

THE SLICED OR SEDATIVE GOSPEL

INTRO: Some time ago I did several messages on the Gospel. In those messages I did several on false Gospels. The Lord Jesus, speaking of the last days says that if it were possible, even the elect would be deceived. The Scriptures abound with warnings. It was Paul who penned these words, "...knowing this that in the last days perilous times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1). Well, we have been in the last days for a long time. 1 Timothy 4:1-3 speaks of what it will be like in the latter times. One of those marks of the last days is 'forbidding to marry'. I think that began to happen in the Roman Catholic church about 1000 years ago.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians he warned them about 'dogs'. These dogs are further described as evil workers and mutilators (Phil. 3:1-3). Then in 3:17-18, still within the same context, Paul writes, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."

I think I can safely say this, that all false Gospels are taught by enemies of the cross of Christ. Now I want us to notice ever so carefully that he does not say they are the enemies of Christ, though that is what they are. He says they are the enemies of the cross of Christ! And what is it in false gospels that is at enmity with the CROSS of Christ? These are gospels that do not put to death. The cross puts people to death. A gospel that does not slay the sinner, is an enemy of the cross of Christ.

I want us to consider yet another point before we begin this message. Listen to Matthew 7:21-22, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

I want you to think for a moment what these people would look like in real life. Would they not look like godly Christians? They proclaimed the Word of God, and exhorted others to live godly. They cast out demons in the name of

the Lord. They did many wonderful works in the name of the Lord. What would these people look like? But what did the Lord say about them? He said, "I never knew you." And then He said these horrific words, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

I. DEFINITION OF THIS GOSPEL

Well, what gospel are we talking about? Why have I called this gospel the sliced or sedative gospel? Well, let me tell you what gospel I am talking about, it is the gospel that says repentance is not necessary for salvation. You say, "Impossible! Who could believe such thing?"

Recently a book on repentance, written by Michael Pearl came into my hands. I want you to listen to this quote on page 33, "There is absolutely no scriptural basis for telling a sinner to 'repent of his sins' in order to be saved. To do so is to preach '*another gospel*'" (Pg. 33).

I do not want to say too much of Michael Pearl's other teachings at this point, but in looking over the catalogue of his materials, I believe the true gospel is not the only teaching under question in his teachings. From the headings of his materials, I would say that confession of sin and sanctification from sin are under very serious question just from the titles alone.

Let me give you an example of no repentance from Rick Warren: On page 58 of the purpose driven life he writes that one must do two things to be saved, "First, believe. Believe God loves you and made you for his purposes... Second, receive. Receive Jesus into your life as your Lord and Savior. Receive his forgiveness for your sins." So how does that get put into practice, I quote now his suggested salvation prayer: "Jesus, I believe in you and receive you." That's it. Now listen to the false hope held out, "If you sincerely meant that prayer, congratulations! Welcome into the family of God! You are now ready to discover and start living God's purposes for your life."

So why do I call this Gospel without repentance a sliced gospel? Well, in my understanding of the message of salvation, for salvation to take place, two things are necessary on man's part. These are repentance and faith. The gospel we are dealing with in this message slices it in half and says only faith is necessary. Pearl even says a non believer can't repent. He says believers need to repent but unbelievers cannot repent. Listen to his words, "The Church has the power to repent from sins, while the unsaved are incapable of it until they receive the Holy Spirit's power." In other words you have to be saved to receive the Holy Spirit's power, and only then can you repent. I say that not only can a sinner repent, he must repent. We will see later what the Bible says about that.

Furthermore, I have called this the sedative gospel. It sedates against conviction of sin and the feelings of the guilt of sin. Conviction of sin brings about a most uncomfortable feeling. I have seen it cause such discomfort that people have left the presence of those through whom God spoke. A sedative has a soothing effect. To say that a person need not repent, only believe, sedates the sinner's guilt and quenches the work of the Holy Spirit. The problem is that preaching that says you need only to believe, and no repentance is necessary soothes, but it does not deal with sin. And this teaching is an enemy of the cross of Christ. This gospel fails to slay, and thus cannot truly produce life.

So, having defined this gospel that says no repentance is required of unbelievers, let us consider briefly what the Bible and theologians of the past have to say about repentance.

II. DEFENSE OF THE REAL GOSPEL

A. From the Scriptures

Let me very briefly give the teaching of the OT on this from R.A. Torrey, a renowned scholar. He said, "The universal call of OT prophets was to repent." Now listen to Jesus confirmation of that, "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at

the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here."

