

Is the Gift of Healing for Today?

Miracles and Divine Healing

The subject of whether miracles and divine healings still occur today has been a controversial topic among many Christians and Christian groups. Often this disagreement has resulted in unnecessary and sometimes caustic rancor between those who advocate the continuation of the apostolic gifts of healing in the church today, and those who hold to the cessation of healing gifts with the close of the apostolic era. Those who insist that the gift of healing is for today usually base their belief on the erroneous teaching that physical healing was provided for in Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

Often, those who hold that the gifts of healing and miracles ended with the close of the apostolic age are accused of denying the supernatural. This is only rarely true. The vast majority of evangelicals affirm that God still heals and performs miracles in answer to prayer. He does so to reveal His glory. However, we would draw a distinction between the act of God healing someone instantaneously and the gift of healing – that is God healing someone through a human instrument.

The New Testament Role of Healing Gifts

While many passages on divine healing may be sighted from Scripture, the question remains as to their proper interpretation *in light of their context* as well as any inferences and conclusions drawn from those passages. The first question to be considered is, what was the role which miracles and divine healings played in the first century church, and is it still a viable role today? First and foremost, the gift of miracles and healing was given to confirm the validity of the apostolic messenger and his message. This can be seen from passages such as 2 Corinthians 12:12 where the apostle Paul lists signs, wonders, and miracles as one of the distinguishing marks of a true apostle. Also, in Romans 15:18-19, Paul identified miraculous signs as validating the gospel which he had preached to the Gentiles, resulting in their obedience to Christ. The role which miracles played in confirming the gospel message is also highlighted in Hebrews 2:3-4. As the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire, the radical transformation that it effected in the lives of Christians became proof enough for the claims of Christianity (2 Corinthians 3:2-3), and, by the close of the apostolic era, all gifts of miracles and healing appear to have ceased. This cessation of the gift of healing is verified by the

fact that Paul, who without question possessed the gift of healing at the beginning of his ministry (Acts 14:8-18; 19:11-12; 20:7-12; 28:7-9), was, toward the end of his ministry, unable to heal his friends Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30), Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23), and Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20). With the claims of Christianity no longer in need of external verification, there ceased to be any need for the miraculous gift of healing. This is an irrefutable fact of history. In fact, many charismatics admit that the gifts of healing and miracles did cease. So in answer to our question, is the authenticating function of miraculous gifts still a viable role today, the answer must be an unequivocal no. The burden of proof rests on the charismatic to show that Scripture is again in need of confirmation. This does not mean that God does not still heal today in answer to prayer. But as the apostolic age drew to a close, miraculous healings working through a human instrument ceased.

What Determines Truth?

The primary characteristic of charismatic teaching in all its various forms, be it Pentecostalism, Neo-Pentecostalism, signs and wonders, power evangelism, or Four Square, is the emphasis placed on experience as the ultimate determiner of truth. The burden of proof lies with the charismatic to demonstrate that his experience is in fact from God.

Either it is from God or it is not. There is no middle ground. Our experiences do not sit in judgment over God's Word. Rather our interpretation of our experiences must be subjected to the scrutiny of Scripture, since Scripture alone is the final authority and determiner of truth. The modern charismatic must show that the miracles and gifts of healing being seen today are *of the same nature* as those performed by the apostles in the New Testament. As we will see, there is little correspondence between the healings in the New Testament with the "healings" claimed by the modern charismatic movement.

In the New Testament, the gift of healing was given to a specific individual which enabled him to heal anyone at will. This is far different than healings performed by God in answer to prayer. The healings which were performed by these gifted men were always instantaneous, totally complete, and obvious to all who observed them. However, the "healings" claimed by charismatics are typically progressive (occurring over a period of weeks, months, or years), usually partial ("I was in a wheelchair, but now use crutches or a cane"), and unverifiable. The healings of the New Testament included demonstrable and confirmable illnesses such as men who had been crippled from birth (Acts 3:2-8; 14:8-10), whereas the "healings" claimed by charismatics are generally not demonstrable afflictions (lower back

pain, ringing in the ears, headache, emotional healing, etc.). The healings in the New Testament never failed and were not dependent upon the faith of the one receiving the healing (Acts 3:2-10). But today those claiming the gift of healing self-admittedly often fail. Typically they blame this on a lack of faith in the one seeking healing, or that the Holy Spirit, for some reason, decided not to heal the person. Either way the afflicted person is left totally devastated and feeling as though they are a second class Christian.

Another distinction of the healings performed by the apostles and those claimed by modern day faith healers is the healings performed by apostles were usually spontaneous and unannounced. The apostles never advertised weeks in advance they were conducting a "healing service".

There is no correspondence between the healings recorded in the New Testament with those claimed by modern healers. This does not mean that the Christian should not seek healing from God through their own fervent prayers and the prayers of the church.

As believers in Christ our primary aim in this life is to bring glory to God. Christians should realize that often times God is glorified more by our response to suffering than by the alleviation of that suffering. After all, it is the Christian who patiently endures

trials (James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:6-9) that stands out most in an unbelieving world, and has the greatest opportunity to give a defense for the hope that is within them (1 Peter 3:14-15).

