The Vineyard’s Response to The Standard

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A Response to the Critique of John Armstrong in The Standard, a publication of the Baptist General Conference.

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Introduction

The Vineyard and John Wimber: A More Positive View

For ten months (October, 1990 - July, 1991), the Baptist General Conference denomination carried in its journal, *The Standard*, a series of articles on the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, written by one of its pastors, John Armstrong, of Wheaton, Illinois. Though one article (in May) mentioned some positive points, the other nine were critical of the Vineyard and especially of its founding pastor, John Wimber. In addition, in January *The Standard* carried a critical book review of John Wimber’s book *Power Evangelism*, and in February there was a critical article on the divisive effects of a “Vineyard-style diversion” in a church. In total, there were 34 pages of material about Wimber and the Vineyard movement over ten months, and almost all of it was strongly critical.

I wrote the following material to provide an alternative perspective on the Vineyard movement for readers of *The Standard*. The editor decided not to publish this material in *The Standard*. I am grateful that the Association of Vineyard Churches wanted to print and distribute this material for those who are willing to consider some other evidence before they decide that the Vineyard is the kind of movement that John Armstrong’s articles have portrayed it to be.

I have a unique reason for writing, for my own background includes both the Baptist General Conference (BGC) and the Vineyard, and I have a love for both movements: I was ordained in a BGC church in 1974, and I spent
four wonderful years teaching systematic theology at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota (a BGC college) from 1977 until 1981, when I came to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. I have been a member of a Vineyard church for two years and am currently an elder in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Mundelein, Illinois.

John Armstrong’s criticisms of the Vineyard may be summarized as follows:

1. The Vineyard does not understand or preach a biblical gospel, or preach the cross of Christ.
2. John Wimber, the leader of the Vineyard, refuses to listen to or respond to his critics.
3. The Vineyard exalts experience over Scripture and reason.
4. It teaches unorthodox doctrine.
5. It encourages strange, highly emotional experiences in worship.
6. It endorses a kind of contemporary prophecy that will lead people astray.
7. It overemphasizes encounters with demonic forces.
8. Its healing ministry is not effective.

I would like to respond to these items in order, and at a few points mention some things I have appreciated about the Vineyard, including some benefits that have come to my own life and that of my family.

Because the twelve previous articles have given extensive criticisms of Vineyard teachings and practices, most of the questions raised can only be addressed by quotations of fact from published materials. I will primarily quote from John Wimber’s three published books, *Power Evangelism* (Harper, 1986), *Power Healing* (Harper, 1987), and *Power Points* (Harper, 1991), as well as from the official journal of the Vineyard movement, *Equipping the Saints*. 
Preaching The Gospel And The Cross

John Armstrong’s most serious criticism is that John Wimber doesn’t understand or preach a biblical gospel and doesn’t preach the cross of Christ. He says about Vineyard leaders, “My primary concern ...is the lack of understanding these men show toward the biblical gospel” (June, p. 19). “John Wimber... does not grasp the gospel of free grace and the centrality of the cross in his preaching.... The cross is not preached as the sole reason for boasting in God” (pages 19-20). Armstrong speaks of “the virtual silence of Vineyard teachers on the gospel and the cross” (p. 20).

I am not sure if John Armstrong realizes how serious this criticism is. To say that a movement has a “lack of understanding and preaching the biblical gospel” (July, p. 20), and to end a ten-article series by saying, “Most of all, I beg this movement to return to the gospel” (July, p. 22), is to say that they are not Christians. Paul writes, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). To charge people with not understanding or preaching the gospel is to charge them with heresy of the most serious proportions. And to accuse the Vineyard movement in general of holding that heresy is also to accuse many other Vineyard pastors and leaders of holding it - including myself, whom Armstrong named as a prominent person in the Vineyard (Feb., p. 36; Mar., pages 26-27).

But several published writings show this criticism to be incorrect. In his book on doctrine and Christian growth, Wimber writes,

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\text{Christ uniquely takes our place (he is our substitute, John 11:50; 1 Tim. 2:6), enduring God’s wrath for us. Jesus... represents us on the cross (2 Cor. 5:14), so that as we identify with him, the benefits of his death are applied to us... Propitiation means that at the cross the wrath of God is turned away from human beings, due to the substitutionary offering of Christ... The blood of Christ appeases God’s wrath. Romans 3:25... says, “God hath set forth [Jesus] to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past...” Forgiveness through Christ’s atoning sacrifice must be received by faith... When we put our faith in Christ (see Acts 10:43) we become so closely identified with him that his righteousness is credited to us, and we are declared righteous. (John}
\]
Not only does John Wimber believe this, it is also required of all Vineyard pastors. The Association of Vineyard Churches’ Statement of Faith (paragraphs 2 and 5) says,

We believe in the full humanity and deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his virgin birth, in his sinless life, in his substitutionary atonement, in his bodily resurrection...We believe that all men and women are sinners and can only be justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:1-10).

Moreover, John Wimber’s own life shows this accusation to be false. He has personally led many hundreds, and perhaps even thousands, to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. He has a heart that burns with a desire to share the gospel with the lost.

Armstrong claims, “The gospel of grace and the centrality of the cross are missing in the sermons of Wimber and his associates” (June, p. 21). But this is simply not true: The 1990 Spring Catalog of Vineyard Ministries International (Anaheim, CA) carries a 13-tape series of sermons by John Wimber on “The Cross.” The catalog description says,

This series offers a fresh look at the person of Christ and what his life death and resurrection really means to us. John looks at the Father’s, the Son’s and the Spirit’s particular roles in our redemption, as well as the effect of the cross on Satan and his power. As a result of Christ’s death on the cross we have available to us justification, adoption and sanctification by God. This set is meant to enrich your relationship with Christ by enabling you to discover the love and power he has given you through his sacrifice (p. 21).

I can only conclude that Armstrong’s contention, that the cross is missing from Wimber’s sermons, is factually incorrect.

But what evidence did Armstrong base his claim on? First, when Armstrong heard Wimber “teach thousands in a setting where the lost were present” he did not hear a clear statement of “repentance, substitutionary atonement, and free grace” (June, p. 20). But I was at the same meetings Armstrong attended, and the purpose was instruction of Christians, not evangelism. We can believe in the cross without preaching on it at every meeting.

Second, Armstrong said that the Vineyard songbook has only one song in 53 that mentions the cross (June, p. 20). The Vineyard continues to put out about four songbooks a year with various selections of new songs, and I do not know which one Armstrong is referring to. I do know that the main songbook, Worship Songs of the Vineyard (1989), was the one used every session at the Vineyard conference both he and I attended in May, 1990, and I count at least eight songs (out of 125) dealing with Christ’s death for us. For example:

- It’s your blood that cleanses me
- It’s your blood that gives me life
- It’s your blood that took my place
- In redeeming sacrifice
- Washes me whiter than the snow
- My Jesus, God’s precious sacrifice (#61)
You are the worthy one
Lamb that was slain
You bought us with your blood
And with You we'll reign. (#111; see also 41, 42, 64, 84, 94, 119)

A 1990 songbook, *King of Saints*, has a new arrangement of “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” with these words:

Crown Him the Lord of love! Behold His hands and side
Rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified
All hail Redeemer, hail! For Thou hast died for me.
Thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity. (pages 34-35)

The *We Behold You* songbook (1990) includes this Graham Kendrick song:

Come and see, come and see
Come and see the King of love
See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer as he lifts the cruel cross
Lone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill
We worship at your feet where wrath and mercy meet
And a guilty world is washed by love’s pure stream
For us he was made sin, oh, help me take it in
Deep wounds of love cry out “Father, forgive”
I worship, I worship the Lamb who was slain
Come and weep, come and mourn
For your sin that pierced him here
So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail
All our pride, all our greed
All our fallenness and shame
And the Lord has laid the punishment on him. (p. 47)

How can anyone sing these songs and fail to believe in and love the redeeming work of Christ on the cross?

Third, Armstrong quotes a BGC leader, John Marrs, as saying, “The power that actually will sweep people into the kingdom, according to Wimber, is not the invisible Spirit attending the spoken word of God. Rather...the power that makes evangelism effective comes from miracles that accompany the Word, not from the Word itself” (June, 1991).

Neither Armstrong nor the quotation from Marrs gives any evidence to back up this statement. Others have charged Wimber with saying that “miracles, not the Word” will convert people, but Wimber has not written or taught that; he always argues that Jesus’ own ministry combined proclamation of the Word with demonstration of God’s present power in life. It is proclamation of the Word plus demonstration of God’s power, not one or the other, that Wimber is arguing for. “The explanation of the gospel comes with a demonstration of God’s power through signs and wonders” (*Power Evangelism*, p. 35, emphasis mine). To say that Wimber thinks miracles instead of the Word will convert people is directly contrary to what he himself says he believes:

Scripture is effective in bringing people to a personal relationship with Christ. *The word of God generates eternal life*. Peter says, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). *Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the word of God also creates saving faith*. It overcomes unbelief and promotes salvation. (Rom. 10:17) (*Power Points*, p. 42)

Fourth, Armstrong says that “John Wimber’s own testimony of conversion gives no indication of knowledge concerning Christ and His cross,
the atonement, etc.” (Dec., p. 19). But this is also false. Wimber tells how he had gone for weeks to an evangelistic Bible study conducted by Gunner Payne. He says,

Over a three-month period I had learned a lot about Christ and the cross I could have passed an elementary exam on the atonement. But I did not understand that I was a sinner. I thought I was a good guy.

Then one night in the Bible study John’s wife Carol decided to pray to accept Christ.

