



The Great Deception

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Index

A Misunderstanding of What the Gospel Is and Is Not.	P. 6
A Wrong Emphasis on Evangelism	P. 7
Using ‘Mediums’ with the Gospel	P. 9
Ecumenical Endeavours	P. 9
Preparation of the Heart	P. 11
The ‘decision’	P. 12

Today there is an increasing number of people who have publicly made ‘commitments to Christ’ in times past, but now no longer fellowship with ‘believers’. They are often referred to as ‘backslidden’ or ‘carnal’.

Many of these have made ‘decisions’ and claim to be ‘Christian’, yet show no sign of the power promised to believers in Scripture. Worse, they appear to believe they are safe and ‘saved’ because of this one-time decision!

Documented evidence shows more than an 80% ‘fall away’ rate amongst those Americans making ‘professions’ for Christ. Statistics reveal these people attend a church assembly for *less than a few months*. Billy Graham, in an interview for *Time Magazine*, admitted his reluctance to label half his converts as ‘Christians’ (1)

The tragedy of all this is ignored by too many evangelists and Church leaders who prefer to focus on the initial numbers and Church attendees. In the words of a much travelled Australian pastor/evangelist who admitted to me personally: *‘there are many professors - but few possessors!’*

In recent years we have investigated the claimed results from several crusades and tent meetings here in Australia. The conclusions are depressing but surely worth considering. On one occasion a small tent crusade was conducted by local Pentecostal assemblies in league with the para-church organisation *Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship International*. Shortly afterward the Pentecostal *Full Gospel* magazine boasted of this event: *‘...30 first-time decisions for Christ and 15 re-dedications...all those who made commitments are now in Churches and going on in the Lord’*. (2) The article went on to state that many were healed and ‘*set free*’ from alcoholism and other addictions. Considering that the internationally accepted benchmark for a full recovery from such addictions require a five-year period of demonstrated abstinence, this is a statement of stunning ignorance.

Our probing of these claims revealed that many of those who made these ‘decisions’ did not consider themselves regenerate, and under questioning showed no understanding of the Gospel in its fullness.

They had no inkling of *why* they needed saving or from *what*! A full year later many were still involved in New Age practices or drinking heavily.

Some did attend the Pentecostal fellowship (that held the meetings) for several months. To our amazement some of these individuals were displayed publicly by way of making ‘personal testimonies’ during subsequent crusades, although they were clearly living unregenerate lives.

When the pastor of this assembly was shown these findings he continued to state that *six* of the original *thirty* were ‘*going on for the Lord*’. The truth was that only *one* of those that made a *decision* was still in fellowship at the end of one full year. One out of thirty (or forty-five if one dared to include the ‘*re-dedications*’) is not a statistic that one should take lightly! The documented results were sent to several people on the organising committee including the magazine that printed the above falsities. All refused to consider the facts or our request that they consider a retraction of the previous claim. We never received any reply from the editor of the magazine. The following year they conducted yet another crusade and made similar claims as to the numbers ‘*saved and going on for the Lord*’.

This is only a sample of a much wider phenomenon. This deception is rampant in most evangelistic endeavours today and there are many such studies available. When Church leaders are politely challenged to verify the published results of their evangelism, one is either met with a wall of silence or an angry reaction. Clearly there is a lack of integrity in much of today’s modern evangelism.

The Bible clearly describes the effects of such in the parables of Matthew 13 - The wheat, tares, and the sower. The tares grow alongside the wheat until harvest time at which time they are ‘**thrown into the fire**’ - which speaks of Hell and Judgement. These Tares and the fruitless confessors in the parable of the sower, talk like Christians and have been informed that they are ‘Heaven bound’. *It is surely the ultimate deception if one thinks they are born again, when they are not.* Yet, this is a horrifying *Scriptural* reality! *The ‘many’* who show no repentance and/or have been ensnared in the

current false signs and wonders movement with it's healings, prophecies, miracles, laughter and spiritual drunkenness - Hell will gladly receive as Christ utters those terrible words: '***I never knew you***', (Matt.7;23).

Are we as Christians prepared to seriously consider the ramifications of much of today's evangelism? What of the increasing numbers of false professions today? What of those that respond to a Gospel that at best has been robbed of it's full truth, or worse, is false? They surely deserve better, whatever the outcome. What exactly is the nature of the problem and its causes, and are there solutions?:

A misunderstanding of what the Gospel is and is not:

Paul succinctly outlines the Gospel in his first letter to the Corinthians as the *death, burial and resurrection* on our behalf (*substitution*) because we are *sinners*: '***...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures***'. The Gospel presented by many today deletes the doctrine of sin and substitution. The facts of the Gospel are given but without a reason for them...the cure is offered without any description of the disease.