Recommended reading:

The Healing Promise by Richard Mayhue

Is the Gift of Tongues for Today?

Many Christians assert that the biblical gift of tongues has reappeared in the church within the last one hundred years or so. The purpose of this article is to examine the claims regarding the gift of tongues made by the modern Pentecostal movement, and compare them with the Scriptural teaching on the subject. This is not done with the intent to disparage any group or individual, but rather to help clarify an often divisive issue and exalt the truth of God's Word. After all, no experience can truly be called "Christian" unless it is willing to be examined in light of God's Word.

The Modern Tongues Movement

In December of 1900, Charles Parham assigned his students at Bethel Bible College the task of answering the question, "What is the Bible evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost?" The students concluded that speaking in tongues was the biblical evidence and began to pray fervently for the experience. On the first of January 1901 at a prayer meeting, a student by the name of Agnes Ozman began speaking in tongues, and thus the modern Pentecostal movement was born. Ozman's experience is usually credited with establishing the validity of Parham's assertion that speaking in tongues was evidence of Spirit baptism. Until 1960,

tongues speaking was largely confined to the Pentecostal Church. But on April 3, 1960, Father Dennis Bennett, pastor of a large Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, announced to his congregation that he had spoken in tongues. This event is considered to mark the beginning of the spread of charismatic teaching into mainline denominations, and in recent years the largest increase in tongues speaking has been among Roman Catholics, especially in South America.

What is 'The Baptism of the Holy Spirit'?

Within the charismatic movement, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is considered to be a second encounter with God sometime after one's initial salvation, and is to be actively sought after by every believer. As a result of this second encounter, or 'second blessing' as it is sometimes called, the believer is launched to a different level of Christianity where he is empowered with gifts of the Holy Spirit and brought into a deeper relationship with Christ. The primary evidence that one has received this second blessing is the new ability to speak in tongues. Some more radical Pentecostals assert that if one does not speak in tongues, then one is not truly saved. The Bible, however, teaches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at the moment of salvation (John 7:38-39;

Romans 8:9-17; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4-5). It is an unrepeatable sovereign act of God which joins the believer to Christ and places him into the body of Christ. Every true believer, at the moment of conversion, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9), sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30), and empowered by the Spirit to live a life in obedience to Christ (Galatians 5:16-17, 22-26).

While it is true that every believer should desire a deeper and richer walk with Jesus, the Bible is clear as to how this is accomplished. A rich, fruitful relationship with Christ is not achieved by seeking ecstatic emotional experiences, such as speaking in tongues, but by mortifying our sinful desires and living in obedience to God's Word (Eph. 4:17-5:2; Col. 3:5-17; 1 John 1:6, 2:4-6).

In 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, the apostle Paul asks the Corinthian Christians a series of questions regarding the distribution of spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church was a church characterized by schism and spiritual one-upmanship (1 Cor. 1:11-12). One of the quarrels within the church was which spiritual gift was superior to the others. Paul had to remind the Corinthians that the purpose of spiritual gifts is for serving one another (12:7; cf. 1 Peter 4:10), and for the building up of the body of Christ, not for personal bragging rights as to who is the most spiritual. In 12:13 Paul reminds the Corinthians that

they “were all baptized into one body,” and they “were all made to drink of one Spirit.” However, in his series of questions concerning the distribution of spiritual gifts, Paul asks “All do not speak with tongues, do they?” (12:30). Because of the Greek construction of these questions, a negative answer is expected. So in answer to Paul’s question regarding tongues, the answer is, “No! All *do not* speak with tongues!” So, according to 1 Corinthians 12, all had been baptized with the Holy Spirit, but not all spoke in tongues. Therefore, speaking in tongues *cannot* be the sign of baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Acts chapter 2 records the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost. When the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit they all began speaking in other tongues (Acts 2:4). But verses 6 thru 11 of chapter 2 make it clear that these “other tongues” were known languages. The Greek word translated “language” in verse 6 is *dialekto*, the root of our word “dialect”. However, the tongues spoken by many in the charismatic movement have no connection with any known language, making it completely different than the gift of tongues recorded in the New Testament.

The NT Purpose of Tongues

Tongues were intended as a sign to unbelieving Israel (1 Corinthians 14:21-

22; cf. Isaiah 28:11-12) in order to demonstrate that God was now beginning a new work among the Gentiles. With the dawn of the church age, God was no longer revealing Himself exclusively through the nation of Israel, but to all people in all languages. The inclusion of the Gentiles into God’s plan of redemption marked a transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant (Eph. 2:11-22). However, once the period of transition was ended, there was no further need for the gift.

