

False Gospels Today

Introduction

The general situation in the modern church is that the true Gospel message is either unknown or misunderstood. Since the Arminianising tendencies of the late 19th century, there has been a growing dumbing-down of the Good News. Even the Arminian crusade evangelists of the early 20th century would be shocked at the superficial message being generally promoted today, so low has the truth fallen. At least these men preached the need for conviction of sin and true repentance, even if they emphasised that it was man's free will that could obtain this. But today the message about man's inability, his ruined state in sin, his need to obey the command of God, his need of sovereign grace to believe and repent, and the greatness of the cross of Christ in redeeming men is all but lost, or at least greatly confused. Worse, the emphasis is often put upon man instead of God, the benefits of conversion in making life better instead of getting right with God, and worst of all that by trusting in Christ one will be healed and become prosperous. This is lamentable.

Example

Below is the text content of the home page of a prominent church ministry,

Jesus loves you and wants to heal you and put joy back into your life. He is alive and still works amazing miracles today. All you have to do is open your heart and ask Him to forgive you and heal you. You can receive your healing right where you are, right now.

Jesus paid the price for your complete forgiveness and healing when He died on the cross over 2000 years ago. He was raised from the dead, and all who believe He is the Son of God and follow Him shall be saved. Pray this prayer: 'It belongs to me because of what Jesus has done for me, I receive complete forgiveness and healing now in Jesus name.'

'Surely He has borne our sicknesses, and carried our pain...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.' Isaiah 53:4-5

... The power of Jesus is present to heal wherever you are, everywhere, anytime, anyplace, receive your healing today. [<http://www.jesuswillhealyou.com/>]

Though there is little or no information about this ministry on the website, books advertised on other linked pages imply that it is a Word Faith/Charismatic based organisation. If this is the way the Gospel is being preached today then it is no surprise that the church is in trouble and the world dismissive. There is so much wrong with this that it leaves one shocked. It may be helpful to analyse this message and explain why it is unbiblical.

Analysis of this Gospel

It betrays a shocking lack of Biblical knowledge about God

The basis of our Gospel is a genuine knowledge of God. Salvation is not only centred in God's work through Christ, it is God himself; he is our salvation. Salvation is of the Lord and is the Lord (Ps 3:8, 27:1, 38:22, 50:23; Isa 12:2; Jer 3:23; Jon 2:9 etc.).

The veracity of any supposed Gospel message is determined by its underlying picture of God. If the proclamation is based upon Scriptural truth about God, then it is likely to be

correct; however, if not it will certainly be a false message. The example above is riddled with false ideas about God.

God's love

The first words of the message above are that 'Jesus loves you'. This betrays an utter lack of knowledge about God and a failure to read Scripture. There is no text which states that God loves everybody. John 3:16 cannot mean that God loves everyone; the 'world' here is given a restricted meaning as it is in many other places, even within John's Gospel (e.g. Jn 12:19, 18:20). If 'world' means everyone in 3:16, then it means everyone in 3:17 – but this would mean that there is no need of any Gospel since there is no hell and everyone is saved automatically. This, of course, is nonsense – the heresy of Universalism.

Then there are the very many texts which state that God hates certain types of people, and certain specific individuals. God hates violent and deceitful people (Ps 5:6). God hates wicked people (Ps 11:5). God abhors (detests and denounces) those who commit adultery and immorality (Prov 22:14). God hated Esau before he was even born (Mal 1:3; Rm 9:13 – the specific individual is intended, not some derived notion of nations). God hates the Nicolaitans, both in works and words (Rev 2:6, 15). God hated the Canaanite tribes and committed them to be destroyed for their sin (Lev 20:23). When Israel committed idolatry, God abhorred the nation (Ps 78:59, 89:38, 106:40); 'abhor' here means 'to hate and then reject or despise' or 'to be abominable'. Hate means what it says and does not mean 'to love less'. It means 'to detest', 'to pursue with hatred', and is used of murderers (1 Jn 3:15; Gen 27:41).

If God clearly hates many types of people, even whole nations, then how can anyone say that God loves everyone? Since Jesus is God, neither does Jesus love everyone. Indeed, Jesus was extremely condemnatory of certain people that he hated and denounced to hell calling such, a 'brood of vipers' (Matt 3:7) or 'serpents' (Matt 23:33).

Those who claim that God loves everyone not only fail to see many simple verses of Scripture, but completely misunderstand the whole doctrine of God, having no clue about his attributes.

God's intent to heal

The second phrase in the message above claims that God wants to heal everyone of physical maladies. How in the world can people claim such a thing; it is nonsense. If God wants everyone to be well, then God is a failure and powerless since so many people are sick and die. If God wants to heal everybody, then why does he afflict them with disease in the first place? This claim also posits a contradiction in God since he wants people to be well but afflicts them at the same time.

