

Modern False Gospels

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Appeal to Disillusionment

Take a look at the following Statement of Faith (it is not important where I got it from):

"We believe:

* 1. *The Bible, consisting of the books of the Old and New Testaments but excluding the apocrypha, is the inspired Word of God and is the infallible, all sufficient authority for faith and practice.*

* 2. *There is one True and Living God who is the eternally self existent "I AM" and who has also revealed Himself to be One being in Three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

* 3. *In the perfect deity and humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, His virgin birth and bodily resurrection.*

* 4. *The Biblical account of creation.*

* 5. *Man, who was created in God's image without sin and given dominion over creation, fell by voluntary transgression as a result of which all men are born with a sinful nature.*

* 6. *Salvation is through faith alone in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born sinless of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was shown approved of God by His miraculous ministry, died once for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, raised from the dead in bodily form on the third day and triumphantly ascended to heaven. Through His blood we have redemption.*

* 7. *The New Birth is an instantaneous operation of the Holy Spirit upon repentance toward God and the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

* 8. *Baptism by immersion in water is enjoined upon all who have repented, believed with all their hearts and confessed that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord.*

* 9. *In the person of the Holy Spirit, His work of regeneration, baptism following the new birth, empowering, indwelling, and sanctification of the believer.*

* 10. *In The Holy Spirit's enabling gifts (with fruit confirming) to the members of the Church individually as He chooses.*

* 11. *In the true Christian Church, which is comprised exclusively of all who by virtue of repentance from sin and faith in Christ are born again of God's Holy Spirit and have become part of Christ's body. The identity of the Body of Christ on earth is primarily perceived through the local church.*

** 12. We strongly confess the local church to be sovereign and autonomous. At the same time we reject sectarianism and divisiveness as great evils.*

** 13. In the spiritual unity of all who are born of God as opposed to unbiblical "so called" interfaith/ecumenical unity.*

** 14. In the pre-millennial personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the prophetic purposes of God for Israel and the Jews.*

** 15. That the Breaking of Bread is enjoined on all believers until the Lord comes and is a representation only of his atoning body and blood.*

** 16. In the final judgement of the living and the dead by Christ.*

** 17. In the everlasting conscious punishment of the wicked and unrepentant.*

** 18. In the everlasting conscious bliss of the redeemed."*

What do you think of that? I, personally, agree wholeheartedly with 12 of the articles, but have problems with articles 7,8,10,11,12 and 14. It is the Confession of Faith of Arminian, antipaedobaptist, non-cessationist, congregationalist, premillennialists who think that there is still a special place for the Jews in God's economy.

I don't agree with any of those things, but I suggest that this Statement of Faith would be agreed to by most Pentecostals and Charismatics, most churches of a Brethren persuasion, and most of the churches in the U.S.A. and China. That is a lot of people - in fact, the vast majority of Bible-believing, evangelical Christians today.

Having said that, it is becoming obvious that the church is declining in our time, as either false doctrines are coming into the church, or indeed people are being taught that doctrine is no longer important at all. To counteract this decline, this statement has been produced to bring back the above beliefs into the forefront of church life once more.

There are many people who are excellent on telling us about the decline in the church, and how we should stand up against it. They are very discerning - and correct - about this, but then they also promote, as an alternative to the status quo, their false views.

I have come across this before. I was attracted by the British Reformed Fellowship after its formation in 1990. They are excellent at alerting us to the decline in the Evangelical churches of today. They certainly attracted people like me. But then they offer the false doctrines of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America (with their denial of the Covenant of Works, wrong view of divorce and remarriage etc.) as an alternative, and expect us to imbibe it without thinking.

It all sounds so good at first, because the church IS declining generally, and things DO need to be done, disillusioned people in these churches DO need to be catered for, rather than isolated on their own. But the whole way these movements work is by a logical fallacy - the "appeal to disillusionment."

Are you disillusioned with the state of the church today? Is this false doctrine creeping in? Is that false doctrine creeping in? YES!!! you say. Someone understands me at last!! It is not just me on my own against the church establishment!! And so people are groomed and led into an umbrella organisation for disillusioned souls. What wonderful fellowship they receive now!! Like-minded people to talk about these things freely with!!

Then, when they are fully caught in the net, they get fed the equally false doctrines of their captors. This is very sad.

