



*The ALPHA
COURSE
EXAMINED*

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The Alpha Course Examined

The Alpha Course Weighed in The Balances of Holy Scripture

Colin Mercer

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Preface

A desire to earnestly contend for the faith has prompted the publication of this booklet. The danger that Alpha presents to the eternal well-being of men and women cannot go unchallenged. Where there is spiritual danger there must be a sure and faithful warning. After preaching four separate messages on the subject of the Alpha course, I was encouraged by fellow Christians to make the material available to a wider audience. This booklet is an attempt to do that. I trust that it will be as a short, sharp blast of the gospel trumpet. May the unsuspecting be delivered from another one of Satan's deceptions.

Foreword

The Bible has warned us that in these last days there shall be a heaping to the men of the world, teachers having itching ears, "*And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*" 2 Timothy 4:4.

The Alpha Course is a course sponsored by Rome and the ecumenical Protestant churches, purporting to present the true gospel of Christ in a simple way to enquirers. Dr. John Dunlop, a former president of the Irish Presbyterian General Assembly, a well-known pro-Romanist and ecumenist, defines it thus: "*The Alpha Course aims to strip away all the baggage of church and religion and get back to asking the basic questions of life. Does God exist?*"

Does He care about me? Why is the world in such a mess?" News Letter, 10.8.01.

The Alpha Course is an attempt to make the strait gate wide and the narrow way broad. It moves the great markers which God has set as the decisive lines of demarcation between the revealed truth of God and the reprobate lie of the Devil.

1. *The Alpha Course points the way of salvation as forgiveness of sin without repentance for sin.*

Without a scriptural understanding of sin there cannot be a scriptural understanding of salvation from sin. Only a person under the burden of sin will flee for refuge to lay hold of the Lord Jesus Christ alone for deliverance.

"The wicked shall be turned into hell," the Bible trumpets in Psalm 9:17.

Preachers and priests who do not believe in hell as taught in the holy Scriptures push the Alpha Course. Some of these preachers have tried to put out the fires of hell. Some deny hell altogether. Forgiveness without repentance is the Devil's lie to deceive and damn the souls of men. When the Alpha Course directs the sinner away from true repentance for sin, then it sets not the course of real salvation but rather counterfeit salvation. It leaves already deceived souls further deceived into believing that they are saved when in fact they are lost. For example, according to Alpha News, a convert states, *"I still needed some physical evidence of the existence of God. Part of the course was the Holy Spirit Weekend at a camp, which I wasn't looking forward to. I went and maintained a stonewall approach until the second day... suddenly a feeling of joy came over me, and I began to laugh uncontrollably. At that point I knew that I had become a Christian."* That is not Biblical salvation, that is deception.

2. *The Alpha Course points the way of salvation away from Christ to a false spirit.*

The Holy Spirit has a definite work to do in the salvation of souls, but that work is all in relation to revealing not Himself but Christ. *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever*

he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13).

The Bible warns us about another spirit which is not the Holy Spirit of God at all. *“For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Corinthians 11:4).*

Any spirit which does contrary to what the Bible teaches the Holy Spirit does, is not the Spirit of God at all, but the spirit of the Devil.

Attestation of seemingly spiritual power is no proof that the spirit is the Holy Spirit. The test is the attitude of the Spirit to our Lord Jesus. That is the Scripture test. The people in Job’s day called the fire from the Devil which burned up Job’s sheep and shepherds ‘the fire of God,’ but it was not. *“While he was yet speaking, there came also another; and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee” (Job 1:16).* So in the great judgment day, Christ warned us of those who will make similar claims.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Here is another quotation from Alpha News: *“A lady came to our church and I was invited along. She gave the talk and I didn’t have a clue what she was on about, but it didn’t matter. At the end she invited people forward for prayer... She put her hand on me and said, ‘Come, Holy Spirit,’ and the most incredible thing happened. I felt as though someone took two torches and put them into my eyes. I saw this incredible white light and my whole body; from my head to my toes, was bathed with bright white light and I kept saying over and over again, ‘I’ve met Jesus, I’ve met Jesus.’”* So Christ is replaced by another spirit.

The salvation of the immortal soul is a solemn matter, and is not accomplished by uncontrollable laughter.

3. *The Alpha Course points away from the finished work of Christ in His Blood-shedding on the Cross. to Church sacraments.*

“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22).

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The Alpha News of March 1998 tells of the conversion of two Alpha Course students after attending Christmas Midnight Mass. In these testimonies of conversion there is no mention of the sufferings and blood-shedding of our Lord Jesus. In Alpha conversions the whole emphasis is upon feelings, not upon faith. In these testimonies the precious blood of Christ is completely jettisoned.

For the Alpha students, the offence of the Cross of Christ has ceased, because the Cross is no longer preached or believed. It is treated as a trapping, *‘baggage to be stripped away,’* as Dr. Dunlop states.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16, 17).

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

“And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased” (Galatians 5:11).

No, the Alpha Course is the gospel of ‘another Jesus,’ and not the gospel of the one and only true Christ, the Son of God.

