

General Topics :: What's Wrong with the Gospel? Part 2

What's Wrong with the Gospel? Part 2 - posted by HomeFree89 (), on: 2007/8/1 13:53

What's Wrong With the Gospel?

Section 2: "The Added Parts"

by

Keith Green

Introduction

In each generation there have been various ways and means used to secure the attention of sinners so that they may be shown the truth and then led into a saving knowledge and true relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a fact that man is a creature of habit. He loves form, doesn't like things to change "too quickly," and he clings to tradition. Unfortunately (for man), God is no such person. Though something has never been tried before, God simply does not care. His only concern is that it is the wisest and most direct way of accomplishing His desire.

This of course, threw the children of Israel into many a panic. "What's God doing now?" If there was a big sea in the way, no problem, He just split it. If there wasn't any water, snap! A drinking fountain from a rock. Food running low? Presto! I'll rain bread in the morning. And Jesus had the same way of dealing with things. When His disciples were far from shore, it didn't matter, Jesus just strolled over the waves. Problem with the weather? "Shut up wind!" And so it went. 1

Now as you can see in the Bible, God had a lot of problems with man and his traditions. Just take a look at the Jews - how they loved their temple, their sacrifices, their Sabbath - too bad they didn't care much for their God. And Jesus ran up against the whole stubborn lot of them. "Did you see that? Why, He healed on the Sabbath!" (Luke 13:14) At every turn, Jesus tried to show them the truth, using the wisest reasoning and the best examples, but they kept getting hung up on His methods - touching lepers, raising the dead, hanging out with sinners, whipping moneychangers - it scared them to death! 2 Their religion was basically peaceful, very solemn and quiet. But Jesus... why Jesus had the whole town in an uproar at least once a week! You can see why He bothered them; He disturbed their nice little religion... with the truth! (John 8:44-45)

It is obvious that God anoints men and women who are completely yielded to His Spirit. He also anoints methods and tools that we use - meetings, tracts, books, music, witnessing, preaching, etc. - when they are also fully submitted to Him in faithfulness. But there is a great danger when man (or even God) designs a tool to be used for God's glory, and then as time passes, people's attention starts to be fixed on the tool itself, rather than on the glory of God (which it was originally designed to promote). 3

The following is a list of just some of the tools, methods, and concepts that I believe have become so much a part of presenting the modern gospel, that they have become just about inseparable from it. In fact, they are to such an extent considered necessary, that if many of them are left out of an evangelistic meeting, Christians can hardly believe that anyone can be saved there.

Some Inventions Of Man That Have Become Essential Parts Of the Modern Gospel

The Term and Concept of "Personal Savior." I find it very disturbing when something unnecessary is added to the Gospel. The use of the term "Personal Savior" isn't very harmful in itself, but it shows a kind of mind-set that is willing to "invent" terms, and then allow these terms to be preached as if they were actually found in the Bible.

But why must we do this? Why must we add needless, almost meaningless things to the Gospel? It is because we've taken so much out that we have to replace it with "spiritual double talk."

That's right, double talk! Would you ever introduce your sister like this: "This is Sheila, my personal sister"? Or would you point to your navel and say, "This is my personal bellybutton"? Ridiculous! But nevertheless, people solemnly speak of Christ as their personal Savior, as if they've got Him right there in their shirt pocket - and as if when He returns, He will not have two, but three titles written across His thigh: King of kings, Lord of lords, and PERSONAL SAVIOR! (See Rev. 19:16.) This is only one example of how a non-biblical term can be elevated to reverence by the Church, as if to say, "Well even if it isn't in the Bible - it should be!"

The Alter Call. Imagine if you can, Jesus having people bow their heads after hearing the Sermon on the Mount, and then very slowly and softly (while Bartholomew plays "How Great Thou Art" on the accordion) saying to the crowd, "While your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed, if you really want to be My disciple tonight, if you really want to show My Father and I that you truly mean to follow this sermon I have given, then I want you to slip your hand up slowly, so that I may see it. There now... yes... yes... I see that hand ... and that one ... and the one way back by the fig tree ... yes! Now, please, while Bart plays another chorus, I'd like you to start moving down through the center of the crowd ... yes, those who have raised their hand. I want to know if you really mean business. I'd like to lead you in a prayer ...

