

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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Distorted Gospel

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Introduction

We have all heard messages that were purported to be “the gospel”. However, in my experience, some of the various messages that I have heard as “the gospel” were vastly different. Why would they be so different if they all dealt with the same subject? Especially a subject as important as “the gospel”? Could it be that we have different definitions of “the gospel”? If so, how do our definitions differ from the biblical definition?

Definition of the Gospel

We have all heard the simple, surface definition of “the gospel” as “good news”. While that is the meaning of the word “gospel” it doesn't tell us anything about what it is. First, it has to be the gospel, good news, about something. The word doesn't stand alone. We don't go around just saying “good news, good news”; but we attempt to tell what the “good news” is. And that is where our different definitions come into play.

Here is a partial list of some of things that I have heard preached as “the gospel”:

1. the gospel of salvation
2. the gospel of prosperity
3. the gospel of the church
4. the gospel of healing and deliverance
5. the gospel of social activism
6. the gospel of grace
7. the gospel of love
8. the gospel of faith

Each of these “gospels” focuses on a particular aspect of God's provision with the end goal being the attainment of that provision. Some of these so water down God's requirements that I question the value of preaching such “gospels” and the validity of our “experiences” with them.

Now, the real question is, “Are any of these the biblical definition of 'the gospel'?”

How did Jesus define the gospel? He preached a gospel before His death and resurrection and continued to do so until His ascension. He referred to His gospel as “the gospel of the Kingdom”.

Matthew 9:35 NASB

(35) Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Notice that the gospel is not called a “salvation” gospel but rather “the gospel of the kingdom”. Apparently, the gospel of the Kingdom contains all that we need in terms of the gospel because Jesus said that this is the gospel that would be preached in all of the world before the end/

Matthew 24:14 NASB

(14) "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Again, notice that this is not a gospel of salvation as we preach it today. This gospel and the kingdom of God were integral to the purpose of Jesus and a part of why He was sent as He, Himself, said:

Luke 4:43 NASB

(43) But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose."

The gospel didn't change after Jesus' death but continued to be preached by the disciples in Acts and the Epistles.

The gospel of the Kingdom is the “full gospel” not a partial gospel as are the various ones that I listed earlier. While the various “gospels” listed above have good news in them, none of them are the complete or full gospel. As a consequence they fall short of providing what we need in terms of the gospel. The true gospel of the Kingdom does what Paul said:

Romans 1:16 NASB

(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Notice that it is to those that believe that the gospel becomes the power of God for salvation. It would appear to me that this means the gospel will bring us into the fullness of salvation not just bring us to the new birth.

Demonstration of the Gospel

The preaching of the gospel was always linked with healing and deliverance. Part of the “good

news” is that the captives are set free, which includes being set free from bondage and disease. This is the pattern that Jesus followed and the pattern that He passed on to the Twelve and later to the Seventy that He sent out.

Matthew 9:35 NASB

(35) Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matthew 10:1; 7-8 NASB

(1) Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

(7) "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

(8) "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.

Luke 10:1;9 NASB

(1) Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come.

(9) and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

Proclaiming the Kingdom of God involves the demonstration of the power of the Kingdom by healing the sick. This was also the same pattern that Paul followed.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NASB

(4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

(5) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Paul's preaching was not just words. Various religions all have “good words”; but, what makes the preaching of Christ different is that the Holy Spirit will move in power and demonstrate the words; that is, put them into action.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 NASB

(5) for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

The gospel is not words only; but is also power in the Holy Spirit. Today's gospel doesn't have the effect of “full conviction” because we bring words only without the power. Even what we call the great commission tells us that signs; that is, acts of power, follow believers and the proclaiming of the gospel (Mark 16:15-20). We are living in the “perilous times” that Paul spoke of to Timothy and we are associating with those who are “*holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.*” (2 Timothy 3:5 NASB)

Distorted Gospel

We need to minister a clear gospel—one that is clear in word; but also one that is clear in power so that our faith rests in God and not in a persuasive speaker.

Even after we have believed, a “full gospel” understanding is required or we will be subject to being swayed by a different gospel.

Galatians 1:6-7 NASB

(6) I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

(7) which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Paul says that the Galatians were deserting Jesus for a different gospel; but then says that it is not really another gospel but it is actually a *distortion* of the gospel of Christ and a few verses later pronounces a curse on those who would preach a distorted gospel.

There is nothing more dangerous to our faith than a “distorted” gospel because it is not as easily recognized as “another” or a “different” gospel. When truth is taken and twisted it becomes a deception even though it started as real truth. A distorted gospel will bring us back under some form of bondage and will hinder our freedom in the Lord. Once our freedom is curtailed then our obedience is constrained and we become incapable of fulfilling our call to work in His Kingdom.

When Paul was dealing with the problem of the Galatians, the ones distorting the gospel were the Judaizers, those who were of the circumcision who had become believers in Christ Jesus. They presented a “gospel” that the “new covenant” was actually an extension of the old covenant and that the requirements of Moses were still applicable to believers.

We have a form of “new Judaizers” arising today that preach a distorted gospel. They want to take various aspects of the law of Moses and make them applicable to us today. These include things like “keeping the Sabbath” and celebrating “the feasts” as part of our duty as believers.

Colossians 2:16-17 NASB

(16) Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--

(17) things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

No one acts as our judge in these matters. The substance has come; there is no longer any need of the shadows. We should not let anyone deceive us with a distorted gospel.

Let us continue in the freedom of Christ Jesus. Let us not be led astray by distorted gospels that entangle us again in bondage. Christ set us free—let us be free indeed.

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