This shows no knowledge of God's sovereignty since God is the Lord over all disease and controls it according to his purpose.

So the LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the LORD?' Ex 4:11

And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.' Jn 9:2-3

When God heals someone it is entirely due to his desire to glorify his name in a certain way. The healings of Jesus were designed specifically to prove that he was the Messiah. The healings of the apostles were to authenticate that they were from God in an age of many competing religions in the Roman world (Heb 2:3-4). There is no message of automatic

healing in the Gospel; indeed the Gospel proclaims that those who follow Christ will suffer tribulation and afflictions (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess 3:4; 2 Thess 1:5; Rev 2:10). Indeed, there is no one example of a Christian in the NT who was healed of a disease, but many eminent believers were sick (Phil 2:25-27; 1 Tim 5:23; 2 Tim 4:20).

Later the example quotes Isaiah 53:4-5,

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

This is frequently used by Pentecostals and Charismatic to claim that physical healing is in the atonement, that it is an automatic benefit of salvation to all. Such a claim would have shocked Isaiah who had no such intention in his oracle. The point Isaiah is making is that the suffering of the future Messiah would eradicate the sin of his people. The healing is healing from sin; indeed the very context is healing from iniquity. Christ was wounded for our transgressions, not for our illnesses.

That this is the correct interpretation is demonstrated by the quotes of this passage by the apostles. Peter categorically states that Isaiah means sin, not physical healing (1 Pt 2:24).

However, there is one passage which seems to deny this, it is Matt 8:16-17,

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'He Himself took our infirmities and bore *ours* sicknesses.'

This application is only possible in connection with the Messiah and not his disciples in the future. The Christ was prophesied to bring physical healing as well as suffering for sin. The one who would atone for sin and remove transgressions was also the one who would have a message of joy and bring healing (Isa 35:4-5, 42:1-7). Jesus himself used this healing ministry as evidence that he was the Messiah (Matt 11:4-5). Matthew is showing that Christ superlatively fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy by not only dealing with sin but also bringing healing to many during the time of his ministry on Earth. This passage has no bearing on the atonement but merely demonstrates the greatness of the Messiah's ministry.

In any case the example of Jesus is not followed by Charismatics. Jesus healed with a word and healed all who came to him instantly, including many chronic conditions. People were healed of blindness, paralysis, deafness and so on. Charismatics do not do this. They do not heal in the market place but can only aspire to bring 'healing' after long periods of softening up in meetings. Even then there are no creditable healings of chronic conditions on the spot, but merely alleviation of pain due to the excitement of the occasion. There are multiple cases of people who were claimed to be healed but who returned to their sick conditions, or even died, after the meeting. An example of a Pentecostal honoured on this website is Smith Wigglesworth. He too was a man who saw people die after his ministry; indeed after punching one man in the stomach to get rid of an evil spirit, the man died afterwards. Another factor is that claims of Charismatic healing are often distorted or are false. Even the hero of Charismatics, William Branham, has been repeatedly shown to have produced fraudulent claims of healings.

God's intent to bring joy

The message continues by affirming that Jesus wants to bring joy into the lives of those who hear it. That joy is the result of salvation is clear, but this is spoken of the consummation of salvation at the Last Day. In heaven there are no tears and no sorrows, but this is not the case during our pilgrimage on Earth.

I have earlier shown that tribulations, affliction and persecution are promised to the believer. Indeed we are called to continue in Christ's sufferings in the church (2 Cor 1:5, 7, 4:11). How can it be true that we are repeatedly promised suffering and yet also be promised joy in the human sense of the word? The true believer can know the joy of God and can rejoice in God even in trials, but this is not what the message above means. It declares to the outward observer that human joy (joy as understood in the world) is the result of believing in Christ – that is not true.

Share with me in the sufferings for the gospel. 2 Tim 1:8

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2 Tim 3:12

Let us take the example of Paul. At his conversion he was not promised joy but rather,

For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake. Acts 9:16

The very beginning of Paul's Christian life was initiated with a promise of great suffering. Later in life Paul could say that, 'the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me' (Acts 20:23). Paul could also list his problems as,

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonoured! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. 1 Cor 4:9-13

In 2 Cor 11:23-28 Paul could say,

Are they ministers of Christ? -- I speak as a fool -- I *am* more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

It is an insult to all the great martyrs of the church throughout history that they should have known joy at a human level instead of their great and persistent suffering.