Introduction

In the late 1970s a leading Anglican cleric, Charles Marnham devised a course of lessons for new Christians. The four-week series covered subjects such as Assurance, Jesus, the Bible and Prayer. Almost thirty people attended those weekly meetings and as a result it was decided to run the course on a regular basis. In 1981 John Irvine, a 51-year-old former Barrister, succeeded Marnham as curate of Holy Trinity Brompton. He immediately extended the course from four weeks to ten weeks and also included a “week-end away,” which was devoted to the subject of the Holy Spirit. Many years have passed since those small beginnings but the course which commenced in the early 1980s has evolved into what is known today as the Alpha course. It is no longer confined to a church flat in West London and it no longer only involves 30 people. It is an initiative which has known rapid growth, so much so, that some suggest that there are 17,000 courses being run world-wide during 2001 alone. The appeal of Alpha is evident from the fact that in the United Kingdom it has been adopted by Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Baptist Churches. It is also used by the Salvation Army, Elim Pentecostal assemblies, Evangelical Free Churches, Charismatic Fellowships and by the Roman Catholic Church. There are also courses in homes, universities, colleges, work places and in prisons. As far as numerical growth is concerned Alpha is going from strength to strength. The phenomenal expansion of this initiative will undoubtedly continue.

Alpha will be presented as a beginning (hence the name Alpha) to the Christian faith. It will be promoted as a way to explore the meaning of life. It will be viewed as a powerful tool of evangelism. It will be set forth as an essential part of church work which almost guarantees church growth. It will also be hailed as a way to bring people to the religion of the Bible and a personal experience of salvation. Supporters of Alpha vociferously claim that it is an excellent initiative. Consequently, many have accepted it without question.

However, 1 John 4:1 records, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”* These words describe both a

great danger and a great duty. There are many who “are gone out into the world” who act and speak as if they were of God but who are false prophets. They are not of God and instead of being for the good of the people they are a great danger. Therefore it is essential that the Christian is discerning and prudent. We must examine their words and prove them to determine whether their teaching and testimony is in accordance with the Word of God or not. The standard of trying the false prophet is outlined in Isaiah 8:20 *“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”* The infallible word of God is the standard. When Alpha is subjected to a careful examination, in the light of Scripture, it is found wanting. A combination of doctrinal error, charismatic deception, questionable methodology, false counsel and ecumenical preference mean that Alpha must be rejected and opposed. The popularity of the course must not deceive the Christian into accepting that which is evil.

This booklet is sent forth with the prayer that it might be used of God to expose the danger of the Alpha course and lead men and women to a true and genuine experience of salvation.

Objection No. 1. Alpha Presents Unbiblical Theology

The importance of sound doctrine can never be minimised in the work of God. When Paul wrote to Timothy he urged him, *“...take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine”* (1 Timothy 4:16). He also exhorted the young preacher to, *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine”* (2 Timothy 4:2, 3). Paul did not confine these comments to Timothy. When writing to Titus he said, *“Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine”* (Titus 2:1). Biblical theology is vital in any work for God. The message must be based on Scripture. At a glance, it appears that the Alpha course meets all these requirements. It quotes from the Bible. It refers to God. It makes mention of Jesus Christ and it encourages men and women to consider spiritual things. At a glance it seems that all is well. However, when a closer inspection is made, it becomes apparent that the doctrinal position of Alpha is not sound.

Its doctrine is flawed. It does not rest on the clear testimony of Scripture. It contains modernistic and liberal theology.

The distinct character of God

Scripture presents a Sovereign, Holy and Almighty God. A God who is far above all. The Shorter Catechism answer to the question, “What is God?” provides an excellent definition and summary of the person of God. It states, “*God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.*” God is **infinite**. He cannot be measured, contained or surpassed (Job 11:7). God is **eternal**. He has no beginning and will have no ending (Psalm 90:2). God is **unchangeable**. Men, nations and circumstances all change, but Jehovah never changes. He is the unchangeable God (Exodus 3:14). God is **wise**. His ways are perfect, true and upright. He makes no mistakes (Psalm 147:5). God is all **powerful**. No one can stand against this Almighty God. By His power He formed the world out of nothing. By His power He sustains it. He has power to save and to damn. He has power to lift up and to cast down. He has power to deliver and to destroy. All power belongs to Him (Psalm 62:11). God is **holy**. He is so holy that He cannot look on sin. He dwells in unapproachable light. No one can accuse Him of sin. He is “holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty” (Revelation 4:8). God is **just**. He is just in the punishing of sin and in the performing and fulfilling of His promises. His justice lies at the heart of all His works (Exodus 34:6). God is **good**. He is gracious, longsuffering and full of mercy (1 John 4:8). Coupled with that is the fact that God is **true**. Men have their false gods, but Jehovah is the only living and TRUE God.

This is the God presented and revealed in the Bible. Isaiah 40:25, 26 records,

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.”

Exodus 15:11 adds the splendid words,

“Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”

This is the triune God of the Bible. He is the God of grace and glory.

God is not portrayed like this in the Alpha course. In Alpha God is merely presented as a God of love. One commentator has suggested, *“Alpha’s God will give us an emotional high and make us feel special!”* Thoughts of God concentrate on His compassion and His loving nature, but almost entirely dismiss His holiness, justice, truth, power and His sovereign dealing with men in salvation. It is very interesting to note that there are few, if any, references in Alpha to God being a God of wrath. That aspect of His character is neglected. The truth of Psalm 7:11, *“God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day”* and Psalm 9:17, *“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God,”* is ignored.

