

The Condition of the Church Today A Warning About the Enemy Within

Examples of False Teaching - Part 6

May 29, 2011

I. Review:

- A. We have been looking at examples of false teaching in the church today, false teaching that is not very obvious to the casual observer, yet it is a serious threat to the spiritual health of individual Christians and the church as a whole. So far we have looked at false teaching related to obeying God completely, loving God supremely, salvation, grace, using entertainment to increase attendance, (what I called) music driven worship, the influence of the self-esteem beliefs from psychology, and tolerance.
- B. These are not “in your face” heresies or obvious false teachings. Rather, our arch enemy, the devil, and our personal enemy – our own fleshly desires – weave these things into the fabric of the true gospel in such a way as to make them seem Christian, and therefore hard to discern as false teaching. I encourage you to pray for discernment and the strength to hold the line on behalf of the true gospel.
- C. Today, we are going to look at two more examples of false teaching in the church. The first example has to do with evangelism and what has become the selling of salvation. The second one has to do with Christian service in relation to holiness, or a godly life.
- D. Pray

II. Examples of False Teaching Within the Church:

- A. As I have said now for three Sundays, it is my opinion that when it comes to false teaching, the third most serious threat to the spiritual health of the church today is the practice – deliberately or naively – of appealing to people’s fleshly self-interest, their worldly desires, their pride, their longing for happiness, and their sensuality, in order to win converts and attract people to the church. Now when the church does this kind of thing, in any area and on any scale, it is making the temporal more important than the eternal, and it is elevating man to a position that is superior to the position God is to hold in our lives.
- B. The Falsehood of Selling the Gospel Through Evangelism
 - 1. In our day, selling the gospel through our currently popular methods of evangelism is so common that it may seem strange or even wrong

for me to point it out as another form of the false gospel, or as a serious threat to the spiritual health of the church. After all, there are serious minded, godly Christians on the mission field and in the pastorate and on elder boards and teaching Sunday School, and in the pews who have come to faith in Jesus Christ through such methods. And we all ought to praise God for every one of them!

- a. Yet at the same time, there are too many on the mission field, in the pastorate, on elder boards, teaching Sunday School, and in the pews who continue to be selfish, conceited, easily offended, prone to expressing hurt feelings, demanding, lacking a godly sense of helpfulness when the community has work to do, are hard to get along with, too easily angered, and . . . I haven't even gotten to the hidden or behind the scenes sins that they continue to practice without any intention of repenting of them.
 - b. So yes, I can agree that in some cases God somehow uses our poor and even unholy efforts, including bringing Christians into the Kingdom by appealing to their selfish interests – just as all salesmen do – to bring them to salvation. But God using what we give Him does not mean He approves of or actually wants what we are giving Him.
2. Now you may be wondering what I am talking about when I say selling the gospel of salvation is a form of the false gospel?
- a. I am talking about presenting the gospel of salvation to unbelievers in a way that points out as many benefits to them as is necessary to get them to want the product – salvation:
 - (1) such as heaven instead of hell,
 - (2) the improvement of a bad situation – such as a broken marriage or financial troubles or terminal cancer,
 - (3) the blessings of God for a happier life inside and outside the home,
 - (4) the possibility of becoming someone important in the work of God,
 - (5) and other such benefits
 - b. while ignoring or minimizing repentance, turning away from rebelling against God and submitting to Him so as to sin no more, renouncing the devil and the ungodly ways of the world, death to self, putting on Christ-likeness, and from that day on, going forward to live for God, God's way – even if it includes suffering for Jesus' sake.

3. The reason this is a false approach to salvation and the Christian life is that it treats salvation as if it were a product, it appeals to a person's selfish interests to encourage purchasing the product, and it leads the person who buys the product to believe they are the intended focus of all the good this product does or is supposed to do.
 - a. And so I ask you, if we introduce unbelievers to salvation this way, why would we not expect them to become part of the church and live the Christian life with this same mindset?
 - b. And isn't this part of what drives the spiritual immaturity and weakness in the church today? We bring people in on the basis that God is doing something so good for them that they are fools not to take it. And once they are in, they continue wanting this kind of self-focused Christian life. And so they seek out the kind of churches that feed their self-centeredness, which in turn motivates churches to meet their demands and satisfy their desires in order to grow in attendance.
 - c. Now there is one more side to this that needs to be considered. What happens if the product doesn't live up to the buyers expectations? I suspect we know the answer to that all too well.
4. Lets look to God's word and see what it says about the gospel of salvation to see what we ought to be saying to unbelievers.
 - a. First, I want to remind us all that repentance is the most often used word in relation to the gospel of salvation. Surely, we ought to include a strong dose of information about the what and why of repentance in any evangelism. One of the great examples of this comes from **Acts 2:36-38** . . . "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—**this Jesus whom you crucified.**" [37] Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, **what shall we do?**" [38] Peter said to them, "**Repent, and each of you be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. **Matthew 5:20** . . . For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, **you will not enter** the kingdom of heaven. (*not just being good – but standards*)
 - c. **Mark 9:43-48** . . . "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; **it is better for you to enter [eternal] life crippled**, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, [44] [*where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.*]

[45] "If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; **it is better for you to enter [eternal] life lame**, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, [46] [*where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.*] [47] "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; **it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye**, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, [48] where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. (*seriousness of the standards*)

d. **Matthew 18:1-4** . . . At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" [2] And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, [3] and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, **you will not enter** the kingdom of heaven. [4] "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (*standards of thinking and living*)

e. **I Corinthians 6:9-10** . . . Or do you not know that **the unrighteous will not inherit** the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, [10] nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (See also: **Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-5**)

f. **Luke 18:22-27** . . . When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." [23] But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. [24] And Jesus looked at him and said, "**How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter** the kingdom of God! [25] "For it is **easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter** the kingdom of God." [26] They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" [27] But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God." (*no worldliness, serving money*)

g. **Acts 14:21-22** . . . After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, [22] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "**Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**" (*the cost in this life of living the Christian life*)

5. My Choice - by Bill McChesney

I want my breakfast served at eight With ham and eggs upon the plate.