Are these people leading others astray deliberately? Or are they true believers, but mistaken, and inadvertently tagging people along with them into false beliefs (which they themselves genuinely consider to be the truth)? I am quite happy, in charity, to believe the latter. But then we must ask ourselves, How should we behave? The Lord leads every individual one of His children into the truth down separate, unique paths. Some are led into the truth about certain things sooner than others, and as long as we are on this earth we will always think and believe different things from each other, although we are all heading in the same direction if we are truly born-again of the Spirit of God. So again, I ask, How should we behave? Should we try to persuade people of our beliefs at all? We are convinced that our beliefs are true now, otherwise we wouldn't believe them; and we long for others to agree with us! But we could be wrong. We have been in the past. Maybe the Lord is leading us through falsehood for a time, in order to teach us the truth in a more powerful way later on. He sometimes does that.

Of course we should live our lives in the light of what the Lord has revealed to us at any one time - i.e. in what we believe to be the truth at the time. But this may well be different from what everybody else around us believes. Our own "Statement of Faith," if you like, might be unique to us. But we should all be willing to be changeable as the Lord leads us into more of the truth through His Word. Of course we have the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, and He is the one we must be taught by, but what do we do when a movement appears such as I have described, which has so much truth in it, but also some error? Try to join these groups, and you will be eventually be ostracised by them because you don't embrace everything they teach. Don't join these groups and you will be isolated.

1 John 2:27

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

The Do-it-Yourself Gospel

There is a false gospel being presented in many churches today, which we need to be aware of. It is not just a different way of preaching the gospel, but a completely different message altogether, and needs to be exposed as such, not least because it leads people into a false sense of security.

The way this "gospel" is presented is as follows: First of all, we are told that we need to "choose" or "decide" to follow Christ. Many Christians mistake this call for the true call of the gospel, which is to repent and believe in Christ for salvation, but the preachers of this message mean no such thing. Repentance and salvation in someone other than ourselves, are alien concepts to them. All the preacher means by "deciding to follow Jesus," is that we choose to follow Christ's teachings. That is it. It is just a decision we make ourselves to stop following the teachings of the world any more and to follow the teachings of Christ instead, just as we may "decide" to follow the teachings of Buddha or

Confucius or some other man. This “decision” involves no heart change, no repentance, and no salvation in a Saviour.

Once we have “chosen” to follow Christ, we are immediately told that now we are a Christian, so consequently all our sins past, present and future, are instantly forgiven and we can relax, because Christ has already dealt with them. We don’t need to think about sin any more, and should not let it bother us again. In fact it is a sin to think about sin at all from now on. We must instead think positively, and have a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance and confidence in ourselves.

This is nothing else but modern humanistic psychology dressed up in religious clothing, and it is the complete opposite of true Christianity, which should rather produce humility, meekness and self-abasement. It is no wonder that the preachers of such a message appear so proud and self-confident.

If we really should not let sin bother us any more, then we get further and further away from seeing our real need of a Saviour. This message leads people away from the true gospel, not closer to it.

But it doesn’t stop there. Now we have “chosen” to follow Christ, we must in future make sure that we “choose” to live by every one of His precepts, taking each one in turn. So, we must “choose” to stop lying and “decide” to tell the truth. We must “choose” to stop cheating people and “decide” to live honestly. etc. etc. Notice that everything is done by ourselves, there is no concept of our need of a new heart and of the Holy Spirit to perform these things in us at all.

The whole point of real Christianity is that we can’t do these things by ourselves, we need a Saviour to do it for us. The gospel is not that we should stop sinning by our own effort, because we can’t. The gospel is that we need the Lord to save us from our sins which we can’t get rid of ourselves, and then for the Lord to work righteousness from within us by giving us a new heart. Only then can we serve the Lord truly, and not before.

By nature, we can’t “choose” anything, except sin. We must be born again:

John 3:3

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

We need a new heart:

Ezekiel 18:31

Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

This is something that we can’t do ourselves, it is the gift of God:

Ezekiel 36:26,27

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

The Biblical gospel is therefore completely different from this humanistic way of preaching.

