

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM AND THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

by
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The Christian Gospel

The Good News of the four Gospels centers on the bloody, sacrificial, vicarious death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins evidenced by His burial, and the bodily resurrection of Christ evidenced by the empty tomb. The necessary implications of these truths include that we are hell-bound sinners, incapable of atoning for our sins, meriting our justification or contributing to our salvation, and that apart from a personal *unreserved trust* (repentant faith) in the Theanthropic Christ (God-man) and His Crosswork, each of us will be eternally judged by God. Additional implications of the Christian Gospel which cannot be denied are His miraculous, virginal conception/birth as well as His absolute equality with the Father and distinctive personality in the Triune God-head (Phil 2:5-11).

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The way of salvation has been exactly the same at all times and in all places: by grace alone, through repentant faith alone, grounded in the merits of Christ alone. However, the content of faith increased progressively throughout biblical history, beginning with the *proto-evangelium* (first gospel - Gen 3:15) and concluding with the all-sufficient revelation of Christ in the sixty-six inscripturated books of the Bible. When Jesus began his ministry, He immediately proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom to national Israel (Matt 3:2; 4:17). Jesus' numerous references to the Kingdom of God call attention to the antecedent prophecies in the OT involving the Divine Messiah and describe a literal, earthly realm involving the land of Palestine and the nation of Israel over which the Messiah would reign (cf. Dan 2:44; 7:14, 27).

Nowhere does Jesus redefine this Kingdom as something substantially different than that which the OT prophets had repeatedly prophesied. Though Israel as a nation rejected the good news about the promised Kingdom via rejection of the King and His message (Matt 12:22-37, 21:43), the sacrificial death of Christ still remained a necessary precondition for the Messianic Kingdom to be inaugurated. Theoretically, had the Jewish nation not orchestrated the murder of Christ (though a virtual impossibility, cf. Acts 2:23), certainly the Romans would have done it. Nevertheless, the Christian Gospel includes the concept that through the new birth we are *positionally* present citizens of a literal, future, anticipated, coming Kingdom of God on earth in which all regenerated individuals will *experientially* participate with distinct obligations and responsibilities (John 3:5). Therefore, though the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Christian Gospel are not identical in their content, they are closely related and more importantly are identical in their condition of repentant faith alone through God's grace alone, grounded solely in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ alone.

Repentant Faith

The Gospel of the Kingdom and the Christian Gospel will be briefly traced through the Gospel of Luke with a particular emphasis on repentant faith as the required condition for eternal life and forgiveness of sin. Luke begins with John the Baptist preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sin in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival (3:7-9). Religious heritage or Jewish ancestry cannot shield one from the coming wrath. True repentance eventually expresses itself not in religious rites or an ascetic lifestyle, but rather in obeying God (3:10-14).

Repentance entails a fundamental change of mind, desire, and intent regarding one's sinful condition including deliverance from sin's eternal penalty and enslaving power. The results of repentance (*fruits* of repentance) are ultimately divinely produced in concert with the complete participation of the repentant sinner throughout the believer's life as evidence of true saving faith. Repentance and faith as theological counterparts are so closely linked in soteriological contexts that when one is mentioned the other is assumed (Mark 1:15; Acts 11:18; 17:30; Heb 6:1; 2 Pet 3:9).

Metamelomai (lit. "to become a care afterward") means a feeling of concern or regret in the sense that one wishes it could be undone (BDAG, p. 639; cf. Matt 11:21; 21:31-32). *Metanoeo* originates from two words, *meta* meaning "after" and *noeo* meaning to "think," with the idea of feeling remorse, turning about, and changing one's mind (BDAG, p. 640; Matt 3:8; Luke 3:8; cf. Psalm 51:3; Acts 26:20). "It affects the whole man, first and basically the center of personal life, then logically his conduct. . . . The whole proclamation of Jesus is a proclamation of unconditional turning to God . . . from all that is against God" (Behm and Wurthwein, *TDNT*, 4:1002-3). The OT equivalent terms are *nacham*, indicating a deep feeling of regret and sorrow (Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 87), and *shuv* which emphasizes a turning of one's whole being such as in Jeremiah 24:7, "I will give them a heart to *know me* that I am the LORD and they shall be my people and I will be their God; for they shall *return* [*shuv*] with their *whole heart* (italics added; Behm and Wurthwein, *TDNT*, 4:985)."

Repentance is not penance. Penance consists of works assigned by a priest to help pay for the temporal punishment of sin. As such it is a sacrament of the Roman Catholic Church consisting of confessing sin to a priest, the priest's pronouncement of absolution, and the assignment of certain works of penance to merit mercy and makeup for the temporal punishment caused by sin, thus hastening one's stay in purgatory. Penance is not toward God, but toward the Romanist church and becomes the meritorious grounds for pardon (Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 434; Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 254ff). Millard Erickson concludes that repentance is "godly sorrow for one's sin together with a resolution to turn from it" (*Christian Theology*, p. 937).

Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee and Luke gives an example of Jesus' presentation of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the Jewish people in His hometown of Nazareth, and Christ is utterly rejected by them (4:16-30, 44; cf. 1:26-35). After the Sermon on the Mount, Luke brackets expressions of faith around the question of who Jesus is. The Centurion's humility, confidence in

Jesus' authority, and his trusting dependence represent the essence of saving faith in the person of Christ as contrasted by many in Israel who respond in unbelief and reject their Messiah despite greater revelation (7:1-10). Later, Jesus pronounces a sinful woman forgiven who anoints Jesus' feet with perfume and tears. Her faith, manifested by her actions of sorrow and devotion, offers Jesus the opportunity to declare His divine authority to forgive sins in response to her repentant faith (7:36-50). Luke continues to focus on Jesus' identity and the nature of saving faith in the Kingdom parable of the sower and the soils. Only those who respond in saving faith and give evidence of such in their lives have forgiveness of sin and thereby are positional citizens of the future Kingdom (8:4-15). This conclusion is immediately reinforced by Jesus' identity of His true family as those who hear the Word of God and obey it (8:19-21). Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, comprises the apex of Jesus' Galilean ministry (9:18-22). Here Jesus gives the first clear revelation that He must suffer, be killed, and be raised on the third day.

In chapters 10-19 Jesus clarifies His earthly mission as He draws near to Jerusalem culminating in Luke 19:10 that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Again, several clear examples of repentance are presented. Regarding those unfortunate souls who were indiscriminately massacred by Pilate or victimized by the collapsed tower of Siloam, Jesus responds to His hearers saying that if they do not repent they will likewise perish (13:1-9). Christ clarifies the thought with the parable of the unfruitful fig tree. God is giving the Nation and its inhabitants one more chance to repent and bear evidential fruit, or else eternal judgment will fall. In the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son heaven rejoices over the one sheep who repents and trusts in the good Shepherd, the angels joy over one sinner who repents, and the father celebrates over the salvation of his lost son who humbly acknowledged his sinful rebellion and was willing to be as one of his father's servants (15:7, 10, 18-21). Jesus states that true repentance is always in conjunction with childlike trust and dependence upon the Father (18:15-17). Luke finalizes this section with the conversion of Zacchaeus who exemplifies what happens when an outcast Jew comes to Christ. Zacchaeus immediately demonstrates a spirit of generosity and restitution, having experienced God's regenerating grace and divine restitution (19:1-10).

The Divine Mission

Is it any wonder that in the Great Commission recorded by Luke that Jesus says to His disciples, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (24:46-47; cf. Acts 17:30-31). Ultimately, this becomes the Christian gospel that all believers are to proclaim to the whole world during this Church age which is particularly characterized by the unmerited, undeserved, and more accurately, ill-deserved grace of God. The Gospel writer, Luke, summarizes his gospel message this way: "Repent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19; cf. 2 Cor 7:10).

CONTEMPORARY VENUES FOR THE INCARNATIONAL GOSPEL

Contemporary venues include: The Civil Rights Movement and Black Liberation Theology, The National and World Councils of Churches, YMCA, Health and Wealth Gospel, et. al. Mainstream Protestant denominations are almost wholly given over to the promotion of some form of social gospel—Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptist Churches U.S.A., United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, and Presbyterian Church USA. Even many generally conservative evangelical denominations and para-church organizations are heavily involved with social and humanitarian enterprise which is strongly tainted by social gospel ideology, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and Campus Crusade for Christ. Also included are Christian world relief organizations, such as World Vision, the Salvation Army, Apostolic Christian World Relief, World Relief, Church World Service, Operation Blessing International, and Samaritan's Purse, in addition to approximately 90 other major denominational and para-church agencies. Current venues include the following.

The Missional Church

The Missional Church movement is a postmodern strategy of outreach by the church to the culture. The term is used by a variety of professing evangelical leaders to challenge Christians to engage their culture with the gospel message. The Missional Church involves more than just one aspect of church life; it *is* church life. Therefore, a more relevant expression would be “Missional Living.” Missional living is a Christian term that describes a missionary lifestyle; adopting the posture, thinking, behaviors, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message. The use of the term *missional* has gained popularity at the end of the 20th Century due to the Gospel and Our Culture Network, Allelon, and the Emerging church movement, as well as Tim Keller, Ed Stetzer, Alan Hirsch, Mark Driscoll, Brian McLaren, and others to contrast the concept of a select group of “professional” missionaries with the understanding that all Christians should be missionaries.

