareness of this central issue, but again we were sorely disappointed (The main elements of this session may be found in **Appendix D**). Instead we found such chummy statements as "Relationships are exciting, and the most exciting relationship of all is our relationship with God," more 'wisdom' from the false theologian C S Lewis, and a few anecdotes that didn't make a lot of sense. Gumbel even displayed *The Light of the World*, a painting by Holman Hunt which is meant to illustrate the statement by Christ in Revelation 3:30 – "I stand at the door and knock." He didn't seem to understand that, by displaying an image of Christ, he was violating the Second Commandment (which the Catholic Church completely disregards).



He also fails to understand chapter 3 of the book of Revelation where our Lord is describing the church at Laodicea. Of the seven churches that Our Lord reviewed, this was the only one that had deteriorated to the point where he stood outside the door. He could gain admission only by knocking and waiting for the church to invite him in. So when Christ says, "I stand at the door and knock", he is not referring to the individual at all – contrary to what Gumbel says – but to a church that has drifted so far from the Word of God that, in the main, it has rejected Christ. This is the Laodicean church, the largely apostate church of the End Time.

The *Alpha Course* teaches "another spirit"

Thus far we have seen that Alpha teaches both another Jesus and another gospel. But it also teaches another spirit.

To appreciate the gravity of this error, we need to go back to 1982 when Nicky Gumbel had an encounter with what he believed was the Holy Spirit. This 'experience' had a profound influence on Gumbel and on the subsequent development of the entire *Alpha* program.



Here is how he described it in his *Alpha* talk '*Does God Heal Today?*' [The complete transcript may be found in [Appendix E](#)]:

Back in 1982 a man called John Wimber came to speak at our church. John Wimber was the pastor of the Vineyard Church in America...he spoke on the subject of Spirit and on healing...

[An assistant on Wimber's healing team asked a sceptical Gumbel] ...'Well, is there anything we could pray for?' So I said, 'Well, what I would really love to pray for is the power of the Holy Spirit in my life.' So he said, 'Okay, we'll pray for that.' And he started to pray.

All I can say is that after about thirty seconds I experienced the power of God in a way that I had never experienced before in my life. I know this is not true for everybody, but for me there was a physical manifestation. It was like ten thousand volts of electricity going through my body.

In fact, it was so intense, I really couldn't take it any more. But this American, I think he'd only just joined the ministry team, because he only had one prayer that he prayed, and his prayer was 'More power, Lord!' And every time he prayed this prayer, the power increased.

So eventually I didn't know what to do. I thought the only thing I could do was pray against him! So I started praying, 'No more power, Lord!' But because he only had this one prayer, he carried on: 'More power!' And eventually there was a kind of shouting match going on between him and me, right in the centre. By this stage everybody else in Church House had stopped praying and was watching what was happening right here!

Gumbel got another demonstration of this 'power' about 12 years later when, in May 1994, a member of a Vineyard church in London, Ms Ellie Mumford, returned from a visit to the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church. Gumbel described the occasion as follows on Video 3, Talk 9 of the original video edition of the Alpha Course:

We went to their house...where a group of leaders of their church was meeting...Ellie Mumford told us a little bit of what she had seen in Toronto...it was obvious that Ellie was just dying to pray for all of us... then she said, "Now we'll invite the Holy Spirit to come," and the moment she said that, one of the people was thrown, literally, across the room and was lying on the floor, just howling and laughing...making the most incredible noise...I experienced the power of the Spirit in a way I hadn't experienced for years, like massive electricity going through my body...One of the guys was prophesying. He was just lying there prophesying...

The so-called Toronto 'Blessing' is very similar to the *shaktipat* given by Hindu gurus. The guru touches the student on the forehead with his finger, or even a feather, and immediately he experiences a state of ecstasy or sees an inner light of dazzling intensity, almost like the sun.

Shakti is the energy of Shiva, one of the most highly venerated of the Hindu deities. This 'god' is really a high level demon or fallen angel who has control over a legion of lesser demons. When a guru submits to his power and undergoes extensive training in the strict disciplines of yoga, he opens the *kundalini* and becomes a conduit for the *shakti* force. Some gurus also acquire the ability to transmit this force to others via the *shaktipat*.



Hindus lining up for *Shaktipat*.

When Ms Mumford returned from Toronto she was acting as a temporary conduit for the so-called Toronto Blessing. This too is an energy transmitted by the fallen angels and has **nothing** whatever to do with the Holy Spirit.

If Christians are not shocked by this, they ought to be! Even though the Word of God tells us to test the spirits (1 John 4), few ever bother to do so (Gumbel certainly didn't). It never even occurs to most of them that Satan can produce counterfeit signs and wonders and that his legions of fallen angels are continually watching for the opportunity to dupe and beguile a fresh batch of victims.