Here are some examples from the Bible of how we should present the gospel:

Matthew 3:17

Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 16:24

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Matthew 18:3

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 13:3 and 5

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Acts 2:38,39

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Acts 3:19

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

Acts 16:31

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Acts 17:30,31

God.... now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Acts 20:21

Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 26:20

But shewed.... that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

The true gospel is primarily a call to repent and believe in Christ for our salvation. To repent, presupposes straight away that we are sinners who need to turn from their sin and cry to God for mercy:

Luke 18:13

God be merciful to me a sinner.

THIS is the gospel. It is a gospel of God's grace, not a gospel of self-help. With the true gospel, we need to see our own inability to respond and our need of a Saviour to save us from our sins. Once we understand this, we will never boast about ourselves ever again:

Romans 3:27

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

If this false gospel was true, then when we get to heaven, we can always say that the difference between us being in heaven and our neighbour being in hell is that we "chose" Christ and our neighbour did not. That is boasting, and so can't be the true gospel.

This false gospel is leading people further away from the true gospel and from seeing their real need of a Saviour. We all ought to see our sin for what it is, and flee from the wrath to come by embracing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as the only Saviour from sin. Only then will boasting be excluded, when we realise that salvation is by grace alone:

Ephesians 2:8,9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

We are born in sins, and conceived in iniquity:

Ephesians 2:1

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Psalms 51:5

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

No matter what we do, we can't get free from our bondage to our sin. We certainly can't "choose" to stop sinning at all, it is impossible! But once the Lord changes the heart, we are free indeed!

John 8:36

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Freedom in Christ

There are many causes of division amongst Christian people, and always have been. But most of them can eventually be put down simply to the fact that some people understand the principles of the Bible a bit better than others.

We are all continually growing...

2 Peter 3:18

...in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And so all of us are at different stages in the Christian life. The differences Christians have with one another can simply be attributed to this fact.

But I want to look in more detail now at a difference between professing evangelical Christians which goes a lot deeper.

I used to know an old lady, who knew her Bible very well and was a professing Christian. And I had no reason to doubt her profession, she seemed to exhibit many Christian graces such as kindness, patience and so on. She had been a Christian for a lot longer than I had, so I certainly respected her. But she had a problem with the church we were both members of at the time. She didn't like the church going on all the time about ongoing sin in the believer.

To back herself up, she came up with this Bible quotation:

Hebrews 10:1,2

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

In these verses we are told that the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament could never take away sin, but were only ever meant to be a picture of the true sacrifice that would come later in Christ. The argument then goes on to say that, if they could have taken away sin, then they would have ceased to have been offered and the worshippers "*should have had no more conscience of sins.*"

Now we know that the animal sacrifices could never take away sin, but Christ's blood can. So this lady was quite adamant that if we continue to think about ongoing sin all the time, then we still have a conscience of it and therefore we can't be true Christians, because we can't have had our sins taken away by Christ yet. That's what this verse, in her mind, was effectively saying.

But my Christian experience is very different. Now I have become a Christian, the Holy Spirit has come to reside in my heart, and it is as though a light has been switched on. I now see all the dark and dingy corners of my life I never saw before. In fact, the closer I get to Christ, the more sin I see in myself. Yes, of course, as a true believer, I know, praise God, it has all been forgiven. It has all been taken care of and put on Christ....

Galatians 2:20

...who loved me and gave Himself for me.

But as a Christian, I still have a struggle with ongoing sin. I don't like my sin, I don't want to do it, I hate it. I don't do it deliberately or wilfully, but I fall into it. I never had this problem before I became a Christian. Sin never bothered me then. But it does now. And until our dying day, as far as my experience has taught me – and I also believe it to be what the Bible teaches – we Christians now have a battle going on within us. The old man against the new man in Christ. The flesh against the Spirit. These are two of several ways the Bible has of describing it. The apostle Paul concluded about himself:

Romans 7:24,25

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

I heard a terrible sermon on this passage not very long ago. The speaker, who would have agreed with the old lady I was telling you about, believed that this wasn't Paul describing himself at all, but some hypothetical person instead. We Christians, he said, shouldn't live "defeated" lives, and should certainly never call ourselves "wretched." We shouldn't dwell on our sins. We have the victory. That was the gist of the sermon. How awful! Not in line with the reality of things at all.

Of course this was Paul describing himself. And I'm a wretched man as well. But, thanks be to God, I have a Saviour who has saved me from this wretched condition, and has put a new heart within me so I can now to some extent begin to live the life He wants me to live. But I still have this indwelling sin within me that will not go away until I receive my new body when I go to be with Him, which is far better, a body that will finally no longer be able to sin.

