

A Subtle Deception

Jesus is the only way. There is no Plan B for Jesus.

Almost all evangelical Christians I know love Israel. We respect the heritage of Jewish people, we adamantly support Israel's right to exist as a nation, and we believe Israelis have a right to defend their democracy from terrorists. We also honor Jews for preserving the Old Testament, and many of us make pilgrimages to Israel to enrich our faith. In both a historic and a spiritual sense, Israel is at the core of Christianity.

Yet I am concerned that some recent teaching about Israel has become unbalanced and unhealthy. Some misguided Christians, for example, insist that churches must celebrate Jewish feasts and observe a kosher diet in order to be in true fellowship with God.

Others require the use of Jewish prayer shawls or Hebrew-style music during worship. And recently a charismatic preacher suggested that God demands special financial offerings to be made during a Jewish holiday to secure God's blessing.

These teachings usually begin as innocent fads. But before you know it, someone writes a book or airs his views on Christian television. Then everyone jumps on the bandwagon.

Of course there is rich prophetic meaning in prayer shawls, Passover seders, shofars, the Day of Atonement and many other Jewish traditions found in Scripture. But we must remember that these things are meant to point to Jesus Christ. He must be our focus. If we allow traditions or rituals to replace Him, then we are guilty of idolatry.

What troubles me even more is a doctrine that is slowly making its way through our ranks called "dual covenant theology." Its proponents suggest that Jews—because of their ethnic heritage—do not need to believe in Jesus Christ in order to obtain salvation. In other words, Jews have their own separate track to heaven because they are God's chosen people—and they get a special ticket.

Dual covenant theology is doubly dangerous because it is rooted in human sympathy. Christians who feel sorry for Jews, mostly because of the horrible treatment they endured during the Holocaust, can't see how they could deserve God's judgment. The reasoning goes something like this: "Jews have suffered enough. I don't think a loving God could ever send a Jew to hell."

One of the earliest proponents of this philosophy was actually a Jewish rabbi from Italy, Elijah Benamozegh, who taught that Jews and Christians can work as "religious partners in telling the world that God is One." He believed Jews should aim to be good Jews by following Old Testament laws; meanwhile, he proposed, gentiles should become Christians.

It might sound compassionate to offer Jews this unique privilege, but dual covenant theology is really just another warmed-over version of the ancient heresy of universalism. It's a first step toward embracing the idea that everyone will eventually find salvation, regardless of his religious beliefs. And it is absolutely at odds with the core message of the gospel—which tells us that all people, Jew and gentile alike, can find salvation only through Jesus the Messiah.

The apostle Paul, a former rabbi himself, certainly did not teach that there were separate paths to heaven for Jews and gentiles. In fact, he angered many Jews when he taught that they had been cut off from the blessings of Abraham because they rejected Jesus. Paul argued that a true Jew is one who trusts in Christ alone—not in keeping laws, observing Sabbaths, making sacrifices or being circumcised (see Rom. 2:25-29).

Paul was not ashamed of the fact that the gospel is exclusive. The New Testament tells us plainly that every man and woman—no matter their ethnic background—must stand before Calvary's cross to obtain forgiveness and eternal life. We have no right to change the rules, no matter how much sympathy we feel.

Jesus is the only way. There is no Plan B for Jews. To suggest that a Jew is given some type of free backstage pass to heaven is the most blatant form of deception. If we truly love Israel

and want God's blessings for the Jewish people, we will unapologetically tell them the truth and urge them to believe it.

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