To present God only as a God of love is a very one-sided business. Alpha is presented as a beginning to the ‘Christian faith.’ If that is the case, then it would be essential to consider God and His attributes. It is indefensible to major only on one aspect of His divine character. Any scheme of true Christian teaching must emphasise the person of God. Alpha fails to lay this sure and solid foundation.

The depravity of man

The doctrine of man’s total depravity as a result of Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden, is an undeniable part of Scripture. Adam had been created with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. He had an understanding totally enlightened in the spiritual knowledge of God and in divine things. He had a will wholly inclined to God and the things of God. Adam was created in the image of God. Then he sinned and as a result of his sin he became spiritually dead. He had no desire for God. He was filled with shame. He was marked as a rebel. What was true of Adam is true of all men. All mankind sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. Romans 5:19 clearly teaches, *“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.”* As a consequence of Adam’s sin, man before God is totally depraved. His whole nature is corrupt. He is at

war with God. He is cut off from the Lord. His mind, will and soul are darkened in sin. He is shapen in iniquity. There is the entire absence of holiness. The Larger Catechism carries the statement, *“The corruption of his nature whereby he is utterly disposed, disabled and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good and wholly inclined to all evil and that continually.”* These words paint man as God describes man — utterly ruined by the Fall and utterly estranged from God. What does Alpha teach on this subject? How does it describe man’s plight? In his book, “Questions of life,” Nicky Gumbel (a leading figure in Alpha) states, *“In every human being the image of God has been to a greater or lesser extent tarnished, and in some cases almost eradicated by sin. Good and bad, strength and weakness co-exist in all human beings.”* He concludes that we, *“...have messed up our lives.”* In an Alpha video John Wimber declares of the time he professed to become a Christian, *“In a flash the cross made personal sense to me. Suddenly I knew something that I had never known before: I had hurt God’s feelings.”* This latter comment likens sin to a playground squabble where friends fall out and one has his feelings hurt! These statements are wholly inadequate to describe man’s state before God. They are staggering statements given the clear testimony of the word of God. Romans 3:10-23 emphatically declares:

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Man is alienated from God. He is depraved in his sin. He is at enmity with the Lord. He has broken the law and has come short of God’s glory. Alpha does not record that. It speaks a little of the consequences of sin — but not the awful reality of man’s depravity.

The death of Christ

In any evangelical work for God there must be a clear understanding and a clear presentation of the substitutionary death of Christ. The finished work of Christ on the cross is the centre of the gospel. Paul made that clear when he testified to the Corinthians,

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

When Paul wrote to the Hebrews he said,

“Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:25-28).

The atonement is central, and the cross is indispensable to the gospel. Without the cross work of Christ there is no gospel and

therefore no salvation. It is true that Alpha mentions both the cross and redemption, but it does so only in the context of God's love. This is in common with much of modern Evangelism. A prominent figure in the Toronto Blessing scene has published a book entitled "Share the Fire" in which he gives guidelines to people concerning what they should tell persons who are interested in Christianity: "*We have to recognise Jesus first of all for who he is. What needs to be recognised in Jesus? Jesus is the son of God and the giver of life. We need to recognise that Jesus wants to change our lives. Jesus shows us what life is really meant to be like — what love, peace, joy and freedom truly are. Stripped right down, we need to recognise that in Jesus, there is a quality to life, a desirability to life that is missing without him.*" He adds, "*Not only do we have to recognise Jesus: we have to receive his love.*" Note the emphasis of this teaching. It is all love. Christ's death is seen only in that light. Alpha does the same. It refers to Christ's death only in the context of his love.

I have no query with the biblical doctrine of the love of God. Calvary does demonstrate that love. Romans 5:8 teaches, "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" But Calvary does more than that. It reveals God's inflexible justice. Why did Christ suffer and die? It was because He bore the sins of the elect in His own body on the tree. He who knew no sin became sin for us. The just died for the unjust. The wrath of God that was our due upon the Lamb was laid. Christ did not just die, He died as the substitute, as the one who bore the sins of His people.

*O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!
Our load was laid on Thee;
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead,
Didst bear all ill for me,
A victim led, Thy blood was shed;
Now there's no load for me.*

God cannot simply overlook sin. The penalty must fall. The price must be paid. On the cross Christ paid that price. He gave His life as a ransom for many. That is the gospel. A holy God poured out His wrath upon His only Son as He stood in the place of His elect

people. It is the gospel of substitution, suffering, blood-shedding, death and resurrection. It is the gospel of Christ living and dying for His people. The cross displays the inflexible justice of God and His amazing love for His people. These two parts cannot be divorced. In Alpha the gospel is the gospel of love, not the gospel of a sin hating God.

This is a major defect. To be wrong or weak on this fundamental aspect of Christian teaching means the entire foundation is flawed. In Alpha a weak, flimsy and inadequate theology is presented.

Objection No. 2. Alpha Practises an Unscriptural Ministry

Earnest Christians often pray for a revival of true religion across the world. When they see an apathy for spiritual things, deepening apostasy in religious circles, rising sin among young and old and the slighting and rejecting of the gospel they take up the words of the Psalmist and pray, "*Wilt thou not revive us again?*" There is a longing for a return to the old paths and for God to visit His church with blessing. Those who advocate the Alpha course suggest this is exactly what has happened through the running of these courses. They very quickly point to the 17,000 courses that are being conducted world-wide this year alone. They speak of the multitudes, many of them non-regular church attendees in the past, who are now frequenting places of worship. They point to the conferences that are over booked, often three and four months in advance. They talk of the weekends devoted to biblical subjects which can hardly cater for the numbers wishing to attend. They highlight the church growth that has been experienced in towns and parishes of the United Kingdom and they will describe it as a revival. It will be argued that this is a work of God. It sounds very impressive.