Certainly, it is not the Gospel at fault, for the true Gospel is '***the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth***', (Rom.1:16). However, in modern evangelism, in an effort not to offend, the message is being either whittled down or added to. This immediately *detracts* from the *understanding* of the hearer!

When we have surveyed fellow Christians by asking them to simply put the Gospel foundations in writing, the confusion between Justification and Sanctification becomes starkly apparent. Many link the Gospel to Sanctification. But salvation is God's work FOR us (Justification), not God's work IN us (Sanctification). The former is objective and outside of us, the work of Christ. The latter is subjective and inside us, the work of the Holy Spirit. The truth is missed when we inadvertently turn attention to what is done by the

Holy Spirit internally. We dare not trust that work for salvation! It is only Christ's substitutionary death, his burial and resurrection that God will accept on our behalf. When we truly trust in Christ and His work only, we have the righteousness of Christ imputed (credited) to our account.

A wrong emphasis on evangelism:

In a letter to a Christian publication someone wrote: *'A concern of mine for many years has been the pressure and guilt Evangelical Christians put on others with the expectation to be 'witnessing for Christ' ...what was the evangelistic role of the...early Church? Did they start sports clubs to interest outsiders? Did they begin a child minding centre to create friends within the community? Did they schedule meetings designed to attract the Godless? Did they hold witnessing classes and send people to knock on doors, witnessing and inviting people to Church? Acts 2:42 says they devoted themselves to the teaching of the Word (the Apostles doctrine), fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer. And what happened? The Lord added to the Church those who were being saved! (Acts 2:47). No entertainment here. They didn't try to sell the Church to the disinterested... is it meant to be any different today?'* (3)

The Greek word for Church is *'ekklesia'* meaning *'The Called Out Ones'*. Christian fellowship is for the edification and building up of *the saints*. The main priority when we gather together is *not* to win souls but to give glory to God and worship Him. When this is done in spirit and in truth, evangelism becomes a way of life for the believer. The Church must be God centred, never a place that caters primarily for the unsaved and their 'felt needs'. When Acts 2:42 - *'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer'*... is followed then the result will be - *'Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved'*, (vs.47).

Many churches that wrongly emphasise evangelism in an effort to *'see the world won for Christ'* show rapid but shallow growth. This

can be seen in churches across the spectrum from Ecumenical, Charismatic/Pentecostal and to more ‘fundamentalist’ churches.

Popular fundamentalist evangelists such as Jack Hyles, Curtis Hutson and John R. Rice, although fine Bible scholars in many areas, displayed unbiblical understandings of evangelism. These men claimed large numbers of souls saved but the aftermath show the figures were grossly exaggerated with large ‘fallaway’ rates as previously mentioned.

In his book *‘Excuses For Not Winning Souls’*, Curtis Hutson wrote: *‘Nowhere does the Bible teach or even intimate that soul winning is a gift.’* (P.9) Yet, Ephesians 4:11 explicitly refers to ‘evangelists’ as being ‘gifts’ to the Church. Obviously, not everyone has this ability as a gift. The New Testament refers to ‘evangelists’ as those who *preached* the Gospel. Hutson says: *‘Evangelism is soul winning’*, (P.20). But the Saints are never labelled ‘soul winners’. The word ‘evangelism’ comes from the Greek ‘*euaggelizo*’ translated ‘*preach*’, ‘*declare*’, or ‘*Gospel*’. Evangelism is basically declaring good news - *preaching*. The importance of evangelism is not so much ‘soul winning’ but rather the act of *preaching* the Gospel. Hutson goes on to say that *‘fruit bearing is soul winning...the fruit of Christians is other Christians’*, (P.9). Scripturally, the word ‘fruit’ conveys no such idea, but rather *‘fruit unto holiness’* (Rom.6:22), *‘Fruit of the spirit’* (Gal.5:22,23), *‘fruit of righteousness’* (Heb.12:11; James 3:18), and *‘fruit of our lips’*, (Heb.13:15).

In concluding the imposition of his ‘soul winning’ theories upon us, Hutson claims *‘it is wicked and sinful for any pastor to excuse his lack of soul winning by saying that he believes in making disciples, not in getting decisions’*, (P.18)...*‘This generation of saints is going to answer to God for this generation of sinners’*, (P.24). Yet, in Matthew 28:19,20 we are instructed to *teach all nations* (‘*matheteuo*’ - to make disciples, to instruct)...*‘teaching them to observe’* (‘*didasko*’ - to teach doctrine by word of mouth). This generation will not be ‘held answerable’ for sinners! To put this erroneous burden upon Christians is wicked. Such teaching has borne the fruit of false professions and soul winning activities partaken in an effort to please God.

