

“Apprentice – Walking the Way of Christ”

By Steve Chalke with Joanna Wyld

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(A book review by Simon L. Ward.)

In 2003, Steve Chalke, founder of Oasis UK,¹ became the senior minister of Christ Church & Upton, now known as Church.co.uk Waterloo, London. This church aims to operate 24/7 - always open, never shut; where no one is ever turned away, whatever the time of night or day. Not only is Oasis UK the physical hub for a steadily growing global virtual community,² it has also become a focal point for the growth of the Emerging Church movement in the UK.

Steve Chalke presents *Apprentice*³ in which he seeks to “call us into a deep experience of learning and relationship with Christ.”⁴ The goal is certainly commendable. Indeed, the testimonials on the first page appear to rank *Apprentice* amongst the best Christian literature of the day. However, by reading just a few pages into the book, the discerning believer will be disappointed.

Apprentice consists of ten chapters. Each chapter is easy to read and contains much illustration. The book is littered with quotations, most of which are from secular sources. Comments from Roman Catholic writers are cited with approval. Scripture references are relatively sparse.

The book begins by highlighting the quest for meaning in our lives. Chalke emphasizes that if Genesis 1:1 is true, then life has meaning and we have purpose. In order to discover that meaning and purpose, we need first to become apprentices of Jesus. Instead of longing for things which we do not possess, or which fail to satisfy, Chalke maintains that Christ teaches his apprentices to channel their desires and longings into redressing aspects of social injustice.

Chalke correctly states that man was made in the image of God and so has a unique place in creation as “a fusion of the physical and the spiritual.”⁵ As man exercises faith daily in a whole variety of ways, so too can man exercise faith in God. Equally, man was not created to live in isolation, but to interact with other people. True joy is obtained from serving others and not by putting our own interests first. Ultimately, we are to love God and to love others. Chalke in no way underplays the cost of being an apprentice of Jesus. Drawing on the example of Martin Luther King, he emphasizes that perseverance is necessary.

Throughout the book, Chalke’s theology is lamentable. Apart from the strong social gospel element already alluded to; *Apprentice* is doctrinally flawed in other ways. The book does not refer to a Holy God who is angry at sin and who has determined to punish it. The need for guilty sinners to be reconciled to a just and righteous God is conspicuously absent. Instead, Chalke presents a Jesus who will help us to find meaning in life. The implication seems to be that

anyone who wants to become an apprentice can do so, just as one might take up a hobby or choose to pursue a particular way of life. It gets worse.

Chalke speaks of the need for faith in God but does not define this faith. Does he mean “saving faith,” as evangelical believers would understand it, or faith in the promises of God, or bare faith where one merely believes that God exists? It is probably not the first of these, since Chalke remarks, “the very nature of faith implies uncertainty.”⁶

Apprentice presents a flawed doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Nowhere is Christ set forth as the one who came into this world to save His people. Nowhere is the eternal Son of God presented as the one who fulfilled every aspect of God’s law for them. In fact, where is the Lamb of God who bled and died for our sins, bearing upon Himself the full weight of God’s wrath in our place? Nowhere! Not surprisingly, therefore, *Apprentice* contains few references to the Cross of Calvary. Christ’s death and resurrection are presented as merely delivering the “decisive victory”⁷ in the struggle between good and evil.

Another fatal flaw is that the book fails to make any mention of the authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture or to our need of the Holy Spirit’s illumination in order to understand it. Chalke appears to set forth little value in laboring to study the Word of God or hearing it preached, but merely concedes that Bible study “has its place.”⁸ His statement that the New Testament writers intended their letters to be “read aloud in a group setting”⁹ may well be correct. However, his understanding that conclusions about the meaning of Scripture within the early church were decided collectively, that insights and perspectives provided balance and alternative points of view, making the church the judge of Scripture. Such a view as this is not far removed from the Roman Catholic position.

Apprentice is a book to be avoided. The book presents an impotent God who loves all but who judges none. To become an “apprentice”, therefore, will not lead to eternal life. It will lead only unto damnation, unless God, in His mercy and sovereign grace, reveals to would-be apprentices the need for salvation from sin by repentance and faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

One of *Apprentice*’s reviewers describes the book on its inside cover as “candy to the soul.”¹⁰ It certainly is neither spiritual meat, nor even spiritual milk. To the seeker of truth, this book is dangerous. To the young Christian, it is misleading. Moreover, to the seasoned believer it is way off line. True “walking the way of Christ” knows God as the All Holy One. Christ’s grace turns a person to trust in Christ alone, by faith alone, for the salvation that He alone gives, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit as the Scripture proclaims, “*for by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*”¹¹

¹ See <http://www.oasisuk.org>

² See http://www.oasischurch.info/church_default.aspx

³ Not to be confused with series 5 of a popular BBC1 program.

⁴ Rear cover.

⁵ p.51.

⁶ p.62.

⁷ p. 122.

⁸ p.167.

⁹ p.75.

¹⁰ Shane Claiborne, author, *Jesus for President*.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:8-9.32