

# **GOSPEL TEACHING SUMMARY SIX: THE MAN-CENTRED GOSPEL**

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## **Galatians 1:8**

*“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”*

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## ***Aims***

By the end of this study the reader should be able to: -

- 1) Understand the meaning of the term '*Man-centred Gospel.*'
- 2) See the faulty assumptions underlying this term.
- 3) Discern the inherent characteristics of this Gospel.
- 4) Discover the underlying purpose of such a Gospel.
- 5) Avoid it – at least in its extreme forms.
- 6) Distinguish between the true God-centred, as opposed to the man-centred Gospel.
- 7) Accept the need to gently correct those who follow it.

## ***Definitions***

**1) THE MAN-CENTRED GOSPEL:** the distorted version of the Gospel, centred upon man himself, his needs, problems and decisions. Influenced by Secular Humanism (and increasingly the New Age movement) this Gospel enjoins such a degree of acceptance within the Western church that the real Gospel has in most places become totally obscured.

**2) THE PARTIAL NATURE OF THE MAN-CENTRED GOSPEL:** the way it encourages only a partial allegiance to **Jesus**. It does this by suggesting that an individual can "*take Jesus as Saviour*" without at the same time accepting Him as Lord our God. His influence is then largely confined to the religious sphere in a person's life. There is a rigid sacred-secular division<sup>(1)</sup> whereby the practical relevance of the Gospel on daily life is diminished.

**3) THE RELATIVE NATURE OF THE MAN-CENTRED GOSPEL:** this is largely an out come of certain Humanistic<sup>(2)</sup> cultural forces<sup>(3)</sup> found in nineteenth and twentieth century Western society. In combination, these forces have helped to distort the Church's understanding of divine revelation. As such, it is a Gospel, which has compromised with the World.

**4) THE UNIVERSALISTIC NATURE OF THE MAN-MADE GOSPEL:** the fact that, by appealing to self-interest, this Gospel can enjoy widespread popularity amongst all peoples of all societies. In its extreme forms, it can encourage the notion that all people can reach God by their own efforts.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Or the division between the religious and non-religious areas of a person's life - it results in people behaving one way at church on Sundays and quite another for the rest of the week.

<sup>(2)</sup> This is another word for '*man-centred.*'

<sup>(3)</sup> The stress upon consumerism and material success is just one example of a capitulation to Cultural Forces.

## **Section One: Source**

The chief source of the man-centred Gospel is man's ideas, schemes and plans. More specifically, it represents an outworking of human aspirations, desires and self-centredness. In its extreme forms it can represent a spiritual counterfeit of Satan. When this happens, its chief effect is to discredit and obscure the real God-centred Gospel.

## **Section Two: General Assumption**

The Man-centred Gospel often assumes that: -

**2.1** Preaching about Christ's humanity is of more importance than preaching on His deity, (Philippians 2.6-11).

**2.2** The virgin birth has little relevance to the Gospel message, (Matthew 1.18-25).

**2.3** Jesus is only the 'best' of a number of ways to God, (John 14.6).

**2.4** Jesus Christ came to offer people a personal relationship with God by demonstrating His Father's love at Calvary. The idea of "love" dominates rather than dealing with human sinfulness, (Colossians 1.20).

**2.5** People can still turn to God of their own volition – their innate sinfulness should not prevent them, (Jeremiah 7.24-26).

**2.6** A personal response to the Gospel makes way for the Holy Spirit and the task of EARNING His blessings, (John 6.63).

**2.7** Personal responsibility is often undermined in favour of the "Jesus loves you" panacea, (Matthew 12.31-33).

**2.8** Faith and repentance are feelings or attitudes, which can be "worked up" by crowd control techniques, group pressure – or even by the use of mass hypnosis, (Mark 9.24).

**2.9** Hard, or unpopular choices are understated so as not to alarm or disturb people, (Acts 28.24; Revelation 20.15).

**2.10** A response to the Gospel should automatically guarantee success and material prosperity. The reality of the heightened suffering brings in terms of human rejection and Satan's opposition is ignored or pushed out as a side issue, (2 Corinthians 5.17-18).

These general assumptions confirm that this Gospel is largely man-centred in its approach. The focus is upon man's will and efforts. It is often accompanied by the use of 'high pressure' sales techniques or by increasingly subtle forms of psychological manipulation. Furthermore, this Gospel might even teach that coming to Jesus is about helping people to realise their own deity! It is often preached with a view to adding to the size of Church membership rather than making disciples into mature followers of Jesus, (Matthew 28.19).

