

Vanguard

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...contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude v. 3

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Special edition...

In this issue of Vanguard, we present a special in-depth analysis of the popular writer and activist Steve Chalke. For many in the United Kingdom, Steve Chalke is the most recognisable face of evangelical Christianity, so we have decided to devote this entire issue to Neil Richardson's excellent and informative analysis of Mr Chalke's message.

To many of us, even attempting to write such an article a few years ago would have been unthinkable, but, as Neil Richardson well demonstrates, Mr Chalke's views have changed so much

over ten years that this article is now very much a necessity. So we ask that our readers put aside their preconceptions about this man and his work (much of which has been commendable), and consider the following *Unmasked* article.

Finally, we are very pleased to welcome Neil Richardson back to the pages of *Vanguard*. His past investigations of Benny Hinn, Gerald Coates and Nicky Gumbel have proved helpful for many people, and we trust that this article will be similarly received.

Siam (editor)

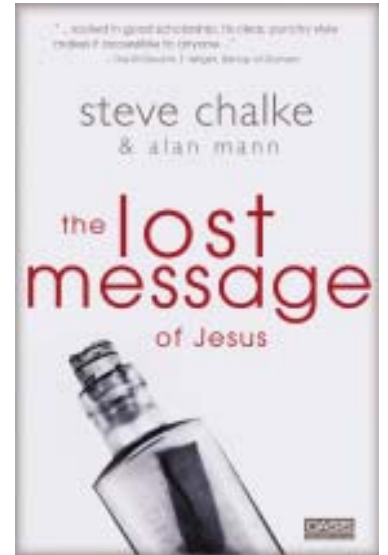
In this issue...

UNMASKED: Steve Chalke
by Neil Richardson

The Lost Gospel of Steve Chalke

By Neil Richardson

“ ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ ...The usual solution to this problem of Jesus’ cry is to suggest that God purposely turns his back on Jesus because he cannot bear to look on sin. As Jesus takes on to himself the fullness of the world’s sin, his sight becomes unbearable for a pure and holy God. I used to preach this way myself” (Steve Chalke, 2004).¹
“The most important thing that Christians believe about Jesus is that He paid the price for the wrong things we’ve done and so took away our guilt. This means we can be forgiven by God even though we don’t deserve it” (Steve Chalke, 1994).²
“My book, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, is not actually about atonement”³ (Steve Chalke, 2004).



¹ *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), p183

² *Good Question* video (Scripture Union, 1994)

³ ‘Redeeming the Cross: the Lost Message of Jesus & the Cross of Christ’, article

⁴ To be covered in a forthcoming article

⁵ “Don’t misunderstand me. I do believe one of the benefits of following Christ is this wonderful eternal life we have now and forever. I love the story and the message and the truth of the Cross, but the Cross is one sliver in the larger story of God’s mission to the world...I’m asking you to have an openness to a bigger gospel...there’s so much more to the landscape of Christianity than I ever imagined... Don’t get me wrong, I do believe that the gospel has eternal consequences associated with it” (online sermon ‘The Forgotten Message of Jesus’, www.trinitychurchonline.org); cf. 1 Cor.1:2; Gal.6:14

⁶ “Steve Chalke’s new book could help save Jesus from Christianity...the Jesus introduced by Steve in these pages, however, sounds like someone who can truly save us from our trouble” (from ‘Praise for *The Lost Message of Jesus*’ on its first page)

This is the first of a series of articles on what appears to be a growing cartel of professing Christian writers and speakers. They have a particular, hard-to-define theological emphasis which centres on NT Wright’s New Perspective on Paul’s doctrine of justification⁴, a huge stress on ‘how Jesus’ message would have sounded to 1st Century Jews’ and “a popularised 21st century brand of worn-out 19th century liberalism” (www.amazon.co.uk reviewer). This group includes Steve Chalke, Vincent Donovan, the Bishop of Durham, Nigel Wright, Dallas Willard, Tony Campolo, Ian Cron⁵, Brian McLaren⁶, Kevin Rains (Vineyard) and others. The Word-Faith movement and the likes of Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland have been thoroughly exposed and shown to be manifestly anti-biblical (though sadly the latter is being given airtime alongside the excellent RC Sproul on the new UCB Europe TV channel). So now it seems the Enemy is hard at work through a new breed of subtler false teachers, many with English accents, who “secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Peter 2:1,2).

And it is certainly true that many follow them. Steve Chalke’s 2003 book *The Lost Message of Jesus* has ridden high in the Wesley Owen top 10 bestsellers for several months. The website www.church.co.uk is an online, virtual church (which has a physical hub [*sic!*] in Waterloo) and for the most part is devoted to promoting Steve Chalke’s ideas, although there are some brave Biblical voices in the online debate forum, such as Ian Goodson (God bless you, brother!).

Chalke has a distinguished career, particularly in the media and social action. He started life as a Baptist minister in 1981 having studied at Spurgeon’s College. In 1985 he set up Oasis Trust, a help-the-homeless organisation which now has over 400 workers. Over the next 20 years he involved himself in speaking and writing books

and articles on parenting, dating and the internet. Lots of people will remember using his 'Lessons in love' videos for their youth group some years back. Others will have seen him on television on programmes like 'The Heaven and Earth show' and 'Songs of Praise'. Just this easter (2004), he caused a stir at the supposedly-conservative Spring Harvest Word Alive, where he brought out some wares from his *Lost Message* book. There was some amazement that this 'formerly sound' Bible teacher should have deviated so far from the plain and glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The discerning Christian reader will find himself immediately discomfited when reading the book, that something-is-not-quite-right feeling one often gets when hearing some 'new teaching'. This article will examine *The Lost Message of Jesus* and try to articulate as clearer as possible by God's grace just exactly why it is so unbiblical.

Authority

"Christians believe that the Bible is where God most wants us to know about life...the most important thing you can do is get hold of a Bible and find out what it has to say for yourself" (Steve Chalke, 1994).⁷

Bible references/influences in Steve Chalke's 2000 book on children and sex: ZERO.

Philip Pullman has become notorious as a writer of children's fantasy literature, considered by some to be better than Tolkien and CS Lewis. The latter occupied themselves with Christian or at least Catholic allegory, whereas Pullman is extremely antagonistic to Lewis- after commending his literary criticism, he says that Lewis "was bitten by tsetse fly...he went mad" when writing the Narnia Chronicles. He says that Lewis is misogynistic, racist and hates life⁸. Pullman is especially hostile to God, Christianity and the church⁹ and makes absolutely no bones about this in his phenomenally successful and well-written trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. Pullman tries to rewrite Genesis 1-3 in the books and says, "I think it would be more...sensible for us to regard Eve as a great heroine, indeed as the first scientist...the first experiment ever was to taste the fruit and see what would happen...she's a great, courageous model of curiosity and interest in the world. She wanted to know more."¹⁰ This is what the New Testament rather describes as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16)- not much great or courageous about the very first act of rebellion against God. Pullman's 'God', whom he calls 'The Authority', is blasphemously portrayed as "indescribably aged...terrifying decrepitude, a face sunken in wrinkles, of trembling hands and a mumbling mouth and rheumy eyes...the aged being gestured shakily...and cackled and muttered to himself, plucking incessantly at his beard, and then threw back his head and uttered a howl of such anguish...."¹¹

This hellish desire to mock, belittle and caricature our Almighty and perfect Creator is never far away. Consider the present Arch-Druid of Canterbury, Rowan Williams: "This is the solitude of truth, the solitude, finally, of God; God as a spastic child who can communicate nothing but his presence and his inarticulate wanting."¹² There is nothing carnal man wants more than to silence and dethrone the God who made him. Whether avowedly atheistic like Pullman, or arcane and religious like Williams, it makes no difference. They have no shame about using words like "decrepitude" or "spastic" when it comes to God's power, and "mumbling...muttering" and "inarticulate" when it comes to His Word. They "cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children" (2 Peter 2:14). Chalke does not go quite as far as the other two, but he is unashamed to speculate that "God is hiding the immeasurable suffering caused by [His] love. No-one could bear to see a face wrung with such infinite pain and live."¹³

Authority, then, is the question for these men and indeed for all of us when we come to consider things of God and of man. I mean this in two senses: 1. Will man submit to God or will he say, a la Pullman and Williams, "We will not have this man to reign over us?"¹⁴ and 2. What is the source through which God reveals Himself to man?

Firstly, men do not like to be under authority, unless it is to be enslaved to the lusts of this world which I have already mentioned. We prefer Satan and our own desires, to God and His kingdom. We reject and despise authority- the phrase "stiff-necked" is used at least eight times in the Books of Moses.

⁷ *Good Question* video

⁸ http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/books/readers/clips/preview.shtml?2002/0710/clips/pullman_philip

⁹ He describes it as "an apparatus of social control which is totalitarian."

¹⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/books/readers/clips/preview.shtml?2002/0710/clips/pullman_philip

¹¹ *The Amber Spyglass*, page 416

¹² *Open to Judgement*

¹³ *Lost Message*, p59

¹⁴ Luke 19:14

Secondly, we must agree how it is God speaks to us His creatures. This is why most systematic theologies begin with this question, and it is always the most significant area of debate with someone from another religion or the cults (e.g. do we base our beliefs about Jesus on the Bible alone, or the Bible + the teachings of the Watchtower?).

I submit that Chalke has problems in all of these areas. Like Pullman and Williams, he has a seriously distorted view of God, he does not like to emphasise the authority and power of God, and will not accept the grounds of authority as being God's most holy and infallible Word, but rather places many other things above it, which we will explore in detail now.

A1. Life experience & pragmatism > The Word of God

Bible teacher David Jackman says that the problem with the scoffers referred to in 2 Peter 3:3-7 is that they draw their conclusions about God from the world, not from the word. In other words, they look at the planet and see that it continues much as it has done since "the beginning of creation", and conclude

that this therefore means Christ will never return and this old order will always remain. But Peter sharply points out that they "wilfully forget" how the world was made by God's word, and then destroyed again by God's word and by water at the time of Noah.

Steve Chalke similarly derives his views from the world, not the word. He pits the message preached on Sundays against the everyday experiences of ordinary folk, mixing legitimate assaults on 'health and wealth' teaching and bogus revivalism with unwarranted attacks on Bible doctrines such as hell. He quotes a young disillusioned woman: "I just can't bridge the gap between the reality of my life and the message that my pastor and church elders teach... I sense that there are many more people like me [but] there seems to be a conspiracy of silence that no-one is willing to break" (p14). One appreciates that far too many churches today present a phoney, positive-thinking kind of gospel, but to say that there is a 'conspiracy of silence' is hard to countenance, given that we live in the most information-rich society the world has ever seen: Bibles, videos, sermon tapes and Christian literature overwhelm our heaving bookcases, and if one is really seeking a Bible-believing, Christ-exalting group of believers, one can find one (at least in the UK where this lady lives).

Furthermore, Chalke speaks favourably of a very wealthy man who no longer attended church, but "hadn't lost his faith in Jesus at all. In fact, all he did was talk about God" (p13). The problem for this man was that church wasn't fulfilling enough and so he had substituted it with his possessions, whilst still having faith in Jesus. Christianity in its current form just isn't hitting people where they live, so Chalke argues, and so we need to change our emphasis and rediscover the lost message of Jesus. But the Bible is very clear about this, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death" (1 John 3:14). Bishop of Liverpool James Jones argued this way in Chalke's 2001 book: "We cannot say that we love God and then ignore our neighbour."¹⁵ A genuine believer may well be disillusioned with the compromise of an individual congregation, and feel obliged under God to leave and seek more godly fellowship. But it is impossible for one who is truly *in Christ* to abandon Christian fellowship altogether. Every true Christian loves his Father in heaven, and loves his brothers and sisters on earth, and knows- whatever negative experiences he may have had- the utmost importance of meeting together to "stir up love and good works...so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24,25).

Chalke makes two crucial errors here. Firstly, he confuses someone's interest in talking about God with a lively faith. The rich young ruler wanted to talk about God, even fell on his knees to do so, but he walked away from both Jesus *and His disciples*, when challenged by the Lord to give up his possessions. Jesus describes the foolish builder not as the man who does not listen, but as the man who *does* listen, but does not act. Actually, we can see the heart of Chalke's rich friend's problem: he is looking for "something meaningful and exciting" in his life, and "Church [had] become a barren and unfulfilling experience." If a person comes to church looking for excitement and fulfilling experiences (but not wanting to be challenged), they will probably be disappointed if the church is faithful to the Scriptures. If they come looking for the Lord and His forgiveness, they will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13), and in many ways He will fill their lives with meaning, excitement and fulfilment. Isn't this our experience as believers? But there is no crown before the cross: "May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, *after you have suffered a while*, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10). Chalke wants a pain-free, experience-orientated Christianity-lite that he can palm off on frustrated spiritual

hedonists who are not prepared to bow the knee before Jesus as Lord of all their lives. That is his appeal, and that is his tragedy.

His second error, therefore, is to try to change how we ‘do church’ or what kind of message we preach based on the reactions of people who have become disillusioned. This is a shaky foundation, surely, in any walk of life. Imagine an Olympic bodybuilder who quit because he dropped too many weights or got drug tested so many times. Imagine the Olympic authorities saying, “OK, let’s drop the drug tests as they aren’t fulfilling for our athletes; or, even better still, let’s give them little pulleys to help them lift the weights up. Otherwise we’re going to have athletes walking out on us left, right and centre! Don’t change the athlete, change the rules!” The Olympic authorities, like all churches, are far from blameless, but they do not solve their problems by destroying any kind of standards or authority. They solve their problems by sticking *closer* to the spirit of the Olympics- or in our case, the Word of God. What kind of value has a prize that one does not need to run for?¹⁶

¹⁶ Philippians 3:14

¹⁷ Mark 7:13

¹⁸ *Lost Message*, p33

¹⁹ *Faithworks*,

p16,18,19,22,52; cf. p36

²⁰ *ibid.*, p54

So, then, we see that Chalke places the complaints of disillusioned men and women above the Word of God when it comes to determining our message and our form of meeting together. On the contrary, John shows that “they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19).

In terms of pragmatism, Chalke’s greatest criticism of the “Pharisees, Zealots and Essenes” is not- as Jesus says- that they made “the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down”¹⁷, but rather that “the problem they all had to face up to was simply that they didn’t work.”¹⁸ He thus shows himself to be far more interested in techniques and effects than in principles and righteousness. Somehow it would have been OK if the Pharisees had accumulated all of their non-Biblical regulations, if only they had worked! Chalke loves the Christian faith principally because it is a sort of nebulous ‘force-for-good’ in society, rather than defining faith as trust bestowed in a worthy recipient- that is, God! Hence he can say, “The greatest poverty our nation faces is a poverty of hope. That’s why Christian faith is potent. Faith transforms lives, and that’s why faith *works*” and “Faith breeds a can-do culture, and a can-do culture refuses to see any obstacle as final” and “That’s why the Christian faith is so potent: it develops the strength and health of both individuals and communities. Put simply, faith sparks transformation” and (profoundly) “Faith is good, not bad. It’s progressive, not regressive. It’s empowering, not enslaving. Our faith is a genuine asset, not a liability, when it comes to providing best quality, cost-effective care. Faith is the engine that drives the church’s work. So our message to the government is: *Don’t remove our engine!*” and “Faith and spirituality are very much alive, interest in them is growing fast. Faith is alive and well in twenty-first century Britain”¹⁹ as if ‘faith’ itself had some kind of mystical, psychically-transforming power apart from God. So Chalke’s pragmatism divorces ‘faith’ from ‘in God’ and, even more notably, ‘in Christ’ time again throughout his 2001 *Faithworks*. This is confirmed on page 48 where he says, talking of the civil rights movement in the USA, “Christians *and those of other faiths* showed absolute, unswerving, faith-driving commitment through all the ups and downs, trials and tribulations of a harsh, decade-long struggle for freedom, justice and respect.” In other words, it doesn’t really matter what faith you have, as long as it drives you to social justice, and as long as it works. “When will churches and Christian charities that provide welfare be judged on the outcome of their work rather than on someone else’s biased evaluation of their doctrinal basis of faith.”²⁰ Pragmatic, appalling and Christ-denying stuff.

