

9 Errors of the Gospel of Self Fulfillment

Read Time: 4 Minutes 44 Seconds

Since the dawn of the “positive thinking” message of Norman Vincent Peale in the 20th century, there has been an avalanche of preachers teaching variations of this message. (The “health and wealth” prosperity gospel, “name it and claim it,” along with various modes of motivational types of preaching.) When the objective is self fulfillment, the message often reduces the gospel of Christ to appease the narcissistic dreams of half-baked Christians.

The following are nine errors of the gospel of self-fulfillment:

1. The cross of Christ is absent. I have read many motivational Christian and secular books from all genres and the one glaring truth missing is the cross of Christ. Jesus told His followers that they had to take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). That is to say, we are called to appropriate the power of the finished work of Calvary to our self-centered desires so we can fulfill His will. (Read Galatians 2:19-20 to see how the apostle Paul taught the church to apply the cross to their flesh.)

The cross is absent from the gospel of self-fulfillment because it is antithetical to its essence. That is to say, the cross rebuts the notion of attempting to live without suffering as it contradicts the idea of living a life based on self-fulfillment. In reality, God calls us to do many things that we do not like and that do not grant us great happiness. Paul even said that he did not count his life of any value so that he may finish the ministry the Lord gave him (Acts 20:24).

2. It empowers egocentric dreams. One of the famous mantras today is that “you can be anything you want to be” or “all our dreams can come true.” However, the reality is that not all of our dreams and desires are God-given or grounded in reality. Reality includes self-awareness regarding one’s natural ability and talent. This kind of teaching makes people disillusioned if their desire is not rooted in God.

is rarely a mention of sin. I do not remember reading anything substantive about the consequences of sinful living in the dozens of motivational books I have read. These books and preachers only focus on “positive things” and rarely mention how the practice of conscious sin can derail a person’s calling. Unfortunately, this gives believers the impression that living a holy life is inconsequential to fulfilling their purpose. Of course, scripture teaches us that nothing can be further from the truth (1 Corinthians 10:6-14; Hebrews 3-4).

4. People are not taught to admit weakness. Second Corinthians 11-12 detail how the apostle Paul had no issue bragging about his weaknesses. This grounded Paul and his readers in reality and helped them understand how believers need to depend upon the power of Christ to fulfill their calling. Unfortunately, many in the “self-fulfillment” camp rarely admit their weaknesses in public because it goes against their public personification of perfection, personal victory and success.

5. It promotes the fallacy of no limitations. I have learned the hard way that I have personal limitations. Understanding my natural and spiritual strengths, proclivities and weaknesses helps me focus. I do not waste my time trying to walk outside the lane of my assignment and abilities. This flies in the face of those who take Paul out of context and cite, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” In this passage, Paul was not referring to accomplishing whatever he wanted but that he could fulfill God’s calling despite his financial challenges (Philippians 4:10-13).

6. Failure and pain are not part of the process. Another life lesson I have learned is that I cannot avoid pain while fulfilling my purpose in Christ. Sometimes pain is self-inflicted and can be avoided, but often it is out of our control since it has to do with the deleterious actions of others. Also, sometimes we make the wrong decisions that cause us to fail in a particular endeavor. The only person who does not fail is the person who never attempts to do anything challenging. The key to success is not to avoid failure but to “fall forward” and learn from the experience.

7. The goal is often happiness. Many come to church seeking happiness, but happiness is not the top priority God has for us in this life. Our highest calling is to know God and obey Him, not to seek a life of self-fulfillment and pleasure (Philippians 3:3-12). The unhappiest people I know are the ones whose primary motivation in life is to be happy. However, the happiest people on earth are the ones who live to serve God and others.

8. It is individualistic. Another grave error of the gospel of self-fulfillment is that it is based upon individual fulfillment and destiny. In Scripture, there is no individual earthly vision, mission, purpose and destiny. Everything we do is interrelated with other people because we are all part of the same body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Of course, the major exception is when every person stands before the judgment seat of Christ. There, we will stand as individuals without the ability to use another person or situation as a scapegoat (2 Corinthians 5:10).

9. It doesn't teach the whole counsel of God. The apostle Paul said that he was free from the blood of all men because he taught them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). When we only accentuate certain truths to the exclusion of other truths in the Bible, we are guilty of reflecting the wrong image of God and His Word.

Many preachers of the gospel of self-fulfillment focus on the goodness and love of God to the exclusion of His righteousness, holiness and justice. Scripture teaches us that righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (or rule); hence when we exclude this side of God, we are left without a divine foundation.

In closing, whenever we expose ourselves to only one teaching genre, we become unbalanced and eventually find out our belief does not comport with real-life experience. {eoa}

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