Yet all is not what it seems to be. Alpha is a phenomenal thing. It has spread into scores of countries across the world and has been adopted by many churches, but these things cannot be allowed to hide the fact that there are many aspects about Alpha which mean it must be rejected. The ministry which Alpha practises is one such aspect. I contend that it is an unscriptural ministry.

The current presentation of Alpha

Any group with a genuine desire to proclaim the gospel should be careful to present it in a manner which honours God and is in agreement with His Word. The church must not adopt the methods and means of the world. We must never reduce Christianity to the level of a social principle or present Christ and His truth as a thing of entertainment and amusement. It is by the foolishness of preaching that God is pleased to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). The gospel is to be presented in a solemn, scriptural and forthright manner. Alpha adopts a different approach. On its web site Alpha is portrayed as, “...low key, friendly and fun.” Great emphasis is placed on it as a means, “...to explore Christianity.” They talk of “...exploring the meaning of life.” I do not believe the gospel was ever intended to be presented in this manner. The great preachers of old — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Paul, Peter, John and numerous others were plain-spoken men. They were not given to exploring the gospel; they were given to expounding the gospel and exhorting sinners to flee from the wrath to come.

Furthermore, there is a great emphasis on the suppers that accompany some Alpha courses. It is suggested that those who run the Alpha course should commence each evening with a supper — or a meal. I have no objection to suppers but the comment of a Norwegian lady who started to run the course in Norway highlights something very interesting. Mrs. Mosvold stated in an article for the ‘Alpha News,’ “*We saw that in Alpha it wasn’t only the teaching that was important — but the food too. Whereas we considered having just hot chocolate and buns we decided in the end to go ahead and have a full dinner every night. The food has been brilliant... I think that is part of the reason why the course has been so successful.*” That is very enlightening. The success of the course rested, in part, on the culinary skills of those running the course. An English pastor takes up a similar theme. Speaking of Alpha, he said, “*We realised that we needed to offer something that was friendship based, based on food, that is social, that has an apologetic element to it — especially in a post-modern world — where they can have some spiritual experience.*” That is quite a

statement. It disagrees with that which Paul exhorted Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 4:2-5,

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”

Paul did not encourage Timothy to have a food-based, socially inclined, apologetic, friendship-founded ministry. He was to preach the whole counsel of God without fear or favour.

Moreover, in highlighting the fact that Alpha is now run in many universities, it is reported that, *“These may be run by Christian unions, University Chaplains or Christian Student organisations. They are usually held on campus in a Union bar, or other room or sometimes in a local pub frequented by students.”* I find that amazing! There is no reverence for the things of God in a public house. Indeed, the behaviour in such places is contrary to Scripture. They are dens of iniquity. Young people should be encouraged out of them: not facilitated in them. (It is a telling reflection on the impact of Alpha that the publicans who permit the course to be run in their premises see no danger to their trade as a result of Alpha!).

Alpha attracts men and women not because of its preaching but because of its presentation. That is not a scriptural way to conduct the work of God. The gospel ministry is not to follow the methods of the age. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever. His gospel does not change. His Word does not change and His command to the Church does not change. We are to exercise a preaching ministry.

The corrupt foundation of Alpha

The Alpha course has its origins in Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican church in West London. It has been described as, *“...one of the flagship churches representing the cause of Charismatic*

practice.” Holy Trinity Brompton has links with many leading Charismatics from America. According to one writer these Americans, especially John Wimber, “...influenced a generation of British ministers and Christians to embrace a doctrine that accepted that believers could be demonized, that signs and wonders were to be accepted as a normal supplement to preaching based evangelism and that it was possible for ordinary Christians to use supernatural gifts of healing, casting out of demons and receiving extraordinary gifts of supernatural insight and prophecy.” In 1997 this same church helped to sponsor a conference which brought over Clark Pinnock, an American theologian. Pinnock is a supporter of the ‘Toronto Blessing’ and a radical man who reportedly believes that, “...people may be converted without hearing the gospel and that God is not really aware of all that is happening and that he is capable of being surprised by events and of changing his mind.” Clearly Holy Trinity Brompton accepts and approves of these individuals and by association with them lends support to their teaching. Considering that Alpha emerged from the same church, we should not be surprised that Alpha is not built on a solid foundation.

Perhaps that is most evidently seen in comments regarding the word of God. Alpha does quote from the Bible. In fact, in week five of the course the Bible is affirmed as, “*the supreme authority for what we believe and how we act.*” That sounds excellent. It gives the impression that Alpha is Bible based. But it seems that leading Alpha figures also teach that, “*God also speaks to people directly by his spirit; through prophecy, dreams, visions and through other people.*” In other words, the Bible is supplemented by other means. And there is the distinct impression that the other means have become more important than the Bible. In the ‘Alpha News’ of March-June 2001 there are no quotations from God’s Word — not even a Bible reference. There is great importance placed on the training videos, books, instructor’s manuals, posters and invitations — but no such emphasis upon the Word of God. Other things take the place of the Scriptures. Christ exhorted men to “*Search the Scriptures.*” He said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” This is how God speaks to men — through His Word. Human

visions, dreams and prophecies have a distinct charismatic ring about them.