Missional living is ideally the embodiment of the mission of Jesus in the world by incarnating the gospel into the community. According to Mark Driscoll, “It is imperative that Christians be like Jesus, by living freely within the culture as missionaries who are as faithful to the Father and his gospel as Jesus was in his own time and place” (*Radical Reformation*, [Zondervan], 2004, p. 40). This embodiment of the gospel is often referred to as “contextualization” or “inculturation.” The movement is a reaction to both the structured traditional “professional” approach to missions as well as the seeker service market-driven mega-church movement.

Critique of the Missional Church

Certainly, the NT admonishes the church to be a witness to the world by establishing redemptive relationships. We are not to be isolationists but actively reaching out to lost humanity outside the confines of our local assembly. This would be true of unsaved business associates (Luke 5:27-29), friends (John 1:45-46), and relatives (Acts 16:30-34), even immoral people (1 Cor 5:9-10). Yet, while the Scripture tells us not to hide our light, it likewise commands us not to be imitators of the

world by associating in immoral or unethical practices (Eph 5:3-14; Col 2:8). Missional advocates, however, are not always careful to draw the difference of being in the world without becoming like it. Our methods should be compatible with the gospel message not contradict it. Note the following criticisms of the missional method.

1. Focuses on *one* purpose of the church—missions, and assumes that every member is or should be a missionary to his/her community. At least two problems with this: a) the church of Jesus Christ exists to accomplish *four* purposes or “reason-for-being” functions: worship (John 4:23), instruction/edification (Eph 4:11-13), fellowship (1 Cor 1: 9), and evangelism (Matt 28:19-20). Another problem b) is that this purpose fails to recognize the distinction between missionary and witness. A missionary in the NT is a designated and gifted position of church planting; it is vocational. A witness, on the other hand, is any Christian who is expected to share his faith. All Christians are to be witnesses but not necessarily missionaries.

2. It is more *deeds*-oriented rather than Word-centered. This creates a scenario whereby the church easily lapses into a form of the social or holistic gospel. Social justice and humanitarian relief, and cultural reform are integral functions of most versions of MC.

3. It invariably uses Jesus’ pattern of ministry as a church model, and incorporates a Kingdom motif of ministry. However, this approach fails to recognize a difference between the Kingdom and the Church. Furthermore, the purpose of Jesus’ ministry of compassion (e.g., healing the sick, raising the dead, etc.) was to authenticate his messiahship, and was not meant to be replicated in the post-apostolic Church age.

4. Inculturational/contextualization/incarnational methodology often results in Christians being assimilated into the culture by using the same terminology, engaging in the same entertainment and lifestyle as the secular world. The line marking living in the world from becoming like the world is frequently obscured. The “relational” approach can mean the loss of identity and the ability to confront the lost sinner with the ultimatums of the gospel: you are a sinner, you need to repent, etc.

5. It transcends denominational affiliation, and in fact, discourages denominational distinctives. Relationships become more important than doctrine. Ecumenism is often the result whereby Christian believers find themselves networking with those who either neglect or reject important theological beliefs.

6. It is opposed to the traditional, the structured, the regulative worship/ministry styles and prefers a more modern, contemporary, subjective, unconventional, even coarse style.

Uniting Evangelicals and Catholics.

The social gospel has become the means of uniting evangelicals and Catholics. A large part of the ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) agenda is “the right ordering of civil society” in order

“to secure for all a greater measure of civil righteousness and justice” (ECT Statement: “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward A Common Mission*, Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. [Dallas: Word, 1995], p. xxiii). In pursuit of unity, ECT advances a social agenda that includes a number of challenges: “serve the poor and needy, work for public recognition of moral truths, protect the sanctity of human life in all stages, secure the integrity of marriage, protect the disabled and vulnerable, care for the marginalized and imprisoned, express solidarity with persecuted Christians, protect non-Christians who are denied rights of conscience, defend one another against unfair attacks, and share worship space in time of need” (cited from ECT IV: “The Communion of Saints” [2003], in Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is The Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], p. 175). “The Manhattan Declaration” is a current expression of Colson’s original vision.

Rick Warren and the P.E.A.C.E. Plan.

Rick Warren is founder and senior pastor of the 83,000 member Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA (including four campuses). He is the author of the best selling *Purpose Driven Church* (1995) and the *Purpose Driven Life* (2002).

The March 2009 issue of *Reader’s Digest*, introduced the Warren initiative in an interview with Carl M. Cannon. The motivation was the 2004 tsunami disaster in the South Pacific. The focus of Warren’s attack is on what he calls the “five global giants”: spiritual darkness, lack of servant leaders, poverty, disease, and ignorance. To Warren, the “perfect tool” for toppling these giants is the church. His solution is his five-part PEACE plan: Promote reconciliation (which has been amended to Plant churches), Equip servant leaders, Assist the poor, Care for the sick, and Educate the next generation (“Rick Warren’s Peace Plan,” an excellent critique by Johan Malan at <http://www.bibleguidance.co.za/Engarticles/Peaceplan.htm>, accessed 2/1/2010).