Soon she was weeping and sobbing repeatedly, “I’m sorry for my sin.” …Then it struck me. Carol was praying to a Person, to a God who could hear her…. In a flash the cross made personal sense to me. Suddenly I knew… I had hurt God’s feelings. He loved me, and in his love for me he sent Jesus. But I had turned away from that love… I was a sinner, desperately in need of the cross. (Power Points, pages 115-16)

Finally, Armstrong points to an article in an Australian journal, The Briefing, concerning Wimber’s associate, Jack Deere. According to this article, Deere admits that he does not know what the gospel is, but he thinks it has something to do with casting out demons and healing. The source of this claim is a private conversation in March, 1990, between Deere and one man, Graham Banister, who gave the information to The Briefing. Armstrong quotes this man’s comments at length (June, p. 21).

I have talked to Jack Deere about this conversation. He says that Banister stopped him outside the auditorium after a seminar he had taught and asked if he could summarize the gospel. This was after Banister had been so persistently contentious and discourteous toward Deere in two days of previous sessions that several people in the seminars had expressed considerable frustration toward him. Deere was late for another meeting but stopped and said that the gospel is summarized in passages like 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 which says that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and that he was raised on the third day. He also emphasized that we are justified by faith alone in the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. But then the conversation turned to what Jesus preached in Matthew 4:23 and 9:35, where it says he went about preaching “the gospel of the kingdom.” Deere said he did not think that at that time that Jesus’ message included teaching about his death and resurrection, because Jesus does not begin to teach his disciples that until Matthew 16:21.

Deere said to Banister that he was not sure about exactly what the content was to Jesus’ early preaching about the kingdom, but that the Gospels clearly show him healing the sick and casting out demons, and that Jesus’ message probably included the good news of God’s power to triumph over these things. Banister then asked if the gospel included any-
thing else. In a hurry and late for another meeting, Deere repeated that the gospel that saves us is the good news of the substitutionary atonement of Christ which we receive by faith. But as to the content of Jesus’ preaching in Matthew 4:23 and 9:35, he wasn’t sure, and he wasn’t prepared to say anything more at that point. Later, Banister told The Briefing that Jack Deere was not sure what the gospel was, but he thought it included something about demons and healing.*

What are we to make of these different reports? Is it just Deere’s word against this other man’s? Not quite, for two reasons. First, Deere’s previous and subsequent ministry shows clearly what he believes. For twelve years he was a Professor of Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he was in agreement with their very sound statement of faith on salvation by faith alone and the substitutionary death of Christ. He had taught publicly on the atonement as recently as 15 months before that conversation and has notes and tapes of that teaching. And he subsequently has affirmed his clear belief in the atonement and in the simple gospel of faith in Christ and has preached on these truths. Is it likely that for fourteen years before this conversation and immediately afterward he would believe these things but then deny them in a hurried conversation in Australia?

Second, the Bible gives us clear instructions on what to do when a single witness brings an accusation against a church leader: “Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19). This is to protect church leaders from unfounded attacks by single individuals when there is no other evidence. The Briefing should never have published this accusation by a single man concerning a private conversation, because in so doing it violated 1 Timothy 5:19. And John Armstrong and The Standard should never have picked up this unsubstantiated report and passed it on to thousands of additional people. A respected church leader has been “tried and convicted” in the court of public opinion on the unsubstantiated testimony of only one witness. Both publications have violated the clear directive of 1 Timothy 5:19, and it seems to me that both publications, and John Armstrong owe Dr. Deere a retraction and an apology.

I have written at some length about this first criticism of the Vineyard, concerning preaching of the gospel, because I take it very seriously. Perhaps John Armstrong thought it was true because he did not have access to all of the materials I have quoted in this article. But in light of the evidence given above, it seems evident that this first criticism is materially false. To clear the record, it would be very appropriate for him to withdraw that criticism in a statement in The Standard.

* For a complete response to The Briefing, see Vineyard Position Paper #2, "The Vineyard’s Response to The Briefing." (April 1992)
(2) Openness To Criticism

John Armstrong says, "Wimber...will listen only to those ministering in signs and wonders" (April, 1991, The Standard, p. 30). But this has never been true of Wimber. For example, the March 19, 1990 issue of Christianity Today carried a ten-page article (pages 24-35) summarizing a day-long panel discussion on the Holy Spirit’s power between John Wimber and six other evangelical leaders: Charles Ryrie, J. I. Packer, Stuart Briscoe, Timothy Warner, Russell Spittler, and Kenneth Kantzer (former editor of Christianity Today and former Academic Dean at Trinity Seminary). Dr. Kantzer himself wrote about that day, “John Wimber proved to be a kindly, jovial grandfather, more eager to listen and learn than to argue” (CT, Mar. 19, 1990, p. 13). Personally, from the day I met him in 1988, I have found John Wimber to be genuinely open to criticism and correction, and eager to hear and change if in any way he is being unfaithful to Scripture.

It is true that John Wimber said at a pastor’s conference in 1989, “I’ve decided I’ll never answer another spectator’s question.” But that was after ten years of patiently dialoging with critics, some of whom simply wanted to be “spectators” to criticize his ministry, and Wimber realized he was getting sidetracked from the positive teaching and ministry God had called him to. So for the last two years, Wimber has not responded to hostile criticism, and has discouraged his associates from responding, mainly in order to try to avoid contentious disputes.

During that time, several critical and inaccurate reports on the Vineyard were published, and then they began to quote one another and escalate in intensity. With still no response from Wimber or others in the Vineyard movement, many people accepted these reports as true.

Finally, at a pastors’ conference in Denver on August 13, 1991, Wimber announced that he had decided his previous policy was too restrictive and that he or others in Vineyard leadership would respond to defend their ministry and integrity when they felt they were misrepresented or falsely accused. I am glad for this and hope it will clear up some misunderstanding.

* For a fuller explanation of his change, see Vineyard Position Paper #1 (April 1992) "Why I Respond To Criticism."
(3) Exalting Experience Over Scripture And Sound Doctrine

John Armstrong writes, "Wimber... repeatedly ridicules the written Scriptures as the ‘sole and final authority for all faith and practice’" (Feb., p. 38), and, "John Wimber repeatedly belittles rational revelation and prefers to lift up experience" (July, p. 20).

Next to the charge of not preaching a biblical gospel, which I treated in the previous article, I consider this the most serious charge which Armstrong has levelled against the Vineyard. But does Wimber ridicule and belittle Scripture?

Armstrong quotes no examples of Wimber ridiculing or belittling Scripture. In many hours of conversations and meetings, I have never heard anything from Wimber but the highest respect and reverence for Scripture. In fact, it was obedience to the Bible that first got him started in praying for people to be healed: "Soon I was praying for the sick, not because I had seen the sick healed but because that was what Scripture teaches Christians to do" (Power Evangelism, pages 42-43).

Writing about his views of Scripture, Wimber says,

"Scripture will never deceive us, never lead us astray. It is wholly trustworthy and wholly reliable. It contains no mistakes and is incapable of error. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), so his word will not mislead us. (Power Points, p. 38)"

"What the Bible says, God says....the Bible is wholly true, a trustworthy authority and guide in all matters of faith and practice.... The Bible is fully inspired in all its parts.... Inspiration extends to the words of Scripture themselves, and not only to the ideas contained in Scripture. (pages 38-39)"

"...no modern revelations from God are to be placed on a level equal to Scripture in authority. In other words, any source of "revelation" that contradicts or exalts itself above Scripture is to be rejected. (Deut. 13:1-5; Gal. 1:8-9) (p. 40)"

John Wimber does not ridicule and belittle Scripture. He honors it, believes it, and seeks daily to obey it. He says,

"The Bible is unlike any other book. It is a collection of incredible love letters from God, telling us about our relationship with him. Small wonder that we are called to be men and women of "The Book," meditating daily on God’s word and allowing it to transform our minds, hearts, souls, and actions. (Power Points, p. 51)"

But does Wimber exalt experience over Scripture and sound doctrine? Armstrong says, in his criticism of the Vineyard, “Experience will displace biblical authority, not in theory but in practice, every time” (Mar., p. 28). I found this hard to understand, because earlier in the same article Armstrong had reported that Wimber had publicly disciplined the leaders of the Kansas City Fellowship for their abuse of the gift of prophecy: Wimber was disciplining them for exalting experience over Scripture, and Mike Bickle, the pastor of that
church, publicly repented and accepted the discipline. How is it that Armstrong can say that experience will displace biblical authority “every time”?

On the contrary Wimber says,

...some people believe mystical experience or private revelation to be equal to or superior to Scripture. This is dangerous, because “truth” that is determined by an inner revelation lies outside the scope of objective restraints...Personal experience and private revelation need the checks and guidance that only the Bible can provide. (Power Points, p. 41)

Now Armstrong may object that Wimber says this but he does not really put it into practice. But anyone familiar with the Vineyard knows that to be false. The Vineyard magazine, Equipping the Saints, has had many articles warning people never to exalt experience over Scripture, whether in the gift of prophecy, or in guidance, or in worship, or in using any other spiritual gift.

Armstrong further says the Vineyard is “an overly anti-rationalistic movement” that is “likely to grow more mystical over time” (Dec., p. 19). He warns it is “taking the church into further forms of mysticism that discourage careful biblical doctrine,” and says it has an “anti-rational perspective on the work of the Spirit and of Christian experience.” He cautions, “To attack careful, critical and rational thought with such abandon will only create further excesses” (Dec., p. 20).

But is the Vineyard against reason, and does it downplay knowledge of Scripture?

John Wimber has already published three books that are filled with explanation and application of Scripture. Vineyard pastors George Mallone and Don Williams have published books with InterVarsity Press and other publishers. Other members of Vineyard churches are actively writing about Scripture and doctrine: psychiatrist John White, a member of a Vineyard church, has published several books on the Christian life, including Parents in Pain, Eros Defiled, The Fight, and Healing the Wounded. Richard Foster has published the widely-used book, Celebration of Discipline. Dr. Walter Bodine chairs the Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew unit for the Society of Biblical Literature and has published a technical book on the Greek text of Judges. Dr. Peter Davids has published major commentaries on James and 1 Peter. Dr. Jack Deere is a former Professor of Old Testament at Dallas Seminary. I myself am actively teaching and writing in the fields of systematic theology and ethics.