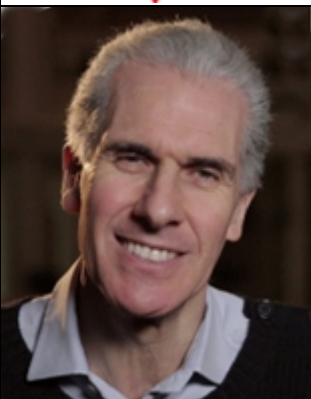
The Toronto 'Blessing' is energized by fallen angels who have congregated at the Vineyard Airport Church in Toronto. Demons seem to work best when they can saturate a geographical location with their presence. In order to receive this 'blessing' would-be recipients normally have to travel to Toronto. However, after they have had their 'experience' – barking, laughing, jerking, 'tongues', rolling on the floor, or whatever – some of them later act as unwitting, albeit temporary, conduits for the same energy when they return to their home town. As they move among with other misguided Christians in their community – who are craving the same experience – the 'Toronto' spirit may strike them also.

We are dealing here with person-to-person transmission, similar to the *Latihan* of Subud and the *Shaktipat* of the Hindu gurus. [See our earlier paper, *Reiki, the Occult, and Psychic Attack.*]

There is no doubt that Nicky Gumbel, Ellie Mumford, and certain others involved in this work are completely sincere. They mean well and are convinced that they are serving God by promoting the Toronto 'Blessing', but they are greatly deceived. The Holy Spirit is **not** doing a special work at the Vineyard Church in Toronto, and never was. The force at work there is certainly supernatural, but it is that of the fallen angels. They know how to produce the kinds of supernatural, ecstatic experiences that impress and overwhelm undiscerning Christians and lure them further into the depths of deception.



Nicky Gumbel, principal founder of the Alpha Course, meets Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis. The Roman Catholic Church has endorsed the Alpha Course, which means the course conforms with Catholic theology. If that is the case then it teaches a false Christ and a false Gospel.

	<p style="text-align: center;">William Branham (1909–1965)</p> <p>Branham denied the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and claimed it was demonic. He taught the 'serpent seed' heresy and claimed to be the prophet Elijah in his End-Time role. Many of the heresies that plague the church today can be traced back to Branham.</p>
	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Paul Cain (1929–)</p> <p>Paul Cain was part of the original 'Latter Rain' movement. Strongly clairvoyant, he was a close associate of Branham and sometimes preached in his place. Cain, it later transpired, was a homosexual and an alcoholic.</p>
	
	<p style="text-align: center;">John Wimber (1934–1997)</p> <p>John Wimber held William Branham in high regard and considered Paul Cain to be a prophet similar to the Apostle Paul. Like Branham and Cain, Wimber placed great emphasis on signs and wonders and the cultivation of spiritual power.</p>
	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Nicky Gumbel (1955–)</p> <p>Nicky Gumbel has been greatly influenced by John Wimber and teaches a very similar message. The false teaching on the Holy Spirit by Branham and Cain made its way to Gumbel via Wimber. His "ten thousand volts" experience was not from the Holy Spirit and all who seek a similar experience risk doing themselves real spiritual harm.</p>

From Branham to Cain to Wimber to *Alpha*

True Christians ought to be deeply concerned that the principal evangelical tool in the world today is promoting another spirit. In fact, the Toronto 'Blessing' was popularized in the UK primarily through the Holy Trinity, Brompton – home of the Alpha Course. Instead of condemning the Toronto 'Blessing' and its demonic manifestations, *Alpha* is actually helping to spread its darkness to the four corners of the world.



Gumbel was greatly influenced by John Wimber and mentions him several times in his talks. Wimber, in turn, was a great admirer of William Branham – who was one of the most demonised pseudo-Christians of the 20th century – and a close associate of Paul Cain, who had worked with Branham for many years. Branham's ministry, bolstered by false signs and counterfeit healings, attracted a cult following and provided a fertile breeding ground for heresies and error of every kind.

The spirit working through these individuals was a spirit of deception, much like the spirit guides that operate through mediums and clairvoyants. These supernatural entities gain a grip on their hosts, often at a young age, and trick them into thinking they have a great spiritual mission in life. People who come to them for counsel and advice, as well as healing, can unwittingly open themselves to the same unclean influence. In this way, false teachings are propagated from one town to the next, usually with rousing emotional testimonies and supposed miracles. Satan makes extensive use of men like Branham and Cain to deceive others and, where possible, to attract potential candidates to the same ministry. They generally mean well, but they are deceived. Even if many of their counterfeit phenomena are shown to be false, a high proportion of professing Christians still cling to the hope that some of them may be genuine.