Rick Warren is following in the steps of his mentor Robert Schuller (*Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, 1982) and Schuller’s example, Norman Vincent Peale (*The Power of Positive Thinking*, 1996 [1952]). In his “peace initiative” Warren fails to consider several biblical teachings.

No reference is made to counter the negative, evil forces that are at work in society and to utter condemnation against sin and sinners and the consequences of eternal damnation. Warren’s message leaves out the offensive truths of the gospel. It is a nonconfrontational “seeker-sensitive.” Warren comments that we should “adapt your style to fit your audience.... The ground we have in common with unbelievers is not the Bible, but our common needs, hurts, and interests as human beings. You cannot start with a text, expecting the unchurched to be fascinated by it” (*Purpose-Driven Church*, pp. 294–95). This is contrary to 2 Cor 2:1–5 and 2 Tim 4:3.

Critique of Warren's Peace Plan

1. The peace that Christ offered is not of this world (John 14:27), nor is it predicated on a "kingdom now" approach. Instead, the Bible teaches that the world is actively opposed to God and is headed for destruction (1 John 4:5–6; 1 Thess 5:3; 1 Tim 3:1–13).
2. The blessings of the future kingdom of God that will be revealed on earth are wrongly applied to the present dispensation. The implication of the PEACE plan is to usher in God's Kingdom on earth before the coming of the King of Kings. It does not account for key events of eschatology that must precede the Millennial Kingdom—the Rapture, the rule of Antichrist, and the Second Coming.
3. Warren's PEACE plan is based upon an ecumenical alliance of all religious groups (including Catholics and Muslims), which is a clear violation of 2 Cor 6:14–7:1.
4. Warren is redefining the mission of the church to one of social rehabilitation rather than gospel proclamation (Matt 28:19–20). NOTE: In a 2009 video Christmas "encyclical" letter to the pastors of Uganda he urged them to oppose a government-sponsored Anti-Homosexuality Bill (<http://www.rickwarren.com/>). His rationale is that all life is precious to God and people should be free to make moral decisions. And yet God explicitly condemns sodomy in both Testaments, and human government's responsibility is enforce laws that will protect people from moral and physical harm, in this case HIV, which is epidemic in Africa. This decision by Warren implicitly places sodomy off-limits to any governmental or even social prohibition.
5. Love is the dominant theme of Warren's message, but it is a sentimentalism which fails to speak the truth (Eph 4:15). True love affirms the truth.

Tim Keller and *Theology of the City*.

Another so-called evangelical strategy is to reach the urban population centers of the world. Keller is the pastor of the PCA affiliated 5,000 member Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. Keller has written several books (e.g., *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* (1997), *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (2009), and *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (2008). The vision of Keller and his church is to "bring about personal changes, social healing, and cultural renewal through a movement of churches and ministries that change New York City and through it, the world." According to Keller, "God is concerned not only for the salvation of souls but also for the relief of poverty, hunger, and injustice.... Therefore, the person who does not generously give away his or her wealth to others is not merely lacking in compassion, but is *unjust*.... Indifference to the poor and disadvantaged means there has not been a true grasp of our salvation by sheer *grace*" (quoted in D. A. Carson, *Gospel Coalition Foundational Documents*). To Keller, "God's purpose is not only to

save individuals, but also to make a new world based on justice, peace and love” (*Redeemer Vision Paper #6 Christians and Culture*). Specifically, Keller advocates the transformation of culture by a gospel of good deeds (see “An Assessment of and Response to Tim Keller’s *Theology of the City* by Sam Horn, Mid-American Conference on Preaching at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).

Conclusion

What changes people for good is word of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, not the display of good deeds, as worthy as these may be. What hinders people from accepting this gospel is their spiritual blindness that only God can sovereignly remove as people are confronted with the claims of the gospel. The temptation is to replace the content of the gospel with the deeds of the gospel misunderstands that good deeds are a consequence, not a means, of conversion. The mission of the church is not the transformation of the culture, but the proclamation of the gospel which calls persons out of an evil culture for the glory of God (Matt 16:4; Acts 15:14; Col 1:13; 1 Pet 2:9).

We have no dominion mandate, but we have a gospel mandate. The church’s authorization for its ministry is the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) and its emphasis on making a whole disciple by means of evangelism, baptism, and a continuing maturity in the context of a NT local assembly. The church does these through the proclamation of the gospel to the world and the instruction of believers in the “all things” which Christ commanded. Social activism is neither the means nor the message of the Great Commission.