Tongues Will Cease

In 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul demonstrates the vanity of exercising spiritual gifts without love. Concerning the gift of tongues, Paul makes the astonishing statement that “if there are tongues, they will cease;” (13:8). The Greek verb translated “will cease” means “to cease permanently,” implying that when they do cease, they will never resume. However, the passage does not say *when* the gift of tongues would cease. Is there any biblical evidence to suggest that the gift of tongues has ceased? Indeed there is. First, tongues was a revelatory gift. With the close of the New Testament canon, no further revelation from God was to be forthcoming. By the end of the first century, the entire canon of Scripture was circulating throughout the churches; therefore the gift of tongues served no

further purpose. Second, as mentioned previously, tongues were the judicial sign from God of confirmed unbelief on the part of national Israel. When the judgment was completed, the need for this sign ceased. Third, Paul ranks tongues at the bottom of his list of spiritual gifts (1 Cor.12:30), indicating that it played an inferior role. Instead, he encourages the Corinthians to seek the “greater gift.” This greater gift is unfolded in chapter 14 and is identified as prophecy. As a lesser, and easily abused gift (1 Cor.14:4), tongues had limited usefulness in the church and was never intended to be a permanent part of the church.

The gift of tongues has ceased, just as the Apostle Paul said it would. The biblical gift of tongues is not for the church today.

Recommended reading:

Let The Bible Speak...About Tongues by Richard C. Schwab

Is The Gift of Prophecy for Today?

The question of whether God continues to speak to His church through modern prophecy is an issue that currently divides many Christians. This is a question of utmost importance for any believer. After all, if God is still giving revelation to His people today, then they must not ignore it. However, if the prophetic gifts ended with the last of the apostles, and God's people are to be led *exclusively* by God's written word, then they must reject any claims to further revelation. What is the nature of biblical prophecy? How can we tell the true from the false? And, most importantly, is this gift still operative in the church today? This article will help answer these questions.

The Nature of Prophecy

Are the prophetic gifts claimed by many today even remotely similar to those in the Bible? To answer this question we need to examine the main features of biblical prophecy. First, a prophet was one who spoke for God. The definitive text for the role of the prophet is the account of the commissioning of Moses and Aaron in **Ex. 4:10-17; 7:1-7**. Concerning this text, the great Princeton theologian, B.B. Warfield wrote:

Here in the most express words, Jehovah declares that He who made the mouth can be with it to teach it what to speak, and announces the precise function of a prophet to be that he is "a mouth of God," who speaks not his own, but God's words...In no case does a prophet put his words forward as his own words. (*The Works of B.B. Warfield*, Baker, 1981, vol.1, p.19)

So we see that a true prophet only spoke *God's words*. Second, the criteria for determining whether a prophet was truly speaking for God is given in **Deut. 18:15-22**. According to this text, a true prophet is known by the fact that *his entire prophecy comes true*, often within his lifetime (cf. Jer. 28:9), and a false prophet is marked out by unfulfilled prophecy. Notice that there is no margin for error, or partially fulfilled predictions. The penalty for a false prophet was death. Third, the messenger formula, "*Thus says the Lord*", is used hundreds of times by the prophets. The use of this formula informed the hearer that they were not merely receiving the words, impressions, or opinions of the messenger, but the very words of the one who sent him, be He God, or a pagan king (Num.22:15-17). The prophet clearly intends to bring his hearers face to face with God Himself. Finally, the divine authority of the prophet is seen by the judgment which falls upon those who ignore, reject, or oppose the words of God spoken through them. Egypt is devastated because Pharaoh rejects

God's command. Ahab is killed when he rejects the warning of Micaiah (1 Kgs.22:13-40). Stephen reviewed the pitiful history of Israel in Acts 7. Because of their rejection of the prophets, and ultimately their Messiah, judgment comes to Israel.

Prophecy in the New Testament

In recent years, many theologians have tried to assert that prophecy as practiced by the first century church underwent a significant change. One such immanent scholar Wayne Grudem has attempted to redefine New Testament prophecy.

Prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human – sometimes partially mistaken – report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind. (*The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, Crossway Books, 1988, p.14-15)

Does the New Testament share this reappraisal of the prophetic gifts? Let us see. The key features of Old Testament prophecy are also seen in the New Testament prophets. First, New Testament prophets, just like the Old Testament prophets, received divine revelation (1 Cor. 14:30; Eph.3:5; Acts 11:28; 21:10-11; all of Revelation), which was considered authoritative Scripture, i.e. the word of God (1 Tim.5:18; 2 Pet.1:20-21; 3:16). Second,

the purpose for testing a prophet's predictions in the New Testament, just as in the Old, was to distinguish the true from the false (Matt.7:15-20; 1 John 4:1-6). No margin for error is allowed. Third, the New Testament prophet also used the messenger formula, *Thus says the Holy Spirit* (Acts 21:11). The conclusion must be that the prophecy found in the New Testament is of the same essential nature as that found in the Old Testament. There is no foundation for the assertion that New Testament prophecy is held to a lesser standard.

