

INTRODUCTION

As I begin this series I want to make a few comments which are important.

First, I do not believe that I have perfect sight either spiritually or intellectually. I come to this subject as a disciple of Jesus who is committed to learning from my Master. This means that I am open to correction and willing to learn. Where I am in error I earnestly seek counsel of others whose knowledge and love of the Lord is greater than mine.

Second, I am painfully aware of the danger of seeing the speck in my brother's eye while ignoring the log in my own. This series is not about writing people off or ridiculing others. Many of the people I will mention during this series are brothers or sisters in Messiah Jesus and I take no pleasure in what I perceive to be their error. It would give me great joy to see their talents, which are considerable, turned for the good of the authentic gospel for the Kingdom.

Third, it is heavy burden of responsibility, but the shepherds of the Church are called to correct error and to expose falsehood for the sake of those they lead. This is why the relative silence of the church on these issues is not a sign of faithfulness to the gospel but a dereliction or duty.

Sermons in this series include:

The Good the Bad and the Ugly –

An introduction to the Health and Wealth Gospel

A Fist full of Dollars – The Prosperity Gospel

For a Few Dollars More – Name it and Claim it...

Hang 'em High – The Cult of the Celebrity Leader

The Wild Bunch – Signs and Wonders

THE GOSPEL - REJECTION AND COMPROMISE

From the earliest days of the New Testament history the Gospel has been vulnerable to re-interpretation and even misinterpretation.

In the first century some who opposed to the gospel ascribed it to Satan. John the Baptist was said to have a demon. (**Matthew 11:18; Luke 7:33-34**) yet Jesus said that He was the greatest prophet of all. (**Matt 11:9-11**)

Jesus received the same criticism when He came proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven from those that opposed Him. (**Matthew 9:34; John 7:19-20; 8:48-52; 10:20-21**).

This opposition to the gospel happened on both sides of the fence.

At times Jesus' own disciples found some of His teachings offensive (**Matthew 16:22; John 6:65-66**). Others attempted to compromise Jesus' gospel. (**Luke 9:59-62; Mark 10:21-30**)

When the Apostles proclaimed the gospel on the day of Pentecost some in the crowd ascribed it to drunkenness. (**Acts 2:12-13**) while others in the same crowd responded with repentance and faith. (**Acts 2:41**)

It is the Pauline writings, above all, that give expression to the battle for the gospel. This is not surprising as Paul's theological acumen was considerable. He constantly defends the Gospel against attempts to change, modify or dilute it. In his time there were two major threats to the gospel. The first was a movement known today as the Judaizers who tried to impose formal conversion to Judaism on gentile followers of Jesus. They insisted on circumcision and other

Jewish legal requirements, and frowned on social contact with 'unclean' Gentiles. Paul deals with the Judaizers in the letter to the Galatians.

Galatians 5:11-12

11 *If I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.*

12 *As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*

The second major challenge to the authentic gospel came from the Gnostics. The Gnostics were a collection of groups who interpreted the gospel in terms of heathen philosophy. They taught that the material world was evil while the spiritual world was good – a view known as dualism. They denied that doctrine of the incarnation because for them it was unthinkable that God who is Spirit (good) would take on flesh (evil). They used a world for God which expressed the fullness of His being – pleroma.

Paul confronts this teaching in the letter to the Colossians when he uses their own word against them.

Colossians 2:9-10

9 *For in Christ all the fullness (pleroma) of the Deity lives in bodily form,*

10 *and you have been given fullness (pleroma) in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*

So we have established that the defence of the authentic Gospel has been a constant companion to the proclamation of the gospel since the apostolic age.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO AN ERRANT GOSPEL?

1. A different Gospel: **2 Cor 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9;**
2. Opposition with impure motives: **Phil 1:15-18**

Paul warned Timothy that some people will turn their ears away from the truth: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables"

(2 Timothy 4:2-4).

The Amplified Bible puts it this way;

"For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold ..."

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lit., "to themselves they shall heap up teachers, tickling the ears"

They were not serious about discipleship what they wanted was entertainment.

The Health and Wealth Gospel

Today one of the fastest growing and wealthiest parts of the church is the collection of personalities and organizations which we can classify under the "health and wealth" umbrella. No doubt you have come into

contact with their teaching through television, DVD's, conferences or books. Their wealth means that they have access to media resources which rival many secular organizations.

Many of the personalities are known to us largely because of the Trinity Broadcasting Network founded by Paul and Jan Crouch.

Benny Hinn, Kenneth & Gloria Copeland and Kenneth Hagin. In fact Kenneth Hagin is, to some extent, the founder of the Health and Wealth Gospel movement. Almost all the other faith preachers point in some way to the profound influence of Kenneth Hagin for their own spiritual development, understanding of faith teachings, and call to ministry.

Other personalities include Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer, Jesse Duplantis, T.D. Jakes and Jack and Rexella van Impe.

Major Themes

According to Bruce Barron, in his book, *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, there are three main themes that set the movement apart from traditional Christian understandings: **healing, prosperity, and positive confession and success.**² The faith teachers themselves are quick to point out that these are not the primary themes of Christian faith and that they must be understood in light of traditional Christian doctrines. Nonetheless, the themes of healing, prosperity, and public confession are highly significant for faith preachers and their followers and are clearly at the heart of the controversy surrounding the movement.

The position of the preachers and their accountability is also an issue that we will examine in the sermon entitled Hang em High – the cult of the celebrity leader.

Healing

The faith teachers believe that "healing is just as much a part of the plan of redemption as - salvation, the Holy Spirit and heaven as your eternal home." Not only is it God's will to heal, it is God's will to heal all! Satan is the author of sickness and disease. - Jerry Savelle

Prosperity

"Prosperity is the condition of being successful and thriving in all areas: spiritually strong, physically strong (healthy), and mentally solid."

"If the Mafia can ride around in Lincoln Continental cars, why can't King's Kids?" - Fred Price

Positive Confession

According to the faith movement, healing and prosperity are primarily realized through evoking the third distinctive theme, positive confession.

"You can have what you say." Kenneth Hagin (*Name it and claim it*)

Success

Some of the faith preachers advocate a "success formula," which they assert to be a universal or cosmic law. Essentially, the formula claims that financial success will come to those who have the faith to believe it and who are themselves a giving people.

For a Fistfull of Dollars see the next article....