What I have appreciated about the Vineyard is that it combines faithfulness to Scripture with a healthy emphasis on experiencing the power and presence of God every day in our lives.

These are not the marks of a movement that is anti-intellectual or anti-doctrine or anti-rational.

Here I may add a personal word. What I have appreciated about the Vineyard is that it combines faithfulness to Scripture with a healthy emphasis on experiencing the power and presence of God every day in our lives. I will not deny that the Vineyard places an emphasis on experience—it does: on an experience of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Never in my life
have I experienced such frequent awareness of God’s presence as I do each Sunday in worship and at small home group meetings during the week.

Recently my wife and I went with some friends to pray for a sick child. We planned to stay for an hour, but the prayer time lasted for two and a half hours as it moved from prayer for the child to prayers of confession of sin and repentance and tears. No one “exalted experience over Scripture,” but passages of Scripture were frequently read throughout the evening. I loved that experience because it brought me closer to God, and I love to be in his presence. I think the Vineyard has a healthy, balanced emphasis on experience - experience of God himself. But the claim that it is “anti-rational” is simply not true.
Armstrong does not quote any Vineyard publication to show that there is unorthodox doctrine in the movement. Rather, several times he uses a logical fallacy known as “guilt by association.” In “guilt by association,” you argue in the following way:

Armstrong does not quote any Vineyard publication to show that there is unorthodox doctrine in the movement.

Wagner has a stronger “whatever works” emphasis than Wimber: I have seen John Wimber publicly disagree with Peter Wagner at length in an academic seminar, precisely over the issue of whether an “experience” was really justified by Scripture.

Another example of guilt by association occurred in the companion article “Deceiving Appearances: Vineyard-style diversion squelched revival in this church” (Feb., 1991). There a pastor who is now in the BGC tells how a revival in his former church was stopped by a divisive charismatic associate pastor who left the church and took 30 others with him. What the article does not make plain is that the associate pastor had nothing to do with the Vineyard! Moreover, the church where the split happened was not even a BGC church. To me, this seems very unfair.

When John Wimber publicly says “I am not a charismatic; I am a conservative evangelical,” and when he has spoken and written for years about his attempts to correct what he sees as abuses in the charismatic movement, then it seems to be dishonest journalism for The Standard to label just any divisive charismatic split as a “Vineyard-style diversion.” This is simply guilt by association.
Similarly, Armstrong says that Vineyard member Paul Cain, who has a ministry today using the gift of prophecy, “was an associate of the late William Branham, a healer/evangelist of 35 years ago, whose ministry ended in disgrace and whose theology consistently was anti-Trinitarian” (Mar., p. 28). But Armstrong fails to mention that Paul Cain (who is now 62) was in his 20s when he worked with Branham on a limited basis, and stopped working with him before Branham fell into anti-Trinitarian error. Cain has publicly dissociated himself from any of Branham’s later ministry or teaching. In the Fall, 1990, issue of *Equipping the Saints*, Paul Cain said of Branham, “He never spoke against the Trinity in the days that I knew him.... It wasn’t until apparently the latter days of his life that he...felt that the Trinity doctrine had been invented by what he considered an apostate church” (p. 9). So Armstrong’s criticism here again is guilt by association that does not give the reader the historical facts needed to see that the insinuations of false doctrine are incorrect.

Most troubling of all are Armstrong’s allusions to the New Age Movement, implying that Wimber is somehow connected with New Age teaching. Because C. Peter Wagner once used the word “aura” to refer to a visible evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work surrounding someone, Armstrong said, “This is very distinctly ‘New Age’ terminology!” (Jan., p. 30). He also said that a 1981 statement by Wimber on miracles used “New Age type language” (Feb., p. 38).

What Armstrong fails to mention is that an entire issue of the Vineyard magazine *Equipping the Saints* was devoted to the topic, “Confronting the New Age” (Fall, 1988). It included an article on “Confronting the New Age Counterfeit” by Douglas Groothuis, author of *Unmasking the New Age and Confronting the New Age*, an article contrasting New Age and biblical worldviews by Brooks Alexander and Robert Burrows of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, a testimony by Charles Strohmer, who had converted from the New Age to Christianity, and an article by John Wimber on biblical ways to defend against New Age movements in the church. The Vineyard is aggressively opposed to New Age deception, and has taken steps to inform people of the danger. Perhaps Armstrong should have mentioned this before employing the accusation of guilt by association.

The Vineyard is aggressively opposed to New Age deception, and has taken steps to inform people of the danger. Perhaps Armstrong should have mentioned this before employing the accusation of guilt by association.

The Vineyard does not hold to or teach unorthodox doctrine. It holds to historic Christian orthodoxy, and is solidly “conservative evangelical” in its doctrine.
Armstrong gives the impression that Vineyard services are loud, disorderly, and irrational. He says that “power encounters” are believed to be “normative in the life of the church” and “are to be treated as part of the regular service of worship” (Nov., p. 26). His description of such events is: “The Holy Spirit is said to come and heal multitudes, give prophetic revelations, and manifest Himself in various physical and extremely non-rational ways, such as shrieks, screaming, uncontrollable laughter, and fainting” (Nov., p. 26). He also mentions “violent trembling..., groaning of a kind which I have heard previously only in funerals, shrieking, screaming, ‘holy laughing’ or ‘holy weeping,’ and epileptic type seizures and fainting fits where people were laid out on the floor for long periods of time” (Dec., p. 20).

Three things trouble me about this report. First, he compares this to part of a “liturgical form” (Nov., p. 26), as though it were a manufactured and routine thing in Vineyard services. Second, he reports the events in emotion-laden, pejorative terms. Third, he makes no attempt to evaluate the results of these events in the lives of the people they are happening to.

Many Vineyard services have no public occurrences of this type. In our own church, we have about 30 minutes of worship songs, celebrate the Lord’s Supper, have announcements and an offering, hear a 30-40 minute sermon, and dismiss. People who want prayer for specific needs can come to the front after the service. The entire service is orderly and reverent, and, after visiting several Vineyard churches in different parts of the country over the past two years, I think we are typical of what happens in Vineyards generally. By contrast, it is significant that John Armstrong does not mention even once having visited a Sunday service at any Vineyard church, nor does he mention once talking with any Vineyard pastor, yet he writes at length about what goes on in Vineyard services and Vineyard churches.

But I agree that sometimes at Vineyard services there are unusual evidences of what I see as the Holy Spirit’s work. John Armstrong and I attended the same meetings where most of these things he reports happened—a conference of over 2,000 people in Villa Park, Illinois, in May of 1990. On at least two evenings John Wimber preached, then prayed at the end. He asked the Holy Spirit to come and do his work in people’s lives, and then he was silent.

One night, after a few minutes, many people began laughing joyously, including a good friend who was sitting near us. Soon she was laughing so hard she literally fell off her seat. She got up again and continued laughing and fell off again. It really seemed “uncontrollable” for perhaps five or ten minutes. She is anything but an irrational person: she works for a large corporation and negotiates multi-million dollar contracts. But what happened to her? Later, she said that it was a very healing experience, because the Lord at that moment lifted a burden of guilt and sorrow that
she had felt for many years - she is a single mother who had experienced an abusive marriage and a painful divorce ten years previously, and has had many tears in her life. In fact, she said that in the week preceding that moment, God had three times impressed on her mind Psalm 126:5, “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.” Later when she was thinking about what had happened she went back to the Psalm that had been on her mind and read verse 2: “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy,” and she saw that evening as the fulfillment of that verse in her life.

Other people were affected in other ways. Some were weeping openly, either in repentance for sin or in heartfelt prayers of intercession for others. But this is hardly something to criticize, for our Savior himself wept and cried out when he prayed: “In the days of his flesh Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear” (Heb. 5:7).

What about the trembling? It happened to our own pastor. He is a godly, mature Christian, a former Inter-Varsity president at a major university, and an honors student at Trinity Seminary. He had gone forward for prayer at the end of one service and suddenly began to feel an overwhelming sense of God’s presence: it was so strong that he stood there with his arms and legs literally shaking for at least ten minutes. But all he could think about was the strong presence of God. He told me later that he thinks he could have stopped shaking if he had exerted all his will power, but he really didn’t want to, because the trembling seemed so right in the presence of Almighty God. I stood beside him and prayed quietly for him while this was happening, and it did not seem to me either contrived or spiritually harmful, but right. Once again, I find it hard to criticize: Psalm 96:9 tells us, “Worship the Lord in holy array; tremble before him, all the earth!” A similar strong awareness of God’s presence was mentioned by some who crumpled to the floor and lay there in joyful, reverent silence (compare 1 Kings 8:11 [NASB, RSV, KJV], where the priests were unable to stand because of the presence of the Lord).

On the other hand, I seriously object to John Armstrong’s inclusion of “shrieks” and “epileptic type fits” with these other phenomena, and his implying that people in the Vineyard automatically take these as manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is demons who

John Armstrong does not mention even once having visited a Sunday service at any Vineyard church, nor does he mention once talking with any Vineyard pastor, yet he writes at length about what goes on in Vineyard services and Vineyard churches.
cause shrieks and fits in the Gospels: “And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him” (Mark 1:26). If something like this does happen, ministry team members are taught to lead the person to another room so as not to make a public spectacle, and there to rebuke the demon causing the problem. I cannot say this doesn’t happen, for it does happen occasionally, but I think it is handled in an orderly way. And I think it is not entirely surprising that demons would cry out when a strong sense of the presence of God descends on a meeting.