If professing Christians studied the Word of God as they should, they would see through most, if not all, of the false teachings that contaminate the church today. They would understand, in particular, that the Holy Spirit is a Person and that He points to Christ at all times. We are never to seek an 'experience in the spirit' – whatever that means. The *Holy Spirit Weekend*, on which so much emphasis is placed in the *Alpha* program, is a great deception. It is a dangerous violation of the gospel and a selfish repudiation of the role that our Lord gave the church. The Weekend reeks of Roman Catholic mysticism, of a desire to 'experience' God and know Him in a new, more personal way. This is not taught anywhere in the Bible, but it is central to the ecumenical, charismatic theology that Rome is trying to promote.

For a detailed examination of the dangers behind this apostate practice, see our earlier paper, *The Great Pentecostal-Charismatic Error*.

CONCLUSION

Alpha gives a seriously deficient account of Jesus. This arises in part from the absence of any clear statement about God the Father or the destructiveness of sin and, in part, from a garbled account of why he came to earth or why he is coming again. The concept of God in *Alpha* is very similar to the "God as you conceive Him" idea which predominates in the lower degrees of Freemasonry.

Alpha teaches a false gospel, principally because it has an entirely unscriptural view of sin and virtually no understanding of repentance. The appalling wretchedness of our fallen human condition is glossed over with a few glib statements here and there.

It has been noted by many discerning Christians that the main focus in *Alpha* is on the Holy Spirit. Christ and his work are seen primarily in an historical context. This in turn leads participants to believe that they need to 'experience' the 'spirit' in order to grow spiritually. Unfortunately, *Alpha* teaches a seriously defective doctrine of the Holy Spirit, one that could do real spiritual harm to participants.

As a consequence of all this, the "relationship" with God that *Alpha* teaches is primarily a relationship with the 'spirit' and not, as the Bible clearly teaches, a relationship with the Father through the Son.

Alpha ignores the real-life work of Satan, his astounding subtlety, and his ongoing efforts to subvert the gospel and lead unwitting souls to destruction. It never adverts to the dangers posed by supernatural deception and the risk of a false conversion. Satan knows that the best way to hide the true gospel is to offer a false one.



These defects do not stand by themselves. Many other aspects of the program are out of kilter with Scripture, often markedly so. These include the *Alpha* approach to faith, justification, sanctification, service, obedience, prayer, and grace.

It is also a matter of great concern that *Alpha* never affirms the Bible as the sole, sufficient and inerrant Word of God. In line with John Wimber's false teaching, it speaks of ongoing revelation via "words of knowledge" (*Does God Heal Today?*). Rome, too, rejects the sufficiency of God's Word and arrogates to herself the right to promulgate new doctrines and 'truths' when and as she pleases.

One would never guess from *Alpha* that the Bible has anything of importance to say about the future and the End Time. Even though one third of Scripture is given over to prophecy, the prophetic aspect of the Word and its place in the gospel is never addressed. *Alpha* is Dominionist in outlook – just like the Catholic Church. It ignores End Time prophecy and cultivates instead the false notion that the progressive 'Christianization' of all nations will usher in the Millennium.

The ecumenism of *Alpha* is rooted in its Dominionist theology. The 'Christianization' of nations will come about, according to Rome (and *Alpha*), when all denominational distinctions are removed and a one world church established. Gumbel revealed his real affiliations in 1995 when he stated:

"We need to unite... there has been some comment which is not helpful to unity. Let us drop that and get on. It is wonderful that the movement of the Spirit will always bring churches together. He is doing that right across the denominations and within the traditions...we are seeing Roman Catholics coming now... Nobody is suspicious of anybody else...People are no longer 'labelling' themselves or others. I long for the day when we drop all these labels and just regard ourselves as Christians with a commission from Jesus Christ."

Do we need to unite? Of course not! Walls of separation protect the few churches that still cling faithfully to God's Word. When Christ reviewed the seven churches in Asia, he never asked them to unite! Each had its own lampstand, its badge of autonomy, and was responsible only to Christ himself.



Rome hates walls of separation because they protect the faithful. The Word of God devotes a complete book to such walls of protection. The Sanballats and Tobiahs in Rome today will use every scheme and device to demolish the few walls that remain and hamper attempts to repair them. Nehemiah had to deal with liars and traitors in his own ranks, threats of force and bloodshed, and several cunning attempts to mislead him. Today we face no immediate threats of force and bloodshed, but lies, trickery and betrayal abound.

