

Are We Proclaiming a Defective Gospel?

by Rick Wood

Is the Gospel message that hundreds of thousands of missionaries are proclaiming around the world defective? Have hundreds of millions of people bought into a Gospel message that is, at its heart, unbiblical? If true, this would be like Bill Gates sending out the latest Microsoft operating system which after installed for a year deletes all the files on the computer. To say the least, it would be a disaster, a catastrophe, and an apocalyptic nightmare all in one. But some are claiming that we are in fact proclaiming a defective, unbiblical Gospel.

Could this be one reason that so many are leaving their faith behind and the once vibrant Evangelical awakenings in Britain and America are but distant memories? The implications for world evangelization are immense. If the Gospel we proclaim will self destruct once installed on the hard drives of people's hearts, then much of our work among unreached peoples could be in danger of collapse as it has in much of Europe. Vishal Mangalwadi warns of this danger in his home country of India starting on page 15 of this issue.

Hundreds of millions of people have likely read the *Four Spiritual Laws*, the booklet written by Bill Bright and published by Campus Crusade for Christ. The first law in this little booklet says, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." This sounds great and it is just the kind of message that people want to



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hear. Many are eager to accept such a message and justifiably so. Who would not want this to be true in their lives. They say, "Wow, I would love to have a loving God on my side to make my life wonderful, to make my life complete." This message is proclaimed in books, songs and sermons across the world.

But what if this message is not true—at least not true in the way that most people want it and expect it to be true? Don't get me wrong, I have the greatest respect for Bill Bright and the ministry of Campus Crusade, but this focus of our Gospel presentation can be misunderstood by, and misleading to, a whole generation of people who want to add God to their lives to make their lives complete. In all fairness, the *Four Spiritual Laws* does go on to identify sin as the problem and to provide the proper solution.

But what kind of expectations are we providing to people when we say, "Come to Christ and God will reveal to you a wonderful plan for an abundant life?" Are we setting people up with false expectations of what God will do for them? Are we promising more than what God has promised to deliver? Are we trying to market the Gospel to a generation of self centered people who really don't understand their desperately lost state before a holy God and are therefore not really saved? Have millions of "believers" simply hired God to make their lives complete?

Ray Comfort in his book, *The Way of the Master* says, "[t]he enemy has very subtly diverted our attention away from our core message. Instead of proclaiming the Good News that sinners can be made righteous in Christ and escape the wrath to

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come, we have settled for a “gospel” that implies that God’s primary purpose in saving us is to unfold a “wonderful plan” for our lives to solve our problems, make us happy in Christ, and rescue us from the hassles of this life.” (p.19)

Is that the central purpose of the Gospel we preach, to give us an abundant, full and rewarding life? Many have sadly bought into this and are disillusioned when everything does not go according to plan.

One dedicated missionary family I know had their daughter brutally murdered. The very first house they ever owned after years of faithful overseas service burned to the ground just days after they moved in along with a lifetime of possessions. They did not even have a chance to unpack their boxes. Then the wife dies of cancer after a long battle.

The husband of another missionary couple I know developed Multiple Sclerosis and spent years bed-ridden and unable to speak until his death left his wife with four kids to raise by herself. Are these

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the exceptions to the wonderful, abundant Christian life that we have been promised? There seems to be a disconnect here between what the “wonderful plan” Gospel message promises and the reality of our life experiences in Christ.

This disconnect between the promise and

the reality has all sorts of ramifications for our spiritual lives. As Ray Comfort explains, “Those who come to faith through the door of seeking happiness in Christ will think that their happiness is evidence of God’s love. They may even think that God has forsaken them when trials come and their happiness leaves. But those who look to the Cross as a token of God’s love will never doubt His steadfast devotion to them. (p. 44)

Certainly many of those who have walked away from their faith have done so because the reality of their lives does not match up with the promised wonderful plan that their loving Heavenly Father has for them.

When the Church presents Jesus as the one who came to “solve our problems” and “make us happy” then we attract only those who have problems or are unhappy and those are the kinds of people who

will then fill our churches. If they do not repent of their sins then they are false converts and they are not new creatures in Christ. As unsaved people who claim to be Christians, they have simply brought their sins and problems into the church. This overworks the pastors, hobbles the outreach of the Church and its mission, and defames the name of Christ when supposed Christians continue in their sins. The irony is that these will also be the people who will be most likely to leave when Jesus does not solve all their problems or make them happy. They become disillusioned and bitter because they were not presented with the true Gospel in the first place (Comfort, p.36).

The Gospel is a promise of the righteousness of Christ for all who will repent of their sins and trust Christ as their Savior. To have a right relationship with God, people must come to the understanding that they are lost and doomed to suffer the wrath of God unless they repent of their sins and trust Christ for their salvation. This must be at the heart of our Gospel message. The Gospel is not a promise of a happy, problem-free life—just the opposite.

When someone comes to genuine faith in Christ and seeks to live a life of obedience, he becomes an active soldier in the ongoing battle between God and Satan. His faith in Christ essentially puts a target on his back and makes him an object of Satan’s wrath. That person becomes an active threat to Satan and his hold on power. Satan will then take every opportunity to take any genuine believer out of action.

But if people who come to Christ are not told of this spiritual reality then there will be tremendous confusion and disillusionment when the truth of this unknown spiritual reality breaks in upon their lives.

It is like a person who buys a vacation package to the French Riviera expecting a wonderful time of fun and relaxation only to discover upon his arrival that there is open warfare taking place with bombs going off, bullets flying and the wounded littering the sandy beaches. Such a person would naturally think: “What is going on here? This is not what I signed up for.”

Until we realize that we are in a war for our lives, we will be sitting ducks for Satan’s attacks and schemes. We will continue to lose those people who were never adequately prepared for battle. We must proclaim a true Gospel of grace and forgiveness of sin and stop trying to market the Gospel as the solution to all of our problems. It is already the greatest gift anyone can receive. 🌐