In the NT, when John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus, his message can be summed up in one word, "Repent!" (Matt. 3:2). When Jesus began to preach, His message can be summed up in the same way (Matt. 4:17). Now, one would expect that John and Jesus would stress believing, but they stressed repentance.

Some, like Michael Pearl bury all this under the teaching of dispensationalism. John and Jesus were preaching in another dispensation. Repentance was necessary in the day of John and Jesus, but after Christ's death burial and resurrection, it is no longer necessary! Now I believe in dispensationalism to a degree as well. But you cannot bury the need for repentance under dispensationalism. There has never been but one way of salvation, no matter what the dispensation of that time was. Repentance and faith are the conditions in every dispensation of God's working.

Some theologians like Lewis Sperry Chafer of Dallas Theological Seminary teach that since repentance is not found in the Gospel of John, which was written to the Church, therefore repentance is not necessary in the Church age.

Well, let's consider that special piece of argument. We concede without pain that John's Gospel was written to the Church. We further add that the birth of the Church took place in the book of Acts in chapter 2. Immediately after the birth of the Church, the Apostle Peter preached a sermon whereby 3000 people got saved. When he was done preaching, the people were convicted of their sinfulness (Read Acts 2:37). Now I want you to notice what instruction Peter gives (read 2:38).

Now the various forms of the word repent occur 10 times in Acts. Listen to a few of them:

Acts 3:19-21 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

Acts 11:18 "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'"

17:30-31 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 20:18-21 "And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 26:19-20 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."

B. From The Theologians

Well, what do the major theologians have to say about this? Augustus H. Strong, an ardent Calvinist covers under the topic of conversion two doctrines; repentance and faith. The Scriptures speak of conversion. Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." The biblical word for conversion means to turn.

Of repentance he begins his article like this: "Repentance is that voluntary change in the mind of the sinner in which he turns from sin." In the topic of faith in conversion he writes, "Faith is the

voluntary change in the mind of the sinner in which he turns to Christ."

Henry C. Theissen, a strong OSAS theologian, in his systematic theology deals with conversion in the same way as Strong and has repentance and faith as the two elements of conversion. On repentance he writes, "The importance of repentance is not always recognized as it should be. Some call upon the unsaved to accept Christ and to believe, without ever showing the sinner that he is lost and needs a Savior. But the Scriptures lay much stress on repentance." He then goes on to list a host of Scriptures.

R.A. Torrey deals thoroughly with repentance. He writes, "The universal call of OT prophets was to repent." Then he adds, "There surely is not the emphasis laid upon repentance in modern preaching that there was in the Bible" (335).

The other day I was in Bible school and they were studying Mennonite history. When I sat in they were just going over the Schleithem Confession, that agreement made February 24, 1527, almost 500 years ago by our Mennonite forefathers. The first article is on baptism and it begins like this: "Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."

The very first step is repentance and amendment of life. It is a change of mind that brings about a change of conduct. A gospel that does not change man's conduct is not a gospel at all!

C. From My Personal Studies

It has been a tremendous benefit to me that I have taught a lot of courses in Bible and theology. One of the courses I have taught for years is the doctrine of salvation. I have come to a reasonable understanding of Calvinism, Arminianism and the OSAS views of salvation.

As I taught through this course I have had to give considerable time to repentance and faith, in the

doctrine of conversion. In the matter of faith, I have come to the conclusion that there are four kinds of faith. If Calvinists recognized this, it would save them from some crucial errors.

You might say, "Four kinds of faith? You're kidding!" For the sake of time, let me give you one Scripture on each kind. First, there is saving faith (Eph. 2:8-9). This kind of faith is exercised by unbelievers. To be saved, they must believe; that is a Biblical certainty. We will look at this more later.

Second, there is the gift of faith. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:9 for an example (read). This is a faith not exercised by unbelievers, but by believers. 1 Corinthians 12-14 deals with spiritual gifts given to believers. All verses used by Calvinists to prove that unbelievers must receive the gift of faith before they can believe are in the context of this gift which is given to believers not unbelievers. No good exegetical principles support the Calvinists view here. If they were to admit this, the whole Calvinistic structure would crumble, that is why they resort to poor exegesis.