The prophecy of both the Old and New Testaments is divinely inspired, and therefore inerrant. Nowhere in Scripture is prophecy a mixture of divine words and human speculation which is subject to error. How does modern day prophecy hold up when compared to this standard? Not very well – actually not at all. The prophecy of the Charismatic movement bears no resemblance to the infallible prophecy of God's Word. A few quotes from Charismatic leaders will illustrate this point:

Prophecy can be impure – our own thoughts or ideas can get mixed into the message we receive – whether we receive the words directly or only receive a sense of the message.
(Bruce Yocum, *Prophecy*, Word of Life, 1976, p.79)

The content of many prophecies is a mixture of divine and human origin.
(Clifford Hill, *Prophecy Past and Present*, Eagle, 1989, p.303)

Uncritical acceptance must not be given to the prophet's words...For although the prophet is the instrument of the Spirit of God he is not infallible, for he is still human and he may err. The discerning congregation must therefore be ready to correct him.
(Donald Bridge and David Phypers, *Spiritual Gifts and the Church*, Inter-Varsity, 1973, p.41)

Most charismatic teachers today would agree that contemporary prophecy is not equal to Scripture in authority...there is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements that are not to be obeyed or trusted.
(Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity, 1994, p.1055.

Were the prophecies of New Testament prophets to be taken with a grain of salt? When it came to Agabus' famine prophecy the early church did not think so. Rather, they immediately sought to provide relief (Acts 11:29). If modern prophecy is so unreliable, what use is it? Does it edify, or harm the local congregation? Much of it is incapable of being tested by Scripture because it deals either with current affairs or local congregational matters. The type of prophecy which these authors have in mind is, by any biblical standard, false prophecy, and the perpetrators of such are false prophets. Under the old covenant they would have faced the death penalty. One wonders how much prophecy would be taking place in the church today if the same penalty applied.

The greatest danger to the church posed by the charismatic idea of continuing prophecy is that it undermines the sufficiency of Scripture. It either implicitly or explicitly denies the profundity of the Bible to meet all our deepest needs. God's revelation is complete, "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The Christian needs no other revelation. Prophecy, along with other revelatory gifts, ceased with the close of the apostolic age.

Recommended reading:

Jim Thompson, *Prophecy Today*, Evangelical Press, 2008.

Territorial Spirits?

In recent years, the church has seen an increased interest in demonic activity, due in large part to an element within the charismatic movement involved in deliverance ministries. This preoccupation has given rise to a relatively new theology of “territorial spirits.” That is, demonic beings are thought to exercise control over certain geographic areas, making them virtually inaccessible to evangelism and missions. This theology finds its primary support from Daniel 10:10-21. In this passage a heavenly unnamed spiritual being is depicted contending with a demonic being known as “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” (v.13, 20). The determinative nature of this passage for adherents to the theology of territorial spirits is emphasized by Priest, Campbell, and Mullen:

All other passages which advocates of spiritual mapping, and spiritual warfare based on that mapping, have appealed to, *are read in the light of this passage* as well as in the light of anecdotes, native beliefs and demonic revelations. This passage is crucial. *If this passage is discovered not to teach the notion of demonic territoriality – the notion that demonic power is linked to and exercised over territories – then the other passages fail to persuade.*¹

¹ Robert J. Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford A. Mullen, “Missiologiical Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm,” in *Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues*, ed. Edward Rommen

Needless to say, a theology based solely on one highly disputed text should cause one to view the teaching of territorial spirits with much skepticism.

Daniel 10

In Daniel 10, the reader is introduced to two heavenly beings. The second is identified as the angel Michael, but the identity of the first is not revealed. The first point to be noticed from Daniel 10 is that these angelic beings do *not* rule over geographical regions, but rather *watch* over the people of God. For example, Michael is described in Dan.12:1 as “the great prince who stands guard over the sons of *your people*.” This underscores Michael’s protective role toward the *people* of Israel rather than a *geographical* territory. Given the parallel between Michael and the demonic princes of Persia and Greece (10:13, 20-21), it is reasonable to conclude that these demonic “princes” are over the *people* of Persia and Greece, and its rulers in particular, who oppose God’s will for Israel, rather than their geographical boundaries. The concept of territorial spirits is rooted in the cultures of the pagan nations which surrounded Israel (1 Kg.20:23, 28). It is also plain from Dan. 10:13 that the angelic messenger

(Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 23. (Emphasis added)

sent to Daniel was *not* delayed for twenty-one days by some sort of inability to overcome his demonic foe. Rather, he was delayed because he chose to remain and exercise his superior strength in order to prevent the prince of Persia from influencing the Persian government from enacting some sort of pogrom against the nation of Israel. It is clear from the context that the issue was political and ethnic, not territorial. In chapter nine, Daniel recognized that the time for Israel’s exile was drawing to a close, so he began praying for its restoration to the Promised Land. The political authorities however, influenced by the demonic enemies of Israel, opposed God’s plan for the nation. In all probability this opposition took the form of resending permission to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and its protective walls and gate (Ezra 4; Neh.4-6; Hag.1-2). One of Satan’s fundamental strategies is deception, both on an individual level (2 Cor.11:3,14), and a national level (Rev.20:3, 8). Thus it is quite rational to conclude that the primary goal of the demonic princes of Persia and Greece was the deception of these nation’s political and social structures rather than their geographical boundaries.