I realize that there are some who will see such an illustration as sacrilegious. And that's just the point. They think that making fun of the "altar call" is making fun of God. But it isn't. Traditions die hard, because they take so long to form. Once I received a very intense letter from the pastor of a church who had sponsored me in a city-wide concert in his area. He was as upset that I had "let several hundred souls go ungathered" because I had not given an altar call. He said, "It seems you have no burden for souls." (Nothing could be further from the truth.) But because I had not given the recognized "official invitation," this pastor could see no value in my presentation of the Gospel. Or as Tony Salerno, (director of "The Agape Force"), once remarked, "If you don't give an altar call, they think you have committed the 'unpardonable sin!'"

The Gradual Altering Of the "Alter Call"

Believe it or not, the altar call was invented only about 150 years ago. It was first used by the American evangelist, Charles Finney, as a means of separating out those who wanted to talk further about the subject of salvation. Finney called the front pew "the anxious seat" (for those who were "anxious" about the state of their souls) or "the mourner's bench." Finney never "led them in a prayer," but he and a few others would spend a great deal of time praying with and giving specific instruction to each, one by one, until finally, everyone was sent home to pray and continue seeking God until "they had broken through and expressed hope in Christ," as Finney would say.

The early Salvation Army, going a bit further on Finney's innovation, developed what they called "the penitent form" or "the mercy seat." After a rousing time of singing and preaching, they would invite any sinner present who wanted to confess his sins to God and repent, to come to the front, and they would be prayed for individually. I have met a few older Christians who used to attend some of these early meetings, and they said that sometimes people would stay there all night, and on a few occasions, even a few days, weeping and confessing their sins with broken hearts. There were always some who would stay right there to instruct them further, encouraging them to make a clean sweep of sin from their lives.

This is what the early "altar call" was like. But gradually, it began to become a fixed part of every meeting, and like all other traditions, it began to lose its original spirit. The "coming forward" part started to be more important than the "sorrow, confession, repentance, and instruction" parts. Eventually, anyone who would "come down the aisle" was excitedly proclaimed "a new believer in Christ!" No matter how they felt, they still were told, "Your sins are forgiven, brother! Rejoice in Christ!" How many a miserable, defeated, and confused person has come away from a meeting like this? (Jer. 6:14)

The Sinner's Prayer. Can you also try and imagine this scene where Jesus is leading some new "disciples" in the "sinner's prayer"?

"Wow! There are so many that came forward for salvation tonight!" (The multitude applauds.) "Now, it is very simple. You just repeat this little prayer after Me, and then you're a Christian! Now it doesn't really matter whether you fully understand the prayer . . . it works just the same. Now ready? Repeat after Me... 'Dear Jesus... Come into my heart...' and so on ...

As you can see, when we try to picture Jesus Himself using our modern methods of evangelism, it seems completely foolish. I think this is a very good test for any method. "Could I see Jesus doing this?" or "Could I see Jesus preaching or teaching this?" Since the Bible tells us, "Walk in the manner that He walked" (1 John 2:6), we should always try to compare our actions and message to the Master's.

It is obvious that there is no "set" sinner's prayer. There are many variations, with different lengths, different wordings, different endings, etc., but the contents are usually the same. The prayer usually includes phrases like, "Dear Jesus," "Come into my heart," "I admit I have sinned" (at least the better ones contain this last statement - there are some who do not even like to mention sin in their "sinner's prayer"), "Fill me with Your Spirit," "In Jesus' name. Amen." Extremely harmless . . . nothing wrong with a prayer like that, right? Wrong! It isn't the wording that's important, it's the state of heart of the one saying it.