A sermon titled '*Pentecostal Power*' delivered by the late John R. Rice, and printed in a recent edition of an Australian fundamentalist magazine, shows clearly how many leaders use unorthodox teaching in an effort to coerce believers into becoming effective 'soul winners'. (4)

Rice's doctrine is practically identical to the Pentecostal 'Baptism with the Spirit for empowerment' to evangelise. The only difference is that the 'evidence' of this 'Baptism with the spirit' or empowerment is the 'soul winning' instead of 'tongues'. * As with Hutson and others, Rice puts the usual 'soul winning' burden on Christians and anyone who cannot see his teaching is '*wicked and distant from God*'. (4)

Using 'mediums' with the Gospel:

The use of a 'medium' through which to better present the Gospel has become an art form. Stage plays, clowning, testimonies, rock music, weight lifting, unbiblical manifestations and worldly methods are increasingly being tried today. But these dilute and lower the *intellectual understanding* of the message. When something is added to basic truth it always pollutes and subtracts from it. One will simply attract those that God is not drawing through His preached Word. When these mixtures are used as 'baits', the following is often true: *the bait you catch them with is the food you will have to continue to feed them with.*

Ecumenical endeavours:

A great number of today's evangelists increasingly favour the inclusion of all denominations in their crusades, including that of false religions. This is done with the thinking that *the end justifies the means* and there is power in numbers. This is called *pragmatism*. Consequently, many thousands of those that respond to the preaching are blithely sent to fellowship with the very people who deny the gospel itself! Therefore the outcome is spiritual confusion and spurious 'conversions'. Others defend modern evangelism on the

ground that we should praise God for the few that are ‘saved’! And if an evangelist appears to be winning souls, then it is assumed that God is with him.

Peter Masters in *‘Stand For The Truth’* refutes this pragmatic thinking in modern evangelism that *‘...Results count more than the purity of the methods we use.* He writes: *This is the reasoning of an ungodly and immoral age, and it often taints the thinking of Christian people... the Bible condemns the attitude which says ‘Let us do evil, that good may come’, (Romans 3.8). Christians must never ignore the rules of the Bible because compromise seems to lead to success...*

Moses... disobeyed God when he struck the rock (on the second occasion) to secure water for the congregation, (Num.20.7-13). Despite his disobedience, God honoured him and water flowed. Nevertheless, Moses did wrong, and later had to pay for his disobedience. Blessing never absolves us from the duties of self-examination, obedience, and reform. (See, for example, Rom.6.1-2 and Heb.3.7-10). God reproves His people ‘that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit... that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt... Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help’, (Is.30.1-2;31.1). Obedience is paramount in the Christian life. The Lord loves obedience better than sacrifice... The Bible gives very definite rules both in the matter of who we fellowship with, and who we co-operate with in His work. God does not want crowds to be gathered (or other things to be achieved) with the help of His enemies. He does not need the co-operation of Catholics and theological liberals. He calls His people to work independently of all false teachers, and in dependence upon His mighty power.’

Pragmatism says that *if it gets any results it works and must be of the Holy Spirit.* However, the real test for such logic is to *push the premise to its limit.* In other words, do we support a satanist camp if someone gets ‘saved’ from it? The pragmatic view that only looks at the thin veneer of so called evangelistic *results*, blinds the minds of many.

Preparation of the heart:

Initially, the heart of the hearer *must* be prepared to understand *why* he is in need of God's salvation and what he would be saved *from*. Again, this matter was dealt with superbly by Jesus Himself in the parable of the sower, (Matt.13:1-23; Lk.8:4-15). Unless the 'soil' (the heart) is prepared, the 'seed' (the Gospel) will fall on unprepared ground and quickly wither and will bear no fruit. (5) *The main point of the parable of the sower is that good seed grows well and bears fruit only in prepared soil.*

One author writes: *'The typical presentation today starts exactly opposite where Paul started. He wrote of 'the wrath of God...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.'* But modern evangelism begins with *'God loves you and wants to make you happy' ... (Paul's) approach was a directly confronting evangelism. He did not do a Community Survey. He did not conduct any special research. He did not try to put together an Evangelism Committee. He just went to the synagogue and the marketplace and preached to whoever was there.'* (6)