A second point to be noticed is that there is a substantial difference between Daniel’s prayer and what advocates of “territorial spirits” refer to as “strategic level intercession” whereby one seeks

the names of the demonic powers, their plans and functions, and employs their names in his prayer – a practice which has more in common with the occult than biblical Christianity (Deut. 18:9-14; 1 Sam. 28:6-7). In fact, there is no indication in the text that Daniel was even aware of the spiritual battle being waged during his three week session of praying and fasting. It was only after the fact that Daniel received any information regarding the struggle that had been taking place, and the identity of the combatants. Even then, the only proper name that is given to Daniel is the angel Michael's. As far as names are concerned, from a biblical perspective it would seem that the only significant names are the angelic. For demons, generic names are quite sufficient. Also, the information that was given to Daniel was delivered by means of direct supernatural revelation, not through anecdotal or experiential accounts, extraordinary spiritual gifts, or super-spiritual insight. Daniel was not attempting to cast out or pray against any demonic forces, much less territorial ones. *God never instructs believers to pray concerning spiritual demons.*

God Is Sovereign

The notion that a demon can exercise control over a geographical region, or that demons can establish a spiritual "strong-hold," over an area of

the globe, undermines the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and flatly contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture (Ps. 24:1; 47:7; 97:9; 135:6). Daniel's prayer was not focused on the cosmic warfare which he knew nothing about, but on the promises of God (Dan. 9:2-4; 10:12; cf. Jer.25:11; 29:10) and their imminent fulfillment.

Unfortunately, it is a tendency of the spiritual warfare theology to overlook the sovereignty of God in His use of the demonic realm. The Bible is replete with stories of where God used the demonic realm to accomplish His purposes. Whether it was for the purpose of chastisement as with King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14), and the incestuous member of the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:3-5), to prevent spiritual pride in Paul (2 Cor.12:7), or to bring about God's greatest expression of love to mankind, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus through the betrayal of a demonically possessed Judas (Jn. 6:70; 13:27), God is sovereign over the forces of darkness. How is one to know if the demonic forces they are opposing are not being used by God to accomplish His will? Perhaps this is why even angels are unwilling to pronounce judgment upon demons (Jude 9).

Rather than getting side tracked with attempts to identify and cast out demons, believers should be engaged in putting on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17) and proclaiming the gospel of

Jesus Christ, all the while trusting in the sovereignty of God to work through His Word to bring all His elect to salvation. To do otherwise may put one in the position of acting against God and sowing seeds of confusion within the church, something that the forces of Satan delight in doing.

Recommended Reading:

Demons: A Biblically Based Perspective
Alex Konya: Regular Baptist Press, 1990.

Prosperity Theology: Does God Want You To Be Rich?

One offshoot of charismatic theology, the Word of Faith Movement, claims that it is God's will for every Christian to be materially and financially prosperous. Not all who embrace charismatic theology accept this premise. In fact, most charismatic leaders reject it as unbiblical. This teaching, however, is flourishing in many churches and parachurch ministries, dominates Christian television, and involves millions of people who, to varying degrees and often without realizing it, have bought into the destructive lie of prosperity theology. As such, it is a topic which needs to be addressed.

Who is Teaching What?

What are prosperity preachers teaching?

"Do you want a hundredfold return on your money? Give and let God multiply it back to you. Invest heavily in God; the returns are staggering. Every man who invests in the Gospel has a right to expect the staggering return of one hundredfold." (Kenneth Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, p. 67)

"Poverty is caused by sin and disobeying the Word of God." (John Hagee, Praise-A-Thon, TBN, April 16, 1993)

"Cash is king! The hundred fold works. 'If I give \$50 you mean God will give me \$5000?' Yes! If

you give \$1000 in the offering this morning, will God give you \$100,000 by tomorrow? Yes! (Jesse DuPlantis "The Choke Hold," The Church Channel, January 24, 2004)

"Poverty is from the devil and that God wants all Christians prosperous." (Benny Hinn, TBN, November 6, 1990)

It has been said that the devil will put a teaspoon of truth in an ocean of lie. This is what makes heresy so dangerous; it contains an element of truth. What makes prosperity theology seem credible is that the Old Testament often links material wealth to God's blessing (Gen.13:1-7; 1 Kg.3:13; Job 42:10-17). But God also warns of the dangers of wealth (Deut. 8:7-18), as well as noting that sometimes the wicked prosper more than the righteous (Ps.73). Solomon was praised by God when he asked for wisdom instead of riches (2 Chron.1:11-12). Prosperity preachers never seem to quote verses such as:

Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens. (Prov.23:4-5 NASB)

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men – a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction. (Eccl. 6:1-2)

We live in a culture which is materialistic and narcissistic to the extreme, and now we have a theology to accommodate our greed. If material wealth is a sign of God's approval, then despots such as Hitler, as well as drug lords, and immoral rock stars are on God's A-list. And if, as prosperity preachers assert, poverty is a result of sin, then Jesus, the apostles, and Paul must have been wretches. Jesus had no home (Mt. 8:20), and those who would follow Him must be prepared to give up everything (Mt. 16:24-25). Paul suffered the loss of all things in order to follow Christ (Phil.3:7-8; 2Cor.4:11-13). The Christian life is the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice, not the jet-setting high life.