Alpha is clearly an ecumenical device to achieve three main goals:

- to greatly blur the distinction between born-again Christians and those who merely profess to be Christian. This is especially troubling where *Alpha* portrays Catholics as Christian. While some may have found Christ – despite the idolatrous nonsense taught by Rome – the vast majority are non-believers and need to hear the true gospel themselves (which *Alpha* can never give them because *Alpha* itself is teaching the false gospel of Rome).
- to break down walls of separation between Christian denominations, principally by focusing on what the ecumenical movement call "the essentials." Its great catch-cry is, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." This neatly deflects attention from the depth and breadth of Scripture and concentrates exclusively on what professing Christians supposedly have in common. Since we all have 'Jesus' in common, we should all come together in some institutional manner. But this is one of the greatest lies spread by ecumenists. We don't have 'Jesus' in common at all! The 'Jesus' of Rome is a saviour who couldn't save; a god who needs his mother to help him with the plan of salvation; a god who must be sacrificed repeatedly in the Mass in order to produce more saving grace; a god whose body is eaten and whose blood is consumed by his followers; a god whose presence dwells in a piece of bread which is worshipped in 'Eucharistic Adoration'; a god who gives special powers to his holy priests; a god who has delegated his High Priestly office to the bishop of Rome; ... and so on. This is **not** the Jesus of Biblical Christianity! (Wake up, people, wake up.)
- to develop a common spiritual language and ethos, including a common gospel, in which all professing Christian churches can participate – as it were a common denominator for all denominations. As such it serves as a seeding ground for the coming one world church.

It says a lot about any local church if, instead of presenting the gospel directly, it imports the Alpha Course into the community. A truly Bible-believing church should have a great deal to say about Christ, the gospel, the Bible, and the LORD's wonderful program of Redemption, without needing help of any kind from the Church of England and her Roman theology. Every believer is requested by God to have a ready testimony for those who are lost: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15)

It has been argued that, despite its 'shortcomings', *Alpha* has genuinely led some souls to Christ. We have no doubt that this may be so and that, even if the number is small, the news is truly welcome. This may be due in practice to the liberty that some churches have taken in presenting the course, dropping some modules and supplying additional presentations and testimonies by local believers. Newcomers also benefit by making the acquaintance of local believers and dealing with them on a one-to-one basis. The true gospel may reach the ears of the lost through these informal exchanges.

The church as a whole is now in the Laodicean age. Having lost all fire for the gospel, it is now a luke-warm institution. Just as the Word of God states, Christ is outside the door, waiting to be invited in. Of course, there are still some churches that never lost that fire, but they are few and hard to find. (Be honest, do you know any?)

Spurgeon once said: ""We must warn with judicious boldness those who are inclined towards the errors of Rome; we must instruct the young in gospel truth, and tell them of the black doings of Popery in the olden times." But this godly advice is being roundly ignored. He also warned his fellow Englishmen as follows in 1864:

It really is an alarming matter to see so many of our countrymen going off to that superstition which as a nation we once rejected, and which it was supposed we should never again receive. I have but to open my eyes a little to foresee Romanism rampant everywhere in the future, since its germs are spreading everywhere in the present...It is impossible but that the Church of Rome must spread, when we who are the watch-dogs of the fold are silent, and others are gently and smoothly turfing the road, and making it as soft and smooth as possible, that converts may travel down to the nethermost hell of Popery.

And that is exactly what *Alpha* is doing, making the road as soft and smooth as possible, so that even greater numbers of false converts are drawn into the web of Romanism. He could have been speaking of *Alpha* when he said: "Popery is as much the masterpiece of Satan as the gospel is the masterpiece of God."

More than a hundred years later we can see how the "germs" that Spurgeon warned about have since multiplied into a plague. Lloyd-Jones rightly blamed this on "a weak and flabby Protestantism that does not know what it believes."



The current direction of the luke-warm church.

The Holy Spirit Weekend and similar activities are leading professing Christians to seek after "angel guides" and the inner voice of 'Jesus'. This is why an utterly apostate book like *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young can be so popular. Here are just some of the so-called evangelical Christian leaders who endorse it:

Max Lucado: "It would be hard to overstate the impact of the writings of Sarah Young. She is a stream in the desert. Her words quench our thirst."

Dr. Jack Graham: "I have personally read *Jesus Calling* regularly and have been blessed beyond measure. I am grateful to God for this devotional masterpiece, which will speak life into generations to come."

James Robison: "Sarah Young's devotions are incredible. *Peace in His Presence* is one of the most beautiful books I've ever seen in my life."

Dr Richard Lee: "It is a great joy for us to recommend the daily devotional *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young. This unique heart-to-heart presentation of Scripture has become a vital part of our daily personal time of reflection and worship."

By giving participants a license, as it were, to seek after "experiences", *Alpha* has opened the door to all kinds of error. The very people who ought to be sounding the warning – whom Spurgeon calls the "watch-dogs" of the flock – are not only staying silent (as Spurgeon had expected) but are actually endorsing these vile writings.

