The Problem with the Modern Gospel

“The trouble with people who are not seeking for a Savior, and for salvation, is that they do not understand the nature of sin. It is the peculiar function of the Law to bring such an understanding to a man’s mind and conscience. That is why great evangelical preachers 300 years ago in the time of the Puritans, and 200 years ago in the time of Whitefield and others, always engaged in what they called a preliminary ‘Law work.’”

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

Kirk’s Comment Give some deep thought to this lesson, because the essence of the entire School of Biblical Evangelism pivots on the illustration given in this chapter. It exposes the motive of the sinner and reveals the pitfalls of the modern gospel message.

QUESTIONS & OBJECTIONS

“I’m doing fine. I don’t need God.”

Many people feel this way because of the modern gospel message. It says that Jesus will help their marriage, remove their drug problem, fill the emptiness in their heart, give them peace and joy, etc. In doing so, it restricts the gospel’s field of influence. If the message of the cross is for people
who have bad marriages, are lonely, and have problems, then those who are happy won’t see their need for the Savior.

In truth, the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ is for people with bad marriages and people with good marriages. It is for the happy and the sad. It is for people with problems and those without problems. It is for those who are miserable in their sins, as well as those who are enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. Those who think they are doing fine need to be confronted with a holy Law that they have violated a multitude of times. Then they will see themselves through the eyes of the Judge of the Universe and will flee to the Savior.

As I began to look at church growth records from around the country, I found to my horror that 80 to 90 percent of those making a decision for Christ were falling away from the faith. That is, modern evangelism was creating 80 to 90 of what we commonly call backsliders for every hundred decisions for Christ.

For example, in 1991, a major U.S. denomination was able to obtain 294,000 decisions for Christ. Unfortunately, they could find only 14,000 in fellowship, which means they couldn’t account for 280,000 of their decisions—and this is a normal, modern evangelical result.

The tragedy of modern evangelism is that, around the turn of the twentieth century, the church forsook the Law in its capacity to convert the soul and drive sinners to Christ. Modern evangelism therefore had to find another reason for sinners to respond to the gospel, and the reason it chose was the issue of “life enhancement.” The gospel degenerated into “Jesus Christ will give you peace, joy, love, fulfillment, and lasting happiness.” Something like this is usually said, “You will never find true happiness until you come to the Lord. You have a ‘God-shaped vacuum’ in your heart that only He can fill. God will heal your marriage and take away that addiction problem. He’ll get you out of financial difficulty and be your best friend.” The following anecdote will illustrate the unscriptural nature of this very popular teaching.

Two men are seated on a plane. The first is given a parachute and told to put it on, as it would improve his flight. He’s a little skeptical at first,
since he can’t see how wearing a parachute on a plane could possibly improve his flight. He decides to experiment and see if the claims are true. As he puts it on, he notices the weight of it upon his shoulders and he finds he has difficulty in sitting upright. However, he consoles himself with the fact he was told that the parachute would improve his flight. So he decides to give it a little time.

As he waits he notices that some of the other passengers are laughing at him for wearing a parachute on a plane. He begins to feel somewhat humiliated. As they continue to point and laugh at him, he can stand it no longer. He slinks in his seat, unstraps the parachute, and throws it to the floor. Disillusionment and bitterness fill his heart, because as far as he was concerned he was told an outright lie.

The second man is given a parachute, *but listen to what he is told*. He’s told to put it on because at any moment he’ll be jumping 25,000 feet out of the plane. He gratefully puts the parachute on. He doesn’t notice the weight of it upon his shoulders, nor that he can’t sit upright. His mind is consumed with the thought of what would happen to him if he jumped without the parachute.

Let’s now analyze the motive and the result of each passenger’s experience. The first man’s motive for putting the parachute on was solely to improve his flight. The result of his experience was that he was humiliated by the passengers, disillusioned, and somewhat embittered against those who gave him the parachute. As far as he’s concerned, it will be a long time before anyone gets one of those things on his back again.

The second man put the parachute on solely to escape the jump to come. And because of his knowledge of what would happen to him if he jumped without it, he has a deep-rooted joy and peace in his heart knowing that he’s saved from sure death. This knowledge gives him the ability to withstand the mockery of the other passengers. His attitude toward those who gave him the parachute is one of heartfelt gratitude.

Now listen to what the modern gospel says: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He’ll give you love, joy, peace, fulfillment, and lasting happiness.” In other words, Jesus will improve your flight. The sinner responds, and in an experimental fashion puts on the Savior to see if the claims are true.

And what does he get? The promised temptation, tribulation, and persecution—the other “passengers” mock him. So what does he do? He takes
off the Lord Jesus Christ; he’s offended for the Word’s sake; he’s disillusioned and somewhat embittered . . . and quite rightly so. He was promised peace, joy, love, and fulfillment, and all he got were trials and humiliation. His bitterness is directed at those who gave him the so-called “good news.” His latter end becomes worse than the first, and he’s another inoculated and bitter “backslider.”

