

Five Marks of a False Gospel

The gospel, or “good news,” is essentially the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world to reconcile God’s people to Himself. Sadly, much perversity masquerades as the gospel, yet it’s designed to lead man away from the truth and into a false sense of relationship with the Creator.

Many cults and false religions have arisen contrary to the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3), but there are far more subtle attacks on the biblical gospel that, in many cases, go unnoticed, and are poisoning the church today. Let’s review five telling marks that a gospel being preached is false.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6-7

1.) The gospel exalts man.

This may sound like an obvious one, but sadly, so many preachers today preach a gospel that exalts man. Arminianism is perhaps the most notorious of these. Contrary to Scripture, man is said to have within himself some level of “goodness” to be able to “choose” God. Scripture teaches that man cannot choose God (Romans 3:11) because we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

Others may teach that God has chosen to save man, not solely according to the purposes of His own will (Eph 1:11), but because of some inherent value in us. Sure, we have some value to God—we are created in His image. We were also created to glorify Him. But Scripture clearly teaches that it is not because of any value or goodness in us that God has chosen to save us; He chose to save us to display His own glory (Romans 9:23).

This mark of a false gospel places our hope in something false—a hope in something other than Christ alone. It places our hope in something within ourselves, and God will not share His glory with any other.

2.) The gospel teaches that you are saved from temporal afflictions.

This is mostly found in the Prosperity, Health and Wealth, and Word of Faith movements. It teaches that when you are saved, you no longer have to suffer from worldly calamities such as poverty, sickness, and disease. Further, it teaches that if you do suffer from these things, that your faith simply isn’t strong enough.

Often, your level of faith is purportedly reflected in how much money you give to the organisation propagating this false teaching. This teaching can certainly lead people astray, giving some who are not truly born again a false sense of security in practices such as tithing. Once again, Christ as the sole object of our faith is diminished and our faith is placed in our good works and is evidenced by our prosperity.

The apostle Paul teaches worldly struggles are not only likely but that God uses them for His glory, in which our purpose is to glorify God. *But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong...* 2 Corinthians 12:10-11.)

3.) Emphasis is placed on the Holy Spirit more than Jesus Christ.

Many charismatic churches teach a gospel that emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit more than the work of Christ. Certainly, the Holy Spirit, equal with the Father and Christ, is worthy of our acknowledgment. But the Work of the Holy Spirit is always to point to Christ and not to Himself (John 16:14-15). Yet these charismatic churches, in many ways, teach that the Holy Spirit is the primary end of our salvation and that it is manifested through signs and wonders performed by those who have “received Him.” This often results in aberrant teachings such as that speaking in tongues is necessary evidence of salvation. Jesus Christ, however, is the primary end of our salvation. As stated in 2 Corinthians 12:10-11 above, His grace is sufficient. Seeking for signs and wonders, Christ said, is evidence of a wicked and adulterous people (Matthew 16:4).

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11

4.) It is attractive to the world.

Another sign that a gospel being preached is false is that it is attractive to the world.

Many false gospels contain half-truths and, even in some ways, may sound very much like the gospel. But the world is impatient with the inward work of regeneration and sanctification through Christ. They seek fulfilment through entertainment and other carnal means, which give them a false impression of their own piety. The message of Christ’s bloody death on the cross and his endurance of God’s wrath is watered down to the point that it is meaningless, while rock bands, laser light shows, and music devoid of any theological substance are echoed throughout the churches that teach this way. In other words, if the world is not offended by the gospel message being preached, it is false.

Scripture teaches that Christ is offensive, even calling Him the “rock of offence (1 Peter 2:8),” and that the gospel is foolish to the world.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18

5.) The gospel is not derived from Scripture.

Many false churches teach that Scripture is insufficient to receive the knowledge of the grace of God. This is most prevalent in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Most cults have some form of this aberrant teaching as well. However, there are plenty of other churches, “evangelical churches,” that have strayed from the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone) as well. In recent years, we have seen pastors stray away from the authority of Scripture. This opens the door to all sorts of error, most of it significant and eternally damning.

The Scriptures themselves are the testimony of Christ and His plan of redemption. They are the complete revelation of Jesus Christ sovereignly preserved by the Holy Spirit to teach, reprove, and equip the saints for everything necessary in this life.

There is nothing else that we need to be made complete in Him.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Yet, false gospels that are not derived from Scripture always end up being teachings contrary to the biblical gospel. They always end up being gospels of meritorious works as opposed to grace or gospels of some other (co) saviour and (co)redeemer as opposed to Christ alone. They always minimise the exclusivity of Christ as the only Lord and give many false hope in other beliefs and religions.

It is Christ alone who saves and it is Christ alone who is King. If your church is teaching another gospel or if you notice any of these signs of a false gospel in your church, it may be time to move. Don’t just sit there and put up with it.

For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. 2 Corinthians 11:4