



# VERTICAL CHURCH

RAISING THE BAR FOR LEADERS AND THEIR CHURCHES

A MINISTRY OF JAMES MACDONALD

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2011

## Association vs. Discernment and Is James MacDonald Changing?

The Bible prescribes a body of truth to be believed and an ethic of behavior to be practiced—both are related to our great salvation, one the profession and one the proof. First, the truth to be received by faith ([John 1:12](#)) and then the fruit of that belief ([Matthew 7:20](#)). I am learning a lot these days by listening. Though more public now, neither my doctrine nor my practice has changed—NOT ONE BIT! My convictions about the Word of God and about the gospel are exactly as they have been and by God's grace will ALWAYS BE! I believe in listening to all criticism no matter how harsh but not answering or counter attacking. For those who sincerely follow my ministry and wonder where I am coming from, I happily submit the following with the prayer that it will be helpful:

### 1: I do not agree that association is the same as categoric endorsement.

I grew up with this separatist centerpiece of fundamentalist thinking, and I rejected it many years ago. I do not agree that speaking at someone's church or having them preach in our church is the same as agreeing with everything they have ever said or done. (I don't agree with everything I have ever done.) If a brother believes the Bible and preaches the gospel, I delight in that relationship as far as agreement can allow it to go and benefit greatly while trying also to influence. I **know there are some who would not partner or associate as I do, but that does not mean my actions mean what theirs would mean if they did the same.** I am not distancing myself from doctrinal fidelity through association, and I



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can allow it to go and benefit greatly while trying also to influence. I know there are some who would not partner or associate as I do, but that does not mean my actions mean what theirs would mean if they did the same. I am not distancing myself from doctrinal fidelity through association, and I am not distancing myself from treasured friendships with these comments. In some ministry relationships I see the need for greater attention to what the Bible asserts; in other ministry relationships I see the need for greater expression of love. In my own heart I see room for growth in both. Interestingly, most opposition comes from outside our own church. Our folks have been taught that love is the fulfillment of the law and the truest expression of biblical fidelity. "And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries...but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). Gospel belief without gospel behavior is what I refer to as 'religious.' Every minister of the gospel should welcome and learn from criticism, but critics that act like pagans are probably just that and bring little benefit to the hearer.

**2: I do not agree that T.D. Jakes is a Modalist. (Based on input I have gotten I have re-written this section for clarity)**

I affirm the doctrine of the Trinity as I find it in Scripture. I believe this doctrine is revealed in the Bible and accurately expressed in historic confessionalism. T.D. Jakes website states that he believes God has existed eternally in three manifestations which is modalist language. I am looking forward to hearing him explain his position currently and how that may have changed from things he has said historically. I am also excited to hear him state his views on money, which may be closer to Scripture than the monasticism currently touring reformed world. I believe T.D. Jakes shows immense humility by being willing to step outside his own circles to interact with christian leaders and discuss his theology. Getting people together within the broadest spectrum of Christianity who don't normally interact, is what the Elephant Room is all about. Talking about issues that separate with grace and truth is what the Elephant Room is all about. We are greatly honored that T.D. Jakes has agreed to participate.

**3: Discernment is good; Discernmentalist, not so much.**

When I was just starting out in ministry, two women were absolutely sure that I was going to deny the faith in the very near future. They were convinced I was a closet charismatic, soft on the gospel, and



**FROM TWITTER**

- “ 2nd son Landon samples EV Hill = awesome encouragement, check out track #3 - <http://t.co/XYwzdN1S> 5 hours ago
- “ @heatherheadley @CharlesJenkins7 oh, trust me he's better than me in most things and I am sure I will hear about it when I see him today. :) 6 hours ago

**RECOMMENDED BLOGS**

- Brothers MacDonald
- Desiring God
- Ed Stetzer
- Greg Laurie
- Levi Lusko
- Mark Driscoll
- Matt Chandler
- Paul Tripp

**JAMES MACDONALD**



James MacDonald is fired up about God's Word and God's Son. He has been a pastor for almost 30 years and revels in the hope that others in ministry can learn from his mistakes. James is down on cranky, cheerless Christians, but good with everyone who is still listening and learning and loving the Savior, whose glory is our passion and whose Word is enough.

To learn more about the ministries he leads, go to:

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faith in the very near future. They were convinced I was a closet charismatic, soft on the gospel, and weak in biblical faithfulness because...I wouldn't stop worshipers from raising their hands, I wouldn't give a public gospel invitation every week, and I wouldn't preach against the things that they feared. They had gifts of discernment that were not controlled by the Holy Spirit, but were lovelessly expressed through fear and anger doing incredible damage to our church. Finally they fled, predicting horror and judgement to fall on our 'apostasy.' That was 21+ years ago. I have been preaching the Word of God year after year in that same church ever since. Thousands have professed faith in Christ and are being disciplined, churches are being planted and we have gone through 10 of the 27 books of the NT a verse at a time. We are far from perfect, but we are uncompromising in what we believe the Scriptures assert. The gift of discernment is a precious gift in the body of Christ. I praise God for those who contend for the faith, insist on a true gospel and seek to hold up 'the faith once for all delivered.' But I do not appreciate those who go further and castigate everyone they disagree with, spout pejoratives like a cowboy with a mouth full of tobacco, and write off preachers for anything they find offensive or discordant with their own sense of right and wrong. I have heard these folks referred to as discernmentlists. Probably a play on fundamentalists who became **famous for rhetoric without rationale**. When I see how they distort what I have written, disdain my record of ministry and deny my commitment to the Scriptures, I am reminded of the kind of mindless fear mongering I left behind. Thoughtful questioning, even criticism or sincere disagreement is welcomed. But harsh denunciation is what puts people in the camp of being religionists, unholy, unloving and possibly unsaved.

#### 4: The Bottom Line

At the **Elephant Room Conference** we welcome the broadest spectrum of people within the body of Christ to listen and learn and challenge and sharpen, in order to model the kind of unity Jesus prayed for—unity that is built around all that the Scripture teaches. At our upcoming **Vertical Church Conferences** (and in my upcoming book Vertical) we will teach more specifically along the lines of what we believe the Bible commands the church to be: Doxological, Biblical, Fruitful, Worshipful...Vertical. In our **Harvest University Conferences** we teach with even more depth and detail on the practical things we have learned over two decades, about how to impact people with the gospel and build a disciple-making church.

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we have learned over two decades, about how to impact people with the gospel and build a disciple-making church.

I respect and have learned from preachers as far apart as John Piper and Andy Stanley. I have friendships with men as diverse as Bill Hybels and Jim Cymbala. I have always been this way. I am heartened by the biblical fidelity of reformed brothers, but occasionally concerned that we lack evangelistic zeal, humility and application of the gospel to marriage and family. I am blessed by many strongly evangelistic church growth proponents, but I sometimes observe that we neglect important biblical themes such as holiness and repentance, or do things in our zeal to spread the gospel that do not adorn the gospel. I have felt for a long time that I don't fit squarely in any camp except with those who are passionate for the gospel of Jesus and 100% sold out to the Word of God applied in all its sufficiency. I have been finding friends like that in some pretty surprising places. Friends who demonstrate humility and love as well as a passion for fidelity to Scripture. Men who are increasingly faithful, fruitful followers of Jesus according to the Word of God, just what I am striving to become.

Some Scriptures are so clear, **"Do not be wise in your own eyes,"** [Proverbs 3:7](#).

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