I believe that a true "sinner's prayer" will gush out of anyone who is truly seeking God and is tired of being enslaved to sin. (Matt. 5:6) The very act of "leading someone in a prayer" is utterly ridiculous. You will find nothing even remotely like it in the Bible, or among the writings and biographies of those in Church history. It completely savors of crowd and peer pressure tactics, and (please forgive me) brainwashing techniques. I do not believe that Jesus wants to have His disciples "repeat after Me," I believe He wants them to follow after Him!⁴

Premature Birth

As with the altar call, the practice of having someone repeat a prayer with the minister probably originated from the best of intentions. And no doubt, there are those who have "followed through," continuing to pray and walk with God, entering into the path of righteousness through God's infinite grace. But also, like the altar call, the so-called "sinner's prayer" is one of those tools that make it alarmingly easy for someone to consider himself a Christian, when he has absolutely no understanding of what "counting the cost" (Luke 14:28) really means.

The greatest reason I believe that God can be grieved with the current use of such tools as the "altar call" and "sinner's prayer" is because they can take away the conviction of the Holy Spirit prematurely, before the Spirit has time to work repentance leading to salvation. With an emotional splash that usually doesn't last more than a few weeks, we believe we're leading people into the Kingdom, when really we're leading many to hell - by interfering with what the Spirit of God is trying to do in a person's life. Do you hear? Do you understand that this constitutes "spiritual abortion"? Can't you see the eternal consequences of jumping the gun, trying to bring to birth a baby that isn't ready?

We are so afraid that we'll see a "big one that got away," that we'd rather rush someone into a shallow decision, and get the personal gratification of seeing him "go down the aisle," than take the time to fully explain things to him, even if it takes long hours and nights of travailing prayer for his soul. We just don't "have the time" to do things God's way anymore.⁵

But God would rather see one true convert than an ocean full of "decisions." Oh, can't you see what a mess we're in? What we've done to the Gospel? And when those "converts" no longer want to fellowship with us, when they want to go back to their old friends and their old way of life, we have the nerve to call it "backsliding," when we stood in the very way of them ever "front-sliding" toward the cross! Oh, it breaks my heart to think of that awesome day when God will judge those who have "stumbled one of these little ones." (Mark 9:42)

Other Man-Made Methods That Have Made the Modern Gospel Very Shallow, And Therefore Unbiblical

Quick and Easy "1-2-3 Steps-To-Salvation" Booklets. I certainly cannot fault the intentions nor the integrity of the men and organizations responsible for these little tools. One of the best known of these booklets has been printed in over 30 languages, and has over 100 million copies in circulation. With that in view, it is even more urgent for me to say that unless these or any other "gospel" booklets contain the same message that our Lord preached (and commanded His disciples to spread "to every kindred and nation"), then they are worse than "inadequate tools," they are wicked!

For the Bible says in Proverbs, "Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the unfaithful messenger to him who sends him." (Proverbs 10:26) Paul said that if we are really Christians, then we are "ambassadors of Christ" (II Cor. 5:20) - we are God's sole representatives in this foreign land called "the world."

With that analogy in mind, consider what a president would think of an ambassador to a foreign country, say Russia, who is told to deliver an extremely urgent message that will involve the peace of the whole world. And that ambassador (even with the best intentions) gives only a small part of the message, in such a way as to make a very different impression - in fact, the exact opposite impression - than what the president wanted to make. What do you think that president will do to the ambassador when he finds out the damage done?

Booklets like these usually mention a "sort-of" repentance like, "you must turn from your sins, to Jesus." But they rarely explain what "turning" really means. This is also true of such other vital terms such as "Lord" - they usually refer to Jesus as "Lord," but again, they seldom define "lordship" - and people go their merry way, believing they have the full right to continue running their own lives as long as they call Jesus "Lord." (See Matt 7:21; Luke 6:46.)

I don't care how many letters I get saying how much good has been done by such and such a ministry, or how many have been "saved" through such and such a booklet. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16) and in another place He said that "Your fruit should remain" (John 15:16), which means it should last! I believe we shall see in that great day, when God spreads out the lives of men in judgment, how many were truly converted by the efforts of these ministries, and how many were turned aside from the path of righteousness - being led to believe the pleasant half-truths contained in these shallow and false epistles that have been printed to the ends of the earth by people with "the best inte

ntions, and the highest integrity." (Matt. 23:15)

The "Poor Jesus" Syndrome. This is the form of preaching that misuses the Scripture in Rev. 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock . . ." How many evangelists have used that Scripture to paint a pathetic picture of Jesus standing outside a door, waiting, knocking, knocking, waiting, for the sinner to open up and let Jesus in? Sometimes these preachers go on and on, until it starts to sound like, "Aw, poor Jesus is out there in the cold, shivering, waiting for someone to let Him in. Won't you go ahead and let poor Jesus into your heart?"