I would urge pastors everywhere to discard their *Alpha* material and prepare a presentation of the gospel that is true to God's Word. After all, as pastors it ought to be their life's work, their whole purpose as ministers of the gospel! Any church that is unable to do this can hardly be called a church.

Jeremy James
Ireland
01 November 2016

For further information visit www.zephaniah.eu

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Structure of the Alpha Course

- Based on the *Alpha Course Administrators Handbook*, revised edition, 2012 -

Alpha Celebration Supper Party

This is a Launch Event, organized by the Alpha Course hosts, aimed at encouraging family and friends of previous participants to attend the course. It includes impromptu testimonies by former Alpha attendees.

Alpha Guest Service

This is a standard church service on the Sunday before the course commences, with testimonials by former course participants. It is intended to highlight the course and encourage participation. The 10-weekly session may also be preceded by an Introductory session.

Alpha 10-week series of Modules

- WEEK 1** Who is Jesus?
- WEEK 2** Why did Jesus die?
- WEEK 3** How can we have faith?
- WEEK 4** Why and how should I pray
- WEEK 5** Why and how should I read the Bible?
- WEEK 6** How does God guide us?
- WEEK 7** How can I resist evil?
- WEEK 8** Why and how should I tell others?
- WEEK 9** Does God heal today?
- WEEK 10** What about the Church?

Alpha Day or Weekend Away

This is the final stage, conducted over one or two days, and comprises 4 sessions:

- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- What does the Holy Spirit do?
- How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?
- How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

Summary of main elements of the *Alpha Course*, Session 1

SESSION 1: Who is Jesus?

Gumbel describes how he came to read the New Testament and accept that it was true.

He mentions historical sources and textual criticism: Tacitus, Suetonius, Flavius Josephus, Herodotus, Thucydides, Julius Caesar, Livy.

Quotes F J A Hort [closet Catholic and founder of an occult society].

Quotes Frederick Kenyon [high-ranking member of the British ruling elite].

Mentions Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code* – which teaches that Jesus was a mortal prophet.

Quotes Bono of rock group U2.

Tells story of his encounter with a famous rugby player.

Quotes Matthew 16:13-16.

...he [Jesus] said, 'It's through me that you come into a relationship with God.'

Quotes Freud. Quotes Jung. Quotes Adler.

Jesus said: 'I am the bread of life.'

In other words, 'If you want that spiritual hunger satisfied, come to me.'

Jesus said: 'If the Son sets you free' – if Jesus sets you free – 'you will be free indeed.'

Jesus said: 'I'm the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'

Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection and the life.'

Those who believe in me will live, even though they die.'

Quotes Mother Teresa.

Jesus said: 'I'm the way.' 'I'm the truth.' 'I'm the life.'

Story about drawing a picture of God.

Jesus said to people, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

John 20:26-28 (Thomas: "My Lord and my God!")

John 10:30 ("I and the Father are one.")

Three possibilities regarding the resurrection:

1. Jesus could have been an evil impostor.
2. Jesus was insane or deluded.
3. He was divine.

Lengthy quote by CS Lewis.

The greatest ever teaching came from Jesus: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

Do to others what you would have them do to you. Love your enemy.

Turn the other cheek.'

Quote by atheist John Mortimer on ethics.

Jesus provided the moral foundation for western civilization.

Miracle at Cana – "how amazing it would be to go to a party with Jesus!"

Healing of lame man – "Imagine...hospital-visiting with Jesus!"

"Imagine going on a picnic with Jesus – don't bring any food; come as you are!"

"Imagine going to a funeral with Jesus – "Take the stone away.""

"...ultimately his death – laying down his life for his friends."

Quotes Time Magazine: "Jesus, the most persistent symbol of purity, selflessness and love in the history of Western humanity."

Quote by atheist Matthew Parris (well-known homosexual) from *The Spectator*.

Dostoevsky described Jesus as 'infinitely beautiful'.

Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies.

"The physical resurrection from the dead of Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity."

Quote by a former Bishop of Durham.

Evidence for the resurrection:

1. No body in the tomb [mentions movie *The Passion* by Mel Gibson]

John 19:33 (re the spear piercing the side of Jesus)

If the body was stolen the disciples would not have been willing to die for their faith

Proof that the body wasn't stolen – thieves would not have left the clothing behind, which "had collapsed like a caterpillar's cocoon when the butterfly's emerged."

2. He was later seen by his disciples. Quotes Luke 24:36-43.

3. The immediate impact on the disciples: "something occurred that totally changed them."

4. The historical legacy of Christianity.

Gumbel: "...over the last 32 years since then I have experienced the love of Jesus Christ, his power and a relationship with him that convinces me that he really is alive."