In Chapter 7 of *The Lost Message*, ‘A New Agenda’, Chalke reprises these twin themes of ‘what people are into’ and ‘what works’. He says:

The world is full of people who have been told, time and again by the Church, what not to do. What they long to hear about is what God wants them to do. People are desperate for a message they can buy into, that they can see will make a difference to them and to the world in which they live. The truth is that you can’t engender a sense of lostness or need into people simply by pointing out that they are “sinners”. It just doesn’t work.

No doubt Chalke would have been there as Moses descended from Sinai to tell him to go back up and get the commandments rewritten more positively. He is completely correct, however, in saying that we cannot *make* people feel lost in and of

²¹*Lost Message*, p141,142

²² John 17:12

²³ I wrote my final year dissertation in English Literature on CS Lewis and still cannot decide whether he is finally an ally or enemy to the Gospel

ourselves. And he is also right that moralising sermons without the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel of Jesus Christ are a waste of time. You cannot tell dead men to be good- first they must be born again by water and the Spirit. But he takes his reasoning too far by implying that there is a problem with a negative message *per se*, because it just isn't comfortable to the listeners. He seems to see non-Christians as people whose lives are missing a jigsaw piece, rather than people who are rebels in their hearts against God and spiritually dead. So if we just skim off some of the more unpalatable aspects of the Christian message, thousands will "buy into" it. No change on their part required- just the message. By Chalke's standards, Peter's Acts 2 Pentecost sermon would fail. The apostle twice accuses his hearers of murder (23,36), of having "lawless hands" (23), and urges them to repent and be baptised for the remission of sins, so as to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (38). Peter does not try to make his hearers feel guilty to induce a sense of lostness, but neither does he hold back on negative and hard-hitting words. The Holy Spirit takes these words ("Now when they heard this...") and He Himself uses them to bring about conviction ("they were cut to the heart and said... 'What shall we do?"). We sinners cannot bring people to conviction of sin, but if we do not preach on sin and repentance, what is there for the Holy Spirit to make use of in order to convict people?

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Chalke starts to blur the distinctions between those who are in Christ and those who are not, since no repentance or crossing-over or new birth appears necessary in order to become a Christian. This is why he quotes CS Lewis' *Mere Christianity* which says

The world does not consist of 100% Christians and 100% non-Christians. There are people who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but still call themselves by that name... There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ but who are so strongly attracted by him that they are his in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it.

Chalke seizes upon this with some delight:

Today, Lewis might couch this message in terms of 'the journey of faith', of 'belonging before believing' or talk of 'church without walls'. But he wasn't trying to 'do church' for a post-modern generation. Lewis was a middle-aged, middle-class, thoroughly English university lecturer who was living in post-war Britain and reflecting on the Bible and real life as he saw it around him. While most of his contemporaries used the language of clear-cut certainties- you were either a Christian or you weren't- the fluid language used by Lewis would have been utterly radical. Lewis was pointing out something he believed to be plainly obvious, not only from his experience of life, but also from his reading of the Gospels- things just aren't that black and white. Shorthand terms like 'Christian' and 'non-Christian' may at first appear useful, but once you dig a little deeper you soon realise that they can cause us to miss the point entirely. As far as Jesus was concerned, it wasn't how close someone was to him at any given stage in their life that mattered as much as the direction in which they were travelling.²¹

He then gives the example of Judas as someone who appeared to be close to Jesus but was travelling in the opposite direction (let's not forget, however- Judas was *never* converted and was chosen to be the "son of perdition"²² in advance).

I think it would require an entire article just to unpick the problems with the Lewis excerpt (though *Mere Christianity*, unlike *The Lost Message*, has some fine points to it²³). Suffice it to say that when one starts to derive ones beliefs from 'experience of life' and 'the Bible' on equal footing, the Bible inevitably loses out in our minds. God is a jealous God, and He will have His Word to take pre-eminence in our thinking, or not at all. See the Catholic Church (which Lewis was very friendly with, incidentally). You see this transparently in the fact that Chalke alludes to the Gospels but conveniently for him does not quote them, and Lewis does not even bother with the Bible at all.

The Bible has no such vagueness about the state of a man before God. Let's take Matthew's Gospel. Either one is a virgin with oil or one without; either you are a sheep or a goat (ch.25). Either a man is for Christ, or against him (12:30). Jesus comes to bring a sword that even divides households on the grounds of belief and unbelief (10:34). Two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left; similarly the women grinding at the mill (24:40,41). The entire book of 1 John works in binary oppositions: light/dark, love/hate, Christ/antichrist, God/world, truth/lies, righteousness/sin. And it is a book of certainty for those who believe: the expression 'we know' is used at least 15 times in this short epistle.

It is true that conversion can appear a gradual process. Nicodemus did not appear to commit himself to Christ in John 3, yet there he is in John 7 speaking up for him, and finally in John 19 at the burial of Jesus. It is also manifestly obvious that many make professions, even boldly, of faith in Christ which come to nothing and they fall away. The parable of the sower (or the soils) is enough to demonstrate this. And it is true that as with the Samaritan woman God is preparing even now the hearts of those trapped by false religion to hear the message of Jesus Christ, repent and believe- but as yet they do not belong to Him, and they must hear the Gospel if they are to be saved²⁴. One cannot draw, therefore, the conclusions that Lewis and Chalke do; namely that one can

- a. lose genuine salvation (cst. John 5:24)
- b. be 'in-between' Christ and the world, not saved but not unsaved either (cst. same verse!)
- c. participate in another religion which rejects Christ and still accept Christ²⁵ (Matt.6:24; 1 Thess.1:9)
- d. reject the teachings of Christ and still accept Christ (cst. 1 John 3:24; 4:3).

Chalke revels, as do all theological liberals, in obfuscation, the breaking down of categories and "fluid language" because they completely undermine the need for conversion. The unregenerate religious man does not understand the need for others to be converted because he is not converted himself. I do not know the state of Steve Chalke's heart, but if he doesn't seem to think it matters whether one is a 'Christian' or a 'non-Christian', then it seems he must be the latter, does it not? I fear it is he who has "missed the point entirely".

A2. Continuous revelation & speculation > the Word of God

Almost all cults are based on continuous revelation. They despise the Word of God though they pretend to love it, so they invent supplements and additions to pursue their own beliefs (e.g. *The Book of Mormon: another Testament of Jesus Christ*). The Catholic Church has its Pope and Magisterium, issuing new doctrines every century, the most recent major one being the bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven (1950). Some branches of the Charismatic movement rely heavily on new words of knowledge, revelations, prophecies, pictures, dreams and visions to guide them. It is no surprise that in these churches the Bible is hardly preached at all, and if so it is 'mined' as a resource to bolster the preacher's latest thought that has occurred to him or her.

Theological liberals do not believe that the Bible is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16), but rather a man-made historical document with special religious significance. And if they do accept that in some sense it is the 'word of God', they find it hard to believe in its perspicuity (i.e. its clearness) or immutability (i.e. that its meaning does not change throughout the ages). Unlike cults and some Charismatics, theological liberals do not try to add special new books, 'downloaded' straight from heaven, to form the basis of their beliefs. But because they believe the Bible to be non-divine in origin (and therefore temporally and culturally bound), they feel the need constantly to re-interpret it to meet what they see to be the ever-changing needs of the world around them: "Every generation must grapple again with the question of who Jesus is and what the message is that he brings."²⁶ And so they view with suspicion any claims that the Bible is clear and its message unchanging since the canon was closed. They see certainty as arrogance and fluidity as an intrinsic virtue. Because the Bible's message is 'fluid' to them, so is their portrait of Jesus. You can see this in the front cover of the book above, which will be assessed in a forthcoming article. NT Wright is one of Steve Chalke's mentors, and though a conservative in terms of basic dogmas, he is liberal in his inclinations and thought-patterns (hence being quite happy to co-write books and have fellowship with people who utterly reject Jesus as Lord, such as Marcus Borg).

²⁴ Romans 10:14

²⁵ It is a gigantic fallacy to suppose that other religions have 'parts in agreement' with Christianity and that if a few alterations were made, they would be the same. All religions reject Christ as the Son of God and as crucified Saviour, and all religions (including Catholicism) reject grace alone as the means of our salvation

²⁶ *Lost message*, p19

²⁷ *Lost Message*, p18

²⁸ *Lost message*, p46

²⁹ Acts 4:12

³⁰ Incidentally, this is exactly what the Mormon church teaches, with Joseph Smith Jr. being the one who brought about the great Reorganisation of the Church after 1800 years of total apostasy.

³¹ *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel, p253

Chalke attacks certainty about Jesus as “arrogant” and “stupid”, and says that to be sure about him “inhibits our ability to communicate his unchanging message to an ever-changing world”. This is very weird logic. If you were a politician, which would you rather have working for you on your campaign trail? Somebody who had listened to your words, was certain and sure about you, knew and approved everything about you, and was willing to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim your worth and urge men to follow you? Or someone who preferred to make up their own hypotheses about you and was keen only to go around knocking on doors having exploratory discussions about who you really are? How can uncertainty aid communication? If Chalke is so adamant against certainty, then how can he be certain that the message is unchanging, or indeed know anything about the message at all? How can he presume to write a book telling us that he has found the message that the rest of us have lost? Not only does he deny all basic reason, but he implodes his own internal logic as well.

Similarly, Chalke commends the “bespectacled theologian” who says, “We need to constantly search for the real Jesus,” and condemns the young man who shouts, “I’ve not lost him. I know him. I love him. I don’t need to search for him.”²⁷ I’m afraid I rather warm to this young man! If someone is searching for something, they evidently don’t have it in their possession. They have lost it. How can Steve Chalke tell us about Jesus if he is still looking for Him, in fact, if he has lost Him? It is only worth reading a book called *The Lost Message of Jesus Christ* if the person has actually found Jesus and His message and can tell the reader how to find him too, not if he is still looking. Otherwise he is just as in the dark as the next man. Save your money and write your own book of speculations. Imagine famous Egyptologist Howard Carter writing a book, say, *The Lost Treasures of Tutankhamun*, page 1: “Dear reader. I have no idea where the tomb of the great king lies, or what treasures are within it, but if I did know I wouldn’t tell you because that would be certainty and as we all know for certain...er...certainty is arrogance. So I invite you to come on a journey of discovery together with me, even though I have no idea where I am going and have thrown away the only reliable map that might get us there...” Such a man as Chalke is like one who is “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

Chalke is so committed to uncertainty, the accumulation of ‘knowledge’ about Jesus and ‘the journey of faith’ that he says, “For us, the realisation that God is love has taken a long time to sink in. In fact, it has taken two millennia for the penny finally to drop. It is the fruit of a *progressive understanding*, slowly gained through centuries of God’s dealing with humankind.”²⁸ I really don’t understand this. Is he saying that no believers before the 21st Century could grasp that God is love? But he is quoting from the apostle John (1 John 4:8) and everybody who has access to the Bible has been able to read this, and some- by the illuminating power of God’s Holy Spirit- have understood, believed and experienced God’s love through Jesus: “In this the love of God was manifested towards us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9,10). If we dovetail this (that God’s love is manifested through the propitiatory death of His Son in our place) with what Chalke is saying (that no-one until now has grasped that God is love), then is Chalke saying no-one until now has actually believed in Christ and Him Crucified? And if they have not trusted in the love of God as shown in the Cross of Christ, then how can they be saved?²⁹ So we have 2000 years of a fake church³⁰, with no true believers, with no-one grasping the love of God or the meaning of Christ’s death? I leave you to draw your own conclusions as to whether it is the entire body of faithful, humble, Bible-believing saints throughout history who has missed God’s love and the point of the Cross, or Steve Chalke.

I really hope that whoever reads this has sought to know Jesus personally and believes in our Lord’s promise that he who seeks shall definitely find (Matthew 7:7). Even Chalke’s muse Dallas Willard says, “The Bible says that if you seek God with all your heart, then you will surely find him. *Surely* find him.”³¹ My prayer is that you will not be satisfied to rummage around in the darkness of your own or others’ ruminations about Jesus, but actually *know* the joy of sins forgiven by Jesus, the glorified Son of God, the risen Son of Man, who died for us and lives ever to make intercession for us, who is the friend who sticks closer than a brother, who is ever by our side and present in our hearts and minds by His Holy Spirit, and always teaches more of Himself and directs us through His perfect Word. “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

Francis Schaeffer says it is possible to know God truly, if not exhaustively. Of course none of us knows anything approaching all there is to know about Jesus, and we never will even in heaven, since we are finite and He infinite. But Chalke implies that even saying that one knows Jesus truly or has ‘found’ Him in any sense is presumptuous. But if a child who has lost his mother in the supermarket runs into her in the next aisle, he has truly found her, even if he knows very little about her life and can only understand a very limited vocabulary of what she says to him. Look at the beautiful simplicity and faith in Andrew’s first words in John: “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). He had found Jesus, truly, though he still had so much to learn. And we have “like precious faith” (2 Peter 1:1) with the apostles.

³² *Lost message*, p45,6

³³ Genesis 50:20; Exodus 20:6; Leviticus 19:18; Numbers 14:18; Deut. 4:37; Joshua 22:5, etc. Even in the book of Esther, which doesn’t mention God at all, the loving kindness of God towards His people Israel is shown in the way He delivers them out of the hand of Haman through his brave servant Esther

³⁴ *Lost message*, p66

A3. Human realisations not Word of God

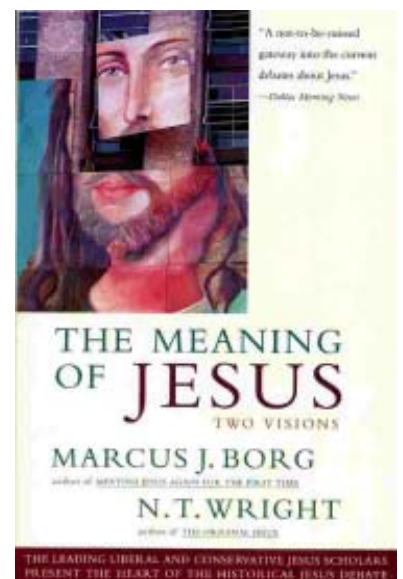
As I’ve said above, if one starts to veer off towards concepts of progressive revelation (cults and some Charismatics) or progressive understanding (theological liberals), then inevitably ones view of Scripture becomes debased. Lo and behold, though he champions 1 John 4:8 as his key text (“God is love”), Chalke cheerfully undermines the reader’s confidence in the absolute divine origin of Scripture:

For John, the writing of 1 John 4:8 is a catalytic moment, the setting out of a profound truth that, battling against his inbuilt mindset, has taken him decades to comprehend. Only after spending a lifetime pouring [*sic!*] over the pages of the Old Testament and, far more significantly, enjoying the closest of relationships with Jesus, does John feel confident enough to set down his earth-shattering statement- God is love. Yet this truth, more than anything else, informs Jesus’ message. That God is love is the entire foundation upon which the Kingdom and the shalom of God are built³².

