

OUR PREMISE IN PRACTICAL MATTERS

This series has been all about proving that the Bible speaks of *more than one Gospel*, yet only one Gospel for our age. But since the Bible gives a Gospel of the Kingdom for Israel nationally, and since Christendom of all stripes rejects the idea that this Kingdom Gospel is different than the Grace Gospel under which we live, we can rightfully suspect that *gospel tracts notoriously mix up Gospel truth*.

And of all things, getting the Gospel right ought to be one of our chief priorities. However, rather than getting together to address the issue, I suspect that preachers and theologians would consider this work to be *an attack on the Gospel* and that *I would be considered the heretic for considering it*.

I personally think that the two greatest weaknesses of Christianity are so fundamental that we ought to *stop everything* until we figure these out. The first is the issue of what constitutes the Bible, and we will have to save that for another day. The second is the issue of what constitutes the saving Gospel, and that is the topic of this study.

Sadly, Christianity shows no willingness to discuss either weakness.

THE THREE COMMON ERRORS IN GOSPEL TRACTS

THEY SELL USING FEAR

Without doubt, fear is a good motivator. But is sharing the *good news* best introduced by fear?

The fear is generated, typically, by one of two topics. By far the first topic is a statement that says, "You are a sinner and God is angry with you."

Here are some examples found in actual Gospel tracts:

- Your sins keep you from being part of God's family.
- The most terrifying words anyone could ever hear will come from the Lord Jesus when he tells the victims of deception, "Depart from me..."
- God will destroy us if we continue in our sin.
- Your rebellion against God keeps you from eternal life.
- Man is sinful and separated from God. Thus he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.

The second fear-topic is hell or judgment. When the Gospel is presented in this way, it has the feel of a threat. Here are some examples of this topic:

- "I've lived a real good life," says the sinner. But the angel replies, "**EVERYTHING** has been recorded."
- To punish man's rebellion, God sent a catastrophic flood. But people continue to sin, so God will one day punish the world with fire."
- At best we only live a few years on this earth, and what then?

On personal sinfulness and a destiny in hell without a Savior, there is no doubt that both are practical realities. But are they the best introduction to the grace gift that God offers freely through Christ?

THEY MAKE THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST TO BE “ALL ABOUT ME.”

There is certainly truth to the fact that *the death of Jesus Christ benefited me*. I suspect, however, that one would search in vain to discover that *Jesus wasn't really coming to die for me*. There is a more primary purpose to the death of Jesus. In fact, the gift of salvation offered to us upon the basis of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection could be considered a *fringe benefit* to that work.

Romans 14:9 teaches us that **...to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living**. The purpose of the death, burial, and resurrection (let's call it “the cross”) was to *take back creation*. Having done so, the gift of life can now be offered freely, to anyone, under whatever conditions God should establish.

But to read the tracts you would think that the cross was punishment for my petty thievery in elementary school! And in making the cross *all about me*, we run the risk of developing believers who really have no idea of the cross' purpose. In fact, I suspect that the vast majority of believers today would say “Jesus died for my sins,” but do not really have any idea how His death enabled my salvation.

THEY ASK FOR WORKS, THEN FAITH

It is very common (perhaps even the default) that Gospel tracts *ask the person to do something else* before they can come to Christ with “faith alone.” Examples of this error are abundant:

- To have eternal life one must repent of his sin and believe in Jesus.
- If you repent (are sorry for and turn from your sin) and trust in Jesus' death for you, you can become a child of God.
- *Admit* that you are a sinner and you are willing to turn 180 degrees (repent) from your sin, then *Believe* that Jesus died for you...then *Confess* verbally and publicly your belief.

THE SINGULAR INHERENT DEFICIENCY IN GOSPEL TRACTS

With all this negativity toward Gospel tracts, it would be a failure on my part to not point out that *gospel tracts attempt to do what cannot be done*. They are so necessarily brief that they can do nothing more than introduce the matter of salvation. But the problem is that *none of the tracts acknowledges the inherent deficiency* and *almost all of Christianity approaches salvation as something that can be presented in a trifold 3x5 brochure*. Perhaps one of the best things for evangelism would not be *passing out more tracts* or having more people go door-to-door in evangelism, but rather a Christian culture that recognizes that a *long-term growth in Biblical understanding* leads people to salvation.

But with that said, there is a place for and a need for brief Gospel presentations. My own tract, *The Essential Gospel*, presents the following pathway leading a person toward salvation:

- A worldview that includes man separated from God.
- A belief that only God can fix this separation problem.
- The belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Savior who, because of His death, burial, and resurrection, can save anyone, anywhere, at any time.
- The belief that God, through Jesus Christ, is offering the free gift of salvation.