What are we to make of these phenomena? Certainly we are not to try to manufacture them by our own will power or any kind of manipulation. But what if they occur in response to a quiet prayer that the Holy Spirit would come and do his work? Here I agree in part with what Armstrong says: “If dramatic interruptions do occur, and they will in revivals, we must certainly not be so naive as to conclude that this is surely the evidence that the Holy Spirit had done this!” (Dec., p. 20, emphasis mine). I agree, but I would add, “We must not automatically conclude that the Holy Spirit has not done this either!” And the history of the church indicates that phenomena like this have accompanied revivals in the past. In fact, Armstrong says, “Sitting near the front of Vineyard meetings night after night I witnessed phenomena only previously read about in texts recording the history of previous revivals.”

Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit” (Matt. 7:16-17). In the instances like this that I have seen in the Vineyard, in several cases with people whom I have known for years, the fruits of these events have been unquestionably positive—repentance, joy in the Lord, deepened prayer and worship, and a stronger sense of God’s presence. Very often there has been some significant moral change, some additional growth in sanctification. I can only conclude that it has been a genuine work of the Holy Spirit.
In the area of prophecy, John Armstrong differs with my book, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Crossway, 1988), especially with the way it is worked out in practice. I argue that the gift of prophecy in the New Testament consists of “reporting something God spontaneously brings to mind.” Someone giving a prophecy may say something like, “I think the Lord is putting on my mind a need for us to pray for Tom right now” (and later you discover that Tom was in an auto accident just at that time and needed prayer).

I saw another example very recently: someone in a prayer group said, “While we were praying I saw a picture in my mind of two angry faces talking, and it looked like fire was coming out of their mouths.” Two people in the group (including the person who saw the picture!) said they thought that was for them, and confessed that they had been guilty of gossip and spreading dissension in some things they had said to others in the room. A church elder who was present then read James 3:5, “So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!” There was a beautiful time of repentance and forgiveness, with tears.

Such “prophecies” are not equal to Scripture in authority, because they can have mistakes that enter when the speaker is unsure of what God has brought to mind, or perhaps adds his or her own interpretation to it. Therefore Paul says, “Do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:20-21; compare 1 Cor. 14:29-33, 36-40; 11:5; Acts 2:17-18; 21:4, 9-11, 33; 22:29). So prophecy has the same kind of authority as spiritual counsel or advice from a friend: it can be very helpful, but we are to test it for conformity to Scripture and to the rest of what we know to be true. The mistakes made with this gift in the history of the church have come because people have either given prophecy too much authority (and thought it cannot be wrong) or rejected the gift altogether.

Armstrong objects that this challenges the sufficiency of Scripture. He says, “The real issue remains the same. Do we have complete and full confidence in the finality, sufficiency, and perspicuity (plainness or clarity) of the written Scripture in the Old and New Testaments?” (Mar., p. 28). He says, “The authority of Scripture is practically undermined” (July, p. 20). He asks, “Why then are these claims to new revelations so dangerous? Because I cannot understand why we need them when they are only fallible hunches at best!” (July, p. 21).

But these questions suggest that Armstrong may not have grasped what I am trying to say about prophecy. He tries to push prophecy either into the category of Scripture or the category of mere human hunches, but it is neither. It is God spontaneously bringing something to mind. Why do we need it? Because it can bring to mind more facts about a situation, facts we had forgotten or were not aware of. Scripture tells me I should pray; it does not tell me that Tom is in need of prayer right now. Scripture tells me gossip is wrong.
it does not tell me that two people in the room have been gossiping (compare 1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Another example comes from Paul Cain, whom Armstrong criticizes for his use of prophecy. When I talked with Paul Cain once, after a few minutes he said, “Do you know someone named Robert [not his real name] who has moved out of the area and with whom you no longer communicate as you I used to?” I immediately thought of a friend named Robert who always wanted me to call him “Robert,” not Bob - he had moved across the country six months previously. I described him briefly. Paul Cain said, “I think if you would call him there would be some healing in your relationship.” I was surprised, but phoned Robert that afternoon. I discovered that he had some anger against me because of some earlier conversations, but I had been completely unaware of it. He said, “I’ve been thinking during the last week that I needed to write or call you about this.”

There was reconciliation in our relationship during that phone call.

To say that such use of prophecy is “dangerous” (July, p. 21) is not an adequate criticism, because some things that are right are dangerous, at least in some sense. Missionary work is dangerous. Driving a car is dangerous. If we define “dangerous” to mean “something might go wrong,” then we can criticize anything that anybody might do as “dangerous,” and it just becomes an all-purpose criticism when we have no specific abuse to point to. A better approach with respect to the use of prophecy is to ask, “Is it in accordance with Scripture?” and “Have adequate steps been taken to guard against the dangers of abuse?” I think that John Wimber has taken considerable care, with extensive teaching and several articles in Equipping the Saints, to guard against abuse and avoid the mistakes of previous generations: both the mistake of equating this gift with Scripture, and the mistake of forbidding the gift altogether.
Armstrong says, “Vineyard theology seems to see Satan as more powerful than the Word of God would lead us to understand” (July, p. 22). By contrast, Wimber writes, “What every Christian needs to know about spiritual warfare is that while Satan is strong, Christ is stronger. We have nothing to fear from Satan or demons as long as we live faithfully and righteously, never backing down when challenged by evil” (*Power Healing*, p. 103).

Moreover, the book review by George Van Alstine criticizes Wimber by saying, “The discerner of demons finds them in more and more surprising places until virtually everything undesirable is defined as demonic.... danger is around the corner if we begin redefining everything in terms of demon possession and deliverance” (Jan., p. 33). A similar accusation is in the section heading “Demons Under Every Rock,” found in Armstrong’s last article (July, p. 22).

But these are inaccurate representations of Wimber’s teaching. He says, “Scripture makes a distinction between natural and demonic causes of physical and mental illness” (*Power Healing*, p. 108), and he says, “This is not to imply that these problems are always or even frequently caused by demons, only that their cause may be from the influence of demons. And their cause may be complex, a combination involving psychological, physical, and demonic factors” (*Power Healing*, p. 102). Yes, the Vineyard does teach about demons and minister to people who have been under demonic attack. But it does not seem to me that such ministry is imbalanced or unbiblical. To say that the Vineyard sees “demons under every rock” is simply untrue.
Armstrong expresses doubts that many genuine healings occur in Vineyard meetings. He writes that Wimber “could not offer one case of cure” when asked about praying for children with Down’s syndrome (Jan., 1991). He then quotes an Australian physician, Dr. Philip Selden, who had investigated some people who had claimed healing and reported, “As I suspected, most of the conditions which were prayed over were in the psychosomatic, trivial, or medically difficult to document categories...” (Jan., 1991).

But Armstrong’s data base is very limited: a question about one extremely serious disease and one physician’s personal conversations with some people. By contrast, Wimber says they keep detailed records of people prayed for by ministry teams at the Anaheim Vineyard. During 1986, for example, “32% of all people prayed for were completely healed, while overall 86% showed evidence of some significant healing” (Power Healing, p. 188). The book reports dozens of case histories, and has an appendix with several specific personal testimonies of God’s healing power (pages 248-69).

More significantly, Armstrong fails to mention the book-length academic investigation of 1,890 people who attended one of Wimber’s conferences in Harrogate, England, in 1986. The book is Healing: Fiction, Fantasy, or Fact? (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), by Dr. David C. Lewis. The author is a social anthropologist with degrees from Cambridge and Manchester who prepared a detailed questionnaire that people filled out during the conference, and then followed up some randomly selected cases several months later. Of 862 cases of prayer for physical healing, 32% (or 279) reported a “great deal” of healing or “total healing.” Another 26% (or 222) reported a “fair amount” of healing. The remaining 42% (or 366) reported “little” or “no healing” (pages 21-22). Many case studies are reported in detail, in several instances with medical reports quoted at length. All the physical problems prayed for are listed in a detailed appendix (pages 276-283). (These physical problems are distinguished from prayer for spiritual problems such as inner healing and deliverance, which are tabulated separately by Dr. Lewis.)

On a more personal level, I know it is just not true to say that prayer for healing in Vineyard churches is largely ineffective. In our own church we have seen God answer prayer in remarkable ways. In our own church we have seen God answer prayer in remarkable ways. At least two cases of migraine headaches that had required medical attention for years were instantly healed and have not returned. A mother in her 35th week of pregnancy requested prayer for her baby, who was in breech position, and when one of our elders (a research chemist) laid his hand on her stomach and began to pray, the baby started to squirm vigorously; the next morning an ultrasound confirmed that the baby had turned. Severe bronchial congestion that had not responded to the doctor’s increasingly strong prescriptions was cleared up in a moment as we prayed. A broken forearm was x-
rayed, then prayed for, then put in a cast; three weeks later an x-ray showed no trace of the previous break, which should have taken six weeks to heal. Several couples unable to have children have conceived after receiving prayer.

Now critics may say, These are not like the miracles of Jesus. You are not seeing the dead raised, the lame walking, the blind restored to sight.” I agree, and I do not know why we are not seeing more remarkable healings such as these: I must leave that in God’s hands. What I do know is that contact with John Wimber and the Vineyard has given me great encouragement to pray for the sick, and I think in the last two years I have learned much about how to pray for healing from listening to and being with people who have extensive ministry experience in this area.

Armstrong objects, “In all this, there is the assumption, unproven by Scripture I might add, that Jesus trained His disciples in the methodologies of signs and wonders” (Jan., p. 30). But I respond that we today do assume that evangelism can be learned from spending time with an experienced evangelist; preaching can be learned from sitting under and being taught by an experienced preacher; counseling can be learned from a skilled counselor. Why can we not learn skills in prayer for healing and spiritual warfare from those who have had many years of experience in these things and have seen God’s hand of blessing on their ministry?