There are so many problems with this that it is hard to know where to begin. A brief list, therefore:

- a. John is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not coming to sudden realisations about God: “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20,21).
- b. John does not have to battle against his inbuilt mindset: as an apostle of Jesus, an eyewitness of the Word of life and a new creature in Christ, he has “an understanding that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true” (1 John 5:20). He has not developed this understanding: he has been *given* this understanding by witnessing Jesus and by the revelation of the Holy Spirit
- c. Love is not the entirety of God’s character or kingdom: He is also “light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). To take God’s love and ignore His justice is akin to taking Christ’s humanity and ignoring His deity.
- d. The Old Testament presents God as a God of love in every single book.³³ It is bonkers to argue that the love of God is an idea which is only ‘realised’ as the last apostle is dying, though obviously the love of God is shown most magnificently and fully in His Son and the Cross.

Because Chalke has no real interest in finding out the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), he is able to make such preposterous statements as the above excerpt and downgrade the value of Scripture in revealing the God who wrote it. Like so many, he ends up resorting to non-verbal and mystical experiences to authenticate his views: in chapter 3, for example, a friend of his comes to a “moment of revelation” whilst gazing on Rembrandt’s ‘Prodigal Son’, and particularly the difference between the father’s hands (one soft, the other rugged). “My friend broke down crying- suddenly he understood. All his life he had seen God as strong and stern, tough and demanding, even harsh and inflexible. Now he suddenly realised that God is tender, God is generous and gracious, God is forgiving, God is love...Jesus, by telling this story...is declaring that there is a people-shaped hole in the heart of God.”³⁴ Faith for this man did not come through hearing the Gospel, repenting and believing, but through a painting of a pair of hands. But surely this means that this man’s view of God is



³⁵ Galatians 2:21

³⁶ Psalm 19:10

³⁷ *Good Question* video

³⁸ *Lost Message*, p63

³⁹ See 1 Corinthians 12- the church is the Body of Christ. To eschew the church is to eschew Christ's body

⁴⁰ *Lost Message*, p24, quoting *Christianity Rediscovered*

⁴¹ *Lost Message*, p22, quoting *Christianity Rediscovered*

subsequently going to be based on a painting by a sinner (was Rembrandt a believer?) rather than God's self-revelation in Scripture. Of course God can use anything He likes to send people towards Him, even patterns in the clouds if He chooses, but His final authority and method of self-communication is His Word, and we cannot rely on other things for understanding and truth. In any case, in his enthusiasm for, as he supposes, the 'soft' hand of God's love, Chalke misses even his own point by discarding the other 'tough' hand. And finally, whilst God's love is tender and forgiving, it is not 'soft' or 'weak': let's not forget it came at enormous and violent cost to the Lord Jesus Christ, because of the very 'inflexibility' of God's law Chalke is so eager to jettison. The Cross is utterly pointless if God is relaxed and undemanding about the transgression of His law.³⁵

If we resort to the experiences of the disillusioned, pragmatism, progressive revelation or understanding and sudden, uninspired realisations apart from the Scriptures, how much confidence can we have in the final melange of ideas in our brains?

No, God's Word is our sufficient authority, perfectly reliable, clear to understand through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Ps.119:18) and able to give light even to the simple (Ps.119:130). If the Bible is able to thoroughly equip the man of God for every good work, and make him complete, what need have we of these pieces of fool's gold³⁶?

God

"[Some] attempt to remould God in a shape that's more convenient, that demands less of them. In fact, today, spirituality is very big business...We'd rather buy a spiritual answer off the shelf than allow God to be God. But in the end it doesn't work. All we do is deceive ourselves. When you've invented, moulded and shaped your god, whatever you've got, you've not got God" (Steve Chalke, 1994).³⁷

"We should never speak of any other attribute of God outside of the context of his love. To do so is to risk a terrible misrepresentation of his character, which in turn leads to a distortion of the gospel. Christian talk about God must always start with love and introduce the language of power only in that context" (Steve Chalke, 2004).³⁸

We have already addressed some aspects of Chalke's skewed perspective on God, but I come now to look at one or two in detail. By promoting what he thinks is 'the love of God' (it is nothing of the sort), Chalke pretty much seeks to dismantle every other attribute God possesses. I find it quite breathtaking that Chalke is anxious to warn us, like Vincent Donovan in my next article, against those who might distort the Gospel and misrepresent God's character. I suppose they don't want people doing it better than they do.

G1. The Power, Sovereignty and Election of God: a Smaller 'God'

Probably the finest quiver of the heretic archer is that of conversational terrorism (i.e. logical fallacies and dodgy reasoning). And the deadliest poisoned arrow in that quiver is *the false dichotomy* (or antithesis or opposition). We have already seen how Chalke has sought to offset the love of Jesus against love of the church, as if the two things could be separated.³⁹ We have also touched upon how he cleverly sets up certainty against humility. This is one of the key devices used by Chalke's hero Vincent Donovan (see next article): "For us, too, he is the unknown God. But we are searching for him...Let us search for him together. Maybe together we will find him."⁴⁰ We are supposed to be impressed with how humble Donovan is, rather than aghast that he has absolutely no gospel to offer these perishing Africans. Another of Chalke's men, Lewis, is not so much lauded for his brilliant clarity of thought as for the fluidity of his language. We will look further on at another example of where certainty and humility are put forward as supposed opposites.

So Chalke's method is to take the love of God and enter it into the lists against other attributes of the Lord. The first of these is power. God is *either* loving *or* powerful, but not both, we are led to believe. For example, in chapter 2, 'The Kingdom has come!', Chalke quotes Donovan as saying that the Jews "often tried to restrict God to their tribe and so made him less of a God than he really was...The God of the tribe of Abraham had become a God who was no longer free. He was trapped in that land...He had to be freed...in order to become the High God...Perhaps God is no longer free...Free your God to become the High God."⁴¹ It is to be understood that Donovan is speaking somewhat anthropomorphically here (i.e. as if God

were bound by human limitations), but what is used as a literary device eventually becomes literal belief in both Donovan and Chalke's minds. That is to say, to them God's power literally is limited, fettered and bound by human perspectives and by His love.

Chalke takes this a step further by clever use of linguistic juxtaposition. He writes, "In the popular mind, this is exactly who the God of the Bible is: a sadistic, monster, a powerful and spiteful punisher of people who are having a tough enough time on earth as it is."⁴² Firstly, he plants words like 'powerful' and 'punisher' amidst some distinctly ungodly terminology. If God is to be powerful, He must be a monster. If He is to be a punisher, He must be spiteful. That is the inference, and it is extremely devious.

He then moves on to give a rather loose sketch of pagan theologies, continuing his false opposition of love vs. power: "This assumption that God is first and foremost power is not new- it runs throughout history. In fact, the thought of a loving god was total anathema to ancient peoples. Love, it was argued, was born out of need. Therefore, to link the gods with love would be to suggest that they somehow lacked something in and of themselves and so by implication were imperfect and vulnerable."⁴³ He is on the whole correct; in fact, some Muslim scholars still argue along such lines, which is why "Allah is love" is not a common expression in Islam, though Muslims are very much encouraged to love Allah (because it is a religion of works, not grace).

But Chalke replaces one fallacy ('If God loves, He must need. God cannot need because He is all-sufficient. Therefore, God cannot love') with its obverse ('If God loves, He must need. If God needs, He cannot be all-powerful. Therefore, love- not power- is the defining characteristic of God'). He depicts God's dealings with Israel thus:

The very fact Israel claimed Yahweh was the one true God implied, according to their worldview, that he must be the most powerful god of all. So when Israel went to war against her enemies, the expectation was that their God, the Lord Almighty, would demonstrate his power, destroy the opposing armies and in doing so vindicate his own name as well as Israel's belief in him.

Yahweh's association with vengeance and violence wasn't so much an expression of who he was but the result of his determination to be involved with his world. His unwillingness to distance himself from the people of Israel and their actions meant that at times he was implicated in the excessive acts of war that we see in some of the books of the Old Testament. From the very beginning, Yahweh's dealings with Israel were motivated by his desire to demonstrate his love. But to a people saturated in a worldview that saw him as *power*, this was always going to be a slow uphill struggle.⁴⁴

It's hard to conceive of a falser pair of paragraphs. Here are two fundamental errors:

- 1. God revealed Himself to Moses as YHWH** at the burning bush in Exodus 3- it was not an 'Israelite worldview' that they laid claim to. The 10 plagues demonstrated to the Jews as much as to the Egyptians that YHWH was the one true God. But as soon as they were out in the desert, they were complaining, creating idols, being immoral and everything under the sun in rejection of YHWH
- 2. God commanded Israel to go to war with His enemies.** It begins right from His promises to Abraham: "They shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."⁴⁵ God's promise to the people of the exodus was that "my Angel shall go before you, and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and *I will cut them off*."⁴⁶ God demands the complete annihilation of these utterly depraved tribes, just as he told Joshua to kill everybody in Jericho⁴⁷ (except Rahab who believed) and Saul to wipe out all the Amalekites. One of the final straws in Saul's downfall was the fact that he spared King Agag of that tribe, so Samuel had to cut Agag into pieces *before the LORD*⁴⁸. Saul thought he was more liberal, tolerant and loving than God, but in doing so he rejected God's word and was rejected by Him as king over Israel. To argue as Chalke does- that God was 'implicated' or 'associated'⁴⁹ with the violence- is a complete denial of God's word, and so God will deny Chalke and all others who argue this way. Their 'kingship' will be given to others. If we find this hard to stomach, it is because we do not properly understand a) the holiness of God and b) the

⁴² *Lost Message*, p47

⁴³ *Lost Message*, p48

⁴⁴ *Lost Message*, p48,49

⁴⁵ Genesis 15:16

⁴⁶ Exodus 23:23

⁴⁷ Joshua 6:17

⁴⁸ 1 Samuel 15:33

⁴⁹ Chalke has moved some distance from just three years ago. Bishop James Jones writes in the Foreword to Chalke's book: "There is not one centimetre of [the world] that can be removed from the sovereignty of God" (*Faithworks*, p8, 2001).

wickedness of man. (The words ‘righteousness’ and ‘wickedness’ do not appear as part of Chalke’s ideas in *The Lost Message*, as far as I can tell.)

⁵⁰ *Lost Message*, p183

⁵¹ Boff, like Donovan, is a Catholic, but even more far-out. He is a Brazilian Liberation theologian (i.e. social gospel, kingdom-of-God-on-earth stuff) and a New Ager: “We must care for our loved and generous Mother Earth” (‘A Manifesto for Harmony and Peace’). These men do not understand or love the Gospel and they do not appreciate the fallenness of human nature, so they draw up vaguely-worded manifestos thinking they will bring world peace (never mind about peace with God), or they reduce the Gospel to such expressions as ‘The Nazareth Manifesto’ (Bishop James Jones). Another such is the overweeningly-titled ‘Universal Ethos’ which is the usual vacuous fluff: “Our time should be remembered for the reawakening of a new respect for life, for a serious undertaking towards sustainability, for increasing the struggle for justice and peace and for a joyful celebration of life” (<http://www.grivel.com/AmbienteEtica.asp?Pagina=E>).

Yada yada. No Jesus, no God, no Cross, no Gospel. All man-centred, hubristic rubbish.

⁵² *Lost Message*, p54.

⁵³ Job 23:13,14

⁵⁴ Proverbs 3:6,26; 5:21; 16:1,9,33; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1,30

⁵⁵ Ephesians 1:4,5

⁵⁶ John 15:16

Against the plain narration of Scripture, Chalke has so convinced himself of the opposition between love and power that he feels impudent enough to conclude: “The cross is a vivid statement of the powerlessness of love. It is a perfect example of Willard Waller’s thesis that in any relationship the one who loves most has the least power.”⁵⁰ To reduce the greatness of redemption’s plan to this is contemptible (we will address it later), but to present the cross as an *example* of a modern man’s theory is utterly preposterous. We bow at the Cross, we do not shoehorn it into our fancy notions. And it is not difficult to see from Waller’s life why he made up this strange idea. Back in the thirties, Willard Waller saw his marriage fall apart and after his divorce he set out to find out why his marriage was so miserable. He noticed a lot of other miserable marriages and he discovered the same root cause in every one he studied. He said, “The person who loves the least has the most power and the person who loves the most has the least power.” So Waller is drawing on the sadness of human failure in relationships to make deductions about how God feels towards us, thus making us equal to God, and dragging Him down to our level of weakness, sin and pride. Talk about looking through the wrong end of a telescope. And that’s putting it kindly. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD (Isaiah 55:8).

Chalke recruits another godless man to bolster his ‘anthropic’ (deducing things about God from the way we are) heresy: “In the telling and moving phrase penned by missiologist Leonardo Boff⁵¹, the Bible reveals a God who is ‘weak in power but strong in love’. And it is this extraordinary, shocking, indeed totally outrageous concept of God as love that is at the centre of the message of Jesus.”⁵² Well, yes, Boff’s statement is shocking and outrageous, but not because it is so true and so exciting, but because it is false and dangerous. It is not as extraordinary as all that to believe that God is love. It is more wonderful by far to come to understand that God loved the world so much as to send His only Son to die in our place, to be incarnated in the likeness of sinful man and bear the punishment for our iniquities. That’s the truly gobsmacking essence of the Gospel (to speak Chalkish!), but unfortunately the very thing he wants to remove. Because these false-gospel merchants like Boff, Donovan and Chalke hate the Cross and what it says about God’s holiness and human depravity, they have to make the Gospel ‘amazing’ in a different way. They do this by diminishing God’s power and arguing that His love somehow enfeebles Him, like Pullman’s ghastly depiction I gave earlier, or Chalke’s view of God as wracked with infinite pain. They think this is wonderful.

One of the very first doctrines of God to go in Catholic, liberal, open theist, New Age, liberation and most charismatic theologies is the doctrine of election. It is almost as unpalatable as hell to the natural man, because it resists his proud notions of self-determination. Chalke has already said that God has a ‘human-shaped hole’ inside Him, which is very much the tenor of the Alpha course, too. Jesus is longing to be our friend if only we would let him. Leonard Boff’s mentality is “the history of the world is at a turning point, Man must choose his future.” Everything is down to us, earth is our grand project, we’re looking for the great evolutionary leap forward, etc. etc. But the Word of God says time and again that God is charge. He controls the big picture and the fine brushwork. “But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does. For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him.”⁵³ Proverbs is absolutely chock-full of references to man having his plans, but God directing his steps.⁵⁴ And, specifically, God predestines who it is should be adopted into His family: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”⁵⁵ Jesus says, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...”⁵⁶ Romans 9 is an entire chapter devoted to the subject of God’s sovereign elective

purposes, hard as they are for even mature believers to accept at times. Because Steve Chalke has a weak-power/strong-love view of God and does not really believe that human beings are thoroughly corrupt (Ps.14:3) in their natural state, Chalke must reject the doctrine of election and opt for a kind of optimistic universalism⁵⁷. Hence: “This Sermon on the Mount announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God and the breaking-in shalom for all, bar none- except at their own decision.”⁵⁸ Naturally, at our own decision, we would *all* reject God, because “all [have] turned aside” (Ps.14:3) and no-one seeks God, does good or understands.