We are not promised human levels of happiness in the Christian life; there is no promise of prosperity, constant health, or even human security. The Christian life is not a bed of roses. For this reason Christ himself demanded that a man should consider the call of the Gospel and consider the cost of following him before he embarked on the journey (Lk 14:25-35).

This false claim has left many who fell for it in terrible abuse. Thousands are confused, deluded, upset and confounded because their lives are not full of the promised blessing. This is why the Charismatic churches are filled with various forms of counselling needs. Loved ones prayed for are not healed; money given to ministries has not resulted in financial prosperity; prayers for desired things have not been answered.

The Gospel is not about success in the world or happiness at a human level; it is a lifting up from the Earth to heaven, it is a spiritual change. It is an overcoming of affliction and

tribulation by the Spirit; it is spiritual contentment in the midst of suffering. That is the Christian virtue.

God does not promise to bring human, worldly joy in the Gospel. He promises to make us like Christ who endured suffering for a greater purpose. The joy of God is evidenced in the ability to overcome with thanksgiving in the midst of tribulation.

But does God intend good for all? The blessings that God brings in salvation are intended for the good of the elect only; there is no blessing intended for the reprobate whom God hates. God has no plans to bring joy to the reprobate, those he has not chosen for grace, but only wrath and condemnation as a testimony to his justice.

'There is no peace,' says the LORD, 'for the wicked.' Isa 48:22

The wicked man writhes with pain all *his* days, and the number of years is hidden from the oppressor. Dreadful sounds *are* in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer comes upon him. He does not believe that he will return from darkness, for a sword is waiting for him. He wanders about for bread, *saying*, 'Where *is it?*' He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand. Trouble and anguish make him afraid; they overpower him, like a king ready for battle. For he stretches out his hand against God, and acts defiantly against the Almighty. Job 15:20-25

'Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known.' *'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'* Rm 3:16-18

God's intent to work miracles today

The message continues with the declaration that God, through Jesus, continues to work miracles today. Now in one sense that is true since all that God does through the Gospel and in the church is based upon grace and is a form of miracle – an interposition of God's power in the world. But this is not what is meant by the message. What it is implying is that the miracles performed by Christ and the apostles continue today in the same form. This is not true.

I have already explained that the ministry of Christ and the apostles was unique and special; their ministry was attested by signs and wonders to authenticate their divine origin. The beginning of the Christian church after the cross was a time of unparalleled miracle working to establish the Christian message as true and the church as divine. As the churches were established the need for miracles diminished. This was especially true as the word of God became more and more settled in printed form, first on hand-written documents then by moveable type. As the basis of apostolic teaching was understood and written down, and as the church expanded to cover the known world, the need for miracles vanished, as God intended.

In fact, the continued desire for miracles after this time is fleshly and superficial. Three times it is recorded that Jesus said,

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. Matt 12:39

People looking for the 'wow factor' in a miracle are superficial and missing the point. We do not seek outward show but inward grace. Furthermore, God warns us that at the end there will be many claims of miracle working that are false, emanating from deluded leaders (Matt 24:24; Mk 13:22; 2 Thess 2:9; Rev 19:20).

God does not intend to continually manifest miracles throughout the life of the church. Miracles were chiefly intended to authenticate the ministry of Christ and the apostles to establish the early church.

It shows an appalling ignorance about Gospel doctrines

Having established that the message misrepresents God, it goes on to misrepresent Christian doctrine.

An emphasis upon man

The message is Arminian in doctrine and claims proudly,

All you have to do is open your heart and ask Him to forgive you and heal you.

You can receive your healing right where you are, right now.

In other words, all a person has to do is initiate their own salvation by free will. This presupposes that there is a finished salvation for all people merely awaiting their decision. Both of these ideas are wrong.

Man cannot open his own heart and change it. He is spiritually unable to do any good (Rm 3) and this includes seeking God's grace. The Bible declares that man is dead in sins and follows Satan – he is utterly unable to make himself alive by changing his heart (Eph 2:1-8). Only by receiving God's grace can a man even begin to draw near to Christ (Jn 6:44, 65). Without this grace, given sovereignly by God to those he chooses, there is no way that a man can approach Christ or hear him.

Neither is there a global salvation procured by Christ for all people. He constantly claimed that he called the few, not the many; that his ransom was for the few not the many and that the cross was for his sheep not the goats (Matt 20:16, 28 22:14, 25:32-33). He came to call forth his people, not the whole world and declared that he was a shepherd to his sheep, known individually, and not others (Jn 10:11, 14-16). He only intended to die for those whom God gave him (Jn 17:2, 9) and did not die for anyone else. Indeed, if he had died for all then his blood would have been wasted for those in hell – which would make him less than God, who only does all things well.