The very *nature* and *character* of God must be fully comprehended; His wrath against sin glimpsed, (Matt.3:7; Jn.3:36; Rom.1:18; 5:9; Eph.2:3); His *Justice* shown first, that His *Mercy* might be revealed. *The sinner must know who God is and what the disease is before he is told of the cure!*

The great and effective evangelists of old were first and foremost preachers of *the Law*. By the Law is the knowledge of Sin, (Rom.3:20; 7:7; 15:56). *'The Law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ'* (Gal.3:24); *'The Law was made for sinners'* (1Tim.1:9); and *'is perfect for converting the soul'*, (Ps.19:7). (7) Anything less than this will lead to fatal misunderstanding. Most of the modern Gospel presentations, including 'tracts' (although there are some sound examples**) give either scant or no reference to sin and its consequences and are a poor preparation for an understanding of salvation.

The Gospel itself *'is the power of God unto salvation'*, (Rom.1:16)...but we must read on!...*'to those who Believe'*! God's

role in this whole process is just as Jesus taught: '***No man can come to me, except the father which has sent me draw him...***' (Jn:6:44) Our role is to be *lights* in a dark world and to assist in sowing the seed - The Word of God in it's fullness.

The 'decision':

The expectation of people to make a 'decision' is a grave error and should not be a part of an evangelical sermon or tract. This practice has often been referred to as the error of 'Decisional Regeneration'.

One missionary author sums this up well: 'We distort and confuse the Gospel in people's understanding when we try to present the Gospel using terminology which turns people's attention to what they must DO rather than outward to what God has DONE on their behalf in Christ. We should use terminology which directs repentant sinners to trust in what has been done FOR THEM through Christ, rather than directing their attention to what must be done IN THEM.'

'Accept Jesus into your heart.' 'Give your heart to Jesus.' 'Give your life to Jesus.' 'Open the door of your heart to the Lord.' 'Ask Jesus to wash away your sins.' 'Make your decision for Christ.' 'Ask Jesus to give you eternal life.' 'These modern and commonly used phrases confuse people's understanding of the Gospel... We must bring people to the point where they see they can do nothing. But even when people do understand their inability to do anything... many [then] tell enquirers things such as 'Now you must give your heart to Jesus'. Having told them they are unable to do anything they then tell them what they must do!...People's interest and concern is turned inward to their own experience instead of outward to trust only in Christ's death, burial and resurrection on their behalf...'

...The Gospel is not man accepting Jesus as His Saviour but that God accepted the Lord Jesus as the perfect and only Saviour 2,000 years ago. The Gospel is not man giving his heart or his life to Jesus but that Christ gave His life in the place of sinners. The Gospel is not man receiving Christ into his heart, but that God received the Lord Jesus into Heaven as the mediator of sinners. The Gospel is not Christ enthroned in the human heart, but that God enthroned the Lord Jesus at His right hand in Heaven.

Do we see the great distinction between these two messages? One is subjective and puts emphasis on what man must do. The other is objective and puts the emphasis on what Christ has already done.'
(8)

Twentieth century evangelism has traded *repentance* for a 'decision' and we have reaped an increasingly bitter harvest of spurious 'conversions', tares and carnality within the church.

Let us close with a fitting statement from A.W. Tozer: '*The cross of popular evangelism is not the cross of the New Testament. It is rather a new bright ornament of a selfassured and carnal Christianity... The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroys confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it... The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings about the cross; Before that cross it bows and towards that cross it points... but upon that cross it will not die, and the reproach of the cross it stubbornly refuses to bear*'.

Terry Arnold

* See our book *'Tongues & The Baptism With the Spirit'*.

** See our booklet *'Eternal Questions'* - designed to systematically and chronologically prepare the heart to receive the Gospel which is also explained within the booklet. Also excellent for Christians to check their foundations.

- (1) David Frost, *Billy Graham in Conversation* (Oxford: Lion, 1998), P.65; *Aust. Beacon*, 8/97, P.5
- (2) 1996 *'Full Gospel'* magazine (Australia)
- (3) Letter to editor of *'New Life'*, (Australia) Sept/99
- (4) *'Biblical Fundamentalist'*, (Australia) May/ 2002 The author has done a critique of this article in which the dangers of the false teaching was exposed.
- (5) See our two audio tapes - seminar on *'Foundations for Evangelism/Discipleship'*.
- (6) *'Ashamed of the Gospel'* by John MacArthur, P.132, 141
- (7) See our tape *'Hells Best Kept Secret'*.
- (8) *'Firm Foundations - Creation To Christ'* by Trevor McIlwain

About the author

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