So in Chalke’s theology, God is weakened or rendered powerless by His love. In fact, it seems almost impossible for Him to be anything other than love: “The Bible never defines God as anger, power or judgement- in fact it never defines him as anything other than love. But more than that, it never makes assertions about his anger, power or judgement independently of his love.”⁵⁹ Well, Mr Chalke, you are wrong. God *is* love, but God is also light. Humans have more than one characteristic, and so much the more so our Creator. God’s attributes work together and do not compromise one another. For example, the book of Nahum chapter 1 defines God thus: “God is jealous, and the LORD avenges...the LORD avenges and is furious...the LORD is slow to anger and great in power...the LORD has His way...the LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who trust in Him.” So we see that God is defined as many other things than love. Nahum does not use the word ‘love’ at all. And God’s love is directed through His other characteristics- so His love for His people causes Him to be jealous when they worship idols. Though He is slow to anger, He will have His way and avenge Himself eventually. He is never anything less than “great in power” and “good”. The whole essence of Romans 3 is that God is seeking a way to love sinners while retaining His holiness, “that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”⁶⁰

What is strange about all this is Chalke seems to have a faint vestigial memory of the truth (that God is love *and* power *and* holiness, amongst other things) fizzing somewhere in his cortex. And when he finishes *The Lost Message* by quoting John Stott, he absolutely contradicts himself:

The slain lamb- the symbol of weakness- stands at the centre of God’s throne, the symbol of power. This is the universe’s greatest paradox and deepest truth. As John Stott puts it, “Power through weakness lies at the heart of even the mystery of almighty God himself.”⁶¹

Chalke has been arguing for most of the book that God is weak *in* power. But here he shows that God has a throne of power and how God’s love and power are both made manifest *through* weakness. Jesus died on the Cross a physically weakened man, but the love and power of the Son of God were absolutely undiminished throughout. As He says to the Pharisees, “No one takes [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father”⁶² and to Pilate, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.”⁶³ To say that God *is* weak in power is the opposite of saying that He manifests His victory and power *through* apparent defeat and weakness. Jesus’ sacrifice was voluntary and the power taken to defeat sin at the Cross and death at the Resurrection can hardly be imagined.

G2. The Holiness, Judgement and Wrath of God: an Amoral ‘God’

If God is *just* love, then He is not powerful, and so cannot make sovereign choices. If God is *just* love, then He is not holy, and so will not bring judgement on those who reject Him and His law. Just as Chalke seeks to whittle away at God’s power, so does he His holiness. He quotes liberal darling and supporter of gay partnerships Archbishop Desmond Tutu who “once famously commented, what he loves most about God is his ‘wonderfully low standards’”.⁶⁴ If you were to read the Bible from cover to cover, would you come away with that impression? Is Tutu’s god the same one who is “of purer eyes to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness”, or whose mountain could not even be approached because of His purity, or the train of whose robe filled the temple as the great seraphim had to cover their faces as they sang Holy, holy, holy?!⁶⁵ Only one man could enter only once a year into the presence of God, the Holy of Holies, and he had to have the exact clothing, incense

⁵⁷ Note: even though God has chosen a limited amount of specific people to be in Christ, as far as we are concerned as Christians and evangelists, we must sow the seed far and wide, because we do not know upon whom the Holy Spirit may be silently working: “that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor.9:22).

⁵⁸ *Lost Message*, p174

⁵⁹ *Lost Message*, p63

⁶⁰ Romans 3:26

⁶¹ *Lost Message*, p197

⁶² John 10:18

⁶³ John 19:11

⁶⁴ *Lost Message*, p165

⁶⁵ Habakkuk 1:13; Exodus 19; Isaiah 6

and- most especially- blood offering for the atonement of the people (Leviticus 16). If he didn't do everything exactly God commanded, he would die. Personally I think this is why he had to have bells all over the hems of his robe- so those outside could hear he was still alive (Exodus 28:34). But Chalke knows better: "God was living with the ordinary people...not in the Holy of Holies where those born into privilege could access him once a year."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Lost Message*, p113

⁶⁷ Matthew 22:13

⁶⁸ *Lost Message*, pages 45 and 182.

Faithworks, p70. See the Martyn

Lloyd-Jones quote below for an

astounding exposé of this

Matthew Henry says on the standards and holiness of God: "The divine law is strict; in many things we come short of our duty, so that we cannot but be conscious to ourselves of much iniquity cleaving even to our holy things; when we would do good evil is present; even this would be our ruin if God should enter into judgment with us. But Christ, our high priest, bears this iniquity, bears it for us so as to bear it from us, and through him it is forgiven to us and not laid to our charge." The entire book of Leviticus is a reminder to us of how holy and unapproachable God is, and what great pains must be taken in order to bring reconciliation between us. In fact, Hebrews 10:4 starkly

warns us that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." Only the death of Jesus could tear the curtain and give us access into the Holiest Place, into God's very presence. Leviticus shows us how impossible it is that man should be in God's presence; Hebrews shows us how only the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, could make that possible.

But because Chalke is "wilfully forgetful" (2 Peter 3:5) of these things, he sees grace as all too easy and cheap a thing, and friendship between God and man as only a matter of a few simple alterations and modifications. God is not really holy, He's not that bothered about sin, and if only we would receive His love, all would be well. This kind of thinking is from the very pit of hell, because "without holiness, no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). The Devil is quite happy for us to believe in the love of God, provided that we do not repent and seek His forgiveness, provided that we do not see our need for the Cross. If we die in our sins, we shall come before God's throne of judgement, utterly mired and stained by our own sins, and will be "cast into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"- in the words of Jesus Himself⁶⁷. This is part of the Lost Gospel of Steve Chalke, and may it please God to enable him to recover it before it is too late.

Another vital phrase of Jesus that, *twice* in *The Lost Message* and once in *Faithworks*⁶⁸ (it can be no accident), Steve Chalke deliberately edits out is the second half of John 3:16- "...that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"- whilst still finding space to quote the whole of verse 17, albeit in his own words. These are the machinations of a man whose mind is bent against accepting that God is holy and man is not, and that the consequence of that is that- outside of Christ- we perish. "Wash me Saviour, or I die," as the hymn goes. And by leaving out the 'whosoever believes' as well as the 'should not perish', Chalke is downplaying the necessity of faith for salvation. Chalke's good news has no negative to it at all. He is like a doctor who knows his patient is dying of cancer and knows the remedy which will heal him. Instead of giving the dying man the remedy and telling him to receive it and believe in it, he just cheerfully waves him off- "All will be well; all will be well; all manner of thing will be well" (universalist mystic Julian of Norwich). He "heals the hurt of My people slightly, saying 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). This is made all the more tragic by the fact that ten years ago Chalke *did* understand that our most pressing need is forgiveness of sin, and quotes the whole of John 3:16 in full, and with urgency in his not-too-bad video, *Good Question* (1994).

Because Chalke now resists the holiness of God, he time and again makes use of 'straw man' phrases (namecalling, actually) to try to repel his reader from the idea. He caricatures a holy God like this: "God's got a big stick and he's on your case" (p42), "a sadistic monster, a powerful and spiteful punisher of people" (p47), "a vengeful despot" (p49), "a demanding deity" (p51), "People still believe that the Christian God is a God of power, law, judgement, hell-fire and damnation. A God whose strapline is probably, 'Get in line fast or I'll squash you!'" (p56). These phrases sound as if they were written by an atheist or sceptic. He seems to prefer his own views of God as the one whose face is wracked with infinite pain, the one rendered powerless by His love; or perhaps, the views of Monty Python in the witty but blasphemous *Life of Brian*. He describes the film as being "much reviled" and "much maligned" (terms of protest used to defend something that is innocent) and "spot on in their portrayal of...first-century Palestine" (p75,76). Anyone who knows the film knows that it mocks and belittles the most serious and wonderful thing the world has ever seen- the voluntary death of God the Son on our behalf. But Chalke would rather ally himself with that, than accept that God is holy.

The law of God displays the holiness, character and glory of God. But Chalke sets forth the Ten Commandments as “a set of values to guide and govern their lives together” (p50), or “an ethic for the whole of life” (p53). “The Ten Commandments is a loving God saying, ‘Look, I am the God who loves you. I’m on your side. I got you out of slavery. I’m the best deal you’ve got going for you. Trust me. Don’t steal. Don’t lie. Don’t abandon me. Don’t commit adultery, because if you do it will unleash destructive powers that will slowly overshadow you, destroying you, your families and your society. Trust me. Don’t be stupid’” (p53). Chalke views the law of God as making best sense for our lives (which it does), but neglects the fact that the law represents God’s holiness and is “our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). It is no surprise, therefore, that he says “My friend J. John recently found his public talks on the Ten Commandments being enthusiastically supported by one local council, which similarly valued his emphasis on the fact that moral choices have serious consequences; that there’s a real and important difference between right and wrong.”⁶⁹ They loved the moral code because Christ was not being preached as its goal. Paul says in Romans 4:15 that the “law brings about wrath; for where there is no law, there is no transgression” and that “I would not have known sin except through the law” (7:7). “What purpose does the law serve? It was added because of transgression, till the Seed [i.e. Jesus] should come to whom the promise was made” (Galatians 3:19). The law keeps us under guard, showing us how holy God is, how far short we fall, and how much we need a Saviour, so that we might have justification through faith in him, for “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Galatians 2:16). The law’s place in redemption is entirely lost on Steve Chalke who sees it as an exalted ethical design for life. He fails to acknowledge that we *cannot* keep the law because in us nothing good dwells (Romans 7:18) and that we are by nature “sons of disobedience” and “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:2,3). This is altogether beyond his ken, and yet it is at the very heart of the Gospel.

⁶⁹ *Faithworks*, p53

⁷⁰ *Lost Message*, p59. There is a big debate about whether God the Father is impassible (can feel pain or not). An early heresy called Modalism denied the Trinity, and said God was one Person in three different modes. This obviously meant that God the Son suffering on the Cross was exactly the same Person as God the Father, hence patripassionism (the Father can suffer). I am not arguing about this here, just attempting to show how Chalke has invented this ‘face contorted with pain’ concept to avoid God’s holy purity and wrath against sin.

⁷¹ *Lost Message*, p62

⁷² Psalm 145:8

The holiness of God means He must finally judge and separate unforgiven sinners from Himself. Chalke recounts the illustration his Sunday School teacher used of tissue paper bursting into flame when put near a candle. “God is holy, an all-consuming fire, and we are sinful. Which means no-one can get close to him without suffering the same fate at this piece of paper when it got too close to the candle’s flame. That’s why it is impossible for us to look into God’s face without dying,” said the teacher. Chalke says that he saw this as the only explanation at the time for Exodus 33:20, “Anyone who sees My face will die.” But when he got older and wiser and “the more I read the Bible [*sic!*], the more convinced I am that my teacher missed the point” (p58). As with Willard Waller, he draws conclusions about God from his own experiences rather than the other way round. So when Chalke visited a Thai orphanage, he was horrified and overwhelmed with pain at the suffering he had witnessed. He then gets to work with his extra-biblical logic and reasons thus (in my words):

1. I love the Thai children a little; they are in pain; I suffer a little because I love them a little
2. God loves the world infinitely; the world is in pain; God suffers infinitely because He loves infinitely.

But Chalke’s own talk belies him here. Despite tokenistically referring to the Bible, his conclusions about God are clearly based on his life experiences and the reasoning he bases on them. Because he rejects the Bible as the basis for his view of God, he ends up with this travesty: “In Exodus 33, God is not hiding from Moses, but he is hiding the immeasurable suffering caused by that love. No-one could bear to see a face wrung with such infinite pain and live.”⁷⁰

Because Chalke is happy for God to feel pain but not anger, and believes that the fundamental problem with humans is isolation and exclusion (not sin) he discards the wrath of God. He admits that “although God is love, this doesn’t exclude the possibility of him eventually acting in judgement”⁷¹ and says that “if God is love, then anger is a legitimate, indeed intrinsic, expression of that love,” but refuses for God to be *characterised* by holiness or judgement. Anger towards the unrepentant sinner is not a function of God’s love; it is a function of God’s holiness. He is slow to anger (which is why He does not destroy the sinner immediately but is patient) and rich in love⁷² (which is why He saves any sinners at all).

Consequently, Chalke absolutely lays into Jonathan Edwards and his ‘Sinners in the hands of an angry God’ sermon. He calls it “all too representative of the portrayal of the gospel by the Church over the last few hundred years...the worst of this

ferocious rhetoric is a thing of the past...people still believe that the Christian God is a God of power, law, judgement, hell-fire and damnation".⁷³

⁷³ *Lost Message*, p56

⁷⁴ Matthew 23:13

⁷⁵ *Lost Message*, p184

⁷⁶ Habakkuk 1:13

⁷⁷ 1 Timothy 6:16

Well! Firstly, Chalke is not worthy to wash Jonathan Edwards' wig. Even flaky Charismatics like Guy Chevreau who wrote Toronto textbook, *Catch the Fire*, acknowledge Edwards to be one of the greatest men of God the world has ever seen. I'm reading his *Narrative of Surprising Conversions* at the moment, and his godliness, prayerfulness, faithful preaching and love of both believers and the lost are vastly apparent. He was used to bring many thousands to faith in Christ. What is Chalke doing? Having "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men" he "neither goes in himself, nor does he allow those who are entering to go in."⁷⁴

Secondly, which one of those properties of God that Chalke ridicules people for "still believing" is not Biblical?

- 1. Power-** "Your right hand, O LORD , was majestic in power. Your right hand, O LORD , shattered the enemy" (Exodus 15:6; cf. Deut. 9:26,29; Joshua 4:24; *passim* the whole Bible).
- 2. Law-** "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7; cf. all of Psalm 119; Deuteronomy means 'Second law'; Jesus said He come not to abolish the law but to fulfil it, Matt.5:17)
- 3. Judgement-** virtually every book in the Bible either uses the word 'judgement' with regard to God or concerns itself with that subject in some measure. Jude quotes Enoch, a man so godly that God translated him to heaven, as saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to *execute judgment on all*, to convict those who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (14,15).
- 4. Hell-fire-** where does the notion of hell-fire come from if not from the Bible itself? And our Good Shepherd and King of Love, the Lord Jesus speaks about hellfire time and again. His love drove Him to warn His sheep of their imminent danger. He who sees no danger does not warn (or he who sees, but does not care). Chalke speaks warmly about the Sermon on the Mount in several places, but overlooks the fact that Christ mentions hell and its fires three times in chapter 5 of Matthew, and the same amount in Mark 9. The lake of fire in Revelation 20 is plainly going to happen, whether literal fire or something even worse
- 5. Damnation...** is another word for negative judgement. It is used 11 times in the KJV NT, and Jesus uses it 6 of those 11 times (e.g. Matt.23:14,33). There is no one who focused more on damnation than our Lord Himself- He who was to be made sin for us so we did not have to experience it.

