

FALSE GOSPELS

MODERN COUNTERFEITS TO CHRIST CRUCIFIED



1. **The Legalism Gospel** - Repeated spiritual acts save you: Jesus and the church give you a code of rules and prescribed forms to practice (law) - attendance at church, bible reading, eucharist, confessions, tithing, cultural customs, missions, etc. Name the command or prohibition, and you do it to prove your spiritual merit. Through discipline and faithfulness to these external works you are saved and stay saved. This creates a run faster, jump higher, performance-driven Christianity where so long as you're doing what you ought then you and God are good.
2. **The Moralism Gospel** - God is essentially Santa Clause. Be nice and you get the present of heaven; be naughty and you get the coal of hell. Everyone is born generally good in their nature. Sure nobody is perfect - we all make mistakes - but Jesus gives us a second chance and helps make us better people. So with God's help we move from good people to better through the exercise of our willpower. As long as you're generally a nice person and don't harm people then you and God are good.
3. **The Fire Insurance Gospel** - As long as you pray the "sinner's prayer" at some point then you won't go to hell. Being saved doesn't really impact day to day life as God is compartmentalized, but that's okay because you're safe from eternal damnation. Since you walked an aisle, raised your hand, or got baptized then you're good. Things like remorse for sin, joy over the beauty of the gospel, or heartfelt pursuit of knowing Jesus are for the spiritually elite. Forgiveness comes through a formula, and in this sense it is more like witchcraft than christianity - reciting an incantation rather than entering into a relationship.
4. **The Therapeutic / Self-Help Gospel** - God wants me to be happy and feel good about myself. Our negativity about ourselves hinders us from fully achieving the potential of all that we are and can be. Jesus wants us to see how great we really are and then pursue letting that greatness out. The solution to our problems are already within us, and He is there to cheer us on past our fears and insecurities and towards greater self esteem. In this sense, feel-good emotional experiences are highly valued while sin and deserved judgment are totally avoided. The problem is 'out there', not 'in here'.
5. **The Prosperity Gospel** - Jesus died to give those who believe in him material blessings (health, wealth, ease and power). If we do not have these things it is because we do not have enough "faith". God is presented like a magic genie, whom we need to manipulate in order to get what we want. Preying on consumerism and the American Dream, comfort and ease are pursued at all costs with the definition of blessing colored through the lens of earthly materialization. There is no accounting for suffering and trial other than weak faith. Meanwhile, people are often manipulated for selfish gain as God is hijacked for his gifts - creation over creator.
6. **The Social Justice Gospel** - The chief ailment of society is inequality and injustice. Therefore, the Christian's *primary* job is to help those in poverty or being unjustly treated. God's kingdom is advanced as we work together to build an equal and just society, pushing political causes and philanthropic projects as preeminently central. An important biblical by-product of the gospel - social justice - becomes the ultimate priority *over* the gospel, taking precedence over the eternal salvation of souls and ensuing heart change. Much of it is unselfish and honorable, but it causes us to confuse our ultimate goal to be an earthly kingdom here and now.
7. **The Universal Gospel** - An attempt to unite Christianity with other faiths, despite the drastic differences in belief. Ignoring the exclusive claims of Jesus and the nature of our sin, it says the greatest problem above all is simply to not be united, to be 'intolerant' and claim you have absolute truth. That is the greatest possible sin. For at the end of the day, all spiritual paths lead to God and heaven, or whatever your version of that is - co-exist. So, just do the best you can in life to be kind to others and leave this planet a better place than when you arrived. God will reward all and judge no one - except maybe the Adolf Hitlers and Charles Mansons of the world.
8. **The Experiential Gospel** - Salvation comes through eventful, emotional experiences with God. Big and intimate moments are the pinnacle pursuit, as the church is there to help me feel close to God. Hyped environments and charismatic spiritual out workings are elevated, and personal sentiment is seen as the prototype version of maturity. A person's faith is based primarily on subjective experience rather than the objective truth of the gospel.
9. **The Progressive Gospel** - (post-modern) - To question all things is the highest virtue. To be certain about anything is arrogant, archaic, and authoritarian, and so doubt becomes the new replacement of faith. With little to no absolute truth, Scripture and orthodox Christianity are constantly scrapped to redefine God, the gospel, and ensuing moral ethics in major areas like gender and sexuality, to whatever the cultural climate of the day is. The inerrancy of Scripture, existence of hell, the historicity of Adam and Eve, or the resurrection are all examples of core doctrines pulled out as tradition and truth are deconstructed without a base for reconstruction in its place. In the wake, Jesus is relegated to a good teacher - an example - rather than a redeemer from sin. As people are "enlightened" by these modern spins to throw off the shackles of old truths, de-conversions to doubt are celebrated as liberating, while those still holding fast to the gospel are viewed as stuck in the past or part of the problem.