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

But this experience of a spiritual battle now going on in the Christian, which was never there before, seems to be totally foreign to the likes of this old lady and this preacher.

I tried to tell the old lady that after we become a Christian we still sin, and I quoted the Lord's Prayer:

Luke 11:4

Forgive us our sins.

We still have to ask forgiveness for our sins from God on a regular basis, even though we are truly born-again Christian people. But she simply told me, "Well, you've come out of Egypt, but you've not entered the Promised Land yet."

And this idea of a Christian being someone who just doesn't see indwelling, ongoing sin any more, is quite common in the modern church.

The nearer I get to Christ, the more I see my sin. This, as far as I have experienced, is true Christianity. This is how it should be. But most modern ministries believe that anyone who thinks the way I do, is still dwelling on their past sin. They insist that people like me must change our mindsets. Christ has taken all our sin away, so, they say, we should instead concentrate on "what we are in Christ" (that's the phrase they use), and not on our sins any more. The thought of sin should now be gone from our lives forever. Not just past sins, but the whole concept of continuing, ongoing, indwelling sin as well. To dwell on our sin is negative. If we don't look at things in this new light, they say, we're not "living the victory life."

"Are you a just a forgiven sinner or a saint?" is what they ask. They think that we who still think of ongoing sin in our lives are only "forgiven sinners" and not "saints," because, to them, we're still wallowing in our past sins. But it's not my past sins that are the problem. Praise God I have been forgiven them in Christ. It's my continuing to fall into sin where I find a problem. These people don't seem to see that they continue to sin at all. They

seem to think that a truly born-again Christian should have no more conscience of sin whatsoever. Otherwise they don't have real "freedom in Christ," as they say.

But I know I continually let the Father down. And it bothers me, because I love the Father. Not that I think I won't get to heaven because of my sins, past or ongoing. Praise God I will, despite my sin. But whenever I sin, I know I'm letting my Lord down yet again. That bothers me.

This whole division in the church between these two groups of people – those who believe in continuing sin and those who don't – is a far more serious problem than any of the usual problems we come across, such as Calvinism versus Arminianism, or whether we believe the gifts are for today or not, or whether we believe in having women preachers, or infant baptism etc. etc. These are all just a matter of some people not understanding the Bible properly yet. In all these cases, people on both sides of the argument can be genuinely born-again Christians. So they can still share Christian experiences and have good Christian fellowship with one another. But this division I'm talking about here, is not to do with whether we understand a Biblical principle or not. It's to do with that Christian experience itself.

I can't understand people who call themselves evangelical, born-again Christians and who live their lives quite happily with absolutely no concept whatsoever of ongoing, indwelling sin. It's just not real. I can't relate to them. I have a battle going on in my members, they don't. At least they don't seem to. They drift through their Christian lives full of confidence. And because of this fundamental difference in our Christian experience, I have become very tempted to conclude that they're not truly born-again at all. That's what's going through my mind, although I know I shouldn't judge people like that. But the fact remains that I seem to have absolutely nothing in common with their experience of the Christian life whatsoever.

But they do profess to have had a true born-again experience in the heart. They profess to be new creatures in Christ. They profess to be evangelical Bible believers. There is such a lot that we seem to have in common, far more than with many other people who call themselves Christian but are obviously not born-again in their hearts. Yet even so, I still can't relate to them in any way. And they can't relate to me. I'm sure most of them don't think I'm a born-again Christian either.

So, are these people just deluded into thinking they are truly born-again? I don't know. Only the Lord can judge that. All I can do is continue to live by what the Lord has revealed to me in my understanding and in my experience. If that means I can't relate to these people, then that's just the way it is, I must leave them to the Lord to deal with.

My "freedom in Christ" comes not from my being completely oblivious to my ongoing sins, but from my knowing that no matter what sins the Lord may uncover in my life (and there'll be many), I won't be condemned. This is a tremendous comfort to the Christian, especially the thousandth time he lets the Lord down yet again.