Quotes the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes.

Gumbel: "And I suppose what I've been trying to argue tonight is when you look at the claims of Jesus, who he said he was, and the possibilities of him being evil or deluded, I think we can rule them out as being impossible when you look at his teaching, his life, his character, his fulfilment of prophecy, his resurrection from the dead – those explanations become – to say that he was evil or deluded is kind of absurd, it's illogical."

Ends with another quote by C S Lewis.

Summary of main elements of the *Alpha Course*, Session 2

SESSION 2: Why Did Jesus Die?

"What do the following people have in common: Madonna, Elton John, Jennifer Aniston, Naomi Campbell, the Pope and Robbie Williams?
There may be a variety of answers, but one answer is they all wear a cross."

"...the cross is a symbol of Christianity"

"'He died for our sins.' What on earth does that mean?"

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

"In a nutshell, the answer to the question 'Why?' is, because God loves you."

Romans 3:23: '...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...'

"I find it so hard to say, 'It's my fault.'"

People sometimes give absurd reasons why accidents happen.

Gives humorous examples.

Story about a squash game that Gumbel played.

Story of a moral pyramid with Hitler at the bottom and Mother Teresa at the top.

"...the glory of God was revealed in Jesus, and compared to him we all fall a long way short."

He gives what he calls the 4 consequences of sin:

1. The pollution of sin. Mark 7:20. What comes out of you is what makes you unclean. Among a dozen eggs, one bad egg affects the whole batch. James 2:10: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."
2. The power of sin. Its addictiveness. Jesus says: it's possible to be addicted to a bad temper or to envy or to arrogance or pride or selfishness or lust or gossip or whatever...
3. The penalty of sin. "Something within our nature...cries out for justice."
Story about commuting to work in a bicycle lane. Romans 2:1 – "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you're condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."
4. The partition of sin. Romans 6:23 – "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." "...there is a partition between us, and God caused by the things that we do wrong." "It's like when you fall out in a human relationship and you can't look the other person in the eye."

"And all that, if you like, is the bad news. But, of course, the very word 'gospel' means good news. The message of Christianity is overwhelmingly good news. And the good news is God loves you and me. And he doesn't just leave us there; he chose to do something about it. 'God so loved the world' – that's you and me – 'that he sent his one and only Son' to do something about it."

1 Peter 2:24: - 'He himself' – that is, Jesus – 'bore our sins in his body on the tree' – in other words, on the cross – 'so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.'

This is what John Stott calls the 'self-substitution of God.'

Story of Maximilian Kolbe, a Catholic priest, in Auschwitz, who offered to die in place of a man named Francis Gajinisdek:

"41 years later, on 10 October 1982, Maximilian Kolbe's death was put in its proper perspective. In St Peter's Square in Rome, present in a crowd of 150,000 people – including 26 cardinals, 300 bishops and archbishops – was that man, Francis Gajinisdek. And the Pope described the death of Maximilian Kolbe in these terms. He said, 'It was a victory, like that won by our Lord, Jesus Christ.'"

[On the occasion of the Canonisation of Kolbe.]

Quotes Cicero on crucifixion.

Quotes Eusebius on flogging.

Isaiah 53:6 – "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him [i.e. Jesus] the iniquity of us all."

Quotes David McInnes on this verse.

Gumbel concludes: "Do you see where that leaves us, where it leaves you and me? Free to have a relationship with God."

"And the cross, it's like a beautiful diamond." "If you ever doubt God loves you, look at the cross. 'Greater love', Jesus said, 'has no person than this, than they lay down their life for their friends.' [John 15:13]

"...the biggest moral objection to the Christian faith: 'How can there be so much suffering in the world? How can God allow so much suffering?' And we don't have any simple answers. It's a very, very difficult question. But we do know this: God himself is not aloof from suffering. He has come in the person of his Son and he suffered for us, and he now suffers alongside of us.'

"The cross and the resurrection – because in a sense it's like one event, the cross and resurrection."

First result of the cross:

The slate has been wiped clean. "When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said: 'Look – the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' He was the one perfect sacrifice." ... "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin" [1 John 1:7]

Second result of the cross:

"Another result is that we can be set free from the bad stuff, the habits, the addictions." Christ paid the "ransom price".

Story about the singer Lionel Ritchie.

"Now, of course, certainly in my case, it's a process. Some things, I found when I came to Christ, instantly I was set free. Other things, it's taking a long time. It's a process. But Jesus sets us free."

Story of an alcoholic cured of his addiction by Christ after 38 years as an addict.

Third result of the cross:

"...we can receive total forgiveness" "Paul says that through Christ's death we have been justified. 'Justified' is a legal term. If you went to court and you were acquitted, you were justified."