## **Section Three: Specific Assumptions**

Specific assumptions of the Man-centred Gospel are that: -

**3.1** Its message can be shared through the use of neat formulae, simplistic messages and shallow testimonies. Childish gimmicks<sup>(4)</sup> are used in conjunction with formal preaching, (1 Peter 3.15).

**3.2** The "notching up of decisions" and building God's Kingdom here upon earth form the two main motivations to this Gospel, (Mark 12.30-33).

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<sup>(4)</sup> Tricks that are used to guarantee success, often there is a high degree of exhibitionism involved.

**3.3** The obtaining of money, enhancement of preacher's reputation and the provision of entertainment also form three more specific motives, (Philippians 1.16-18).

**3.4** Its chief task is to make people feel happy, often by encouraging them to "*think positive*," and '*affirm*' themselves, (1 Corinthians 1.23).

**3.5** Freewill is paramount – even while remaining sinner's people can still make a decision for Jesus. They can choose to be saved at any time. The emphasis is upon MAN'S decision for Christ, (Zechariah 4.6).

**3.6** The Father and Son remain impatiently outside the doors of a person's heart waiting to come in, (John 6.44).

**3.7** Revival is viewed as something, which can be planned and worked up by men, (Joel 2.28).

**3.8** The Holy Spirit's blessing can be "*called down*" at any given moment. The Holy Spirit is subject to human beckoning, (Ecclesiastes 3.2-9).

**3.9** Faith and repentance are man's contribution to his own salvation, (Ephesians 2.8).

**3.10** The Holy Spirit can only be given as a REWARD for faith – therefore, He becomes an earned blessing, (John 12.39-40).

**3.11** Repentance is viewed more as a sorrowful confession. The sinner can only be sorry for the consequences of their sin, but not for the sin itself, (Acts 9.1-9).

**3.12** Faith is often directed in toward itself, so it becomes "*faith in faith*" – something that can be drummed up through positive thinking techniques or group pressure, (Hebrews 12.2).

**3.13** Gospel proclamation is usually kept separate from Bible teaching so that the Gospel message often has little doctrinal content, (Acts 17.2-4).

**3.14** The emphasis is frequently upon chatty anecdotes or fervent (emotionally manipulative) appeals which seek to pressurise people in "*making a decision for Jesus*." Man can work out the Gospel for himself, (2 Timothy 3.16).

**3.15** Christ's work is seen to be incomplete, man feels he has to ADD to it by "*making a decision*" or "*taking a step of faith*," (Colossians 3.1-14).

**3.16** An undiscerning universalism adopting the belief that, "*Christ has died for everyone, so everyone in the end will be saved*,"<sup>(5)</sup> (Acts 22.21).

**3.17** People are regarded as only having needs and problems – sin is underemphasised. Indeed, through the influence of modern psychology the sinfulness of human nature is abandoned as being outdated, (Ephesians 2.5).

**3.18** "*Conversion*" can happen through emotional manipulation, mass hypnosis and high-pressure sales techniques (John 6.65).

**3.19** Partial Lordship is acceptable. Christ's Lordship is confined to the religious and emotional areas of life, (John 20.28).

**3.20** Individual witnessing only takes place by word of mouth. It may be noisy and intrusive, (James 2.14).

**3.21** Preaching and witnessing is often done apart from the life of the local church by freelance organisations and individuals (1 Corinthians 12.27-31).

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<sup>(5)</sup> At the other extreme, there can be an unjustified '*particularism*,' which asserts that certain classes and nations are not among the elect. However, this stance is very rare nowadays.

**3.22** Large organisations form the main vehicle of evangelism. As a result, local Christian groups are reduced to acting as passive donors of money and other resources, (Titus 1.5).

**3.23** Miraculous '*signs and wonders*' must accompany Gospel preaching. They can occur at a time of the preacher's own choosing and are viewed as being of more importance than the message being offered. There may also be a heavy emphasis on '*Sensationalism*,' (Acts 11. 11-20).

**3.24** Widespread sharing of the Gospel is viewed as a means by which the church can "*establish domination*" over the earth. Present is a desire to use it as a means to gain social-political power in order to get the world ready before Christ's return, (Matthew 5.13-16).