Psalm 51:17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Worshipping the Money God

A while ago I visited a supposed Christian church which, it has to be said, worshipped money, not God. The Bible clearly states:

Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Not that it's wrong to be rich in and of itself, if that's what the Lord has given you. Abraham and Solomon were both very rich. It's the **love** of money that's the problem:

1 Timothy 6:10

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Let me tell you about my trip. I was one of a group from the church I normally attend. We were persuaded to go to this church, about 100km from where we live, so we went. We left Saturday afternoon, and returned Sunday evening. Delegations from two other churches were there as well. We were treated very well. The food was excellent, and we were given a bed for the night, which was very comfortable.

On the Saturday evening we were shown around all the church facilities, which were extensive. Not only did they have a church of about 1,600 people, but they ran a nursery school, and planned to open a clinic as well at some point in the future. They had also just completed three blocks of flats, mainly for the hundred or so full-time workers they employed (including the school). Everything was very professionally run, which was good. We should always do the best for the Lord.

But... Sunday morning came along. The main service of the day was at 8.30am, when 1,600 people from all over the area came into the main auditorium. The service itself was fairly familiar. There was half an hour with the "worship band" playing loud, foot-tapping music (not my scene, but that's what you get these days), followed by the Scripture reading, followed by an hour-long sermon, which it has to be said, was very good. Then the shock of the day.

After the sermon, several stewards brought out large boxes and set them up at the front of the auditorium. After a rousing speech by the "senior pastor," the soft piano music started, and everybody came out of their seats to put their offering into the boxes. That was the highlight of the service.

If it was everyone coming forward to take the Communion, I could understand it, but the highlight wasn't Communion, it wasn't even the sermon, it was the collection. Then a final hymn was sung and the benediction and that was it.

We visiting delegates were then whisked off for an hour's seminar (on the Lord's day, remember) given by the "senior pastor," which was on nothing else but business management skills, and how to use them in the running of a "successful" church.

We found out that this pattern had been imported from a church in Hong Kong, which had in turn got it from, yes, you've guessed it, the USA.

It works, in that the church grows. The basic unit is the "cell group" of 6-16 people, meeting in someone's home every Friday evening. The idea is that you invite your neighbours into the group. Once the group reaches 16 people it divides into two, and so on. All the people connected with the church get together for the one service on the Sunday morning, where the collection is centre-stage.

On a Tuesday evening all the "cell-group" leaders meet to get instruction on how to run their "cell-groups." Everything is run on a very professional business model. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned.

They use the "million leader mandate" technique for developing their leaders. Now, I've never heard of this before, so I looked it up on the internet. It's American (of course), but it's based on self-confidence, self-acceptance, "have pride in your achievements," and so on. This is not Christianity at all. It is humanistic psychology, and the exact opposite of the gospel. No humility.

And to cap it all, the "senior pastor" then told us, helpfully, that we can loan money to them at any time, and they will guarantee to beat the interest rates of the banks. This is no different from "Bank of Dave," which Channel 4 viewers in the UK may have seen. His idea is that we lend our money to him, he guarantees us a better interest rate than the bank, and he in turn lends the money to a local business that needs it. In the church's case, they use it for their own business ends.

The point about this church is that everything is geared around worldly business management techniques and MONEY. No real, heartfelt prayer, no guidance by the Holy Spirit, just slick managers implementing techniques for getting people into the church and, more to the point, getting their money out of them.

And, we were told that to get the best preachers, you must pay them the best salaries. Now, that works in the banking industry. If we cap the bankers bonuses, they'll all go abroad. But are true pastors motivated in any way by money? Really? No. The true pastors of the flock of God should be motivated by the salvation of souls, not what they get in their pay packet at the end of the month.

And another thing, which I thought was actually quite funny. The collection data is published every week, and we found out that the church we go to regularly, where there is no collection at all, just boxes at the back of the church, gets far more money in the collection than this church where the collection is the central part of the service. There is proof that the smooth presentation and soft music doesn't work. We need to trust in the Lord instead.

Philippians 4:19

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

And what about the good sermon? How do we explain that? Well, that's easy. They used the golden rule of sermon preparation. Expository preaching through the text, letting the text do the work. That technique will work for anyone, no matter how bad, or how worldly

they are. God speaks through the Bible, not through the preacher, so if you stick to what the Bible says, you are guaranteed a good sermon.

And that was my experience of the money-god church. And it grows, it's outwardly successful. But is God in it? I leave that to you to work out for yourself.