In conclusion, Chalke cannot or will not accept the holiness of God as that which keeps His face hidden from us (see the opening quote at the head of the article). But his reason for rejecting this is once again merely human logic: "The problem with this, however, is that if God is omnipresent, as the Bible clearly teaches, he cannot exclude himself or remove himself from his creation but must look upon sin every day."⁷⁵ In one fell swoop Chalke dismisses holiness, sin and the need for redemption by putting God's omnipresence on the other side of the scales, instead of placing God's attributes all together as one consistent whole. Habakkuk's statement ("You are of purer eyes than to behold evil") is immediately followed by... "Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?"⁷⁶ Unlike Steve Chalke, Habakkuk wrestles with these two aspects of God's character: namely that God is pure, holy and cannot tolerate evil; but also that He is patient, merciful and delays punishment whilst giving opportunities for repentance. This is why the previous verse says, "Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction." In other words, by introducing a *third* aspect of God's character (that is, His timelessness) it becomes a little easier to resolve the difficulties. God can be totally intolerant of evil in His eternal perspective, whilst being patient with evildoers in the perspective of this life. But the reality is that all evildoers who will not repent, though apparently scot-free and happy in this life, are indelibly marked for judgment. God is aware of their wicked deeds, but He will not, as it were, "lift up the light of His countenance upon them" (Ps.4:6), and He will ultimately cast them out of His presence: "Depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness" (Matt.7:23). We have to accept God's self-revelation in the Bible and that, unlike us, it is possible for Him to see everything evil but also not look upon it in the same way. It is possible for Him to know everything, and yet not remember our sins (Isaiah 43:25). It is possible for Him to be everywhere, and yet for there to be a place of outer darkness where it cannot be said that He dwells, since He "dwells in unapproachable light".⁷⁷ Instead of grappling with the paradoxes and complementary

truths of the Scriptures, Chalke draws his own conclusions in rejecting God's holiness, from a very one-sided view of a single characteristic of God (omnipresence).

I will leave the last word on this to the late Martyn Lloyd-Jones (one could almost believe that he had read Chalke's book!):

The false believer does not really trouble to study the Word of God; he is not a true student of the Bible. He may indeed have a certain interest in the grammar or mechanics of Scripture, but he is not really concerned to know the message of the Book; he has never really allowed himself to face its full teaching. Paul was able to return to the elders of the church at Ephesus and to say to them that he was very happy about one thing, that he had delivered unto them "all the counsel of God". He did not keep anything back. The message he had been given by the risen Lord he had given to them. There were parts of it that hurt; parts that perhaps he would rather not have given, but it was not his message; it was the whole counsel of God, and he had given it to them as from God. The superficial false believer is not interested in that.

Secondly, he picks out what he likes, and concentrates on what appeals to him. For instance, he likes the doctrine of the love of God, but not the doctrine of the justice of God. He does not like the idea of God as a holy God, and a righteous God. The idea of the holiness of God is repellent to him, so he does not read about it. He knows that there are great passages in the Bible that manifest the love of God, and he can recite them by heart because he reads them so often. He thinks he knows all about John 3:16, but he does not even read that properly. He emphasises a portion of it, but he does not like the idea of "should not perish". He does not go to the end of that same third chapter where it says, "The wrath of God abideth on him"-that he does not believe and does not like. He is interested in the love of God, and in forgiveness. He is interested in other words, in everything that gives him the feeling of comfort, and happiness, and joy and peace within. So whether consciously or unconsciously, he picks and chooses as he reads the Bible. There are many people who do that. There was quite a vogue in that kind of thing in the early part of [the 20th Century]. There were people who never read the Epistles of the apostle Paul⁷⁸; they only read the Gospels. And they did not read the whole of the Gospels because they felt that there things that were offensive, so they narrowed it down to the Sermon on the Mount. But even here, in the same way, they did not read the Beatitudes, they simply read about "loving your enemies", etc. They were pacifists and idealist who did not believe, they said, in striking back, but in turning the other cheek. That is the typical false believer. He extracts and picks out what pleases him, and ignores the rest. You see it so clearly in the picture of the man who built his house upon the sand, and it is exactly the same in the spiritual realm.⁷⁹

G3. Reclaiming the true love of God

On discussing *The Lost Message* with a Christian brother, we agreed on several things. Firstly, we thought Chalke had a point in some of his negative criticisms of the church as sometimes judgemental, bigoted, cold, etc. Because churches comprise sinners, and the love of many churches has grown cold, it can appear that the lovelessness of the church is actually the problem, rather than the sin of the world.

So lack of love can be a big problem and does put people off coming to Jesus. But it is completely wrong to set love at odds with God's other characteristics, or use the lovelessness of some churches as an excuse for unbelievers not to repent. In fact, as Luciano Pelosi demonstrates here, God's love co-operates perfectly with all His other characteristics, such as His holiness and His justice, and this is seen most especially in the love between the members of the Trinity:

We need to understand God's love in its eternity. The Trinity loves itself forever. God loves His only Son. The Son loves the Father. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit live in the highest, most perfect form of Love. Here is the supreme love to compare all loves with. In election we find love. All true believers are loved in Christ. We are also given to Christ as a love gift from the Father. Even in eternal damnation we find love. God's love for His own holiness. At the Final Judgement we meet Jesus the Son displaying His love for His Father's Law. Christ redeeming is an act of love firstly to His Father, achieving victory over the great rebel Satan and salvation for God's elect, and secondly it is Christ's part in the great redemption toward the elect in which all the Trinity demonstrate their love

⁷⁸ There is not a single reference to Paul or any of his epistles in *The Lost Message*

⁷⁹ Martyn Lloyd Jones, *The Sermon on the Mount* (1959-60), Vol.II, p306,307

for us. Christ damning is a great vindication of the truth of the Spirit, and the love which declares that His Father's purity and holiness will not be violated.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ See Proverbs 8:30,31 (love in the Trinity); Malachi 1:2 (love in election); Galatians 2:20 (love in Christ); John 6:37 (church is love gift from Father to Son); Psalm 33:5 (God's love of holiness/righteousness); 1 Peter 1:2 (Trinity's love for elect); Revelation 21:26,27 (damnation of impure shows God's love of purity, Christ's love of justice, Spirit's love of truth, etc.)

⁸¹ 1 John 4:1-3

⁸² Docetism, Apollinarianism, Monophysitism

⁸³ Arianism, Adoptionism/Dynamic Monarchism, Ebionism

⁸⁴ Eutychianism

⁸⁵ Nestorianism

⁸⁶ Mother Teresa was devoted to her Catholic rituals and good works. She could not have trusted in Christ if she had no desire to bring others to know Him: of Hindus she said, "If they believe whatever they believe, that is their salvation."

Jesus: very God-made-flesh or inspired teacher?

John advises us: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but tests the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."⁸¹ Here we see the need for discernment and testing because of the proliferation of false teachers- i.e. it is more likely than not that you will encounter false teachers, so be on your guard.

Every false teacher and cult attacks the natures and person of Jesus Christ, and Steve Chalke is no exception. The giveaway signs are that they undermine either His human nature⁸² or his divine nature⁸³ or say that He was a mixture of both God and man but not truly either⁸⁴ or say that He was two persons closely linked in one body.⁸⁵ It is exceedingly difficult if not impossible for finite, sinful, human minds such as ours to comprehend how infinity can be contracted to a span, and the Word could become flesh and dwell among us. But with God all things are possible. Jesus is a single Person of the Trinity, with distinct but inseparable divine and human natures. He is 100% God and 100% man. John 1:1-14 is perhaps the clearest declaration of this, but Philippians 2:5-11 is also very helpful.

Chalke, as with all theological liberals, leans to the human nature of Jesus to the downplaying of His deity. He says,

But interestingly, when we are actually pinned down as to why we believe in Jesus' divinity, we begin to struggle. We end up scrambling around for the odd verse where we are semi-confident that Jesus was claiming this is the case. But trying to find verses where Jesus explicitly says he is divine are like trying to find needles in a haystack. As we have already seen, the kind of verses we cling to [Matt.16:16; Mark 14:61-62] had nothing to do with a claim to divinity. In staking his claim to be the Messiah, he wasn't claiming divinity (page 112).

He goes on to say that Jesus' divinity is displayed instead through his actions, but see how subtly our confidence in both Jesus' deity and the Scriptures is hacked away at. But he has missed out the whole gospel of John. The Jews understood loud and clear that Jesus was claiming *with His words* to be God as this is why they often sought to stone Him:

"I and My Father are one." Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:30-33).

As for Chalke's argument that a claim to Messiahship was not a claim to divinity, perhaps he should check his Old Testament again. Isaiah 9:6 is a classic Messianic prophecy, and "His name will be called...Mighty God," not to mention Psalm 110 which Jesus himself teaches from in Mark 12:35-37 to show that the Son of David (Messiah) must also be the Son of God.

The demotion of Jesus continues when Chalke casually compares him to his favourite religious/liberal icons, the usual suspects, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Mother Teresa and so on. I always find it striking that the world's heroes are adopted by the liberal church. They are always famous for their humanitarian actions, and never for their proclamation of the Gospel or devotion to Jesus Christ.⁸⁶ This is why one black Christian researcher wrote:

I started looking up Martin Luther King's writings. As I read, I realized that he was a stranger, a foreigner to me. Whenever he mentioned Jesus, it was along with mere mortals like Socrates or Ghandi. In his jailhouse letter, King

lumped all religions into the same class. I could not find one “sermon” where he preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified. What I saw is that this man “preached” a social gospel using Black churches as his springboard.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/king.htm>

Chalke is of the same ilk as Martin Luther King, if not such a great speech-maker:

⁸⁸ *Lost Message*, p137

⁸⁹ *Lost Message*, p17

⁹⁰ *Good Question* video

⁹¹ *Lost Message*, p67

⁹² Though also present in Islam

It has been said that every great leader has one core message that permeates everything they do and say...it was true of Karl Marx, of Gandhi, of Martin Luther King Jr., of Freud. And it's equally true of Jesus (page 16).

He sees Jesus as one great inspirational figure in human history: “He deliberately evoked the core plot of Israel’s story but then subverted it, and, like all the best storytellers, gave its ending a totally unexpected twist” (p24). Indeed, he devotes a whole chapter to how much like Jesus Gandhi was. Gandhi, Chalke says, “self-consciously based his ideas on the teachings of Jesus. Yet in spite of this, he never introduced himself as a Christian. Mahatma (the Great Soul), as he came to be known, saw Christians as unwilling to truly follow Jesus’ teaching and example. Perhaps, as a result, he was proud to talk openly about his deep commitment to the message of Jesus, but equally keen to avoid any association with Christianity or the church” (p124). Chalke then commends Gandhi for commending Jesus for “grasping” the principle of non-violence. What amazing presumption that either man should drag the Son of God down to this level. And how foolish of Chalke to ‘big up’ Gandhi for being a kind of ‘Christian-in-essence-if-not-in-name’. (In actual fact, Chalke shows inadvertently how Gandhi’s non-violence was more motivated by defiance and pride than love of his enemies.) Let Jesus speak: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another” (John 13:35). If Gandhi had “listened to Jesus, taken his words seriously and proved him right,”⁸⁸ as Chalke claims, he would have *loved* Jesus and Jesus’ people too and proclaimed Jesus’ Name as the only way of salvation (as we have touched upon above). Just lifting a few pacifist principles from the Sermon on the Mount does not amount to faith and love of Jesus. And using hypocrisy in the name of Christ as an excuse to not repent and believe, well that’s the shabbiest and oldest trick in the non-believer’s dodge-book.

Chalke’s respect for those who deny Jesus Christ amounts to a denial of Jesus Christ in its own right. His affinity with those who just saw Jesus as a great man of ideas reveals that he cannot see our Lord as anything more than this. This is why he talks of Jesus as someone who “from his cradle to his grave...radically challenged centuries of popular Jewish understanding and teaching about God’s character and his agenda for humanity...the radical, life-changing, world-shaping message Jesus brought to the people living in Palestine two thousand years ago.”⁸⁹ Even though theoretically Chalke accepts Jesus’ divinity the way he writes about him seems so past tense, so like just an extraordinary, but mortal man.

Man: good enough for God?

“There’s something about human nature that means however much we want to do the right thing, we find it easiest to do the wrong thing...none of us are what we ought to be...the one person we find it really very difficult to put in the frame [to blame] is ourselves...the whole of our society doesn’t believe in guilt any more...it seems best to pretend it was never there in the first place...but the solution to guilt, is forgiveness” (Steve Chalke, 1994).⁹⁰

“Jesus believed in original goodness...original sin...is this grave error that has dogged the Church in the west for centuries” (Steve Chalke, 2004).⁹¹

As with the football leagues, relegation for one idea means promotion for another. So just as Jesus’ glory and deity are diminished to the level of Gandhi and Luther King, man’s goodness is elevated to the highest division. Since I wrote an article some years back on Celtic Spirituality and Roger Ellis (Fusion student movement), the false doctrine of ‘Original Goodness’ seems to have made some headway. It is a rejection of the Fall and total depravity, and a belief in the essential goodness, or at least neutrality of human nature. It derives in part from the British monk Pelagius⁹² who contended with Augustine who taught the Scriptural doctrine of Original Sin. Chalke, who has made a 180 degree turn in ten years on this subject, summarises his current viewpoint in his own inimitable scholarly style:

While we have spent centuries arguing over the doctrine of *original sin*, pouring [*sic!*] over the Bible and huge theological tomes to prove the inherent sinfulness of all humankind, we have missed a startling point: Jesus believed in *original goodness!* God declared that all his creation, including humankind, was very good. And it’s this original goodness that

Jesus seeks out in us. That's not to suggest that Jesus is denying that our relationship with God is in need of reconciliation, but that he is rejecting any idea that we are, somehow, beyond the pale.

⁹³ *Lost Message*, p121

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p117

⁹⁵ Matthew 7:11; 9:13; 12:39

⁹⁶ *Lost Message*, p98

To see humanity as inherently evil and steeped in *original sin* instead of inherently made in God's image and so bathed in *original goodness*, however hidden it may have become, is a serious mistake. It is this grave error that has dogged the Church in the West for centuries. In the fourth century Augustine developed his influential theology that the material world and everything in it was inherently evil and corrupt. This "fallenness" he said, was like a virus, and in humans was passed on through the act of sexual intercourse and conception. So from the seeds of Augustine's thinking, the doctrine of original sin was born. However, the Eastern Church instead followed the teaching of Irenaeus, who believed that all people were God's image-bearers and though flawed were, as he put it, like flowers in bud- slowly coaxed into full bloom by God's love (page 67, *his italics*).

Once more there are about 17 billion reasons why these paragraphs are completely bogus. I will try to be brief, honestly:

- 1. Loaded language.** He deliberately plants phrases like 'arguing over' and 'to prove' as if these things were not clearly evident in Scripture. This is similar to his 'cling to' and 'claim' with regard to the deity of Christ.
- 2. False antithesis.** Yes, it's that old favourite. Chalke tries to force the reader into making a choice either for original sin *or* original blessing, hence the repeated use of italics. But he defines original goodness as the world being good when God created it, which is beyond question. So cleverly, if one were now to preach original sin, Chalke would have you believe you are denying the goodness of creation. There is a simple cut to this Chalkean knot. It is the Fall. God created man and the world "very good" (Gen.1:31). Man fell. By chapter 6, "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (v5). There is absolutely no explanation for the Flood in Chalke's 'original blessing' theology. So he ignores both Fall and Flood, not to mention Babel. The other false antithesis Chalke indulges in is to face off Augustine against Irenaeus (see below).
- 3. Downright rubbish.** There is nowhere in the entire Bible that it says that Jesus "constantly looked for the good in people"⁹³ or just "chose to inspire them with stories about a better way to live"⁹⁴, as if all they needed was a fresh code, rather than a new heart. Chalke even thinks that Jesus' non-retaliatory stance was an attempt, even on the Cross, to "call on something in human nature, something that would cause his enemies' hatred of him to decrease and their respect for him to increase." But Jesus knew He was being murdered by ordinary people who are described as "strong bulls of Bashan...they gape at me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion" (Ps.22:12,13). He was not appealing to their better nature. He was dying for wicked men such as you and me. He is the Saviour of sinners, not the facilitator of the morally undeveloped. Christ makes no effort to spare our feelings on this: "If you then, being *evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children..."; "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"; "an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign", and so on.⁹⁵ This is entirely opposite to Chalke's protestations that "These people aren't depraved and evil; they are ordinary Jews, only too aware of their failures."⁹⁶ The Bible makes it clear that righteousness is a *gift* from outside of ourselves, imputed into us by God's grace, "in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). Grace, incidentally, is a word or concept I don't think appears in *The Lost Message*. Of course this must be true because, sadly, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Romans 7:18). Yes, we are made in God's image, but that image is so marred by sin that only Christ can restore any kind of goodness to us, and all of that belongs to Him in any case. This is why we worship Him! We love much because we are forgiven so much (Luke 7:47).