On Whose Authority?

Prosperity theology is not known for its accurate interpretation of Scripture. Its methodology is highly subjective and arbitrary. Leaders habitually appeal to extra-biblical revelation received directly from God to support their teachings. If their teaching conflicts with Scripture, then the preacher usually assures his audience that he has it on good authority, directly from God, that *his* teaching is the right one. By comparing their "revelations" with the Word of God, one finds that the source is all too human. Passages are frequently pried from their historical context and manipulated to fit the prosperity message.

Not only does prosperity theology deny the sufficiency of Scripture, it implicitly rejects the sovereignty of God. Instead of man existing to serve God, God exists to serve man by granting him his every demand, provided the demand is accompanied by sufficient faith. God is relegated to a divine butler who is obligated to fulfill our every desire.

God or Man-centered?

In the book of Job, Satan asks God, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1:9). Unfortunately many within Christendom seek God, not for Himself, but for the fringe benefits they think He offers. Prosperity theology envisions God as a tool to be used and manipulated, and as a means to a worldly, materialistic end. At its core, prosperity theology is man centered, seeking the exaltation of man, not God. We make all the demands and God provides all the service. Apparently God's reason for existing is to give us what we want. It encourages self-indulgence, not self sacrifice. It foments covetousness, not contentment. The faith of less prosperous believers is called into question, and they have heavier burdens placed upon them.

Prosperity or Perversion?

The Apostles Paul and Peter had hard words for those who supposed that the gospel was a means to material gain (2

Peter 2:2, 3; 1 Tim.6:3-6). The Bible tells us to be content with food and shelter, prosperity preachers say otherwise. The love of money and riches is condemned by God, these teachers praise it (1 Tim.6:8-10). Peter warned of false teachers who "in their greed they will exploit you with false words," and "entice by fleshly desires" (2 Pet.2:3, 18). These purveyors of prosperity pray on the desperate, the gullible, and, for the most part, the uneducated. They offer a get rich quick scheme with little or no effort on our part. Just send your money *to them*, (not your local church), and presto-changeo, you are on easy street. Prosperity theology totally changes the motivation for Christian service and giving. The motivation becomes one of tit-for-tat, *quid pro quo*, give to get, rather than a means of worship. I was once watching a fund-raising event for the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) where the viewers were being asked to phone in and pledge their debt. If they sent TBN the amount of their debt, then, they were promised, God would pay off their debt. All backed up by viewer testimonials of course! This is immoral, exploitive, and predatory.

The Christian View of Wealth

When compared to the rest of the world, the poorest of Americans are wealthy. When we are faithful in our giving, God

is faithful to bless us. This is an undeniable teaching of Scripture (2 Cor. 9:6). However, God does not bless us with wealth in order to live extravagant lifestyles, as do all the prosperity preachers. If we faithfully sow the seed which God has given us, He will cause it to multiply *so that we might have more to sow*, not consume (2 Cor. 9:8-10). The means which God has ordained for the growth of His church, not our personal portfolios, is the faithful stewardship of his servants. Prosperity theology is not Christian, and the message it preaches is "another gospel." The Christian's true riches await him in heaven.

Recommended Reading:

Money, Prosperity, and Eternity by Randy Alcorn, Tyndale House, 2003.

Does the Church Need “Power Evangelism”?

“Power evangelism” is the term coined by the founder of the charismatic Third Wave Movement, John Wimber, to distinguish his evangelistic method from traditional evangelism, or what he disparagingly refers to as ‘programmatically evangelism’. According to Wimber, ‘power evangelism’ is evangelism which “comes with a demonstration of God’s power through signs and wonders,” and “is preceded and under girded by demonstrations of God’s presence, and frequently results in groups of people being saved.” (*Power Evangelism: Revised Version*, John Wimber and Kevin Springer, HarperCollins, 1992, 78). These demonstrations consist of words of knowledge – which bear more resemblance to clairvoyance - healing, prophecy, and deliverance from evil spirits. Traditional gospel centered evangelism it is argued, may result in conversions, but since these new believers do not *experience* dramatic signs, there is something missing from their conversion experience, resulting in incomplete, weak, and powerless Christians. Since its inception in the mid-1980’s, power evangelism has captured the attention of millions of Christians worldwide. But is evangelism which relies upon the miraculous to prompt saving faith biblical evangelism? Is a believer’s assurance based on witnessing the miraculous? Is power

evangelism scripturally based, or experientially based?

Do Signs Prompt Saving Faith?