**3.25** Any attempt to share the Gospel will produce much material blessing, and will contribute to a new Christian social order on earth, (Ephesians 6.10-18; Acts 19.23-41).

### **Section Four: Main Characteristics**

Main characteristics of the "*relative*" Man-centred Gospel are: -

**4.1** A belief that the central reference point being man – HIS desires, needs and problems.

**4.2** Its reliance upon psychological techniques in order to produce the desired effect of a decision for Christ, (represented is an attempt to do the Holy Spirit's work for Him).

**4.3** Its tendency to brush over sin and increase self-centredness.

**4.4** An often vague and unstructured message - this may be clouded still further by "*windy rhetoric*."

**4.5** That it is unrealistic – God is viewed as some '*soft sugar daddy*' that will always give blessings when requested of Him. High materialistic expectations are encouraged.

**4.6** That its messages are tailored to gain mass popularity and/or "*a respectable cultural relevance*." The '*world*' rather than the Scripture is allowed to dictate the contents of this Gospel.

**4.7** Its inability to meet the deepest spiritual needs of those to whom it's addressing. At best some minor psychological demands may be temporarily alleviated. This inadequacy often leaves people with a spiritual hunger, which leaves them receptive to any counterfeit experiences offering to satisfy that hunger.

**4.8** Its tendency to heighten people's vulnerability to spiritual deception – often this is because they are encouraged to believe that every powerful experience coming their way is from God.

### **Section Five: Particular Characteristics**

Particular characteristics of the “*universalistic*” Man-centred Gospel are its belief in: -

- 5.1** A person’s capacity to accept Jesus as Saviour at any time of their choosing.
- 5.2** The emphasis is again with man and HIS ability to choose, there is little or no stress on Sovereign Grace.
- 5.3** The pre-eminence of divine Love as compared to any other attribute.<sup>(6)</sup>
- 5.4** The unimportance of moral law compared to divine forgiveness.
- 5.5** Christ’s death upon the cross making it possible for people to SAVE THEMSELVES. The cross is indeed important, but only plays an active role in saving people from sin when man decides.
- 5.6** Christ as Saviour and problem solver.
- 5.7** Emotional “*super spiritual*” experiences simply as an end in themselves; these might be manifested through hysterical laughter, uncontrolled convulsions, swooning and even animal noises.
- 5.8** The material blessings, which will come when following Jesus.
- 5.9** The joys that *Jesus* can bring in this life (with little emphasis upon eternal life).
- 5.10** The use of popular entertainment and bogus ‘*signs and wonders*’ to soften people up for the Gospel.

A dangerous feature of this Gospel is its tendency to overemphasise some Biblical truths at the expense of others – i.e. we know that the true Gospel majors upon Divine Love and Divine Forgiveness, but it does so ALONG with the other attributes of wrath and judgement.<sup>(7)</sup> However, with this man-centred Gospel it can be seen that important parts of Biblical teaching are simply glossed over or missed out altogether.

### **Section Six: Concluding Comments**

While contrasting the ‘*total God-centred*’ with the ‘*incomplete man-centred*’ Gospel it is important to bear the following points in mind: -

- 6.1** The incomplete Gospel often errs, not so much in what it says but in what it leaves UNSAID. It therefore represents a one-sided presentation of truth, which fails to declare ‘*the whole counsel of God.*’ Usually the assumptions lying beneath it are not openly stated.
- 6.2** Sometimes, with the best possible intentions, preachers combine elements from both of these Gospels. Rarely is it a case of just one of these Gospels preached in its entirety. Rather, what the hearer must discern is the weighting given to each version. In such cases, only some, not all of the assumptions and characteristics of the “*Man-centred*” Gospel will be present.
- 6.3** In His mercy God may still bless those who preach an incomplete Gospel. This is especially the case when such a Gospel is preached out of ignorance and not through any form of wilful perversity. Often the best policy in such situations is to correct people in an attitude of loving gentleness, rather than employing that harsh condemnation, which only serves to entrench in error.

Yet despite the above-mentioned qualifications, the man-centred Gospel does represent a taking away from God’s word. It is a clear case of the Gospel minus important elements. As such, it is something that is to be condemned rather than commended, (Revelation 22.19).

<sup>(6)</sup> Often Divine Love is presented in very mawkish, sentimental tones.

<sup>(7)</sup> Nonetheless, going to the other extreme and omitting love and forgiveness (as the late medieval Roman Catholic Church did) can be just as bad.