So a further word about Irenaeus. As it is, his views are not quite as Chalke would love them to be. Actual scholar John Gill shows us a more accurate way (the 17th Century language is worth persevering with):

Irenaeus is expressly for the corruption of human nature through the sin of Adam, which he calls "the old plague, blow, or wound of the serpent," from which men cannot be saved otherwise than by believing in Christ. He says that "we offended God in the first Adam, not doing his commandment, and which we had transgressed from the beginning;" and that Eve was the cause of death to herself and to all mankind;" and that man "will be justly condemned, because being

made rational, 'he has lost true reason,' and lives irrationally, is contrary to the justice of God, giving himself up to every earthly spirit, and serves all pleasure." Also he affirms that "we lost in Adam will to the image and likeness of God." Now a very considerable part of this lay in man's free will to that which is good, and therefore this must be lost by sin; and what free will to that which is spiritually good can there be thought to be in man naturally, who, is said by, Irenaeus to be a dry tree, which cannot bring forth fruit unless the voluntary rain of the Spirit descends from above upon it? The weakness of human nature is proved by this writer from Romans 7:18; his words are these: "who (Christ) saved them 'because they could not be saved by themselves'" wherefore Paul declaring the infirmity of man, says, "I know that in my flesh dwells no good thing;" signifying that "not of ourselves, but of God, is the blessing of our salvation." The inability, yea, the impossibility of attaining to the true knowledge of God, without divine teaching, is plainly asserted by him when after citing some passages in Isaiah, as, "I am God, and before me there is no Saviour," etc. he says, "Neither diversely, nor haughtily, nor in a boasting manner, does he say these things, but because 'it was impossible to learn the knowledge of God without him,' he teaches men by his Logos, or Word, to know God." And elsewhere he observes the bondage state of man by nature, and that immortality and eternal glory are not of himself, but are the pure free gift of God; "Man, says he, "who was before led captive, is taken out of the power of the possessor, according to the mercy of God the Father," who has pity on his own work, "and restoring it, gives salvation to it by the Word; that is, by Christ; that man may experimentally learn that not of himself, but by the gift of God, he receives immortality."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ *The Cause of God and Truth*, part 4, chapter 3, section 5, 'Original sin, the impotence of man's free will, etc.:'; all genuine Irenaeus quotes taken from *Against Heresies*; I can't find the flower in bud reference anywhere

⁹⁸ <http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/num54.htm#FATHERS>. Check this site for a full handling of the issues

⁹⁹ *Faithworks*, p19

As you can see, Irenaeus, a man who fought for Biblical truth, is a million miles away from being a special recruit for Steve Chalke, or an enemy of Augustine. What is also irritating is this notion bandied about by theological liberals that somehow Augustine 'invented' original sin out of his own head (which is where they get most of their theologies). Here is a list of all the "church fathers" who expounded the Bible doctrine of original sin *before* Augustine: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Methodius, Aphraates, Ephraim, Athanasius, Cyril, Basil, Didymus, Chrysostom (to some extent), Pacian, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster.⁹⁸

And most importantly, something that makes all church fathers and theologians and what-not fade into insignificance is that original sin is a Bible doctrine, i.e. the Holy Spirit believes in original sin:

- "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one" (Ps.14:1-3; cf. Ps.53:1-3; Romans 3:10-18)
- "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps.51:5)- David realises that it is in his corrupted nature even to commit adultery and murder
- "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus spread to all men, because all sinned....for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:12,19).
- "We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:3,4).

And I'm afraid that it all comes back to this: pride. Steve Chalke cannot accept that he himself is a wicked man in need of God's grace, mercy and pardon, and the blood of Christ to wash him clean of his many, many sins; in fact, to cleanse him of his sinful nature, its penalty and power. For him, it is enough that "people begin to believe in themselves when they know someone else believes in them."⁹⁹

Holy Spirit: unnecessary or sine qua non?¹⁰⁰

Distinctly and significantly absent in the book (also *Faithworks*, *The Parentalk Guides* and the *Good Question* video) is the Holy Spirit of God. Why would a man who ‘wasn’t that bad really’ need the Holy Spirit to come and dwell within him and give him power to do what is right? Can’t he just morally rearm himself, pull up his bootstraps and be a better person in 2005 than 2004? The doctrine of the Holy Spirit goes hand in glove with the doctrine of (original) sin. Because we are “dead in our trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) we cannot bring ourselves to life, or even desire to stop sinning: “by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body.”¹⁰¹ Only the Spirit can “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8), doctrines Chalke hopes are consigned to the dustbin of history. Only the Holy Spirit can “guide men into all truth” (John 16:13). In other words, he has no use for the Holy Spirit, and who is the Holy Spirit but God Himself?

Cross: human waste-disposal unit or substitutionary atonement?

“He came to our rescue... He showed us by His example the right way to live, but more than that, Jesus came to deal with the root of our problem, our failure to acknowledge God as God. He did this by dying in our place. The Bible says that when He died on the cross Jesus was actually taking the punishment we deserve for never letting God be God in our lives. God knew we could never, never pay the price for turning our back on Him, a price so much bigger than any of us can imagine, and including eternal separation from God. But God wanted us back in relationship with Him so much that He found a way of paying the price Himself, buying back for us the right to be close to Him. Imagine how much God must love us to do a thing like that” (Steve Chalke, 1994, my underline).¹⁰²

“How then, have we come to believe that at the cross this God of love suddenly decides to vent his anger and wrath on his own son? The fact is that the cross isn’t a form of cosmic child abuse- a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith” (Steve Chalke, 2004).¹⁰³

I hope you are beginning to see the logic of all of this. I think it all stems from a stubborn commitment to a single-premise (‘God is love’) to the exclusion of all others, and then a man-made definition of what that premise means and implies. Chalke’s rejection of the Bible’s authority leads to a distorted view of God and a diminished view of Christ. This in turn leads to an inflated view of Man, and therefore no need for the Holy Spirit or- in this section- the Cross.

Chalke’s rejection of substitutionary, penal atonement has become famous since the book released, but one of the main reasons for this long article is carefully to establish why- over 10 years- he has arrived at this conclusion, and to equip you, dear brother or sister in Christ, to discern the patterns of thought that are all too prevalent in the so-called Christian world today. Chalke is at the bottom of the Gospel-denying slippery slope that I would say most churches in the West are already beginning to slide down. He is by no means a blip.

Here is what Chalke rejects about the Cross in summary (including some of the most blasphemous quotations in the book):

- 1. No atonement necessary: forgiveness is free.** He says that “Jesus’ greatest complaint against the temple officials wasn’t the bad exchange rate; it was that they had dared to put a price on forgiveness at all, when God had always intended it to be free.”¹⁰⁴ Yes, forgiveness is free to those who believe, but it **comes at infinite cost** to our Saviour: “You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor.6:20).
- 2. No propitiation¹⁰⁵ necessary: God is not angry.** “John’s Gospel famously declares, ‘God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son’ (John 3:16). How then, have we come to believe that at the cross this God of love suddenly decides to vent his anger and wrath on his own son? The fact is that the cross isn’t a form of cosmic child abuse- a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement ‘God

¹⁰⁰ Without-which-not... “Without Me you can do nothing”

¹⁰¹ Romans 8:13

¹⁰² *Good Question* video

¹⁰³ *Lost Message*, p182,183

¹⁰⁴ *Lost Message*, p107

¹⁰⁵ To propitiate is to “make propitious or favourably inclined; appease, conciliate, placate” (OED). In Greek, the word for ‘mercy seat’ is very similar. The mercy-seat was on top of the Ark of the Covenant, between the cherubim, and just above it was from where God would speak to Moses. It would be covered with bull’s blood by the High Priest (Lev.16:11-30) as an atonement, so that the sinful Israelites would not be destroyed by God’s wrath.

is love'. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by His Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil."¹⁰⁶ Here it is again: he starts with 'God is love' and rejects anything else that does not fit into his anthropic definition of what that means. Thus he seeks to destroy the heart of the Gospel. But the Word of God speaks out against such lies:

- a. God is just, so He is angry against sin, and He will take revenge on sin and unbelief.** "In flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9). Christ's command not to pay back evil with evil is not because He espouses injustice, but because "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 12:19). The problem with personal revenge is that we are taking the place of God, to whom belongs the dispensations of judgement, whether in this life by authorities He ordains (Romans 13:1-4), or for eternity when His Son returns (Revelation 20:11-15). The fact that *any* are chosen for salvation shows that God loves His enemies- "...when were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Rom.5:10). The Cross is God's solution for how He can avoid compromising His justice and still find a way to love His enemies and leave them unpunished. Jesus voluntarily takes the penalty, justice is served, sin is punished, the sinners go free, at the expense of the blood of God's Son. Is this not the glorious Gospel, which Chalke rejects so out of hand?
- b. God did set forth Jesus Christ as a willing sacrifice to take the punishment of the elect.** "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand" (Isaiah 53:4,5,10). It was God's initiative, not an accident. We have not "come to believe" this and God did not "suddenly decide" it. It was His "determined purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). In God's sight, the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world for our redemption (Rev.13:8). Despite spending much of the latter part of the book trying to dismantle this, Chalke's love of CS Lewis means that he accidentally ends up including substitutionary atonement as part of his Aslan quote: "...a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead..." (p191). Lewis, despite his weaknesses, understood the atonement far better than Chalke does, but it is quite weird that Chalke argues so comprehensively against himself here, implying that after all mankind are traitors and do deserve punishment.
- c. Jesus is our propitiation/mercy seat.** The blood of Jesus absorbs all of God's wrath against believing sinners. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation/mercy seat by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:23-26; cf. 1 John 2:2; Luke 22:20; Eph. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Heb. 9:11, 12, 28).
 "The mercy seat protected man from the judgment of God represented by the judgment angels, the Cherubim. Because of the blood that was sprinkled on the mercy seat, man's sin and guilt were washed away and the curse of the law has no effect. The mercy seat foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our mercy seat. He forever stands between a holy God and sinful man. Just as the sins of the whole nation were atoned for by the sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat, so also Christ, by the shedding of His own blood atoned for the sins of the entire world."¹⁰⁷

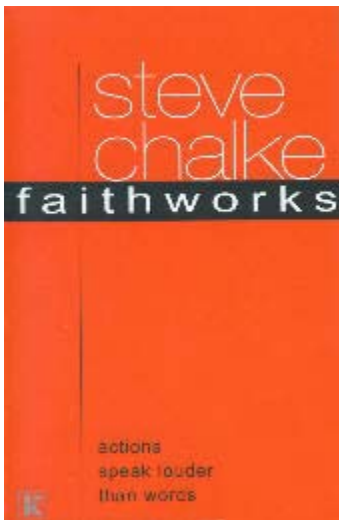
¹⁰⁶ *Lost Message*, p182,183

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.bible-history.com/tabernacle/>

[TAB4The_Mercy_Seat.htm](#)

¹⁰⁸ 'Redeeming the Cross' article

Chalke is so keen to play down substitutionary atonement, that he says in an article written later to defend his heresies in *The Lost Message*: "I am convinced that a robust theology of the cross is...multicoloured rather than monochrome. More than that, I am sure that this spectrum includes a clear substitutionary atonement element along with a number of others, among them identification, example (e.g. 'Take up your cross and follow me') and representation, though no single theory can possibly capture the breadth and profundity of the cross."¹⁰⁸ Chalke has a fine way of diluting the effect of something by putting it in a list and then saying that no one item of the list can really do the job. To say that substitutionary atonement is



an 'element' of the Cross is like saying that deity is an 'element' of Christ or that love is an 'element' of marriage. It is the *heart* of the Cross, and injunctions like 'Take up your cross' are implications that ensue from substitution. To cling to Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf as the only means of our salvation, then, is to be rather grey, missing out on the full colour of Steve Chalke's social action brochure.

Chalke's faint blandishments towards substitution turn to ashes almost immediately as just two paragraphs later he says that

the relatively modern concept of 'penal' substitution" (the idea of a wrathful God who can only have his anger at iniquitous sinners appeased through bringing about the violent death of his Son) is a totally different matter. Indeed, besides anything else, it is not as old an idea as sometimes imagined. Penal substitution (as opposed to other more traditional substitutionary or 'satisfaction' theories) first emerged in 'draft' form with Anselm in the 11th Century. It was substantially shaped by John Calvin's legal mind in the Reformation and was finalised by the Princetown scholar Charles Hodge in the 19th Century.

If penal substitution is a modern concept, it's not Biblical. But as you can see from the plenitude of Bible quotations above, this is rubbish. Anselm, Calvin and Hodge may have written about the subject systematically, but they no more invented it than Augustine invented original sin. Chalke has a fine way of reducing a Bible doctrine by saying it is a novel invention, where all the novelty is coming from his own mind and his splendid library of liberal theologians, such as Jurgen Moltmann (whom he recommends).

If Chalke rejects 'penal' substitution, but somehow accepts a looser concept of substitution, what kind of substitution could it be? Well now we come to what Chalke positively does think about the Cross:

- 1. The Cross is a lightning-conductor or human-waste-disposal unit.** In Chalke's theology, Jesus was not appeasing the righteous anger of a holy God against sinners. He was, like a lightning-conductor, soaking "up all the forces of hate, rejection, pain and alienation all around him... A cross was like a human-waste-disposal unit..." (p179). Jesus was kind of mopping up the bad vibes that exist in the world.
- 2. The Cross is a symbol of both exclusion and hope.** "So it was that Jesus had to go to the cross to face the ultimate means of exclusion. Having dealt with the meal table and the temple, Jesus would now turn this ultimate symbol of rejection and exclusion into yet another symbol of hope. As Richard Bauckham states, 'It is important that he [Jesus] died a victim of a political system. *We must not give his death a meaning, which is indifferent to the processes and structures by which some human beings make victims of others.* It is as one of the victims that in his love he reaches all of us'" (p180). "Together, Jesus' death and resurrection represent the most potent symbols of his life-transforming message" (p174). "Jesus' cry of abandonment mirrors those of countless millions of people who suffer oppression, enslavement, abuse, disease, poverty, starvation and violence" (p184). Chalke reduces the Cross to a symbol alongside the 'meal' (Lord's supper) and the temple. It has no special redemptive significance in his mind at all. If we think it does, Bauckham claims, we are giving it an extrinsic meaning. Rather, its significance is in that it shows that God knows how it feels to be left out. As we shall see in the next section, Chalke's gospel essentially boils down to a protest against social exclusion, since he doesn't really believe that God is holy, so sin doesn't really exist, so judgement is not a problem, and so the Cross as atonement is unnecessary.
- 3. The Cross shows God is with us.** Chalke conflates and confuses Christ's incarnation and His death: "The truth is, Jesus was born into a messy world and he died in a messy world. The cross is often portrayed as the bridge over the chasm that separates heaven and earth. It is our means of escape. But the reality is that it stands at the centre of our decaying world- thrust into the dirt to proclaim, 'God is here!'" (p185). The Cross for Chalke is not a lot different from the manger.
- 4. The Cross & Resurrection are vindications of Jesus' message.** Because Chalke wants to whittle the Cross down to a symbol, he posits it as a kind of impressive validation of Jesus' veracity. "Jesus' death and his resurrection from the dead prove that he was telling the truth so we can trust him" (p173, cf. p189,190). But because Chalke rejects the atonement, he cannot see any value in the Cross as distinct from the Incarnation or the Resurrection:

“Without the resurrection the cross is impotent, a symbol of failure and defeat. Before the resurrection Jesus was just another victim of the ultimate method of exclusion- death itself. Before the resurrection, Jesus’ Messiah-project had quite simply run out of road. But all that was Friday- this was Sunday!” (p192).

