

**GOSPEL TEACHING SUMMARY SEVEN:
MAN-CENTRED PREACHING AND WITNESSING**

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Zechariah 4:6

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”

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Aims

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

- 1) Define concepts like man-centred preaching, witnessing and sharing.
- 2) Grasp the purpose of the man-centred Gospel.
- 3) Distinguish between God-centred and man-centred Gospel sharing.
- 4) Understand the methods used in man-centred sharing.
- 5) Perceive the likely overall results of the man-centred Gospel.
- 6) Avoid being manipulated by it.
- 7) Accept the need for Gospel sharing.

Definitions

- 1) **MAN-CENTRED PREACHING:** the form of preaching, which attempts to enhance a sense of proud self-reliance on the part of both the preacher and his hearers; it is essentially self-centred.
- 2) **MAN-CENTRED WITNESSING:** means the same as man-centred preaching, only it applies in the area of personal witness, not public preaching.
- 3) **MAN-CENTRED SHARING:** a general term that covers both man-centred preaching and witnessing.

Section One: Purpose

The intention of this man-centred Gospel is to help people by bringing them comfort, happiness, peace, prosperity, satisfaction and success.

Section Two: Aims

Particular aims followed by the partial man-centred Gospel are to help people: -

- 2.1** Feel better, (Proverbs 1.7).
- 2.2** To be positive in their thinking, (Job 28.28).
- 2.3** Solve their problems, (James 4.13-16).
- 2.4** To be materially successful, (John 15.8).
- 2.5** To become generous givers to wealthy evangelistic organisations, (Romans 12.1).
- 2.6** Avoid confronting troublesome questions, (Hebrews 10.25).

In short, this Gospel is shared with a view to helping people “*affirm themselves,*” by adopting “*a positive self-image,*” (John 15.13-14). It is this affirmation, which enables people to go on to realise their “*full potential*” and make a success of their lives.

Section Three: Method in Man-Centred Preaching

Main methods used in preaching a man-centred Gospel are: -

- 3.1** A use of “*chatty anecdotes*” – these entertain more than they instruct. Undue verbosity (which sometimes is combined with silly gimmicks) may be a problem, (Acts 17.22-31).
- 3.2** A random mention of a wide variety of Scripture passages which may not be related to one another or to the sermon in question. They are often used to lend a sense of respectability to a teaching, which is not really Scriptural, (Acts 17.11).
- 3.3** To “*work up the audience*” by generating an atmosphere of hysterical excitement. People are often pressurised into “*making a decision for Christ*” or even to receive the ‘*Baptism of the Holy Spirit*’ before they are ready for it, (Romans 2.19-20 and 1 Corinthians 2:14).
- 3.4** The giving out of emotional appeals that bypass the intellect, while an oversimplified teaching denies all divine attributes except love, (Isaiah 1.18).
- 3.5** To become actively involved in large spectacular ‘*Gospel*’ events, which promise great blessing and even “*mighty miracles.*” In such situations a “*cult of personality*” often surrounds the “*star*” preacher, with vast amounts of money having been spent upon a worldly kind of advertising. The sermons point more to the preacher than to Christ Himself, (Matthew 18.20).
- 3.6** The encouragement of unrealistic individual expectations in that participants may be encouraged to believe they can ‘*get their healing now,*’ enjoy a continuously ‘*victorious life*’ or ‘*name and claim*’ some sort of material blessing, (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). Any failure to attain those ‘*blessings*’ is attributed to ‘*a lack of faith*’ (Job 42:9-7).
- 3.7** The encouragement of unrealistic corporate expectations in that participants may be encouraged to believe they (or their churches) can ‘*transform the nations for Christ,*’ ‘*win the world for Jesus*’ or ‘*exercise dominion over through creating a new global order which will prepare humanity for the second coming.*’ They may also be encouraged to engage in loud forms of spiritual warfare in order to ‘*pull down spiritual strongholds*’ over particular localities. Biblical warnings of global persecution will be conveniently ignored or dismissed as being ‘*negative,*’ (Matthew 24:9b-10).