Of course, someone might say that in healing we depend totally on God to give any success to our efforts— but is not the same true of evangelism and preaching and counseling as well? All of it must be the Holy Spirit’s work if there is to be any genuine result.

If I were to offer my own conclusion, as an alternative to John Armstrong’s evaluation, it would be that God has used John Wimber to bring a significant reawakening of the gift of healing to many parts of the church today. I think that his overall teaching and practice regarding healing is biblical and God-honoring. But rather than asking people to take my word for it, or John Armstrong’s, I would encourage people to read Wimber’s book Power Healing for themselves and come to their own conclusions.

Rather than asking people to take my word for it, or John Armstrong’s, I would encourage people to read Wimber’s book Power Healing for themselves and come to their own conclusions.
Conclusion

In the May issue, John Armstrong did list several positive emphases of the Vineyard: (1) An emphasis on the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit. (2) An emphasis on fellowship. (3) The stress on every-member ministry. (4) An emphasis on praise. (5) An emphasis on healing (May, pages 21-22). I appreciate this, and it makes me think that theologically perhaps John Armstrong and I are not that far apart on many of these issues.

Moreover, some of the areas where I have differed with him have been due to the fact that he did not have complete information about the Vineyard and its teachings, and also to the fact that for the last two years other people have published some critical articles that misrepresented the Vineyard, and John Wimber has not given any response to clear up the record, so Armstrong may have simply assumed that these other articles were accurate.

In addition, the Vineyard movement has grown rapidly in 14 years, and John Wimber himself has grown in doctrinal maturity and practical wisdom during that time, so that John Armstrong may have been relying on some of Wimber’s earlier teachings and actions that were not well considered, but that have now been corrected.

Nevertheless, the entire series of articles troubled me for several reasons. First, a number of statements in them simply were not true. They “bore false witness” against a Christian brother, because they gave readers a factually inaccurate picture of the Vineyard and John Wimber, I have detailed those statements above.

Second, the articles were unlike the Baptist General Conference in tone and content: The BGC has not been a polemic, contentious denomination. It has stood firmly for biblical truth, but I don’t think ever before has any publication in the BGC issued a 10-month series of articles filled with prolonged criticism of another Christian denomination or Christian leader.

In fact, I don’t know of any denomination within evangelical Christianity that has used its official journal to mount such a sustained attack on another Christian denomination or organization. Is this the pattern we want to establish within evangelicalism? Others may differ with my assessment, but personally I am embarrassed that a wonderful denomination in which I was ordained, and which I still love, has published these articles.

Third, the articles oppose what I am convinced is a genuine and powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the world today. John Wimber began with 50 people in a new church in 1977, and the Vineyard now numbers over 500 churches and around 100,000 members - remarkable growth in 14 years. The Anaheim Vineyard, where John Wimber is pastor, now numbers over 5,000. But far more significant than that are the countless people in over 50 countries who have been touched by John Wimber’s conferences and books. There have been thousands of new Christians brought into the kingdom, and hundreds of non-Vineyard churches have experienced a reawakening of evangelism, a
new expectation of seeing God work in miraculous ways to confirm the proclamation of the gospel, a renewed Christ-centeredness and genuineness in worship, a strengthened ministry of prayer for healing, and an “every member” emphasis on the use of spiritual gifts. And this is to say nothing of the thousands of people—including my wife and myself, and almost every family who has been in our church for more than a few weeks—to whom God has given significant degrees of physical and emotional healing through Vineyard ministry. This can only be a work of the Holy Spirit exalting Jesus as risen Lord and Savior. To speak in prolonged opposition to a work that is doctrinally sound and is bearing such good fruit seems to me to be very unwise.
Don Anderson, the editor of *The Standard* (the journal of the Baptist General Conference), has written a 38 page document (dated Feb. 14, 1992) in which he replied to my article, “The Vineyard and John Wimber: A More Positive View.” I am writing to give an evaluation of that document. (The document takes the form of a 4-page letter to Kevin Springer, the editor of *Equipping the Saints*, and an additional 34-page critique of my paper.)

I will treat Anderson’s document under five categories:

**PART I: General Analysis**

1. Charges of doctrinal error without any quotations of error.
2. Charges of doctrinal error by logical deduction instead of quotation.
3. Charges of duplicity against John Wimber.

**PART II: Specific Questions About John Armstrong’s Articles**

5. Responses to my claims of inaccuracy or misrepresentation in the articles by John Armstrong.

**PART I: GENERAL ANALYSIS**

1. **Charges Of Doctrinal Error Without Any Quotations Of Error**

I think the most striking thing about this paper is how frequently it charges John Wimber with doctrinal errors, not by quoting any erroneous teaching Wimber has given, but simply by quoting other people who say that Wimber teaches one error or another. Here’s a sample of the things this paper accuses Wimber of, without any quotes showing that he teaches or believes these things:

Page 1: “Sinners’ resistance to the gospel message is removed by encounters that transcend the mind, not by illumination of the mind as it receives the truth” (quoting Walter Chantry).

Page 2: “Having indicated his confidence is turned aside from the Word of God, it is not surprising that Wimber belittles rational truth” (quoting Walter Chantry).

Page 3: “People can be saved by seeing supposed signs and wonders before they hear the gospel” (quoting Walter Chantry).

Page 4: “The power that will actually sweep people into the kingdom, he says, is not the invisible Spirit attending the spoken Word of God as it comes to people’s hearts through the intellect” (quoting John Marrs).

Page 8: “Wimber... repeatedly ridicules the written Scriptures as the ‘final authority for all faith and practice.’” And “Wimber con-
tinually belittles rational revelation prefers to lift up experience” (quoting John Armstrong).

Page 9: “There is no difference between the words and works of Jesus. The works have exactly the same message as words” (quoting Ken Sarels).

Page 9: “Wimber sets aside God’s Word as authoritative.”

Page 12: Jack Deere claims that: “ultimately this doctrine [the sufficiency of Scripture] is demonic even [though] Christian theologians have been used to perfect it” (quoting Mark Thompson).

Page 30: “Wimber gives a picture of Jesus struggling with a lack of faith.”

Page 31: “Nearly all Third Wavers speak of theology as inherently divorced from experience” (quoting John MacArthur).

My point in this section is a very simple one: These are accusations without supporting quotations. Anderson repeatedly quotes Wimber’s critics in this paper, showing that these critics have accused Wimber of many false teachings. But in none of these cases is there any quotation from Wimber himself endorsing these false teachings.

In fact, quotations from Wimber’s writings explicitly deny most or all of these things; but that is not my point here: my point is only to say that charging someone with doctrinal error without quoting any place where the person affirms that error simply proves nothing. More than that, it carries the strong possibility of wrongfully damaging a person’s reputation by accusing him of doctrines he does not hold.

2. **Charges Of Doctrinal Error By Logical Deduction Instead Of Quotation**

The paper often charges John Wimber with false doctrine in another way, by using the following procedure:

1. Quote something that Wimber has said.

2. Draw a “logical deduction” from Wimber’s teaching and say that Wimber “must therefore believe” this logical deduction as well.

3. Criticize that logical deduction.

The problem with this procedure is that Wimber does not believe or teach these “logical deductions” that his critics have attempted to force on him. In fact, they are not really logical, because they do not necessarily follow from the things that Wimber believes. It would be more accurate to call them mistaken inferences that critics draw from Wimber’s teaching. Then a further mistake is made when people do not ask Wimber if he actually believes or teaches them but simply go into print accusing him.

The most common form this argument takes in Anderson’s paper is the following:

1. John Wimber believes that signs and wonders (or miracles) should accompany the proclamation of the gospel today.

2. Therefore, John Wimber does not believe in the authority of Scripture (or the power of the gospel, or other important doctrines).

3. Therefore, John Wimber is guilty of theological error.

One clear example is on page 3. Anderson says,

Wimber (and Springer) could write a hundred books such as *Power Points* and issue a thousand tapes on the gospel and the cross, but as long as Wimber continues to believe, to teach and to practice that 1) the gospel is authenticated by supposed signs and wonders, and 2) people can be saved by seeing such signs and wonders, and 3) the experience of salvation comes in the experience of God’s presence as Christians exercise spiritual gifts, Armstrong is fully justified in saying that Wimber lacks “understanding... toward the biblical gospel” and “The gospel of grace and the centrality of the cross are missing in the sermons of Wimber and his associates.”
We should note exactly the force of this paragraph. It says that even if Wimber issued a thousand tapes on the gospel and the cross, it would be fair to say that the gospel of grace and the centrality of the cross are missing in his sermons, as long as he believes that sign and wonders should accompany the gospel.

In analyzing the question whether Jack Deere believes in justification by faith alone, Anderson says,

Deere could issue a hundred tapes on what he believes regarding the Pauline doctrine of justification; if his teaching is qualified by Wimber's kingdom teaching on the power of signs and wonders, his claim to orthodoxy is compromised to a large extent (p. 6).

In other words, even if Deere says and teaches that he believes in justification by faith alone, his teaching about signs and wonders calls into question his belief in justification as well.

Anderson in another place refers to Wimber's "signs and wonders" ministry "which by definition negates much of his preaching" (p.33).

In the other examples that follow, the pattern of argument is the same:

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders today, he does not believe in or preach a biblical gospel. (This is the argument of pages 4-6.)

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders today, we cannot expect him to argue for his views with men of the caliber of Kenneth Kantzer, J. I. Packer, Charles Ryrie, Stuart Briscoe, Timothy Warner, and Russ Spittler. (This is the argument on pages 7-8 in spite of the ten page article in Christianity Today showing that Wimber did exactly that.)

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders today, he does not believe in the authority of God's Word (the argument of pages 8-9).

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders today, he must belittle Scripture (the argument of pages 9-10).