¹⁰⁹ Note: Paul shows here that he does expect the Gospel to be put forward in words, just not in words *only*

¹¹⁰ Jesus actually said He came specifically *for* sinners. The first thing He says in Mark is “Repent” and the first thing He says to the paralysed man is “Son, your sins are forgiven you,” thus dealing with a need far greater than paralysis

Gospel: social inclusion or divine rescue?

The rejection of the Bible’s authority, God’s power and holiness, the fullness of Christ’s deity, the sinfulness of Man’s sin lead Chalke to a neutered and atonement-free ‘cross’ and a ‘resurrection’ that is little more than a rubber stamp to Jesus’ integrity. It is little surprising, therefore, that the Gospel is finally warped into a vague universalist social protest rather than “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

There is absolutely no need for repentance or conversion in Chalke’s scheme. Man is not depraved, not hostile to God, not in need of a new heart- only new principles and exciting new manifestos and a bit of love and understanding and inclusion. But Chalke self-consciously and repeatedly indulges in a bit of his own exclusion: he animadverts against the word ‘conversion’ preferring ‘revolution’ and ‘conversation’. Indeed, one of his subheadings is entitled ‘Conversation not conversion’, as if the latter were a dirty word. He describes the Kingdom of God as “a quiet, social and spiritual revolution” (p39), once again reinforcing the false impression that it is a kind of better-than-average political programme. In fact the entire book *Faithworks* gives off that vibe. “Humanity is waiting for a Christian revolution which will call the world evil and change it” (Walter Rauschenbusch, quoted in *Faithworks*, p69); “Compassion, not conversion, is the motivation for our involvement. Acting on our faith, not telling people about it, is what drives us” (*Faithworks*, p86). He makes much of being part of “non-proselytising” organisations.

There is no need to communicate Chalke’s gospel in words because it is mostly to do with social inclusion which obviously is best shown through homeless work, welfare programmes, clinics and so on. There is no need to set forth the Gospel “not in word only¹⁰⁹, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance” (1 Thess.1:5). People’s biggest need is not forgiveness of sins before an awesome and holy God, the consuming fire, but rather **inclusion**, the ‘gospel’ that utterly dominates *The Lost Message*:

- “[Jesus] redrew the boundaries of the Kingdom of God to include very definitely those who previously had been excluded” (p30)
- “Jesus is announcing a paradigm-shifting concept- that ‘outsiders’ were welcome in the Kingdom of God” (p31)
- “Life in Palestine was all about the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’...this is all what Jesus had come to change” (p38)
- “The real message of Jesus leaps from the pages of the Gospels. Jesus....welcomes the marginalized to be his closest companions” (p45)
- “The divine scandal is that God is on the side of the ordinary people” (p82)
- “He never wavered in his battle to destroy the prevailing culture that stigmatised ordinary people as ‘sinners’” (p88)¹¹⁰
- “God bless you who are lonely, ugly, old, anorexic, bullied, infertile, displaced, overworked, redundant, underpaid, homeless, unemployed, abused- God’s Kingdom belongs to you” (p93)
- “If Jesus had not come to model an inclusive Kingdom open to all...in what sense was it ‘good news’?” (p98)
- “The Kingdom of God was an open kingdom. What Jesus created was a gigantic illustration, a living parable of what God’s new community would look like” (p163)
- “Without the resurrection the sinners, the outcasts, the unclean who [*sic!*] Jesus empowered and to whom he brought liberty would have been reduced once more to the nobodies that the Pharisees and religious leaders had always said they were” (p192).

This kind of inclusivist gospel inevitably tends to **universalism** and a **rejection of hell**:

- “Indeed, it would ultimately include the whole of creation” (p30)
- “We have developed a ‘them’ and ‘us’ culture with two distinct categories- saints and sinners, ins and outs, saved and unsaved” (p140)
- “Salvation isn’t about having the right labels; it’s about becoming truly and fully human” (p154)

“We are taught that God is love, but no-one explains how this teaching coheres with the reality of those whom we know, love and respect but who don’t know Christ and so, as the preacher tells us, are bound for eternal torment in hell” (p15).

¹¹¹ *Lost Message*, p147

¹¹² *Lost Message*, p148

¹¹³ *Lost Message*, p149. The very

fact Chalke puts inverted commas

around ‘eternal destiny’ suggests

that he does not believe in it.

Inverted commas are used primarily

for ironic distancing

Jesus’ big project according to Chalke was to come and make worthless people recover their sense of self-esteem and cock a snook at the establishment, who killed him for his impudence. Chalke’s ‘God’ gave the big thumbs up Jesus’ project and raised him from the dead so the little people could feel good about themselves again. Now it is completely true that Jesus especially had time for social outcasts such as tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, Samaritans, the woman with the flow of blood, and so on. Chalke is right in this respect, but he is so so

wrong to limit Christ to the status of social reformer. And he is also wrong to fall into the classic theological liberal ‘blessed are the poor because they are poor’ error. It is the kind of mindset that misreads the Beatitudes as talking of literally poor and hungry people, rather than people who are poor *in spirit*, hungry for *righteousness*. As it was, Jesus also had time for the rich and influential, such as Jairus, Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, the centurion (commended above all Jews). The dividing line Jesus drew was the ‘whosoever’: “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

In one sense, Jesus is *more* inclusive than Chalke allows Him to be, in that He includes all the wealthy and successful who are willing to receive Him and “not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim.6:17). But He is also more *exclusive* than Chalke would like. He rejects everyone who will not come to Him in faith and humility, whether poor or rich, ‘have’ or ‘have not’. Not all poor people are humble, and not all rich people are arrogant. For all his talk of resisting categories and labels, Chalke still draws dividing lines. He just draws them in the wrong place. The Bible’s dividing line is between those who believe in the Son (everlasting life) and those who reject Him (the wrath of God)- see John 3:36. God is only on the side of the ordinary people who accept His Son, and most do not (Matthew 7:14). It seems that Chalke’s close friendship with so many non-Christian liberals and social activists has coerced him into completely changing his gospel into something vague, inclusivist and hell-free. Rather than accept that, as nice as they are, Mandela *et al.* are going to hell unless they accept Christ, he deletes hell from the Gospel. However, all believers have people amongst their family and friends that they love and admire. We all experience terrible pain when we consider their eternal torment. But we *must* stand firm and contend earnestly for the faith that was once and for all delivered to us (Jude 3) if we love them and really seek their good. Pretending everything will be OK for them because they sometimes appear to act like Jesus would is the most damnable form of indifference imaginable. Shame on you, Mr Chalke.

Of course unbelievers reject the Gospel without the agency of the Holy Spirit. Didn’t we all until the Lord opened our eyes? “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritual discerned” (1 Cor.2:14). But when Chalke has observed unbelievers railing against the true Gospel which is such a blow to our human pride, he does not draw the conclusion that the natural mind is at enmity against God. Rather, he concludes that there must be something deficient in the message for them to react so strongly.

The doctrine of regeneration is particularly offensive for the natural man (“Jesus only used the phrase ‘you must be born again’ twice,¹¹¹” says Chalke, trying to reduce its importance), because it tells him that in his own nature nothing good can be done: “For the vast majority of people outside the Church, the term [‘born-again’] has come to symbolise everything about Christianity they most loathe and despise. For them it sums up a type of Christianity that is not only judgemental, bigoted, arrogant and narrow-minded but is also about a them and us, in or out, pharisaic approach to life.”¹¹² Chalke inadvertently lets slip that we are all hostile to the Gospel in our natural selves, but he prefers to conclude that the loathing and despising is justified because of the deficiency of the message, rather than that the hearers do not want to hear it.

He downgrades regeneration to this: “[Jesus] was not using the term ‘born-again’ in the same sense we have come to do. Jesus was simply saying that entering into God’s kingdom or shalom is about seeing the world differently and adopting his new agenda” (p148). What an emaciated Gospel! No new birth, no new heart, no Holy Spirit, just a new agenda which we have no will, desire or capacity to carry out. In fact, to be born again in Chalke’s imagining is no different to receiving a repackaged Ten Commandments. It entails no inward, supernatural change at all.

Consequently, Chalke rails against believers who wrote to non-Christian columnist John Diamond as he was dying, “concerned about his ‘eternal destiny.’”¹¹³ He puts forward instead an everso ‘umble friend of his who, lamenting these bunglers and

their insensitivity, wrote to Diamond explaining that “not all Christians thought the same way”. Instead of telling Diamond how Christ can be His Saviour, Chalke’s friend shares how God brought “meaning and hope to the random stuff that happens in life” and asks Diamond if the latter could help him in his “journey”. Diamond, delighted to get a letter from a religious person that did not shake his self-belief, wrote back:

“The problem I have with Christians is that they are so often peddlers of certainty. You are the only Christian in the entirety of my life who has ever told me that they thought they could learn something from me. I’d love to meet with you and talk further.” Sadly that meeting never happened. In fact, John Diamond was dead within a week. Many would see that as a missed opportunity to share the gospel. But the truth is, *my friend did share the gospel*. In the last few days of his life, John Diamond had a meaningful conversation with someone who helped him in his journey. Who knows what impact it had, how that changed his attitude to God, to Jesus, to life or death? Whatever its impact, there can be no doubt it did far more than the judgemental and condemnatory tone of most of the correspondence he had received from Christians until that point¹¹⁴ [*my italics*].

The Gospel is offensive to sinful man. It is foolishness or a stumbling-block (1 Cor.1:23), and he does not receive things of God (1 Cor.2:14), because they are the aroma of death to him (2 Cor.2:16). Chalke does not understand this. As we have noted, he also does not really believe in hell. There are two consequences in his thinking:

1. If natural man is offended by a Christian, the Christian must be at fault, rather than the Gospel;
2. All warning is wrong because hell does not exist, and therefore it is only judgemental or scaremongering.

It is absolutely natural (I use that word again) that Chalke and his friend should side with Diamond’s point of view because they actually share it, though a religious version of it.

Emblazoned on my memory is the image of my atheistic grandfather perishing in a hospital bed of double pneumonia. My father is bending over him, speaking very gently to him words of kindness. My father tries to find a way to lift my grandfather’s thoughts towards the Lord, and suddenly my grandfather sits bolt upright in bed, reviling against God. My father is normally blunt and unadorned in speech, but I can tell you he made every effort to speak gently and without insensitivity to his father. It was the GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST that offended my grandfather, it was the spirit of Jesus living inside my dad that narked him so intensely. The very fact Jesus was murdered by His own people should give anybody ample proof that “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). But Chalke would not have this to be true, and would rather believe that those Christians who wrote were judgemental than that Diamond did not want to hear what they had to say.

If indeed Chalke’s friend had shared the Gospel, he would have forgotten everything except Christ and Him Crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). There is no gospel without Christ, and the sharing of ‘equally valuable parallel spiritual journeys’ is not the same as pointing someone towards Him.

But Chalke’s desire to rewrite the Gospel into something palatable to natural man is total. He chucks out this version of the traditional gospel message, as he renders it:

1. God created me.
2. I am a sinner.
3. Jesus came to die for me.
4. Until I accept him as Lord and Saviour I cannot receive the abundant life God has for me.

And gives us his own, ‘Chalke’s Four Spiritual Laws’ Gospel presentation:

1. Jesus explains that God loves them unconditionally¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ *Lost Message*, p151

¹¹⁵ It is very illuminating that, as Philip Foster points out, in the entire book of Acts the word ‘love’ is not mentioned. This book contains the finest sermons ever preached by the Apostles, and yet not once did the Holy Spirit inspire them to say “God loves you” to their hearers. The love of God is *His motive* for sending His Son (John 3:16) to die for our sins; the love of God is *our motive* for telling others about Jesus (2 Cor. 5:14), but “God loves you” is not our primary Gospel *message*. Love is the motive not the message. This is why Jesus looks on the rich young ruler and loves him, but does not tell him that- rather, He tells him to get rid of the one idol keeping him from trusting in Jesus and receiving eternal life (Mark 10:17-31). Jesus does not tell His hearers that God loves them, but shows it in His actions, and urges repentance and faith in Himself, the means by which they can be forgiven and thereby be opened to receive the love of God that has hitherto been inaccessible to them

¹¹⁶ Chalke says that the Kingdom of God is a “here-and-now reality, not a future ideal” (p35). He has no eschatological mind whatsoever. He even says that to do as Jesus says and “store up treasures in heaven” is a “travesty” (p36)!

¹¹⁷ 2 Timothy 3:5

¹¹⁸ *Faithworks*, p21

¹¹⁹ Pages 9,17, 24, 25,31,45,46,51,104, 141

¹²⁰ Pages 115,116

2. God longs for them to be part of his plan for creation.
3. Jesus teaches that no-one can keep them from this destiny except their own decision.
4. Jesus’ death and resurrection from the dead prove that he was telling the truth so we can trust him.

See how the holiness of God, righteousness, sin, judgement, atonement, salvation, the Cross of Christ, grace, faith, repentance, election, predestination, the Holy Spirit, heaven¹¹⁶ and hell are all completely marginalized if not annihilated by Chalke’s revision of the Gospel. What a sham, and what a shame.

Death by arrows...and by a thousand darts

As if writing a whole book shooting arrows at virtually every single central doctrine of Biblical Christianity weren’t enough, Chalke also has a bushel of little poison darts at his disposal.

The first is his use of **euphuistic language**. What I mean by that is that, like all false teachers, he has a problem. Because he has eviscerated the Gospel of any meaning or power- “having a form of godliness but denying its power”¹¹⁷- he is left with nothing. He has indeed lost the message of Jesus. Despite saying

that he wants to “bridge this gap between rhetoric and reality”¹¹⁸, in order to lend any kind of weight or interest to what he is saying, he is cast back on using words *purely for the sound that they make*. Often they come in the form of double-barrelled neologisms (newly invented words), which are used as an attempt to make essentially lifeless concepts sound thrilling. Here is a list:

radical (half a dozen times), life-changing, life-enhancing, world-shaping, core plot, drama, paradigm-shifting (2), mind-bending, brain-stretching, worldview-shaping soundbite, earth-shattering, life-long discovery, paradigm-changing, far-reaching, liberating, sin-busting, forgiveness-bestowing, journey of faith, belonging before believing, church without walls.¹¹⁹

The second is his attempt to shift repentance away from the immediately relevant, **individual** and spiritual, to the 1st-Century-only (“contextualisation” as Chalke calls it), **collective** and social. This kind of thinking is very common amongst this new breed of false teachers, and I will expand on it in the Donovan article. Vineyard speaker Kevin Rains says,

So when Jesus appeared on the scene and said “repent” he was speaking into this very specific first century Jewish context. We tend to think of repentance as an individual turning from sin and starting to live right. We think of repentance as, “God, I’m so sorry for gambling (or drinking or cheating or lying or lust or...). Help me to stop sinning and start going to church.” When a Jew in the first century heard the word repent it was much more comprehensive and national.