10. **The Spirituality Gospel** – As long as we have a sincere faith in something and follow a spiritual path of some kind, God will accept us. All spiritual paths lead to God and heaven. It's just better if we make Jesus a part of the path since He is such a good example and heroic martyr.
11. **The Social-Club Gospel** - Salvation is all about finding fellowship and friendship at church. Christianity is reduced to a country club of relationships that help us enjoy life.
12. **The Asceticism Gospel** – As followers of Christ, we can never possess or enjoy anything in this world. A true faith relationship with Jesus results in choosing to be poor in terms of material things, but rich in terms of the spiritual. So stop desiring things period. You cannot be a Christian and enjoy material things.
13. **The Knowledge Gospel** - A higher degree of information or discovery of secret hidden knowledge is the key to happiness and salvation. (Gnosticism)
14. **Cults - Mormonism, JW, Scientology, etc.** - Abandon or revise core orthodox beliefs of Christianity for distorted versions as late movements started by, and empowered around, single leaders. Unsurprisingly, these belief systems resemble modern versions of recycled early-church heresies.

All false and distorted gospels:

1. Redefine the greatest problem - other people, government, lack of money, lack of education, lack of self-belief, religious people, my appearance, my upbringing, my boss, my season of life, my spouse, or convince of NO problem / reduce the problem. **Instead of SIN**
2. Redefine the solution - (functional saviors, idols) - self-esteem, resources/money, education/knowledge, political change, power, pills, avoidance, financial & physical security, material comfort & leisure. **Instead of JESUS**

3 levels under the umbrella of false teaching

1. Level 1 - GRAVE ERROR - false gospel - directly contradicting or compromising the gospel on essential matters. These are untruths about God, sin, Jesus, salvation, faith, etc. that are wrong, harmful & would keep someone from being saved / lead someone (even unknowingly) to hell.
2. Level 2 - ERROR - any false teaching/doctrine - untruths about secondary matters like end times, ecclesiology, creation, marriage, spiritual gifts, etc. that may be biblically incorrect... but don't change the fundamental gospel. Yes, there can be serious impact, but it's not eternally damning.
3. Level 3 - EMPHASIS - teachings that potentially may be biblically correct, but are off in emphasis, attitude, and application. Examples include:
 - a. Issue Christians - good things made ultimate things. Secondary / tertiary issues are elevated to primary. Everything seems to be about promoting this subject or this cause intellectually - things like debating the millennium, politics, speaking in tongues, celebrating the OT feasts, etc. (either negatively with criticism or positively with passion). Often debated things are declared as undebatable. In essence, non primary are made primary.
 - b. Conviction Importers - strong convictions (usually on secondary / tertiary things) are put on others. Others have to be about this as much as they are / do it to the degree they do or else they are wrong, potentially even labeled as sinful. This may look like a conviction about fasting, ending abortion, getting off social media, physical health & stewarding the body, or a certain mode of bible study. These things can be good - and are usually things tied to their strengths - but others are required to care the exact same amount.
 - c. Rabbit Trails - going down holes on subjects that aren't significant. Whether that is genealogies / myths like in 1 Tim. 1, or modern mysteries or controversies on things like angels, numerology, signs of the end times prophecy, church music styles, Nephilim, near-death visions of heaven, non canonical books, etc. It's not that any of these subjects are problems in and of themselves to be aware of, but a fascination and fixation leads to over-investment on things that have little to no bearing on actual life or truth or mission. What's low in importance ends up consuming high amounts of mental time and energy, and before long people are way off the main path.

* Often, level 3 people escalate into level 2 or level 1 (like in Ephesus / 1 Timothy). Infatuation with these things can eventually lead to compromises of the gospel, leading others astray, and getting people off mission.

Keep the main thing the main thing!