The charismatic deception of Alpha

The Alpha course has been described as being, “...*thoroughly and unashamedly charismatic. Charismatic emphasis and the extolling of charismatic experience run throughout ...the course.*” This subject comes to the heart of the Alpha course, for central to this scheme is what is termed as the, “Week-end Away.” Alpha teaches, “*The weekend is a crucial element of the course when the Holy Spirit is introduced. Sometimes the teaching can be incorporated into a single day, but the weekend is a good chance to cement friendships and take a break-away.*” During the week-end emphasis is laid on being, “filled with the spirit of God.” People are told not to be afraid to vent their feelings or express themselves in extravagant ways. They are then urged to accept the ‘gift’ that is offered. There are certain instructions that are given to those who are present. They include the following:

1. “*Ask God to fill you with his spirit and to give you the gift of tongues. Go on seeking him until you find. Go on knocking until the door opens. Seek God with all your heart.*”
2. “*Open your mouth and start to praise God in any language but English or any other language known to you.*”
3. “*Believe that what you receive is from God. Don’t let anyone tell you that you made it up.*”

Often these times are marked with bodily sensations, tinglings, swoonings, trances, hysterical laughter and giggling ‘like a playful toddler.’ Many people mark this as the time of their ‘conversion.’ They speak of warm feelings of love and are told this is all of God. These sensations, they claim, are signs of the infilling of the Spirit of the Lord.

This is another spirit which is not the Spirit of God. These things are contrary to the Scriptures. No man can arrange a weekend and monopolise the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of the Lord does not produce these strange things. Where do we read in the Bible of people laughing hysterically when filled with the Holy Ghost? We don’t! The true infilling of the Spirit of God is a solemn thing. It is only

for those who are genuinely converted. It is not a man-arranged, man-ordered, or man-centred experience. It is the work of God, which ALWAYS glorifies God. The experience in Alpha is a counterfeit experience. It does not measure up to the Word of God. It is unscriptural.

The clear motivation for Alpha

True Christian service will always be for God's glory. Whatever other impact it may have, we are to do all things for the glory of God. This is to be our motivation. 1 Corinthians 10:31 states, "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*" That is not the case in Alpha. Its success is measured by church growth. One of the reasons why this scheme was developed, was to arrest the falling numbers in church attendance. Church leaders noticed that young people were not attending, church rolls were decreasing, and interest was waning. The panic button was pressed, and it was determined to bring in something attractive, appealing and socially engineered, and wait for people to return. The aim was to make it fun in order to make it work. That is what has happened.

I do not believe this is a work of God. It is a dangerous scheme. It is very subtly and very attractively presented, but it practises a ministry that is unscriptural.

Objection No. 3. Alpha Produces False Security

The city of Athens has been described as, "*...the most celebrated city of the ancient world.*" It was a city at the centre of the arts, literature, architecture and philosophy. It was a place which witnessed great discussions and debates on a vast range of subjects. The people of Athens were fond of new ideas and strange values. As the years passed and its reputation grew Athens became known as a great cultural centre. It was also a city noted for its false religion. Empty worship and gross idolatry were common. It was often said by the Romans that, "*...it was easier to find a god at Athens than a man.*"

The Athenians seemed content with this situation. There was nothing to disturb their world of powerless religion. That was until the apostle Paul arrived in the city. Paul was a noted firebrand.

From the moment of his conversion he lived for Christ and sought to spread the gospel. He was a faithful follower of his Lord. He was a preacher of the old school, a man of earnest prayer, a fervent and diligent servant and also a contender for the faith. Acts 17 records the highlights of Paul's visit to Athens. It recalls, "*Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.*" The word 'stirred' literally means 'stimulated, spurred on, urged.' Paul was greatly troubled at the sin of this place so much so that in Acts 17:17 it is recorded, "*Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.*" Paul challenged the false religion in that city. He exposed the hypocrisy and emptiness of the worship. He contended against the heathen ideals and idolatry of the people. He did not act in this manner just to be contentious, but that the people might be warned of error and directed towards the truth. He was alarmed at the false sense of security among the people.

Alpha produces a similar false sense of spiritual security. When the Lord Jesus was bringing His great sermon on the mount to an end, He gave this very solemn and very sobering warning,

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Those who claimed to be Christians had a false profession. They had never entered the straight gate and had never started on the narrow way. For all of their statements they were yet in their sin. I fear that is how it is with many who have participated in Alpha. 'Conversions' in Alpha are not like conversions in the Bible. And this will lead inevitably to persons resting in false security — claiming to be saved but not saved. How has Alpha produced this tragic situation?

Alpha emphasises self instead of the Saviour

If there is one thing scripture makes clear it is that, "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" The gospel is described as the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul declared,

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:29, 30).