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders today, he has "lost confidence in the Scripture itself" and he flatly denies the sufficiency of Scripture (the argument of p. 11).

Since Wimber affirms the benefit of emotional experiences in worship, he cannot believe in the power of the Word of God to change lives (this is the argument of p. 17).

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders today, he does not believe in the "authority of the written Scripture in spiritual warfare" (the argument of p. 23).

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders, he cannot believe in the power of the gospel to transform lives (the argument of p. 30).

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders, he is not "conservative evangelical" in doctrine (p. 31).

Since Wimber believes in signs and wonders, he is outside Christian orthodoxy (p. 32).

This kind of argument is really at the heart of Don Anderson's paper. He seems convinced that Wimber’s belief in signs and wonders is a false doctrine and has necessary implications that lead to many other false doctrines as well. The problem is that these other accusations simply are not true with John Wimber's own teaching and belief.

How can it be fair journalism to tell people that John Wimber doesn't preach the gospel or the cross when what you really mean is that he thinks that we should expect miracles to accompany the gospel today. These are far different things. If Anderson thinks that a belief in signs and wonders may lead to other doctrinal changes, he is certainly welcome to make that kind of argument. But that argument should be made clear in the interest of fairness and truthfulness.
Moreover, where Wimber has explicitly denied the error that Anderson thinks will result, it is also fair at least to point out that Wimber has denied this error, rather than leading the readers to believe that Wimber has already adopted the wrong teaching Anderson fears.

One other point needs to be made about a belief in signs and wonders: Anderson and others may argue, if they wish, that a belief that signs and wonders should accompany the gospel means that one does not believe in the authority of Scripture, or does not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, or does not believe in the power of the gospel or the power of the cross. But if they argue this, they must also answer this question: Did Jesus and Paul believe that signs and wonders should accompany the preaching of the gospel? And if they did, especially in their own preaching of the gospel, then did Jesus and Paul also deny the authority or sufficiency of Scripture, or did they deny the power of the gospel or the power of the cross?

I mention this only to point out that a belief in signs and wonders accompanying the gospel does not necessarily imply that one denies the power of the gospel or the cross, or the power of Scripture. Nor does it necessarily imply that one holds to any of the other "logical deductions" Anderson uses to try to force false doctrines on Wimber, doctrines which Wimber simply does not hold.

3. Charges Of Duplicity Against John Wimber

Anderson's paper says, "We can never be sure that what Wimber says, he really believes" (letter, p. 2). He speaks of Wimber's "duplicity" (letter, p. 1); he also speaks of Wimber giving two messages: "one for his crowd, and one for those who might examine his orthodoxy" (p. 24).

This is a serious charge, but the only evidence given to support this charge is the fact that Wimber said, "I identify as a 'conservative evangelical' in my theology. I identify myself as something other than that in my practice" (letter, p. 1). If Wimber did say this, I do not think it proves duplicity. He simply is saying that he holds to conservative evangelical doctrines, but his practice of ministry (in the expectation of miraculous answer to prayer, in style of worship, etc.) differ from what has been the style of ministry most common in most evangelical circles. That does not signify any doctrinal difference, and it certainly does not imply dishonesty.

4. New Charges Of Heresy Against John Wimber

In the last section of his paper, Anderson quotes John MacArthur and others who claim that Wimber is unorthodox for saying in 1981 that the Pope was preaching the gospel as clearly as anyone (p. 28, quoting a 1981 unpublished tape), and that he denies Jesus' omniscience because he says that Jesus did not know things and had to ask questions (p. 29).

The statement about the Pope referred to a 1981 speech (made perhaps in Chicago) in which the Pope explicitly called Catholics to come to experience a personal relationship with Christ. Whether Wimber would reaffirm that offhand statement upon further reflection is hard to say without asking him today. But he did affirm that the Pope was calling people to personal faith in Christ, and that he was glad for that. This hardly makes Wimber guilty of heresy, however.

Concerning the question of whether Jesus was omniscient, I think everyone has to give some explanation of Mark 13:32: "But of that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Similarly, Luke 2:52 tells us that "Jesus
increased in wisdom,” and Hebrews 5:8 says that “he learned obedience.” Now I personally would affirm that all three of those verses speak of Jesus’ human nature and do not deny the omniscience that he possessed in his divine nature.

I have not asked Wimber about these verses, and I do not have access to the unpublished tape from 1981 to hear the statement in context. However, I do know that Wimber himself does not deny the omniscience of Christ, but he explicitly affirms the full deity of Christ in Power Points (pages 87-92). He simply does not hold to the heresy that MacArthur and Anderson are trying to pin on him.

In both of these cases, I find it distressing that MacArthur and Anderson will reach back to an unpublished tape of a seminar given in 1981 to bring a charge of unorthodox doctrine against John Wimber. If they want to know what Wimber teaches about these things, there are many published tapes and books, and Wimber himself could be asked what he believes and teaches about these things. I am not sure that any pastor today would like to be charged with false doctrine on the basis of an unpublished tape made of a seminar given eleven years earlier. And it is especially distressing to be accused of false doctrine in a national publication such as MacArthur’s book without having any opportunity to say whether that isolated statement represented what he teaches and believes, or whether, in the context in which it was made, another interpretation is possible.

(Moreover, in 1981, Wimber’s church had only several hundred people in it, and he had no idea that every remark he made would later be scrutinized by scholars looking for some hint of heresy in all of his past statements.)

This leads to another consideration: Anderson’s paper has the tone of a prosecuting attorney attempting to use every possible shred of evidence to prove some kind of wrongdoing or wrong teaching that Wimber has committed in the past. Even at that, and with quotations from at least a dozen critics of Wimber, Anderson comes up with precious little in terms of false teaching.

But should this “prosecuting attorney” approach be the approach of one Christian brother to another? If other Christians want to write an evaluation or critique of Wimber, shouldn’t we at least expect that they will have the fairness to seek to give an accurate summary of what Wimber actually believes and teaches right now, rather than trying to draw possible heretical inferences from isolated statements years in the past?

Wimber has published three books and has many tapes and other articles as well. He has made himself available for extended discussion of his views with evangelical leaders (as the March 19, 1990 issue of Christianity Today reported in its ten page article). And I am sure he is available for conversation with responsible evangelical leaders who want to talk with him about what he believes and teaches. But this eager and intemperate heresy-hunting that has characterized a number of the writings Anderson quotes, and that characterizes Anderson’s paper as well, has gone on far too long.

PART II: SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT JOHN ARMSTRONG’S ARTICLES

5. Don Anderson’s Responses To My Claims Of Inaccuracy Or Misrepresentation In The Articles By John Armstrong

When I wrote my article, “The Vineyard and John Wimber: A More Positive View,” I
not only gave a more positive evaluation of the overall ministry of the Vineyard, but I also pointed out a number of specific inaccuracies or misrepresentations of the Vineyard contained in the earlier articles by John Armstrong. Because of these apparent misrepresentations, Kevin Springer, publications director of Vineyard Ministries International, and editor of *Equipping the Saints*, filed a complaint with the Ethics Committee of the Evangelical Press Association. Much of Anderson’s paper attempts to respond to my claims that there were inaccuracies and misrepresentations in the earlier articles. It is appropriate that I comment briefly on the status of these specific points.

(1) Armstrong’s claim that Wimber does not preach a biblical gospel or preach the cross of Christ (my pages 3-4).

I had pointed out that over a year before Armstrong’s articles, the Vineyard was advertising and distributing a thirteen tape series of sermons by John Wimber on “The Cross.” Don Anderson’s reply to this is to say even if Wimber issued a thousand tapes on the gospel and the cross, because Wimber also believes in signs and wonders today, John Armstrong “is fully justified in saying...” the gospel of grace and the centrality of the cross are missing in the sermons of Wimber and his associates” (p. 3).

We should note carefully what Don Anderson is doing here: He is saying that if John Wimber preaches on the cross and says he believes in the cross of Christ, Don Anderson will not believe that he is preaching on the cross. And he apparently feels fully justified in writing and telling people that Wimber does not preach the gospel or the cross. If reduced to its simplest form, Don Anderson’s argument seems to be this:

I realize that Wimber preaches doctrine A (the cross).

But I disagree with Wimber’s doctrine B (signs and wonders).

Therefore I will tell people that Wimber does not preach doctrine A (the cross), and I feel fully justified in doing so.

But this is simply not a truthful way to carry on a theological argument. If Don Anderson or John Armstrong disagrees with Wimber’s teaching on signs and wonders, they are free to write and speak about their disagreements. But it does not seem to me that their theological disagreement gives them the right to be dishonest when reporting what Wimber preaches. And to say that the gospel and the cross are missing from Wimber’s sermons, in the face of evidence to the contrary, is simply being dishonest. It seems to me that this kind of statement requires that The *Standard* print a correction to it.

(2) Armstrong’s statement that the Vineyard songbook has only one song that mentions the cross (my page 4).

I pointed out that the main Vineyard songbook has at least eight songs out of 125 dealing with Christ’s death for us. Anderson responds that Armstrong’s statement was based on a report he had read of a Wimber meeting in Australia and a collection of songs that was used there (pages 45).

At this point the EPA code of ethics is relevant:

Those responsible for the publication must exercise the utmost care that nothing contrary to the truth is published. Whenever substantive mistakes are made, whatever their origin, they should be conscious of their duty to protect the good name and reputation of others.

Here a substantive mistake has been made, in that readers were wrongly given the impression that the songbook ordinarily used
by the Vineyard seriously underemphasizes songs about Christ’s death for us. The cause of this mistaken information was that John Armstrong simply repeated a statement from another publication without checking it out himself. But the source of the mistake does not really matter here, because the point of the EPA statement is to say that whatever the origin of the mistake, the journal that published it still has a duty “to protect the good name and reputation of others.”

