

Book Review

John MacArthur, Gen, ed., *Fool's Gold? Discerning Truth in an Age of Error* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005): 224 pp..

This book opens with an illustration taken from the gold rush of the old American West when some mistook iron pyrite (“fool’s gold”) for the real thing. MacArthur cautions:

Doctrinally speaking, today’s church is in a similar position to the California gold rushers of 1850. Spiritual riches are promised at every turn. New programs, new philosophies, new parachurch ministries—each glitter a little bit more than the last, promising better results and bigger returns. But, as was true in the mid-1800s, just because it glitters doesn’t mean it’s good. Christians need to be equally wary of “fool’s gold.” We must not accept new trends (or old traditions) without first testing them to see if they meet with God’s approval. If they fail the test, we should discard them and warn others also (p. 21).

This book is thus written to caution the modern evangelical church against its tendency to run from fad to fad, whether it be seeker-sensitive worship, rock music, or the *Purpose Drive Life*, without carefully sifting and examining the worth of these programs. It serves as a clarion call for the church to use measured judgement and discernment in what it chooses to approve.

The book offers twelve articles from eight different contributors and falls into four parts. Part one “Promoting Discernment in an Age of Blind Acceptance” offers two introductory articles from MacArthur. He pointedly warns against those who spend more time studying the culture than they do the Word of God in order to claim relevance in ministry. To get a taste, listen to these comments:

Some Christians immerse themselves in the philosophy, entertainment, and culture of society. They feel such a strategy will strengthen their witness to unbelievers.

But the emphasis of that strategy is all wrong. Our focus should be on knowing the *truth*. Error is to be shunned (31).

Millions in the church today are being overwhelmed by the Trojan-horse ploy calling for the integration of secular ideas with Biblical truth. Others are easily duped by anything labeled Christian. They don’t examine everything. They don’t hold fast to the truth. And they won’t shun evil. They are left vulnerable to false doctrine and have no defense against theological confusion (33).

When we look at contemporary ministry, we see programs and methods that are the fruit of human invention, the offspring of opinion polls and neighborhood surveys, and other pragmatic artifices. Church-growth experts have in essence wrested control of the church’s agenda from her true Head, the Lord Jesus Christ (37).

What happens to preachers who obsess about cultural “relevancy” is that they become worldly, not godly (39).

Indeed, MacArthur offers a refreshing tonic to those post-modern, seeker-sensitive, and emerging church approaches that advocate spending more time exegeting the culture than in exegeting the Scriptures.

Part two is “Practicing Discernment in Your Local Bookstore” and features four articles critically evaluating recent publishing phenomena in evangelical circles: Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life*; N. T. Wright’s *What Saint Paul Really Said* (the so-called New Perspective on Paul); John Eldredge’s *Wild at Heart*; and Transit Book’s *Revolve*, which makes the New Testament a teeny-bopper tabloid magazine.

All of the articles are highly recommended. Each weighs the aforementioned books and find them wanting. The reviews are charitably yet firmly presented. For example, after his analysis of *The Purpose Driven Life*, Nathan Busenitz notes that it is “not outright heresy” but he does not hesitate to say that it is “fluffy, feel-good, and watered down” (60). Rick Holland is perhaps most unsparing (and rightly so!) in his criticism of the banality of the *Resolve New Testament*.

Part three is “Practicing Discernment in Your Local Church” and calls for churches to examine issues such as the use of contemporary worship music, invitations and alter calls, the promotion of partisan politics from the pulpit (a timely read in these days), and consumerism. Finally, part four offers two essays dedicated to “Pursuing Discernment in Your Daily Life.” Here the stress is on the sufficiency of Scripture to aid one in establishing a theological framework for evaluating whether a teaching, book, or program will edify or weaken a believer in the faith.

Once again, this book is a refreshing call for the church to exercise godly discernment, and it is recommended with enthusiasm. Not only will it be helpful reading in the present hour for the Pastor or laymen who is tempted to jump on *The Purpose Driven-Life* bandwagon or who is pressured to lead a *Wild at Heart* men’s Bible study because “everyone else is doing it,” but it will equip the reader to discern the value of similar evangelical fads that will inevitably continue to come in the future.

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