

Beware of the False Gospel

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really is no gospel at all... if anyone is preaching to you another gospel... let him be eternally condemned!" Galatians 1:6 & 9

The apostle Paul was disturbed when he heard God's people were turning to a different gospel. Paul knew that a different gospel would lead them astray from sanctification and devotion to Christ. This is why Paul was vigilant and fearless to confront those who preached a gospel different than the one he had received from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12). Paul called his gospel the message of Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). This gospel can be expressed as "Christ died for us and included us in His death so He might live in us." This was the gospel Paul practiced and preached when he testified, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20)."

It is essential that we also practice and preach the same gospel of Christ crucified. We simply will not come into sanctification and a true knowledge of Jesus Christ by any other gospel. What makes a gospel different than the true gospel? Whenever anything is added to or taken out of the gospel, it is a false gospel. For example, if someone teaches that you must be water baptized *before* you can be saved, this is a false gospel since it has *added* something to the true gospel. Water baptism does not save you; it only confirms your salvation in Christ. It is more difficult, however, to discern a false gospel when something is *omitted* from the true gospel. For example, the gospel commonly preached today is "Jesus died to forgive you for your sins." Of course, this is true, but all of God's promises and provisions are conditional. Yet most preachers leave out the fundamental condition for Christ's forgiveness of sins to be effective: Christ forgives our sins *if* we turn away from darkness and walk in the light (1 John 1:5-7).

The Bible says that if you sin against God, you must confess your sin to Him (1 John 1:9). If you want to walk in fellowship with God (and other believers), you must practice walking in the light. You cannot continue to walk in the darkness (practice sin) and expect to have the benefits of God's forgiveness and fellowship. God never intended that Christ's death on the cross for our forgiveness would be used as an excuse for sin. This is why Paul said, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1-2) Therefore, this incomplete gospel is false unless it is preached within the context of repentance and turning away from practicing sin. Without the message of repentance, this gospel gives a false license to sin and a false security. As a result of this false gospel, many Christians are willfully practicing sin and grievously sharing in the Lord's Supper in an unrighteous manner. Tragically, they will be judged along with the rest of the world. "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving a knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment (Hebrews 10:26-27)."

Once again, the complete gospel is "Christ died for us *and included us in His death* so that He might live in us." The most devious counterfeit of the gospel conspicuously leaves out this central portion of Christ's gospel. To the immature and undiscerning, this omission seems unimportant. But a crucial centerpiece of the gospel has been left out – *our inclusion by faith into Christ's death on the cross*. Jesus Himself taught that applying the work of the cross in your life is central to discipleship: "Whoever does not carry his own cross... cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:27)." Omitting this essential truth is Satan's scheme to substitute a seemingly harmless but extremely dangerous counterfeit to the true gospel. The only way we can overcome Satan and sin is to abide by faith in Christ's completed work on the cross; otherwise "whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23)." This is the whole gospel: When Christ died, we died with Him. When Christ was crucified, our sinful nature was crucified with Him. When Christ was buried, our sinful nature

was also buried and removed in Him (Romans 6:3-11). Once again, God's promises and provisions are conditional. If we believe and act on the truth that we have died with Christ, He will sovereignly live in us. If we do not actively identify by faith with Christ's death in this way, He will not sovereignly live in us. We cannot just mentally assent to Christ's inclusionary death and expect to have Christ's life. Jesus Christ said if we abide in Him, then He will abide in us (John 15:4). We must abide (act by faith) on the truth of Christ's death in order for the power of His resurrection life to be expressed in us. Death always comes first, then resurrection life (Romans 6:5). When we were born again, we received Christ's seed into our heart. If we stay rooted in Christ by faith *so that His death becomes our death by carrying our own cross*, His seed will reproduce His life within us and we will stop practicing sin and will intimately know Him. "No one who is born of God continues to sin because His seed *abides* in him; and he cannot go on sinning, because he is born of God (1 John 3:9)."

Whenever anything is added to or taken out of the gospel that undermines God's intended purpose for His people, it is a different gospel. Some preach a different gospel (which really is a false gospel) out of ignorance, but others do it because they resist the Holy Spirit and do not want to stop sinning. Those who preach a false gospel do not abide in Christ and His teaching and do not carry their own cross for His sake. Since they have "gone beyond" the cross, they do not walk in sanctification and do not know Christ. "No one who abides in Him keeps sinning; no one who keeps sinning has seen Him or knows Him (1 John 3:6)." The only way we can know the difference between the true gospel and the false is to walk in the Light as He is in the Light. Then we will have fellowship with Jesus and His Light will separate the true gospel from the false!

"Anyone who goes beyond and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has the Father and the Son." 2 John 9