Story of judge who found his old friend guilty but then went around and paid the fine himself.

Fourth result of the cross:

We can become part of God's family.

"The root and result of sin is a broken relationship. It's like a parent and child who've fallen out."

2 Corinthians 5:19 – "God was in Christ reconciling the world – that's you and me – to Himself."

"God came himself in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for you and for me."

"God loves us – that's the heart of the Christian message: he loves you and he loves me."

Galatians 2:20 – "The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me."

Gumbel says that, in effect, he is offering each member of his audience a blank cheque drawn on the bank of heaven, signed by Christ..."you can fill in your name."

"And I want to pray a prayer – it's a very simple prayer – saying Sorry, thank you, please. And it's a way of believing, if you like, a way of accepting the gift."

"...if you would like to pray tonight, here's a prayer which you could pray in the silence of your heart.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for dying for me on the cross. I'm sorry for the things in my life that have been wrong. I now turn away from everything that I know is wrong. And I now receive your gift of forgiveness.

I put my trust in what you did on the cross for me. And I ask you, please, to come and fill me with your Holy Spirit, to give me the strength to lead the kind of life that deep down I'm longing to lead.

Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen."

Summary of main elements of the *Alpha Course*, Session 3

SESSION 3: How Can We Have Faith?

How Gumbel met his wife.

2 Corinthians 5:17

"Relationships are exciting, and the most exciting relationship of all is our relationship with God."

"A Christian is a Christ-ian, a follower of Christ Jesus, someone who has a relationship with God through Jesus Christ."

"I know the exact date: 16 February 1974. Before that I was not a Christian. I became a Christian on that day, and since then I've been a Christian."

Gives analogy by C S Lewis.

John 1:12 – "Yet to all who received him, to those who received Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

God wants us to be sure of our relationship with Him.

1 John 5:13 – "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

Members of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is our certificate of marriage.

Story of squash and striving for too much at one go.

Revelation 3:30 – "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me."

Shows image of painting by Holman Hunt, *The Light of the World*.

The door opens from the inside. Christ does not force us to accept him.

Another analogy by C S Lewis.

Romans 6:23 – 'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord – or, as some versions put it, the free gift of God.'

A story about free gifts.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

"On the cross Jesus took our sin — he 'made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'"

"What we leave behind is nothing compared to what we receive, and it's nothing compared to what Jesus gave up on the cross. But we do have to turn away from the bad stuff. That's repentance."

Story about Blondin, the tightrope walker, to illustrate faith.

Story of a Christian who grieved the loss of his mother.

Gumbel speaks of the tripod, "the word of God, the work of Jesus...[and] the witness of the Holy Spirit."

"Actually, it's not Jesus who comes in; it's the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus."

Galatians 5:22 – 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.'

Story about a fruit tree and imitation fruit.

Story about the changes that come when we are converted. Our attitudes change, we are more loving: "...a love that comes from the Holy Spirit."

Romans 8:16: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God."

Story from Gumbel's life to illustrate the difference between faith and knowledge.

Story by Gumbel about his children.

Closing prayer led by Gumbel:

"Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that you love me so much. Thank you that you stand at the door of my life and you knock. And tonight I want to invite you in. I turn away from all the bad stuff in my life, all the things that I know are not right. I'm sorry for them and I ask your forgiveness. Thank you that you died for me on the cross so that I could be totally forgiven, the slate could be wiped clean and that I can make a new start. And tonight I put my trust in you. I ask you to come in and to fill me with your Holy Spirit, to help me to lead the kind of life that deep down I long to lead. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen."

Alpha Course transcript
'Does God Heal Today?'

Back in 1982 a man called John Wimber came to speak at our church. John Wimber was the pastor of the Vineyard Church in America. And at the time back then, I was a lay member of the congregation, I was practising as a barrister. And I have to say, when I saw John Wimber I was deeply cynical about him – for a number of reasons: partly because of how he looked, and partly because he was an American. Now, as you know, I love the Americans and have since repented of his appalling attitude that I had at the time! And as you know, we've learnt a huge amount from them, and are deeply grateful to them. But at the time I was deeply suspicious.

He came and he spoke here on the Sunday night on the whole subject of the Holy Spirit and healing, and wonderful things happened. But I still left deeply cynical. The next night he came to speak in the Spring – down there, the room down there – to about seventy leaders in the church. And again I arrived very, very cynical. And he spoke on the subject of healing. And I'd heard talks before on healing, and that was fine. But then he said at the end of the talk, 'Now we're going to have a coffee-break, and when we come back from coffee we're going to do healing.'