What a line of reasoning. First of all, this statement by the Lord in Revelation is not to the unsaved, it's to the Church in Laodicea (see 3:14). The picture is truly pathetic. Jesus is standing outside of His own church, knocking for them to let Him in! (Sound familiar?) And if there's any doubt left as to who He's talking to, look at verse 22, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Second of all, the truth of the matter for sinners is the exact opposite. Jesus is not outside of their world, knocking to come in - they are outside of His Kingdom! And they can knock all night like the five foolish virgins (Matt. 25:11), but Jesus will never let them in unless they meet the requirements: a humble and contrite heart, and a complete disgust for sin. Then, and only then, will God deliver them from their slavery to sin - and transfer them by His grace to the Kingdom of His lovingkindness. God will never repent for someone - He will take every step possible to make the sinner see the folly of his ways, but the final move is up to the individual himself. Each person must make the final surrender, the desperate gasp of "I am a fool to run my own life! Lord, show me the way to your door, and I'll knock and knock, and beg forgiveness . . . I'll do anything, anything, ANYTHING YOU SAY!" Then, and only then, will God save a sinner.⁶

Bumper Stickers, Cheap Clickbait, and "Christian" Slogans. It pains me to see the beautiful truths of Scripture being plastered about like beer advertisements. Many think it is wise to "get the word out" in this way but, believe that we are really just inoculating the world with bits and pieces of truth - giving them their "gospel shots." (And we're making it hard for them to "catch" the real thing!) People become numb to the truth when we splash our gaudy sayings in their eyes at every opportunity. Do you really think this is "opening them up to the Gospel"? Or is it really just another way for us to get smiles, waves, and approval from others in the "born-again club" out in the supermarket parking lot, who blow their horns with glee when they see your "Honk if you love Jesus!" bumper sticker?

What about those "other sayings"? You know, the quasi-biblical ones, like "Please be patient, God isn't finished with me yet," which can really be a horrible replacement for "I'm sorry." (And besides, it puts the blame on the wrong person - "The reason I'm such a creep is because God isn't finished with me yet.")

And if you really want to play "Stretch the Bible" there is that other fabulous excuse that absolutely ends all quests or expectations for holiness: "Christians aren't perfect... just forgiven!" Ah, how convenient. You might just as well say, "Christians aren't moral, just forgiven!" or what about "Christians aren't nice, just forgiven!" How about the ultimate? "Christians aren't saved . . . just forgiven!" (That might be a little too deep.) What we're saying by this glorious piece of prose is, "Madam, you cannot trust your teenage daughter with my Christian son, you'd better keep your eye on him . . . he's not safe . . . he's just forgiven!"

Maybe I've gone a little too far to make a point, but I think the world is completely sick to its stomach with our sayings and "witnessing tools." It's time for us to be expressing the truth with our lives, and then the whole truth of God with our lips!

"The Follow-Up Program." There is one last great mistake being committed in the name of evangelism. It is rightly called "follow-up." I say "rightly called" because it is following up the same miserable and incomplete gospel with a miserable, incomplete, and false replacement for what the Bible calls "discipleship."

Our "follow-up" usually consists of a "packet of literature," which almost always includes a complete list of all church services and functions. This "packet" also may include many "essential" items like a complete Bible study on "tithing." Also enclosed is usually at least one tithe envelope. (It's amazing that this is one "principle" that nearly every new believer learns right away!)

In my studies of the life of Jesus, it has amazed me that He never had "a follow-up program." It was usually His habit to let people "follow Him up." He never had to go door to door, looking for that fellow who He healed last week, wanting to share another parable or two. He always seemed to have the attitude of, "If they want life, then they'll have to come and follow Me."