The whole scheme and plan of Salvation is all of God. In His sovereign electing grace, He has chosen a people for Himself. He has sent His own dear Son to die the just for the unjust. He poured out His wrath, upon Christ the sinners’ substitute. By His Holy Spirit, He effectually calls men to newness of life. From first to last the whole plan of salvation is all of God. He is the sovereign Saviour. He is the one who chooses, calls and converts the sinner. This does not destroy or conflict with man’s responsibility. The hearer of the gospel is to come to Christ, but man cannot save himself. Salvation is a divine work received by faith without works. As Psalm 3 puts it, *“Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people.”*

In Alpha the emphasis shifts from God to man. It is a man-centred, man-directed and man-orientated scheme. That is clearly seen in what is taught at the weekend away. Participants are told that by coming forward, having hands laid on them and offering prayer, they will know the coming of the Spirit. From that point on they are considered Christians. The thrust of this teaching centres on man dealing with God, not God dealing with man. It centres on what man does, not on what Christ has done. It centres on man’s ability, not on God’s sovereignty. It is a man-made salvation, which is no salvation at all. We are not saved by the works of the flesh, by keeping the law, by charismatic experiences or by following the procedures of men — *“For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* To emphasise anything else will undoubtedly lead to false professions. In Matthew 7:22, 23 the emphasis is on what the people did in the name of the Saviour. It is not what the Saviour did for them. That is a serious failure. Alpha imbibes the same spirit. It emphasises self instead of the Saviour.

Alpha emphasises feelings instead of faith

Alpha places a great importance on emotional experience. Thoughts of love, happiness and sensations dominate its thinking. If it makes people feel good, feel loved and feel elated then it is deemed a success. In many of the cases of ‘conversion’ feelings take the place of faith. It is tingling instead of trusting that seems to be the key theme. Believing on Christ alone for salvation is relegated and sensing bodily feelings is elevated in this man-made scheme!

The ‘Alpha News’ records the following interesting and enlightening testimonies:

“As the course went on I had a sense that this was the truth. It was a gradual thing, from hearing others speak and doing my own reading. I began to go to church and to sing the worship songs. By this time, I knew I was well on my way to becoming a Christian. I just needed a final act of confirmation, something that I could feel in the physical sense. And I went along to the Holy Spirit day mainly out of curiosity. When I received the Spirit, I just wept and then I felt so peaceful.”

“On the Holy Spirit Day, I prayed a prayer to accept Jesus as my Saviour. It was so easy to say, and I was powerfully touched by the Spirit.”

“They laid hands on me and I knew release... you know. Then that next day when they prayed to bring the Holy Spirit upon you and stuff. I have to say that I knew that kind of unconditional love that you so rarely see from God. It was like being in a really good fight and then getting blacked out! It was good! But uh... it was cool.”

Others have recorded something similar. One writes:

“On the weekend away, I was blessed to receive the Holy Spirit. What an experience: total peace, floods of tears and feeling that I was a special person, loved by Jesus totally.”

Another says:

“I didn’t want to come to the weekend and I did. But I would call myself a Christian now. I would say that I felt the Holy

Spirit. I was feeling I was loved. It was really a tremendous overwhelming feeling of love.”

Another ‘Alpha convert’ records,

“Nicky talked about the gifts and tongues, and at the end of his talk, he asked the Holy Spirit to come. I was just totally overcome. I couldn’t control what was happening to me. I didn’t want to control it. The tears starting running and everything was happening to me — it was just a wonderful experience and something I truly never expected.”

The emphasis in those statements is on how the people felt. Their salvation is wrapped up in their emotions, bodily sensations, the warm sense of love and the overwhelming floods of tears. They felt loved and good. In the midst of the emotional feeling there is no mention of faith, no coming to Christ, no consciousness of God’s holiness, no casting themselves completely on Christ alone for Salvation, no believing on the only Son of God and no realising that without Him they are lost in sin forever. In ‘Charismatic Alpha’ feelings take the place of faith and that leads to false professions.

Alpha emphasises remorse instead of repentance

The first sermon that Christ preached at the commencement of His public ministry was on the subject of repentance (Matthew 4:17 *“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”*). This is significant, and it teaches that:

1. True evangelical repentance is an important subject.
2. Gospel preachers must not neglect to preach this great theme
3. Sinners from all backgrounds must repent or they shall perish in their sin and be lost for ever.

Repentance is a fundamental doctrine of the Word of God. According to the Shorter Catechism, which is based on the Word of God,

“Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out

of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience.”

This has become the Cinderella doctrine of neo-evangelicalism. People will speak of, ‘turning over a new leaf,’ but they will rarely if ever speak of true evangelical and genuine repentance. Alpha does not, either. In the section of the study entitled, “Why did Jesus die?” one paragraph reads,

“If you are unsure about whether you have ever believed in Jesus, here is a prayer which you can pray as a way of starting the Christian life and receiving all the benefits which Christ died to make possible. Heavenly Father, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. (Take a few moments to ask his forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience.) Please forgive me. I now turn from everything, which I know is wrong. Thank you that you sent your Son Jesus to die on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free. From now on I will follow and obey Him as Lord. Thank you that you now offer me this gift of forgiveness and your Spirit. I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

On the surface that may seem an acceptable prayer, but there is no mention of sin OR repentance. Indeed, in that section of the course, the term repentance does not appear. There may be a sense of remorse, maybe even regret, but that falls far short of true repentance. In the testimonies of many ‘Alpha converts’ the theme of repentance does not emerge. One man stated, *“I still needed some physical evidence of the existence of God. Part of the course was the Holy Spirit Weekend at a camp, which I wasn’t looking forward to. I went and maintained a stone wall approach until the second day... suddenly a feeling of joy came over me and I began to laugh uncontrollably. At that point I knew that I had become a Christian.”* There is no mention of sin, of offending God or of repentance. It does not appear because it is not deemed important enough in Alpha. Such a position will undoubtedly lead to a false profession.