So there is saving faith, which the unbeliever exercises to be saved and there is the gift of faith which is given to some believers. Third, there is the Christian faith. This refers to what Christians believe (see 2 Tim. 4:7). Look at Hebrews 12:2 as well. Here the Calvinist says, "Ha, here is proof that saving faith is a gift." It says He is the author and finisher of our faith. If you will notice carefully, the pronoun 'our' is in italics, indicating it is not in the original text. And what does the original text say? It says He is the author and finisher of "THE faith." The faith is the sum total of the Christian faith. Of course He is the author and finisher of the Christian faith.

There is yet one more kind of faith spoken of in Scripture. It is the individual's faith (see 2 Thess. 3:5,10; James 1:3 and a host of others). Mormons have individual faith. So do JW's. But their's is not a true faith. It does not save.

So I want to deal with one more important matter. What is saving faith and how does it work with relation to repentance? If I believe that Jesus died for the whole world and I believe He died for me, to take away my sins, does that save me? No, those are the facts of the Christian faith I must believe to be saved. Scripture says, "You believe there is one God, you do well. The devils also believe and tremble" (James 2:19). The devils realize the facts. So does one who believes Jesus died for him. But this person is no more saved than the devils.

In order to be saved, I must act on those facts, and the first action is to repent. I want you to see it in the words of the Lord Jesus Himself (Mark 1:15). So, if you repent first, and then believe, what must you believe?

Listen to how it is spelled out in the Schleithem confession, the earliest Mennonite statement of faith, "Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life (#1), and who believe truly..." Now this confession will spell out what one has to believe in order to be saved, and if you grasp this concept, you will understand why so many in our community who agree that Jesus died for the world are still lost in their sins.

"Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life (#1), and who believe truly (believe what? Here it is) that their sins are taken away by Christ..." That is saving faith. When I repent of my sins, I must now believe that my sins have been taken away by Christ. Why are so many professing believers in our community lost? It is not because they do not know the facts about Christ and His death on their behalf. They hear this over and over again. It is not because many of them have not repented. Why are they still lost? They have never truly believed that after they repented that their sins were truly taken away. If they believed this, they would be saved and have assurance of salvation. Here is the acid test.

So, what does it mean to repent and believe? To repent is to change my mind about my past sinful life and acknowledge that I am a sinner and that it was my

sin which put Christ on the cross. To believe is to have come to a firm conviction that my sins are gone. They have been forgiven. They have been washed away by the blood of Christ! It means to be assured of a right standing with God because my sins have been taken care of!

III. DANGER OF THIS GOSPEL

So, what is the danger of the sliced or sedative gospel? Well, the danger is exactly the same as in all false gospels. A sinner is led to believe that he or she is saved, when in fact they are still lost. And the predicament of such a person is that now they are twice as lost as before. Before they might have learned that they are lost. Now they think they are saved, when in actual fact they are lost.

CONCL: I know that is too brief a treatment for so large a topic, but may these few words serve to warn. Years ago I read a Bible teacher who said this gospel is a decapitated Gospel; that is, it is beheaded. It is a half a gospel, a sliced gospel; it is a sedative gospel; it is a beheaded gospel. It cannot save. People are led to believe they are Christians, when in fact they are lost. May converts to such a gospel not be of those who say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? " (Matt. 7:22).

The teaching that repentance is not necessary to salvation is a false gospel. Look with me at two last Scriptures (read Gal. 1:6-9). May those who preach a false gospel be accursed. I want you to see how very serious this is and I hope you will not be offended. Turn to Galatians 5:12 (read). I trust you will not be offended with me for telling you what these words mean as I understand them. We must see how strongly Paul felt about those who preach another gospel. He is saying here, "I wish these people would castrate themselves." He is talking in a spiritual sense. And I think the reason he uses such language is so that these false teachers might not be able to reproduce their deadly, hell destining gospel.

May the Lord give to every listener a hearing ear; and to those who disagree, may He grant them a studious, honest heart. And to all who claim to be believers here this morning, maybe you want to see, did I just receive Christ,

or did I repent and receive Christ? If you are not sure, I would encourage you to make sure. You might pray something like this, "Lord, I am not sure I ever acknowledged my sinfulness to You. Today I want to make sure. Lord, I acknowledge that I am a sinner and that it was my sin which put You on the cross. Oh, Lord, I change my mind about my sinful ways. I want You to know that I recognize I am a sinner, and I repent of my sins. Now Lord, I believe You that You have forgiven my sins and I invite You to be My Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and saving my soul."