Well, we had never 'done' healing before. And so we had a very long coffee-break. Everyone was having more cups of coffee, and third cups of coffee. And then we came back in, and the people who'd been at the front felt it would be selfish to keep those seats! And so they moved up to the back! And then he said that his team had been praying and that they'd had a number of words of knowledge. And he defined words of knowledge like this: 'a supernatural revelation of facts about a person or situation which is not learnt by the efforts of the natural mind but is made known by the Spirit of God. This may be in the form of a picture, a word seen or heard in the mind, or a feeling experienced physically'.

So he said that his team had had a number of these words of knowledge. And then he gave them out. There was no faith in that room, no expectation at that moment of anything – except a slight hope that he might fall flat on his face!

Well, he then went back through the list and he said, 'Well, the first person', if I remember rightly, it was a man who'd injured his back aged fourteen chopping wood. And to my amazement this guy got up and walked down and said that was him. And they prayed for him.

Then there was another one, and then there was one again about a back problem, which Jeremy Jennings, who is the Pastoral Director on the staff here, he got up and he came forward. And that night he received healing for his back. And as they went through this list, and one after another after another came down and were prayed for, you could feel the level of faith in the room rising.

There was one word of knowledge which was not responded to, and that was that there was a word that there was a young woman there who was barren. Well, we're British – we don't even talk about that, let alone come forward in response to a word like that! So he waited.

And eventually a friend of mine called Sarah Wright – we had no idea that she had been trying for children for some time and that they had been unable to conceive and they were having various tests. And she came forward, and he said, 'What's your name?' and she said 'Sarah' – now, of course, there's good precedent in the Bible for being called Sarah and being barren! And so he prayed for her. And nine months later, she gave birth to a little baby boy! Although conception, I hasten to add, didn't take place in the Spring!

The extraordinary thing is, although there was so much going on that night, and people I knew being healed — of course, I know now that they were healed; I didn't know then; it only looked as if they'd been healed – I still left that night deeply cynical.

The following evening he was speaking over in Church House to anyone who was in a small group in the church. We were a much smaller church at that stage – there were about 250 people – and we were crammed into Church House. I had been in court that day, practising as a barrister. I was wearing a three-piece pinstripe suit, stiff white collar, looking very pompous, and I was late, Pippa and I were late. And you know how it is in the Anglican Church – we fill up from the back. First people to arrive take the back seats. And so the only seats left when we arrived were the front two seats. So Pippa and I went and sat right in the front.

Again he spoke on the subject of Spirit and on healing, and again he said that his team had had various words of knowledge. And again he gave out some of these words of knowledge, and people started to stand up all around the room. Then he said, 'There are ten people here who have athlete's foot.' Now, I happened to have athlete's foot – but I was not going to stand up! Nine people stood.

And I was sitting next to my wife Pippa, and she was going like this: 'That's you!' and I'm saying, 'No, no, no, I'm fine.' But eventually the pain in my ribs became so intense that I decided it'd be less painful if I did stand up. So I stood. And this very nice American on the ministry team, he came over and he said, 'Would you like me to pray for your athlete's foot?' So I said, 'No, thank you very much indeed.' I said, 'I'm perfectly happy having athlete's foot.' I said, 'In fact, I find it very satisfying being able to scratch it when it itches.'

So he was extraordinarily gracious, because he said, 'Well, is there anything we could pray for?' So I said, 'Well, what I would really love to pray for is the power of the Holy Spirit in my life.' So he said, 'Okay, we'll pray for that.' And he started to pray.

All I can say is that after about thirty seconds I experienced the power of God in a way that I had never experienced before in my life. I know this is not true for everybody, but for me there was a physical manifestation. It was like ten thousand volts of electricity going through my body.

In fact, it was so intense, I really couldn't take it any more. But this American, I think he'd only just joined the ministry team, because he only had one prayer that he prayed, and his prayer was 'More power, Lord!' And every time he prayed this prayer, the power increased.

So eventually I didn't know what to do. I thought the only thing I could do was pray against him! So I started praying, 'No more power, Lord!' But because he only had this one prayer, he carried on: 'More power!' And eventually there was a kind of shouting match going on between him and me, right in the centre. By this stage everybody else in Church House had stopped praying and was watching what was happening right here!

I think John Wimber must have had difficult people in his meetings before, because he said, 'Oh, take that one out!' So they carried me out through the French windows of Church House. And as I was being carried out, John Wimber said this: he said, 'God is giving that man the ability to tell people about Jesus.' And although it was never something I was very good at, it was something I really longed for.

And so that night when I got home, I started to reread the Bible, to see what it says on this whole subject of healing and the kingdom of God.

Of course, God heals with the cooperation of doctors and nurses and the medical profession. But the more I've looked, the more convinced I am that we should expect that God will also heal miraculously today.