Can't you see what fools we are? We preach a man-made, plastic gospel. We get people to come forward to "the altar" by bringing psychological pressures that have nothing to do with God. We "lead them" in a prayer that they are not yet convinced they need to say. And then to top it all off, we give them "counseling," telling them it is a sin to doubt that they're really saved!

Conclusion

And now we come to the end of this "Bible study." Yes, that's just what it has turned out to be. I hope you will take the time to look up each of the Scriptures given, and see for yourself what God has said in His Word about all these things. I realize that these articles will step on many toes, and some might even be deeply offended, but that is not my intention at all. My only prayer is that through this little effort, many will begin to take up the cross and preach the good news of our salvation with the same power and anointing that Jesus promised and gave to the early Church, and that when we ministers stand before Him on that great day, we will be able to say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith . . . I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ" (II Tim. 4:7; Rom. 15:19), so that we may hear those sweet words from our King's lips, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:21)

Beloved family, the world around us is going to hell. Not because of communism, not because of television, not because of drugs, or sex, or alcohol, or the devil himself. It is because of the Church! We are to blame! We alone have the commission, the power, and the truth of God at our constant disposal to deliver sinner after sinner from eternal death. And even though some are willing to go... into the streets, the prisons, foreign lands, or even next door, they are taking a watered-down, distorted version of God's message which He has not promised to anoint. That is why we are failing. And unless we admit that we are failing, then I'm afraid there is no hope for us or the world around us. We have the choice between causing eternal tragedy for our whole generation, or bringing our beloved God a whole family full of "good and faithful servants."

Please pray over all of this. God is waiting to meet you in the closet. (Matt. 6:6)

The following list is a list of books for further in-depth study on evangelism and the content of the Gospel:

Today's Gospel by Walter Chantry - The Banner Of Truth Trust

Finney On Revival by Charles G. Finney - Fleming H. Revell Co.

Gems from Tozer by A. W. Tozer - Christian Publications, Inc.

That Incredible Christian by A. W. Tozer - Christian Publications, Inc.

Footnotes:

1) Exodus 14:21-22, 16:4, 17:6; Matt. 14:25; Mark 4:39.

2) Matt. 8:2-3; 9:11, John 2:15, 11:43-44.

3) See II Kings 18:4- Because it had become an idol, King Hezekiah had to destroy the same bronze serpent that Moses had made in Numbers 21:8, which was used to stop the plague of death among the Israelites. This is the same bronze serpent referred to by Jesus in reference to Himself, in John 13:14!

4) Matt 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 16:24, 19:21; Luke 9:59; John 12:26, 21:19,22; I Peter 2:21; Rev. 14:4.

5) In contrast to this, look at the amount of time and effort Jesus took to explain salvation to one mere Samaritan woman - John 4:3:42

6) Psalm 34:18, 51:17; Isaiah 66:22; Luke 18:14; James 4:10.

Re: What's Wrong with the Gospel? Part 2 - posted by sojourner7 (), on: 2007/8/1 15:24

Could it be we just don't see the gospel
as a reality that still has the power to
change hearts and lives? Why are so many
of us lacking this conviction?? We must
live with conviction of the need of the cross
before we can lead others to the cross!!
;-)

Re: - posted by HomeFree89 (), on: 2007/8/1 19:57

Hi Sojourner7,

We need to preach the Cross and the Law to lead sinners to repentance. Really nothing's wrong with the Gospel, it's just those who preach it and add or subtract things from it that's wrong.

Jordan

Re: - posted by sojourner7 (), on: 2007/8/1 22:31

Conviction of the cross constrains us to do more than preach the gospel. Conviction of the cross enables us to love the sinner, even loves our enemies!! 8-)

Re: What's Wrong with the Gospel? Part 2 - posted by BrokenMan, on: 2007/8/2 0:49

This article was awesome to read...to ponder... so many traditions, to be done away with, as they subvert the true gospel. If only we would fully know and rely on the Holy Spirit...all these traditions would fade away

Re: - posted by HomeFree89 (), on: 2007/8/2 21:26

You're right BrokenMan.

What amazes me is that Keith wrote this over 25 years ago and how he was able to really pinpoint somethings that we should look at.

Jordan