

Why I Reject the Contemporary 'It's All About Me' Gospel

The New Testament **gospel** starts with God and tells us what we must do to please Him. The contemporary gospel starts with us and tells us what God can do to please us.

No wonder we are in such spiritual confusion and moral malaise.

When Paul wrote to the Romans, he wanted to be sure they understood the true gospel, and after declaring the gospel as the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16), the first major subject he addressed was the wrath of God.

That's right. The **wrath of God**. Today, we dare not even speak about it.

But Paul knew better, stating, "For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (v. 18, ESV).

And he continued writing about this same subject for 14 verses.

What? He didn't start with a message about God's love? He didn't start with a sweet sermon about how the Lord wants each of us to be happy and fulfilled? He didn't go out of his way to make sure that his plain speech didn't offend his hearers or hurt their feelings?

It is true that he told the Roman believers they were loved by God (v. 7), and he certainly exalted Jesus right from the start (vv. 3-4).

But he hardly preached some sappy, sentimental, feel-good

message. To the contrary, he proclaimed that God's wrath against sinners was clearly revealed, that human beings had no excuse and that all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, were guilty in His sight and in desperate need of His mercy. In fact, these were the main themes of the first three chapters of the book.

Do we think we know better than Paul? Do we have a greater **revelation** of grace than he did? Do we understand the gospel more than Paul understood it?

After teaching on justification by faith (Rom. 4-5), he then moved on to the subject of our victory over sin, making statements like this:

"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin" (Rom. 6:6-7).

"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions" (vv. 11-12).

"But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (vv. 17-18).

Yes, we find true liberty by being "slaves of righteousness." (Note also that Paul described himself as a "slave" of Jesus the Messiah—using the identical Greek word—in Rom 1:1.)

In that same spirit, Paul wrote, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom 8:12-13). We are spiritual debtors!

I could cite similar quotes from almost all of Paul's letters, not to mention those of Peter, Jacob (James), John, Judah (Jude) and Hebrews, all with the same message: Because we have been saved by the Lord Jesus, we are no longer our own and we do not have the right to live for ourselves. Rather, we have a lifelong debt to Him, and it is our joyful privilege to fulfill that debt, since living for Him is the only way to experience real life, which is eternal life.

Of course, Paul would be the first to tell us of the glories of **God's grace**, of the peace and joy we experience in His presence, of the extraordinary nature of His love, of the power of the Spirit who lives in us and of the sacred standing we have as His sons and daughters. Yes, yes and yes! (Read Paul's words in Romans 5:1-11 or 8:14-39 to sample two wonderful passages just found in this letter.)

But Paul started with God, not with man (after all, He is the Creator, and we are the creation), and he didn't water down the message to make it more palatable to rebellious sinners. And he didn't mince words when it came to detailing the nature of our sins, describing lost people as being "filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Rom 1:29-31).

He didn't describe nonbelievers as morally challenged, dysfunctional and disoriented but rather as disobedient.

And that's why we need a Savior—not someone who would look the other way and wink at our sins (which would not have done us any real good) but someone who would take our sin on His own shoulders, dying for us that we might live. What a Savior!

Isn't it high time that we get back to a New Testament **gospel** message—the real gospel—rather than the contemporary version,

which not only dishonors God but also does a disservice to people, ultimately hurting those we want to help?

Isn't it time?

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