It would seem appropriate for The Standard to correct this mistake.

(3) Armstrong’s quotation of John Marrs as saying that Wimber teaches that the power that makes evangelism effective comes from miracles, not from the Word of God (my page 5).

I pointed out that Wimber has clearly written and taught that the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying the Word of God creates saving faith, and that when miracles accompany the preaching of the Word they do not themselves create faith, but they bear witness to the truth of the Word that is preached (see Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:4).

Don Anderson’s response (pages 45) quotes Wimber’s book, Power Evangelism, but the quotations simply prove that what I wrote was true: Wimber teaches that we should expect miracles to accompany the preaching of the gospel. But he nowhere teaches what John Marrs and John Armstrong attributed to him (that miracles, rather than the Holy Spirit working through the Word, make evangelism effective). The misleading statement in The Standard still requires a correction.

(4) Armstrong’s statement that John Wimber’s testimony of his own conversion gives no indication of knowledge concerning Christ, the cross, or the atonement (my page 6).

I quoted an extensive public statement from Wimber showing that at the time of his conversion he had much knowledge about Christ and the atonement that had come from an evangelistic Bible study that he had attended for several weeks.

Don Anderson responds that my quotation came from Wimber’s book, Power Points, which was published in 1991 after John Armstrong researched his articles (p. 6). But here three points must be made:

(i) Is the goal of John Armstrong and Don Anderson to represent Wimber fairly or simply to “prosecute and convict” him in the court of public opinion whether or not their accusations are accurate. The last article by John Armstrong came out in July of 1991. But Power Points had been published in January of 1991, several months before the final and most critical articles came out. It seems that a writer who spends thirty-four pages in ten articles in which he accuses the Vineyard of many serious doctrinal errors should at least take account of Wimber’s only published book on Christian doctrine (Power Points), even if it means adding some additional analysis to his final few articles.

To completely ignore this book while allowing the final articles to go into print in The Standard certainly causes people to wonder if Anderson and Armstrong were attempting to represent Wimber’s teaching accurately and fairly.

(ii) The book Power Points was largely based on an eight tape series of cassettes by John Wimber on Christian doctrine, also called “Power Points,” that was readily available in the Vineyard catalog as early as 1988. It is difficult for me to understand how The Standard could publish articles accusing Wimber of
false doctrine and not give any attention to these tapes on Christian doctrine.

(iii) We must remember that people do not say everything they believe each time they give their testimony. The fact that Wimber's testimony of his conversion on a video tape of a seminar does not mention the cross or the atonement is not good reason for thinking that he doesn't believe in these things.

Even the apostle Paul in telling about his conversion in Acts 22:6-16 and again in Acts 26:12-18 says nothing about the cross or the atonement, but tells how the; was blinded by a light from heaven on the Damascus road and heard the voice of the Lord asking why he was persecuting him. This doesn't mean that Paul did not believe in the cross or the atonement, or did not preach them to others. It simply means that he didn't mention those things at that particular point in telling about his conversion.

The Standard should publish a correction noting that Wimber had a clear understanding of the cross and the atonement before his conversion.

(5) Armstrong's quotation of an Australian journal (The Briefing) which said that Wimber's associate, Jack Deere, did not know what the gospel was, but thought it had something to do with casting out of demons and healing (my page 6).

I pointed out that Deere had a fourteen year record of public teaching ministry clearly affirming belief in salvation by faith alone in the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. More over, both The Briefing and The Standard were violating Scripture (1 Tim. 5:19) when they published this accusation of serious heresy against a church leader on the evidence of only one witness. In reply, Don Anderson does not even mention the matter of violating Scripture by accusing a church leader publicly on the testimony of only one witness. It still seems to me that a serious wrong has been done to Jack Deere's reputation, and the editors of both journals owe Jack Deere an apology. I am surprised that Don Anderson did not comment on this at all, since it is among the most serious of the misrepresentations in the series of articles in The Standard.

Don Anderson does say (pages 6-7) that even though Jack Deere teaches publicly on justification by faith, "his claim to orthodoxy is compromised to a large extent" because Deere believes in signs and wonders today. This is another example of the method of argument that was used when presented with evidence that John Wimber clearly teaches on the cross of Christ (point 1 above). Here Anderson argues as follows:

Jack Deere publicly teaches doctrine A (justification by faith alone).

But I disagree with Deere's teaching on doctrine B (signs and wonders).

Therefore, we are justified in publishing an article saying that Deere does not even know what doctrine A is (the gospel of justification by faith alone).

Again the issue is one of journalistic honesty. If Armstrong and Anderson wish to differ with Jack Deere's teaching on signs and wonders, and to publish many articles differing with that teaching, they are certainly free to do so and no one in the Vineyard would say that it is unfair. But when the published articles say that Jack Deere does not even know what the gospel is, a claim that is clearly contrary to fact, then it seems that they have misrepresented Jack Deere and wrongly maligned his reputation in the eyes of their readers. Again, the EPA code of ethics seems relevant:

Those responsible for the publication must exercise the utmost care that nothing contrary to the truth is published. Whenever substantive mistakes are made, whatever their origin,
they should be conscious of their duty to protect the good name and reputation of others.

A similar example of what appears to me to be false accusation occurred in the letter to the editor which *The Standard* printed in its June 1991 issue (pages 38-39). The letter, signed by “Concerned Parents, Arlington Heights, Ill.” told of a daughter who “became involved with a local Vineyard Christian Fellowship.” The parents claimed the daughter had become estranged from them and had rebuffed repeated attempts at reconciliation, and then they compared the Vineyard to Jim Jones and the People’s Temple, the Children of God, The Way, the Unification Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the deceiving spirits in 1 John 4:1.

Even though Al Buchweitz, pastor of the Arlington Heights Vineyard (there is only one Vineyard in Arlington Heights!), visited Don Anderson in his office and presented him with evidence that the “daughter” in question was an independent adult in her mid-twenties and had made reasonable attempts to be reconciled with her family, Don declined to publish any correction or answer to this defamatory letter.

Finally, Don Anderson misrepresents me regarding this issue concerning Jack Deere. He says, “The charge that the editors are ‘vicious’ or ‘malignant’ in motive will not hold up” (p. 7). When he puts the words “vicious” and “malignant” in quotation marks, he gives the appearance of quoting my article, to which he is responding. But I did not make any such charges against the editors of *The Briefing*. I said nothing about their motives, nor did I use the words “vicious” or “malignant.” I simply said that they had violated the clear teaching of 1 Tim. 5:19, which says, “Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.” It seems that a published retraction in *The Standard* would still be appropriate regarding this matter, to clear lack Deere’s reputation and that of Al Buchweitz.

(6) Armstrong’s statement that Wimber will listen only to those ministering in signs and wonders (my page 8).

Armstrong’s statement appeared in the April 1991 issue of *The Standard*. I pointed out that the March 19, 1990, issue of *Christianity Today* carried a ten page article that summarized a day-long discussion of the Holy Spirit’s power between John Wimber and six other evangelical leaders, who are not involved in the Vineyard Movement. In response to this, Don Anderson quotes again the statement by John Armstrong that “Wimber... will listen only to those ministering in signs and wonders,” and then Don Anderson says, “Wimber said exactly that a few years ago.”

But Don Anderson’s statement is simply not true, and he gives no quotations or evidence to back it up. Wimber has never said that he will listen only to those ministering in signs and wonders. He did say in 1989 that he was going to stop answering questions from “spectators,” by which (in context) he was referring to hostile critics.

But hostile critics make up only a very tiny percentage of the evangelical world. People like Ryrie, Packer, Briscoe, and Kantzer, who were on that *Christianity Today* panel, are not “those ministering in signs and wonders.” But neither are they hostile critics, and Wimber publicly entered into a very long discussion with them. Kenneth Kantzer said that Wimber was “more eager to listen and learn than to argue” (my page 8).

In Don Anderson’s reply (pages 78), he mentions the *Christianity Today* issue and the panel discussion, but says, “Wimber probably did not consent to appear with the panel in order to argue his philosophy and practice of
signs and wonders.” This statement is quite surprising, for the explicit purpose of the Christianity Today panel was to talk about the power of the Holy Spirit and it is quite clear from the article that Wimber was there specifically to talk about his philosophy and practice of signs and wonders.

So Don Anderson’s argument takes the following form:

Christianity Today showed Wimber listening at length to people who do not minister in signs and wonders.

But I disagree with Wimber’s view of signs and wonders.

Therefore, Wimber probably did not argue for his view of signs and wonders with the Christianity Today panel that claims that he did so, and we are justified in publishing John Armstrong’s statement that Wimber will not listen to such people.

Here we face a choice: Will we believe that the Christianity Today article was true and that Wimber really did dialogue for an entire day with people not ministering in signs and wonders? Or will we believe that Don Anderson is correct when he says this probably did not happen? If we agree that the Christianity Today report of its panel discussion was correct, then we must conclude that John Armstrong is wrong in saying that Wimber will only listen to those ministering in signs and wonders, and we must conclude that The Standard should publish a correction to this statement.

(7) Armstrong’s statement that Wimber “repeatedly ridicules the written Scriptures” and “repeatedly belittles rational revelation and prefers to lift up experience” (my page 9).

I pointed out several statements indicating that Wimber has the highest regard for Scripture, and pointed out that Armstrong gave no evidence to support this serious charge.

In response to this, Don Anderson simply quotes several other critics of John Wimber, who all say that because John Wimber believes that signs and wonders should accompany the proclamation of the gospel, Wimber therefore doesn’t believe in the authority or the sufficiency of Scripture, or that Wimber has lost confidence in Scripture.