There are dozens of reasons why this is bogus, but suffice it to say that as different people came to repent before John the Baptist, they asked him *specifically* how they needed to amend their lives (Luke 3:10-14). Of course the impetus behind making repentance collective is so that individuals don’t need to repent or come to Christ at all. Very sinister.

The third is exceedingly **sloppy scholarship**, even though the Bishop of Durham says on the front cover that the book is “rooted in good scholarship”. In terms of *basic English*, and I know it’s a very small point, but Chalke cannot seem to distinguish between ‘pouring’ (as into a jug) and ‘poring’ (as over a book). In terms of *history*, Chalke is cavalier at best:

In AD 66...Josephus rode into Galilee on a daring and dangerous mission- to attempt a face-to-face meeting with a gang of Judean revolutionaries intent on the violent overthrow of their Roman oppressors...He describes how he told the rebel leader to give up his own agenda and trust him; that he and his men would never achieve the freedom they craved if they continued with their violent agenda. And the actual words used by Josephus were simply, “Repent and believe in me.”

Jesus often used the word *repent*...And when he said these things, he was saying what Josephus was saying, “Start living your life differently; do it my way! Your way won’t work. Choose mine instead!” That’s precisely what people heard- a call to a new agenda, a different way of doing life, a bigger and better vision for life than anyone had previously articulated.¹²⁰

He is wrong about Josephus. The men he went to meet were actually a band of robbers hired by the city of Sepphoris to fight with him. The people of Sepphoris were “determined to *continue in their allegiance to the Romans*”¹²¹, the exact opposite of what Chalke says. Josephus tells Jesus, the leader of the gang, that he will forgive him his murderous designs, “if he would repent of it, and be faithful to me hereafter”. Josephus is merely asking Jesus to give him his word not to attack him again. This is very different from “Believe in me” or “Follow my bold new agenda” as Chalke makes out, and it isn’t “simply” what Josephus says- in fact it is at the end of a speech.

¹²¹ *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, section 22
¹²² See <http://www.drjudithreisman.org/> for full exposes; but bear in mind Ephesians 5:11,12

He is also wrong about Jesus Christ. By saying ‘repent’, Jesus was not telling people to adopt His new agenda, he was telling them to turn around from their own way and the way of the world and place their trust directly in Him. Repentance from the world must always be followed by faith in Christ (Acts 19:4). You have to face in a direction!

Chalke also makes a passing remark about thieves never being crucified in the Roman world (p177). However, Joe Zias, formerly of the Israel Antiquities Authority disagrees, “As a further deterrent in the ancient world, many victims were crucified where the criminal act took place. For instance, thieves would be crucified along the cities’ busiest thoroughfares.” Even more conclusively, the Greek word in Matthew 27:38 (“two thieves were crucified with Him”) is *lestes*, which is used 15 times in the NT, each time translated ‘thief’ or ‘robber’.

In terms of *linguistics*, Chalke is woeful. In yet another attempt to undermine God’s holiness and the need for man to be holy, he attempts to soften Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” He says

Jesus couldn’t have meant ‘be perfect’ because there is no word or even concept in his native Aramaic for such a thing. Instead, the Greek word the Gospel writers used to translate Jesus’ statement is *teleios*, which describes a copy, a model made in the exact likeness or impression of something. Thus Jesus’ meaning is clear, “You must always act like your Father in heaven. Look to God. Model yourself on him. Get reconnected- be generous, loving, gracious, forgiving, compassionate and merciful” (page 121).

Firstly, “as for the native Aramaic, of course there are words and phrases for being perfect - it is just like in English where the word carries a whole range of meanings and people like Chalke get confused by not considering synonyms, which we use to define which meaning is indeed intended in each context, eg whole, complete, etc. or holy, righteous, etc.” (Semitic languages expert, Dr Siam Bhayro).

Secondly, Chalke must be confusing the Greek *teleios* for *eikon*. The latter is the one that means image or ‘exact likeness’ (as in Colossians 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God”). *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, the authority on such matters, describes *teleios* as “finished, complete, perfect, fully grown, mature”. The words ‘copy’ or ‘model’ are not part of its definition.

Finally, even ignoring Chalke’s lack of Aramaic and Greek, “the point he makes is nonsense! If he is right, and Jesus is saying ‘Be a perfect copy of God’, then the second part of the sentence would mean ‘as God is a perfect copy of God’ which is utterly stupid” (Dr Bhayro).

Chalke’s fourth dart is his **godless sexual ethics**. Though not dealt with in *The Lost Message*, one of the main preoccupations of Steve Chalke is family relationships, hence his ‘Parentalk’ series and frequent talks on sex, relationships, parenthood and so on. A mother of four known to me attended one of these talks recently, and was saddened that it was entirely secular, with no reference to the Bible, God or Jesus. I have just read *The Parentalk Guide to your child and sex* (2000, Hodder & Stoughton) and it presents the same picture: an entirely godless one. There is nothing about Steve Chalke’s sexual ethics that distinguishes him from a little-more-moral-than-average secular sexologist. And given that most sexologists range from the thoroughly depraved and corrupting at worst and godless and amoral at best, this is faint praise. The father of sexology is the filthy and wicked Alfred Kinsey¹²², who used child rape, sado-masochism and all kinds of sexual activities amongst his ‘fellow researchers’ to produce his 1948 ‘study’ *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*. Despite all this, Chalke

¹²³ Chalke blithely repeats on a number of occasions that early sex education tends to produce wiser children who have sex later. This is of course rubbish as almost every year sexual activity amongst youngsters increases, directly correlating with how much they are exposed to this amoral junk from twisted sexologists and teen mags. When I was at UCL, pregnancies increased by 700% after ‘Safer Sex Week’! What a farce. When young people are presented with sex as a completely relationship- and moral-free zone, they do it more. And if they are prepared to throw away their heart and their body so freely, they don’t stop to use a condom either

has no problem quoting from the Kinsey Institute, “America’s famous research institute on sex, gender and reproduction,” (44) as he calls it. Here, then, is a list of the deviancies in Chalke’s thinking on sexual ethics:

1. Godless origins. Perhaps Chalke hasn’t had the time in his busy schedule to check out the Kinsey Institute or the man behind it. But surely he ought to know what lies behind groups such as The Family Planning Association and the World Health Organisation (who helps fund the former), whom he cites at least ten times as authorities on sex matters. The leading light behind the Family Planning Association, Planned Parenthood Federation, Marie Stopes etc. organisations was one Margaret Sanger, who was President of the Birth Control International Information Centre (BCIIC) in 1930. She was notorious for her views on eugenics (creating a “race of thoroughbreds”), the sterilisation of the ‘unfit’ (i.e. uneducated and non-whites whom she called “human weeds”, or those “whose religious scruples prevent their exercising control over their numbers”), adultery (satisfaction more important than marriage vows) and on abortion (a very necessary thing, especially for those who were not fit to be parents).

2. Godless ‘options’. Throughout the whole of *The Parentalk Guide*, actions and attitudes which are clearly condemned in Scripture are presented as ‘options’. For the sake of space, we shall focus on one aspect:

Lust, marriage and the trivialisation of sex. For Chalke, the main thing to do is to make sure your child is going to have “sex for the right reasons, with the right reasons, with the right person, at the right time...and because they really want to” (31). So as long as they really want to do it and it seems right, then God’s happy? He contrives to spin out almost six chapters about sex before actually getting down to marriage, and then with some coy reluctance: “However you slice it and dice it, in the end we’re basically talking about the idea of marriage...TOP TIP: Your child needs to understand that sex is more than bonking- it’s about love, trust, care and commitment” (71). Look at the qualifiers Chalke inserts: 1) “However you slice it and dice it”; 2) “In the end”; 3) “Basically talking about the idea”. SEVENTY PAGES ON SEX before you get to the prerequisite: marriage. And what a definition: “more than bonking”. How tawdry, how tragic. And marriage is only gifted with a tiny FIVE PAGES of a 184 page book. That’s under 3% of the book! This means that 97% of what can be said about sex can be said *outside of the only context God created for it*.

So inevitably, Chalke’s view of sex becomes trivialised and essentially about two people feeling good together. He has absolutely nothing about marriage and its consummation being a sacred union before God (since he doesn’t mention God in the book). He doesn’t even hint about marriage and sex being representative of the mystical, self-giving, loving union between Christ and His Church (see Ephesians 5:22-33). In fact, the only thing about the Bible he says in the whole book is this: “Even the Bible contains enough bonking to make you blush!” (134). What reverence for the Word of God. There’s more downgrading: Chalke rabbits on about flavoured condoms for use in oral sex (63). Or getting an erection through looking in lust on a girl- “Your child may need to be reassured that if they see an attractive member of the opposite sex across a crowded room and their eyes- or perhaps other parts of their anatomy- bulge, that isn’t ‘wrong’: it’s just good eyesight! Sexual attraction is all part and parcel of being human, even when it’s not reciprocated or they’re already spoken for” (39,40). Never mind our Lord’s sobering injunctions against such things (Matt. 5:28), or Job’s admirable covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1). With regard to masturbation, Chalke entitles one section “Forgive Me, Father, For I’m About to Sin” and says many other remarkable things that are verging on the unprintable. He concludes with a decidedly unpleasant and morally effete phrase: “Masturbation may be good for the heart in purely cardiovascular terms, but it’s a washout when it comes to good, old-fashioned love” (135).

3. Godless outlook. It is easy to explain why Steve Chalke ends up sounding like a barely-moral echo of his more depraved counterparts who outspokenly reject God. It’s easy to understand why he is so warmly in favour of sex education¹²³ rather than Biblical instruction, condoms rather than abstinence, ‘options’ rather than obedience and self-esteem rather than the love of Christ. And the reason is: Chalke listens to the world of men, not to the Word of God. For instance: “For a long time, both medical and public opinion saw homosexuality as a wilful, stubborn and evil practice that had to be dealt with severely by a decent, civilised society. But at the start of the twentieth century, when the science of psychology

was in its infancy, this kind of thinking began to change” (90). If he argues against any kind of behaviour, it is never because it is Biblically or morally wrong, only because there might be negative consequences for the agent. He does not believe that children belong to their parents’ keeping and why? Because he does not believe children belong to their Creator: “Your child’s body belongs to *them*. No one else” (157). On the contrary, Mr Chalke, “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness.”¹²⁴ The Bible is the key to training up children in the way they should go, so that they should not depart from it when adults (Proverbs 22:6). Sex education did nothing to help me understand marriage or avoid the temptations of sex outside of it. Only the Bible was sufficient as a lamp to my feet and light to my path (Ps. 119:105).

Steve Chalke’s mind, and consequently his book, is a sexual maelstrom entirely in darkness without the light of Christ, the living Word of God to illuminate it. He is a “well without water” like the false prophets we are forewarned of who “speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:17-22).

I would also ask you, however much you liked his *Lessons in Love* videos, to warn as many Christians as possible against Steve Chalke, Vincent Donovan, NT Wright and other like influences, and to discern their false patterns of thought in the literature you read and the services you go to. Young believers are especially vulnerable to these subtle shifts away from the Gospel, and we have a duty to them to “pull them out of the fire” (Jude 23). Typically, Joel Edwards of the Evangelical Alliance, sat on the fence when asked to comment on Chalke’s book in the September 2004 *Evangelicals Now*: “Understandably, Steve’s book has generated critical concerns about underplaying sin, and penal substitution as a valid model of atonement. As a prominent and influential evangelical leader, Steve’s objective was to raise a debate about a Christian message which has not been heard to convey love. Consequently, the Evangelical Alliance has arranged a public debate to bring together the opposing views. Through this process we want to give ample opportunity for clarity about the points Steve has raised and to reaffirm together what we believe as evangelicals.” If you want to go to that debate, at which Chalke will be speaking, ring Julia Murphy on 020 7207 2114 or email acute@eauk.org. Tickets cost £3. I’ll be there anyway to put forward a Biblical perspective, as the Lord enables.

Finally, let us rejoice in our Lord Jesus Christ. Like the wonderful Good Shepherd that He is, He has sought us *and found us* while we yet a long way off in our hardened, foolish sinful condition. Let us give thanks “to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:12-14).

Hallelujah, what a Gospel has been revealed to us- what a saving message we have found in Christ!

Hallelujah, what a Saviour! **V**

The Lost Gospel of Steve Chalke: summary (to photocopy/pass on)

Somewhere between 1994 and 2004, Steve Chalke has lost the true Gospel of Jesus Christ for the following reasons:

1. Authority. Chalke rejects, albeit subtly, the Word of God as his final authority, placing these things above it in his thinking...

- **life experience**
- **pragmatism**
- **continuous revelation**
- **speculation**
- **human realisations**

2. God. Chalke presents a completely skewed view of God, starting with and limiting himself to a badly-defined premise of 'God is love', imagining that the Lord has a face contorted with infinite pain, because he wishes to exclude God's

- **power**
- **sovereignty**
- **election**
- **holiness**
- **judgement**
- **wrath**

3. Jesus. This in turn leads to a demotion of Jesus, whom Chalke nominally accepts as the incarnate Son of God, but implicitly presents as a particularly inspirational human teacher and social reformer. He does this by:

- **downplaying Christ's deity**
- **putting Jesus on the level of Mandela, Luther King, Gandhi, etc.**

4. Man. The demotion of Christ leads to the promotion of man who is portrayed as

- **without original sin (not born sinful or depraved)**
- **only in need of a new agenda/moral rearmament, rather than regeneration**

5. Holy Spirit. Because Chalke rejects the need for new birth, the Holy Spirit and His roles are sidelined (He is not mentioned in the entire book):

- **No need to convict men of sin, righteousness and judgement**
- **No need to sanctify and regenerate men, giving them new hearts**
- **As their minds are not darkened, no need to guide men into all truth**

6. Cross. Similarly, since Chalke thinks that in effect "righteousness comes through the law" of social action and reformation, "Christ died in vain" (Galatians 2:21). Therefore...

- **No atonement necessary, as forgiveness is free**
- **No propitiation necessary, as God is not angry at sin**

So the glorious Cross of Christ, the boast of all believers is reduced to:

- **A lightning-conductor or human-waste-disposal unit**
- **A symbol of both exclusion and hope**
- **A sign that God is with us**
- **A vindication that Jesus was telling the truth**

7. Gospel. Chalke's gospel is little more than a repackaged, classic liberal social gospel with the elements of

- **Social exclusion not sin man's greatest problem**
- **Universalism**

And rejections of

- **Man's natural resistance to the Gospel**
- **The need for repentance, conversion or regeneration**
- **Hell**

8. 'Darts'. Chalke's casual minor errors contribute to the overall picture of how untrustworthy a teacher he is:

- **Words and concept chosen for sound not meaning**
- **Individual vs. collective false opposition**
- **Sloppy scholarship in basic English, history and linguistics**
- **Godless sexual ethics- pro-abortion, homosexuality, *laissez-faire* sex education with no reference to Word of God, association with godless sex-promoting organisations such as FPA and Kinsey Institute**

For full article, email neil.richardson@bigfoot.com. "*Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen*" (Gal. 6:18).

Also recommended is the book review from June 2004 *Evangelicals Now*: <http://www.e-n.org.uk/>