Alpha emphasises sensationalism instead of sanctification

A true convert will be a changed person. His life will be marked by holiness and a desire to go through with God. He will be changed, (2 Corinthians 5:17: *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”*). A person who has come to Christ will be different in his ambitions, attitudes, appearance, associations and actions. He will be a new person with new desires. He will be holy and happy in the Lord. There will be a desire for sanctification. In Alpha sensationalism takes the place of sanctification. Some of those who were ‘converted’ through Alpha continue to drink, continue to attend the Roman Catholic mass and live a life not becoming the gospel. Alpha does not appear to instruct them otherwise. There is little by way of sanctification. If there is no holiness can we really say there is salvation?

Objection No. 4. Alpha Promotes Ecumenical Activity

There is a great effort made to present Alpha as a scheme that appeals and is supported by all denominations. The official web site contains comments from various church leaders.

The general secretary of the Baptist Union, David Coffey, said, *“The Alpha course has been of enormous value to churches in strengthening fellowship and increasing effective evangelism in the local community.”*

Roman Catholic Bishop Ambrose Griffiths said, *“The course is simple, direct, illustrated by wonderful stories. What’s more, it provides in wonderful form the basis of Christian belief which many Catholics have never cottoned on to...”* Roman Catholics have stated that Alpha is, *“...a valuable contribution to our commitment to evangelisation.”*

Presbyterian minister Bob Wotherspoon of Galloway who has been running Alpha for more than three years said, *“In my 18 years of ministry I have not come across anything so electrifying.”*

Ed Wright, a Pentecostal pastor from Columbus, Ohio, USA commented, *“alpha has given us a model for effective evangelism. Relationships are formed on Alpha and unchurched participants are loved even before they are saved.”*

George Carey, the one-time Archbishop of Canterbury has

spoken publicly in support of the course on many occasions and *“commends it wholeheartedly.”*

All these leaders have given their blessing to Alpha. This worldwide initiative is described as a tremendous tool for evangelism, but the endorsement by so many church leaders leads to the conclusion that Alpha would be better described as a tool for ecumenism. The ecumenical movement seeks to reverse the Protestant reformation. It considers the Roman Catholic church as a Christian church and works towards uniting historical Protestant churches with the Roman Catholic church. Alpha is guilty of aiding and abetting this movement. It is an ecumenical venture.

Alpha fails to expose the errors of ecumenism

Some of the greatest characters in the Bible, both Old and New Testament were men who objected to and opposed false religion. Characters like Gideon, Elijah, Isaiah, Nehemiah and Paul (to name a few) championed the cause of God. They were firm and steadfast in their defence of the gospel. And that led them to reject false religion. A faithful ministry must involve this. Faithfulness to God requires exposing error. Ephesians 5:11 teaches,

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”

Jude verse 3 confirms this position with the words,

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

It is often unfashionable to contend for God. It is deemed uncharitable to speak against the deceitful and dark doctrines of Romanism. It is looked upon as being negative, intolerant and bigoted. However, an honest gospel ministry must include this. The errors of false religion need to be revealed. Rather than this being negative, speaking the truth in love to perishing souls, even if that includes condemning false religion, is a positive and scriptural thing. However, you will not find this approach in Alpha. In all of their literature that I have read, I do not find any warning against the false doctrines of this age. There is no alarm sounded against the

false cults. There is nothing to alert people to the dangers of the Roman Catholic mass, the spurious doctrine of salvation by works, the charismatic deception or the evils and entanglements of the ecumenical movement. There is little or nothing by way of earnestly contending for true Christianity, based on the Bible as its infallible rule of faith and practice. The course does not highlight the errors of man-made religion.

This is why leading Roman Catholics Bishops can write in glowing terms of Alpha. David Konstant, the Catholic Bishop of Leeds is on record as saying, *“The Alpha course is a valuable contribution to our commitment to evangelisation as we move towards the new Millennium, and I am sure it will be of great benefit to the Church’s mission.”* (He surely means the Roman Catholic Church’s mission!). Another Roman Catholic Bishop, Ambrose Griffiths of Hexham and Newcastle said, *“It is not a complete exposition of Catholic doctrine. No introductory course could possibly do that. But it doesn’t contain anything that is contrary to Catholic doctrine.”* These are telling statements. They mean that the Roman Catholic church can find nothing in Alpha that contradicts its own teaching. If it was a true Christian course, an evangelical, reformed, Protestant and Biblical course, the Roman Catholic church would not give it its endorsement. Alpha does not tackle the issues of Roman Catholicism. It does not expose the errors of the cults. It is so broadly based, so short on Biblical truth, so intent on speaking of love and so determined to attract as many people as possible that everything is acceptable and little, or nothing is condemned. That is not God’s way and it only leads to devilish ecumenism. Roman Catholicism and apostate Protestantism need to be exposed. It is no service to the unsaved within these churches to stay silent and let them go on to damnation. Alpha is silent!

Alpha actively favours and facilitates the leaders of ecumenism

For many years the Roman Catholic church and many liberal Protestant churches have sought means to join together in a closer fashion. They have joint services, weeks of prayer, processions and parades, shared buildings and ecumenical gatherings. They have

pushed ahead with their joint manifesto of bringing the two together and accepting each other as Christian churches. Alpha has given this evil spirit of ecumenism a shot in the arm. It is an ecumenical masterpiece. It has proved to be a means of reviving and revitalising this devilish scheme of joint worship.