Grace is for the elect alone and no one else (Eph 1:45; 2 Thess 2:13); thus salvation is given by God to those he chooses from his own good pleasure – it is not available for any man to take it by his own strength.

Its message is arrogant

It says,

Pray this prayer: 'It belongs to me because of what Jesus has done for me, I receive complete forgiveness and healing now in Jesus name.'

Nowhere in Scripture is there an example of someone coming to salvation in Christ by parroting the prayer of another person. Indeed, the very thought of it is presumptuous and foolish. A sinner must come to God in his own way and have dealings with God personally. He can only do this if God calls him and draws him to Christ; without this a man cannot even hear the words of the Gospel, he is deaf to them (Matt 13:15; Mk 4:12; Rm 11:8-10). A man must be convicted of his sin and come trembling to God seeking mercy; how can a person dictating a prayer know that this has genuinely happened. To proclaim a person saved merely because he has prayed a simple prayer is the utmost folly.

It suggests that salvation is easy, within any man's reach and available to all

This trivialises the Biblical concepts of sin and grace and ignores God's sovereignty in salvation. Man's sin is a huge problem that leaves him in desperate straits. He is not just sick but dead; without God's grace he is lost for eternity in condemnation. This is not a

trivial, simple condition to escape from but a severe problem needing amazing grace from God and the wonderful condescension of the Son of God to die for our sins.

But even with the atonement of Christ as a finished work, man is still not safe. Man has no power to obtain this salvation without God's help and grace. Man can do no good work (as we have stated) and cannot gain the benefit of atonement by merely making a decision. Man has no innate desire to make this choice, preferring to stay in his sins. Until God awakens him by conviction of sin then man has no concept that he is lost and in great danger. His sins are enjoyable and he has no desire to lose them.

But not all men are awakened to their sin. Only those who are chosen by God in eternity are drawn to Christ and given a new desire to believe in him and repent. Only those given to Christ by the Father have any inclination to sorrow over their sin and seek the Saviour. This happens as a result of regeneration; only those God sovereignly chooses to be regenerated, to be born again, have any ability to see the import of their sinful condition and yearn for forgiveness through the cross of Christ.

It is a spiritual work, a faith work, to yearn for deliverance from sin. It is only by grace that a man sees Christ as Saviour and desires to follow him forever. Both repentance and faith are gifts from God to those he has chosen and these are imparted by the Holy Spirit who brings them to those he regenerates (Jn 3).

The message above completely ignores the sovereignty of God in its statements, something the Bible seeks to emphasise. God is sovereign in salvation not man. It is not a trivial, simple, easy matter for a man to turn from his sin whenever he wants to, and gain all the benefits of being in Christ. A man can only hear when God opens his deaf ears; he can only see Christ when the scales are taken from his eyes; he can only believe when God gives him faith; and he can only repent when God gives grace for him to turn from his sins and former way of life.

What is needed

In Gospel preaching the seriousness of sin needs to be explained. A man needs to know of the judgment of God against sin and the realities of hell. A man needs to be directed to seek the mercy of God and seek it earnestly in much prayer. A man needs to see the glories of Christ put forth as the Saviour of men. He needs to be shown that following Christ requires him hating his own life and yielding to Christ as Lord. There are no shortcuts to a man dealing with God and agonising over his sin. Without a proper conviction of sin there can be no proper repentance. Every person deals with this differently; some have a very prolonged period of groaning for sin before they come into the light, while others appear to gain release very quickly. Evangelists have no right to circumvent God's ways of dealing with people by telling them that if they do this or that they will be saved immediately. Such methods will ensure that the result is not a true conversion.

And this is what we see in modern churches all around; thousands of individuals, who have followed Gospel messages like that above, are told that they are saved but they are not. Charismatic churches in particular are filled with people who have a superficial, professing faith but are not genuine Christians. This is the reason why there are so many flawed conversions and so many pressing counselling problems. Whole ranks of counsellors and techniques have arisen under the Charismatic Movement that never existed in history before. Many have formed their own ministries with large headquarters seeking to 'serve' the churches with their false doctrines and practices. All these techniques, from exorcism to pseudo-psychology, are required to alleviate the problems caused by false conversions due to false gospels.

Conclusion

The Gospel is the power of God. It is not a formula or method but the revelation of God's power to save. When the Biblical Gospel is proclaimed the result is the salvation of men who are totally changed as a result of new life. These men are empowered by divine grace and fellowship with God to live new lives. Their characters change and improve; sinful habits are rejected and abandoned while new spiritual habits are formed.

We must take great care to ensure that the message we proclaim is Scriptural and honours God. If we fail to do this then we not only cause damage to our hearers but we dishonour God and deserve his chastisement.

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