We should note carefully what has happened here: neither Don Anderson nor any of the people he quotes give any examples where Wimber has ridiculed Scripture or belittled rational revelation. But because they disagree with Wimber’s view of signs and wonders, they feel justified in saying that Wimber ridicules Scripture and belittles rational revelation. But these are not the same thing. If these authors differ with Wimber’s view of signs and wonders, they are free to write as many articles as they wish expressing their differences, and no one in the Vineyard would object. But they are not free to say that Wimber ridicules and belittles Scripture, for that is simply false. Since The Standard has published this false charge against Wimber, it seems to me that it ought to issue a retraction and correction to it.

I should also add that in a letter to me (September 11, 1991) John Armstrong, who wrote the original articles in The Standard, quoted some examples where he thought that Wimber misinterpreted Scripture when he was speaking, but then said,
I greatly appreciate this statement from John Armstrong and think that something like it would be appropriate to publish in The Standard.

(8) Armstrong’s statement that in the Vineyard, “experience will displace biblical authority, not in theory but in practice, every time” (my page 10).

I pointed out some cases where Wimber had publicly disciplined church leaders for exalting experience over Scripture, and some quotations from Wimber where he said we must never let experience be equaled to or superior to Scripture. Don Anderson does not respond to this point in his article. A retraction from The Standard would still be appropriate for this erroneous statement.

(9) Armstrong’s statement that the Vineyard is “an overly anti-rationalistic movement” that has an “anti-rational perspective on the work of the Spirit and of Christian experience” (my page 10).

In response, I noted a number of responsible Christian scholars (such as George Malone, Don Williams, John White, Richard Foster, Walter Bodine, and Peter Davids) who are active members of Vineyard churches, and I noted that it seemed to me that the Vineyard did a good job of balancing experiences of God’s presence with rational understanding of Scripture.

Don Anderson’s response is simply to say that these authors have been deceived. And such additional charges without supporting evidence still do not show the original statements of John Armstrong to be correct. It seems to me that The Standard should publish a correction to this claim.

(10) The Standard published a companion article entitled “Deceiving Appearances: Vineyard-Style Diversion Squelched Revival in This Church” (my page 12).

I pointed out that the article was misleading because it does not specify that the charismatic pastor who split a church in Florida had nothing to do with the Vineyard. Moreover, it doesn’t clarify that the church was not even a Baptist General Conference church, and therefore not directly related to the denomination that sponsors The Standard. It seemed very unfair just to label any divisive charismatic split that could be found as a “Vineyard-style diversion.”

Don Anderson does not respond to this point.

The Standard should publish a clarification that the church split had nothing to do with the Vineyard and should not have been labeled a “Vineyard-Style Diversion.”

(11) Armstrong’s statement that connects Vineyard member Paul Cain with the late William Branham, whose theology was anti-Trinitarian (my page 13).

I pointed out that Paul Cain had dissociated himself from Branham’s later ministry and teaching, in which he fell into error. In response, Don Anderson points out that Armstrong is careful to say in his articles that Paul Cain distanced himself from Branham’s unorthodox teachings.

On looking at John Armstrong’s articles again, I see that in the section I quoted (March, p. 28), John Armstrong connects Cain and
Branham and mentions Branham’s anti-Trinitarian theology but says nothing about the fact that Cain distanced himself from it. However, I see in the April article (p. 30), Armstrong does say that Paul Cain “seeks to distance himself from more aberrant theological views held by Branham.”

My conclusion on this is that I do not think John Armstrong was unfair or inaccurate in the April issue, though the March issue taken alone was misleading.

(12) Armstrong’s statements about the New Age Movement imply that Wimber is somehow connected with New Age teaching (my page 13).

I pointed out that when John Armstrong says that Wimber and Wimber’s friend C. Peter Wagner use “New Age terminology” it implies to readers that Wimber is connected with New Age teaching. I objected that Armstrong failed to mention that the Vineyard had published an entire issue of *Equipping the Saints* devoted to the topic, “Confronting the New Age” (Fall, 1988), including articles by major Christian opponents of New Age teaching.

In response, Don Anderson says that John Armstrong did not intend to connect Wagner with the New Age or with New Age teaching (pages 13-14). I cannot judge what Armstrong’s intent was, but I can point to the fact that he did connect both Wagner and Wimber with the New Age movement by saying they used New Age terminology. Otherwise what was his point in saying this? It seems that a correction from Armstrong would be appropriate at this point.

(13) Armstrong’s statements that report emotional experiences in Vineyard services (a) as manufactured and routine, like part of a “liturgical form,” and (b) using pejorative terms, and (c) without evaluating the results in the lives of specific people (my page 14).

I pointed out that another interpretation of these emotional experiences is possible: (a) that they are not manufactured or part of a liturgical form; (b) that they could be better reported apart from the use of pejorative terms, (c) and that any report should attempt to evaluate the results, many of which I knew to be positive in the lives of individuals with whom I am acquainted.

I should state here that this item is not so much one of truth or falsehood regarding the Vineyard, but rather one of fairness and accuracy in reporting. It seems to me that Armstrong’s articles fail to adhere to the EPA code of ethics where it asks that Christian publications be characterized by

...truthfulness, accuracy, and an avoidance of distortion and sensationalism.

Don Anderson’s response (pages 14-19) is to quote a number of other people who use pejorative language in describing Vineyard services, and to say that he thought the language was quite accurate and not pejorative. He also questions the biblical validity of emotional experiences in worship.

The question of whether a complex event was reported fairly is largely decided by the subjective evaluation of the persons who were there. Armstrong and Anderson think that their report was fair and I do not. (For example, I seriously objected to John Armstrong’s inclusion of “shrieks” and “epileptic type fits” with phenomena that Vineyard people would see as indications of the Holy Spirit’s work, whereas these are generally thought to indicate a demonic presence, as in the Gospels: see Mark 1:26, etc.).

All I was trying to do in my article was to provide an alternative perspective (“A More Positive View,” according to the subtitle).
may not be ethically required for The Standard to allow this other perspective to be voiced, but it certainly would seem appropriate for it to do so. And it would seem to be in keeping with the general spirit of the EPA’s principle:

In dealing with controversial matters, opposing views, when presented, should be treated honestly and fairly.

It is this larger matter of balance in issues where Christians differ that genuinely surprises me concerning The Standard. I know of many BGC pastors who have a very positive view of the Vineyard. John Armstrong’s highly critical view is certainly not the only one within the denomination. So I am surprised that only his perspective was allowed publication, and my “more positive view” of the Vineyard could not be represented at all.


I have no objection to the way Armstrong represented my view or that he differed with it. This kind of interaction is normal in theological discussions. In my article I gave some responses to his criticisms, but I did not say that he had been inaccurate or unfair in any way.

Here a distinction must be made: I wrote my article for publication in The Standard, not for any other reason. I did this after conversation with Don Anderson, and I submitted it to him with the full expectation that he would publish it.

This means that my article is a general response to John Armstrong. It includes things I think were inaccurate and unfair, and things on which I just wanted to argue for another viewpoint. I did not write this article as a complaint to the Evangelical Press Association, nor did I file any complaint with the EPA.

After the article had been turned down for publication in The Standard (Oct. 22, 1991), I gave permission for Kevin Springer to use it as part of his complaint to the EPA (December 26, 1991). But the article includes in it many things that I do not think to be matters for EPA consideration. And I think that Kevin Springer’s concern was only with the questions of truthfulness and fairness in reporting what the Vineyard actually is. Don Anderson says, “Grudem is out of order in deeming this point reason to complain to the EPA Ethics Committee” (p. 20), but I did not and do not deem it that.

(15) Armstrong’s statement that Vineyard theology sees Satan as more powerful than Scripture says he is, and the section heading “Demons Under Every Rock” in a companion article about the Vineyard (my p. 19).

I quoted Wimber’s teaching that we have nothing to fear from Satan or demons, and that our illnesses can come from many different causes, psychological, physical, or demonic, and Wimber certainly does not see “demons under every rock.”

Don Anderson’s response agrees that “much of Wimber’s teaching on demons cited by Grudem seems to properly reflect the Bible’s teaching on demons” (p. 21). But then he adds, “But Wimber’s practice often differs from his theology” (p. 21). To prove this he cites a teaching by Jack Deere that demons can gain influence over Christians through retention of anger and unforgiveness, and a teaching that “demonic doctrines” include the idea that God does not heal and does not speak today.

Yet neither of these things establish the point that was claimed in the original articles in The Standard: that Vineyard theology sees Satan as more powerful than Scripture says,
and that the Vineyard sees demons under every rock. Both statements are still inaccurate distortions of Vineyard teaching, and should be corrected.

(16) Armstrong’s statements that the Vineyard’s healing ministry is ineffective (my p. 20).

I pointed out that Armstrong used a very limited data base and failed to mention either a book-length academic study of the effectiveness of prayers for healing at a large Vineyard conference or the Vineyard’s own records of healings as summarized in *Power Healing*.

In response, Don Anderson says (a) he observed few people healed at a Wimber conference in Villa Park, Illinois; (b) Wimber’s emphasis on healing is imbalanced; and (c) the healings claimed today are far less miraculous than those seen in the lives of Jesus and the apostles (pages 24–28).

But these responses do not address the question of giving readers fair access to the most significant body of relevant data: (a) is only personal observation of a conference not advertised or focused on healing, and (b) and (c) are theological arguments, not matters of fair reporting of relevant data. Even if Armstrong’s statements were due to overlooking the most relevant available data, it seems that, once this data is made known to him and *The Standard*, it would at least be fair to let readers know that it exists.

**CONCLUSION**

After careful reading of Don Anderson’s paper, I do not think that he has shown the Vineyard or John Wimber to be guilty of any doctrinal error, nor has he given good reason why *The Standard* should not issue a correction to the many misrepresentations of the Vineyard that they published, and somehow also allow readers fair access to an alternative, more positive view of the Vineyard.
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