A well-broiled steak I'll eat at one And dine again when day is done.
 I want an ultramodern home And in each room a telephone;
 Soft carpets, too, upon the floors And pretty drapes to grace the doors.
 A cozy place of lovely things, Like easy chairs with inner springs,
 And then, I'll get a nice T.V. – Of course, I'm careful what I see.
 I want my wardrobe, too, to be Of neatest, finest quality,
 With latest style in suit and vest Why should not Christians have the best?
 But then the Master I can hear In no uncertain voice, so clear:
 "I bid you come and follow Me, The lowly Man of Galilee."
 "Birds of the air have made their nest And foxes in their holes find rest,
 But I can offer you no bed; No place have I to lay my head."
 In shame I hung my head and cried, How could I spurn the Crucified?
 Could I forget the way He went, The sleepless nights in prayer He spent?
 For forty days without a bite, Alone He fasted day and night;
 Despised, rejected – on He went, and did not stop till veil He rent!
 A man of sorrows and of grief No earthly friend to bring relief;
 "Smitten of God," the prophet said Mocked, beaten, bruised, His blood ran red.
 If He be God, and died for me, No sacrifice too great can be
 For me; a mortal man, to make; I'll do it all for Jesus' sake.
 Yes, I will tread the path He trod, No other way will please my God,
 So, henceforth, this my choice shall be, My choice for all eternity.
The author was a missionary to the Congo in Africa and he was brutally murdered at age 28 along with hundreds of other missionaries.

6. The gospel is not a commodity to be sold, and when we reduce it to that, we must appeal to the buyers selfish interests to gain converts. **II Corinthians 2:14-17** . . . But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. [15] For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; [16] to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? [17] For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

C. The Promotion of Christian Service Apart From Holiness

1. Getting those who attend church involved in the work of the church or involved in some outside ministry is a well known tool for getting new members into the church and holding on to those who already attend. I have seen this method at work from my youth up, and I know it produces the expected results.

- a. People want to feel needed and important – and it is especially fulfilling to feel needed and important for a good cause.
 - b. And what better cause is there than the cause of God and His church – be it in some leadership position, or performing up front, or teaching Sunday School, or leading the youth group, or driving the Church van, or working in a homeless shelter, or helping low income children improve their educational skills, or passing out food to the hungry, or going on a missions trip that works on a project and evangelizes young people in the community . . . and this list could go on and on.
 - c. Therefore, many of those churches who know the power of this principle, design church life in a way that provides the maximum number of people the opportunity to serve in some church supported way. And along with the church provided and supported opportunities comes affirmation and praise for all those who participate in doing the work.
2. Now I do not want to imply that this is all bad. In fact, there is a lot of good that is done inside and outside the church through the many opportunities to serve. And what is more, some of the service is needed for the proper functioning of the church. So though it may seem that I am speaking against this kind of activity, that is not the case. What I am speaking against is the way the church handles this kind of activity.
3. The problem, as I see it, is that we have raised Christian service above holiness, and made giftedness more important than godliness.
 - a. Where once the church first looked to those who were filled with the Holy Spirit and examples of the faith to do the works of service in the church, it has become common to start looking to those who are gifted, or who have experience in the business world similar to the job needing to be done in the church, or who are good speakers, or are respected members of the community outside the church.
 - b. Therefore, many engage in the work of God who have scarcely any sense of the sacredness and responsibility of the work. They have little experience in exercising faith. They do not earnestly hunger and thirst after righteousness. Too often they are immature or new believers. And too many of them seem to disconnect how they live day-to-day – especially in their own home – from the work they are doing for the church. In other words, there is too little concern for the spiritual condition of those who

fill the available positions and do the work of the church – inside and outside.

- c. In fact, this practice of looking at the outer qualities of ability before discerning the spiritual quality of the heart, is so common that a parallel false teaching has joined forces with this practice. This parallel false teaching says that God has made each of us unique and therefore special. And because we are unique, God has a unique plan and purpose for each of us. But as with all false teaching, it goes beyond proclaiming our uniqueness and that we have a unique role in God's kingdom – which in itself feeds pride far more than holiness. This teaching proclaims how important each of us is to accomplishing God's purposes here on the earth, and it even can be heard saying God needs us, which is that same old role reversal of exalting us above God.
4. God says in **II Timothy 2:20-21** . . . Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. [21] Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.
5. We see this lived out in **Acts 6:1-3** . . . Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. [2] So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. [3] "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

III. Conclusion

- A. Religious, biblical words used in connection with ungodly efforts do not improve or make godly the efforts, or change the effect of those efforts on the hearers and followers.
- B. Beware of selling salvation. Call unbelievers to repentance and a faith in God that produces a Christ-like life and lasts until death.
- C. Guard against making people feel better by serving their fleshly, selfish interests. Remember **Matthew 5:4** . . . Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.