Instead of preaching that Jesus improves the flight, we should be warning sinners that they have to jump out of the plane—that it’s appointed for man to die once and then face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). When a sinner understands the horrific consequences of breaking the Law of God, he will flee to the Savior, solely to escape the wrath that is to come. If we are true and faithful witnesses, that’s what we’ll be preaching—that there is wrath to come—that God “commands all men every where to repent: because he has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30,31).

The issue isn’t one of life enhancement, but one of righteousness. It doesn’t matter how happy a sinner is, or how much he is enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season; without the righteousness of Christ, he will perish on the day of wrath. Proverbs 11:4 says, “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivers from death.”

Peace and joy are legitimate fruits of salvation, but it’s not legitimate to use these fruits as a drawing card for salvation. If we continue to do so, the sinner will respond with an impure motive, lacking repentance.

Can you remember why the second passenger had joy and peace in his heart? It was because he knew that the parachute was going to save him from sure death. In the same way, as believers we have “joy and peace in believing” (Romans 15:13) because we know that the righteousness of Christ is going to deliver us from the wrath to come.

With that thought in mind, let’s take a close look at an incident aboard the plane.

We have a brand-new flight attendant. It’s her first day. She’s carrying a tray of boiling hot coffee. She wants to leave an impression on the passengers, and she certainly does! As she’s walking down the aisle, she trips over someone’s foot and slops the hot coffee all over the lap of our second passenger.
What’s his reaction as that boiling liquid hits his tender flesh? Does he say, “Man, that hurt!”? Yes, he does. But then does he rip the parachute from his shoulders, throw it to the floor, and say, “The stupid parachute!”? No; why should he? He didn’t put the parachute on for a better flight. He put it on to save him from the jump to come. If anything, the hot coffee incident causes him to cling tighter to the parachute and even look forward to the jump.

If we have put on the Lord Jesus Christ for the right motive—to flee from the wrath to come—then when tribulation strikes, when the flight gets bumpy, we won’t get angry at God, and we won’t lose our joy and peace. Why should we? We didn’t come to Christ for a better lifestyle, but to flee from the wrath to come. If anything, tribulation drives the true believer closer to the Savior. Sadly, we have multitudes of professing Christians who lose their joy and peace when the flight gets bumpy. Why? They are the product of a man-centered gospel. They came lacking repentance, without which they cannot be saved.

**Questions**

1. What percentage of those making decisions fall away from the faith?

2. What is the tragedy of modern evangelism?

3. What was the result of the first passenger’s experience?
4. What was the result of the second passenger’s experience?

5. What should we be telling the other “passengers”?

6. What is it that the Bible says “delivers from death”?

7. Why should a Christian have joy and peace?

8. As Christians, what should tribulation do to us?

PREACHER’S PROGRESS

Christian Loveless: “Hi, Mrs. Smith. How are you doing? Is Erik in yet?”

Mrs. Smith: “Lunch again, huh? I haven’t seen him come through the lobby today. He came into work last week with a bad hangover. Probably the same thing has happened today. How was church?”

Christian Loveless: “It was really good. We had Brother Don Waterdowns come in and do a series of healing meetings. Hundreds gave their hearts to the Lord. I’m in charge of the follow-up program. Man, I didn’t
realize how easy it is to get people saved. Lots were getting healed and people were coming to the altar without even being preached to.”

Mrs. Smith: “What a blessing. We had him at our church too. He advocates ‘friendship evangelism,’ doesn’t he?”

Christian Loveless: “Yes. I like that. It’s what I’ve been using on Erik. We’ve become good buddies over the years.”

Mrs. Smith: “I like that approach. It’s so much better than shoving the gospel down people’s throats.”

Christian Loveless: “True. That can alienate them. I’m waiting for the right time to mention the things of God to Erik; I don’t want to make him feel uncomfortable. Erik came to one of the meetings, and he really seemed to enjoy it. That’s the good thing about non-confrontational evangelism. He didn’t give his heart to the Lord, though. Maybe today he will bring up the subject. I never do, because I don’t want to offend him. I’m just a good friend, and I think that’s the right approach.”

Mrs. Smith: “I agree. I’ll call the Third Floor and speak to his secretary. Perhaps she will know why he’s late.”

Christian Loveless: “Okay.”

Mrs. Smith: “Jeannie, Rose Smith. Is Erik Tuday in yet? Christian Loveless is here to see…”

Christian Loveless: “What’s wrong? Your face has gone pale!”

Mrs. Smith: “I’m afraid Erik died during the night. He had an aneurysm in his sleep and was pronounced dead at 8:17 this morning…”

**Lesson 3 • The Problem with the Modern Gospel**

Daniel Webster stated shortly before his death, “The great mystery is Jesus Christ—the gospel. What would the condition of any of us be if we had not the hope of immortality?…Thank God, the gospel of Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light.” His last words were:

“I still live.”