That is clear when you read the ‘Alpha News’ of March-June 2001. In that particular edition of the official paper there is an article entitled, “Catholic archbishop and Church of England Bishop open Alpha conference together.” The subsequent report goes on to say that, *“The Roman Catholic archbishop of Birmingham, the most reverend Vincent Nichols, and the Anglican Bishop of Lichfield, the Rt. Revd. Keith Sutton have jointly opened an Alpha conference in Stoke on Trent.”* As could be expected the Roman Catholic Archbishop did not miss his opportunity to promote the teachings of his own church. He said in his opening speech, *“In the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, although I do not yet know it very well, we too are trying to play our part in this crucial task of presenting the good news of Christ to our society. A variety of approaches are used, some of which are aimed at exploring and understanding of Catholic faith, some at introducing people to richer ways of prayer and some at responding to those who express an interest in coming to Christ for the first time, or at least the first time in their adult life. And within these initiatives, the Alpha course is playing a significant role.”* This was an Alpha sponsored conference, yet it had a very distinct and definite ecumenical emphasis. The two leaders were presented as Christian ministers. They were seen to be talking about the same ideas, same desires and same ‘Christian’ work. It bears all the classic hallmarks of an ecumenical opportunity.

Another leading Roman Catholic, Thomas McMahon, Bishop of Brentwood has stated in favour of Alpha, *“How can one not give one’s unqualified support to Alpha — because when I look at its aims today — addressing the post Christian society which sadly we are now in — the aims of Alpha to give an introduction to the Christian faith, does what we need. It is aimed very specially at non-church goers, the lapsed and new Christians and then deepening the faith of those who are committed by a course on basic doctrines.”* Alpha may quote from men like J.C. Ryle, but the

preference of Alpha is not for men of Ryle's persuasion. It prefers to provide a platform for ecumenists. It facilitates and favours false preachers. It accepts and accommodates these men as men of God. There is not a word about the lies and corruption of Romanism. Alpha encourages fellowship with Romanism. The Holy Spirit has very strong words for those who preach another gospel. "*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*" (Galatians 1:8).

The Christian minister must not give space to those who preach another gospel. His duty is to expose them, not encourage them. His duty is to speak out against them, not support them. His duty is to denounce them, not endorse them. Those who preach another gospel must never be given a platform to preach that gospel.

Alpha goes even further still. It not only fails to expose the errors of ecumenism — that deals with its silence. It not only favours and facilitates the leaders of ecumenism — that deals with its support,

Alpha rejects the scriptural command of separation from ecumenism

This is an inexcusable sin. Scripture plainly teaches, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*" (2 Corinthians 6:17). This is a command. Men and women are to have nothing to do with the works of darkness but rather they are to be taught and exhorted to separate from them. The opposite is the case in Alpha. Nicky Gumbel records, "*In one sense it is not so important what denomination we are — Roman Catholic or Protestant; Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Anglican or House Church. What is more important is whether or not we have the Spirit of God. If people have the Spirit of God living within them they are Christians, and our brothers and sisters.*" It is important to have the Spirit of God ("If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" Romans 8:9). It is also the case that there are Christians in many different denominations, but to suggest to those who may profess faith in Christ, that it does not matter which church they belong to is plainly wrong. As one commentator has said, "*...it matters greatly because in some churches and in some*

denominations the true gospel and biblical teaching will not be heard. It is most irresponsible to suggest to young believers that it is virtually a matter of indifference which church they attend.” Yet this is what it is done in Alpha. Those who make a commitment in Alpha are not directed to seek out a Bible believing, gospel preaching, reformed, separated and faithful church. They are not encouraged to pray and determine the mind of God as to where they should worship. They are not instructed to find a spiritual home that will benefit them and help them to grow in grace. They are left to continue as before. It might mean the Roman Catholic church, Anglican church, or any other church of whatever persuasion. By Alpha standards that is acceptable. That only serves to further the ecumenical movement and the Roman Catholic church.

Alpha is a dangerous initiative. It masquerades under the name of Christianity but is a tool in the hand of Satan to lead men to hell. Alpha denies the great doctrines of the word of God. It puts experience and sensations in the place of regeneration. It exalts another spirit — which is not the Spirit of God. It leads men to false professions and not true evangelical repentance and faith in Christ. It supports and strengthens the hand of the accursed ecumenical movement. It encourages attendance, rather than exposes, the errors of the Roman Catholic church. It presents a one-sided picture of God, which robs Him of His sovereignty, supremacy and righteous anger against sin and it paves the way for men and women to go to Hell, while thinking they are on the road to Heaven. Alpha is a destructive, dangerous and devilish scheme which must not be promoted or encouraged. It is not a blessing but a spiritual blight!

When faced with such a subtle attack on true Biblical Christianity, the Church of Christ has no alternative but raise a voice of opposition. Perilous times call for earnest prayer and faithful preaching. The need of this hour is a return to the old paths.

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...” (Jeremiah 6:16).

When the Alpha Course is subjected to a careful examination, in the light of Scripture, it is found wanting. A combination of doctrinal error, charismatic deception, questionable methodology, false counsel and ecumenical preference mean that Alpha must be opposed and rejected. The popularity of the course must not deceive the earnest Christian into accepting that which is evil.