Sometimes the preaching may be long and protracted. This may be done with a view to “*opening up*” an audience for a final emotional appeal at the end of the performance or even to some form of spiritual experience, which is wrongly associated with the Holy Spirit. However, it is impossible to deny that neglecting the emotions in preaching can be just as bad. All that results in are ‘*dry as dust*’ sermons, which have little immediate relevance. Effective preaching must appeal to both the heart and the mind.

Section Four: Methods in Man-Centred Witnessing

Methods employed in witnessing to this Gospel, are in the main: -

- 4.1 An impulsive “*lunging into*” difficult situations without a great deal of forethought and prayer, (1 Peter 3.15).
- 4.2 Pious clichés, which are irrelevant and off-putting to hearers, (Revelations 3.8). One example of a pious cliché is the question, “*are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*”
- 4.3 The inaccurate use of the Scriptures, (Matthew 8.4).
- 4.4 The use of one-way monologues – refusing to listen to any opposing viewpoints, (Acts 26.1-23).
- 4.5 A tendency to try and manipulate an opportunity for witness, (2 Corinthians 1.12).

By using the methods mentioned above, all that happens is that people become more and more entrenched in their prejudices against Christianity. Followers of Jesus are dismissed as intolerant cranks. There is less responsiveness to genuine Gospel preaching, as the unbeliever simply has no means of knowing whether it's the right or wrong Gospel. Consequently, he or she puts the whole package together and throws it all in the bin.

Section Five: Effects of Man-Centred Sharing

After the initial emotional excitement has waned the effects of this Gospel are that:-

- 5.1 Tends to anaesthetise people against sin. Nominal Christianity is reinforced as people are discouraged from facing up to key personal issues. (Luke 18.13).
- 5.2 Produces instability. People fear that they can lose their salvation, because they have been taught that it lies completely in their own hands. There may also be considerable bitterness and disillusion as the blessings promised by the Gospel fail to materialise. At worst people (and even whole societies) may become “*Gospel hardened,*” Ecclesiastes 1.11).
- 5.3 Fuels human self-confidence, (Mark 9.24).
- 5.4 Indulges human self-interest and pride, (Acts 3.9).
- 5.5 Encourage an unhealthy and unquestioning acceptance of the preacher's authority and a disorderly, mindless form of worship (Philippians. 1.6).
- 5.6 Centres people's attention upon the personality of the “*super-star*” preachers.
- 5.7 Allows for a superficial exhibitionism and worldliness – a ‘*unity at all costs*’ ethos may be emphasised, (Romans 13.1-10).
- 5.8 Subtly distort the meaning of biblical terminology. Words like ‘*peace,*’ ‘*justice*’ and ‘*reconciliation*’ are given a meaning that differs from that provided in scripture
- 5.9 Encourages a frivolous excuse-making attitude to wrongdoing, (Hebrews 12.14).
- 5.10 Weakens the effect of local Christian groups by discrediting their witness and draining away much-needed resources to large Para-church organisations, (Titus 1.5-9).

5.11 Provokes scepticism in unbelievers and credulity in Christians, (Acts 22.18).

5.12 Can bring people into a form of spiritual bondage – especially in its wilder manifestations, which emphasise “*demon chasing*,” (Mark 1.22-28).

5.13 Can excite the powers of darkness into further activity by encouraging the use of such occult techniques as visualisation, (Luke 4.40-41).

Section Six: Concluding Comments

The overall characteristic of the ‘*incomplete*’ man-centred Gospel is its superficiality. Along with its casual attitude to truth, it fails to get to the heart of man’s problem (which is sin). In the end, its final effect is to cloud any real understanding of God or His Son, Jesus.

In all their Gospel sharing, Christians need to ask, “*What Gospel is it I am offering to people?*” Should they fail to ask such a question, then deception lies around the corner.