When the scribes and Pharisees demanded that Jesus perform an attesting miracle, He did not view it as an opportunity to prompt saving faith in his antagonists. Rather, He labeled the desire for further signs as the mark of “an evil and adulterous generation” (Mt 12:38-39). Compare this with the blessing which Jesus pronounced on “those who have not seen and yet believe” (Jn 20:29). The demand for a sign was not limited to just the Pharisees. Sometimes it came from his many followers. The request seems to have been prompted by more than mere curiosity, for they ask, “What then do You do for a sign, that we may see, *and believe* You? What work do You perform?” (Jn 6:30). The crowd asked this *after* they had just witnessed the feeding of the 5000 (Jn 6:1-14). Jesus made it clear that the crowd was motivated to follow Him because He had met their immediate desires, i.e. being fed (Jn 6:26), not because they desired salvation. They did not look to Jesus for salvation, but for a fish dinner. The desire to see signs is vigorously repudiated by Jesus. The clearest reason for this is given in Luke 16:19-31.

In this parable, the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his five brothers of the certainty of God’s judgment (16:27-28). “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them’” (29). But the rich man questions the sufficiency of God’s Word. His brothers need a sign (30). Abraham refutes the rich man’s assertion, saying, “if they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead” (31). Signs and wonders are incapable of prompting saving faith. The persuasiveness of the gospel is not enhanced by the addition of signs and wonders. Consider the response of the Pharisees to Jesus’ raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:53).

According to Jesus, the Pharisee’s unbelief was not due to a lack of signs, wonders, or revelation, but of their failure to believe what had already been revealed (Jn 5:31-47). Their failure to believe Jesus was the result of their rejection of Old Testament teaching concerning the Messiah (37-47).

In the purpose statement to his gospel, the Apostle John indicates that he has presented sufficient evidence to lead someone to saving faith:

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; *but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that*

believing you may have life in His name. (Jn 20:30-31, NASB, Emphasis added)

John does not say that his readers needed to have personally witnessed Jesus' miracles in order to prompt saving faith. The testimony recorded in Scripture is sufficient. The demand for convincing signs did not end with Jesus' death and resurrection. In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul defended the sufficiency of the gospel against Jews who asked for signs (1:22). Rather than capitulate to their demands, Paul simply preached the gospel of Christ crucified (1:23; 2:1-2).

The testimony of both the Old and New Testament affirms that its *documentation* of signs and wonders is sufficient to lead anyone to saving faith. Those who deny the sufficiency of the Bible's witness are judged by Scripture as unbelievers. Power evangelism denies the sufficiency of Scripture. In the scheme of power evangelism Scripture is not sufficient to bring about conversion (Rm 1:16), to produce mature Christians (Jn 17:17), for effective evangelism (Acts 8:30-39), nor is the promise of Christ's return sufficient comfort for those who are suffering. Assurance of salvation does not come from experiencing the miraculous, but by belief in, and faithful obedience to God's revealed Word. (2 Pt 1:1-11).

Historically, it is not the absence of signs and wonders that has been a

stumbling block, it is the message of the cross, and Jesus' demands of discipleship which have caused people to reject the gospel (Jn 6:28-66; 1 Cor 1:23-24). Unfortunately, it is these key elements of the gospel, along with a call to repentance that is often missing from power evangelism.

A Different Gospel

It should be obvious that any evangelism which is dependent upon signs and wonders for its effectiveness is inherently unbiblical. When signs and wonders become the basis for evangelism, the true focus of the gospel - the death and resurrection of Jesus, the need for repentance, and submission to Christ's lordship - take a back seat. The object of faith becomes the signs and wonders, not the Savior, and a mystical, nebulous Jesus is substituted for the historical Jesus. The object of saving faith must be Jesus Christ, not self-serving signs and wonders. The gospel, not signs and wonders, "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rm 1:16).

Experience Over Truth

Despite its claims of being biblical, power evangelism is experiential and pragmatic, not biblically based. Personal experience becomes the basis for reality, not the teaching of Scripture.

The focus on experience as determinative is made abundantly clear by reading the testimonies on any power evangelism web site. Experience, not the Bible, determines power evangelism's theology and practice.

Advocates of power evangelism are eager to point to the rapid church growth which their method seems to produce. Results are used as proof of its legitimacy. But when what works conflicts with the Bible's teaching, pragmatism usually wins out.

Do not be fooled by the dramatic claims of power evangelism. The only true test of authenticity is whether a person's teaching conforms to the Word of God. The claims of power evangelism are diametrically opposed to the teaching of Scripture and deny the sufficiency of Scripture to change hearts and minds. Let us be good Bereans (Acts 17:11).

Recommended reading:

Signs & Wonders and Evangelicals, Edited by Robert Doyle, Lancer Books, 1987.

Demonology and Spiritual Warfare: Can the Devil Make You Do It?

Spiritual warfare is a reality of the Christian life (2Cor.10:3-4). But some who engage the enemy have gone to extremes, focusing on the enemy rather than the Ally. Is spiritual warfare that focuses on demons biblical? For years, many involved with charismatic spirituality and deliverance ministries have asserted that Christians can be inhabited by demons. But more recently, this belief has overflowed the banks of charismatic streams and spilled into non-charismatic circles; despite the lack of biblical evidence. Christians are encouraged to exercise the same authority as Jesus over the demonic realm by rebuking and binding demons, many of which are associated with specific vices such as smoking, pornography, overeating, alcoholism, and drug abuse to name just a few. The result of this teaching is an unhealthy and unscriptural fixation with the demonic rather than on Christ. Also, ascribing particular vices to demonic influences virtually absolves a person from personal responsibility for their behavior and promotes a victim mentality. In addition, referring to personal vices as “having a spirit of lust, greed, covetousness”, or whatever, redefines sin. Repentance is replaced with deliverance.

