

The Great Sin of Trying to Make the Gospel Palatable

One of the greatest failures of the contemporary church of America is our attempt to make the gospel of Jesus palatable to lost sinners—our effort to take away its offense, remove its reproach, water down its contents and explain away its standards. In doing so, we dishonor the Lord and contribute to the damnation of the lost. It's time we wake up and repent of this worldly, faithless approach.

There's a story I often tell to illustrate the folly of trying to preach a palatable gospel.

A doctor made an amazing scientific breakthrough, perhaps the greatest of all time. He discovered a cure for cancer that was 100% successful, and it worked for all forms and all stages of cancer. Perhaps the most incredible thing of all was that just one dose of the medicine would cure the cancer for life.

The only problem was that the medicine had to be taken in pill form; each pill cost \$1 million dollars, the pill was huge and very difficult to swallow, and it left a terrible, bitter taste that lasted for seven days.

Of course, the research and development team was ecstatic over the discovery, and they met with the doctor, telling him he had to make three simple changes for his breakthrough to be successful: He needed to figure out a way to reduce the cost of each pill so it would sell for \$10,000 per dose; he needed to reduce the size of the pill so people wouldn't choke on it; and he needed to remove the bitter taste.

After two years of hard work, the doctor called the team back, announcing he had succeeded on all fronts. With the new formula he had developed, each pill would cost just \$10,000, it would be packaged in a small gel cap, and it would actually

have a pleasant aftertaste.

There was only problem. The pill no longer cured cancer!

And that is exactly what we have done with the gospel. We have tried to make the narrow gate wide and tried to make the cross of Christ popular, thinking somehow we would get more people “saved.” But our message no longer saves!

We have tried to make Jesus acceptable to sinners rather than making sinners acceptable to Him, removing the call to submit to His lordship and live a new life in Him. And we have redefined repentance, reducing it to a mere change of mind rather than a change of direction—specifically, a turning from sin and a turning to the Lord, an about face by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit.

Today, we just say to people, “Change your mind about Jesus!”—but that is only a small part of the gospel message.

Belief in Jesus is now presented as a good insurance policy and packaged as a great deal, at that: “Just give up your guilt and depression, and in exchange receive success, prosperity and eternal life!”

May I ask you to show me one example of a message like that preached to the lost anywhere in the book of Acts? Or do we think we know better than the apostles?

Was there a reason that Paul, when reaching out to a lost sinner and speaking about “faith in Christ Jesus,” also spoke to him “about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:24-25)? Is this part of our gospel message?

Of course, we should be people of compassion, reaching out to the lost with hearts overflowing with genuine love and care. And of course we should exercise wisdom and cultural sensitivity. But we do not win the lost by becoming like the lost; we win the lost by becoming like Jesus—and by presenting

the Jesus of the Scriptures and the gospel of the Scriptures, whether it brings offense or reproach or mockery.

Paul wrote that when Jesus returns, “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:8). How often do we think of the gospel as something to be “obeyed”?

More than one generation ago, A.W. Tozer noted, “The trouble is the whole ‘Accept Christ’ attitude is likely to be wrong. It shows Christ applying to us rather than us to Him. It makes Him stand hat-in-hand awaiting our verdict on Him, instead of our kneeling with troubled hearts awaiting His verdict on us. It may even permit us to accept Christ by an impulse of mind or emotions, painlessly, at no loss to our ego and no inconvenience to our usual way of life.”

It’s time we get back to the New Testament gospel, exalting both the holiness of God and the love of God, presenting Jesus as both Lord and Savior (in that order), and preaching a message that is foolishness to those who perish but is the power of God to those who believe (1 Cor. 1:18).

Let’s preach the truth without compromise, empowered by the Spirit, filled with compassion and unashamed of Jesus and the cross, and God Himself will back the message about His Son.

Michael Brown is author of *The Real Kosher Jesus* and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire* on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience. Follow him at AskDrBrown on Facebook or @drmichaellbrown on Twitter.