Charismatic Demonology

Charismatic theology adheres to a demonology that places Satan in a position almost equal with God, and who is in a constant struggle with God for dominion over the world and lives of humans. Satan is the head of all evil forces, especially demons, which affect all aspects of human life. These messengers of Satan, which are to be found everywhere, are responsible for all illness, immorality, misfortunes, and anything else that is detrimental to human happiness. This theology seems to assume that God intended humanity to be free from suffering, and, in many cases, the everyday struggle with one’s own sin nature is confused with demonic activity. Therefore any intrusion of pain and suffering into one’s life must be the result of being blindsided by the devil and his minions. Misfortune means that one is being robbed of the God given right to happiness by evil forces. This philosophically dualistic view of life is pagan in origin and makes it possible for all vices and misfortunes to be accounted for by demonic activity from which one can be delivered.

A Theology of Fear

Radical charismatic demonology thrives on and is perpetuated by fear. The constant threat posed by the forces of darkness provides the primary reason

why one must belong to a Charismatic church. Only here will a person receive the spiritual power to combat the minions of Satan. The only cure offered for this demonic domination is the power derived from the Holy Spirit and invoking the name of Jesus. Thus, without the devil and the fear engendered by him, Jesus and His church would be irrelevant, making the efficacy of God dependent upon Satan. This is indeed an affront to God’s sovereignty, omnipotence, and self-sufficiency.

There is no doubt that the Bible links all sin to some degree of demonic influence (1 Jn 3:8-12; 5:19; Eph 2:2; Jn 14:30), but not all sin is directly caused by Satan. Demonic activity may be a factor in almost all sin, especially that which opposes the work of God in the world, but the emphasis of the New Testament is on overcoming the influence of indwelling sin (Rm 12:2; Gal 5:16-17; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5-17; Jm 1:13-15), not the influence of demons.

Can a Christian be Demon Possessed?

Those involved in deliverance ministries list several reasons why a Christian may be subject to demonic possession: unconfessed sin, persistent rebellion, involvement in false teaching, child abuse, a dysfunctional home life, ancestral involvement in the occult, sexual sins, or demonic transference

through sexual relations. Especially vulnerable are those who deny that Christians can be demon possessed, because we are under the “deception” that we are immune. And the list could be enlarged. In fact, the list is so comprehensive, one wonders if any Christian is exempt. Not one, however, of the above reasons can be deduced from Scripture. There is simply no Scriptural evidence of Jesus or an apostle ever casting a demon out of a believer. All of Jesus’ exorcisms were performed on unbelievers, so it is indeed curious that most modern deliverance ministries, which claim to model themselves after Jesus’ ministry, focus on freeing Christians, and yet give so little attention to demon possessed unbelievers.

The Christian wages war on three fronts, the world, the flesh, and the devil. As such, it is essential to know the enemy and to distinguish between demonic *possession* and demonic *influence*. The Bible is clear that only unbelievers are subject to demon possession, while both believers and unbelievers may be demonically influenced. The biblical concept of possession is clearly an indwelling in which the personality and body is actually demonically controlled (Mt 8:28-31;12:22; Mk 9:17-18; Acts 16:16-18). Influence, however, refers to attacks from without through pressure, intimidation, and temptation, and may be

substantial. This explains the believers need to “put on the full armor of God” (Eph 6:10-17), to resist the devil (Jm 4:7), and to not give the devil any opportunity (Eph 4:27).

The very nature of salvation precludes any possibility of a demon inhabiting a true Christian. The Christian has been sovereignly regenerated, sealed, indwelt, and filled by the Holy Spirit, placed “in Christ” (Rm 6:1-7), never to lose their salvation. It is impossible for a demon to inhabit the same body in which the Holy Spirit dwells. To contend otherwise is a direct affront to the sovereignty of God in salvation and over the forces of darkness.

Biblical Spiritual Warfare

Due to the faulty demonology of charismatic theology, many Christians today are dominated by concerns about the devil and his minions, and stunted in their sanctification, rather than living fruitful, victorious lives focused on Christ. God has delivered every Christian from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col 1:13). Jesus has vanquished all evil cosmic powers, they derive their very existence from Him, and do not act independently of Him (Col 2:10, 15). From the highest to the lowest, all are subject to Him (Col 1:16). The Devil is God’s devil. The believer, however, is not to be ignorant of the

Devil’s schemes (2 Cor 2:11; Eph 6:11). Our enemy always tempts by means of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (Gen 3:6; Mt 4:1-11; 1 Jn 2:16). Demonic influence may take many forms, but all temptation falls into one of these three categories. The Christian faces a formidable foe who strives to nullify any future effectiveness we may have for God’s kingdom. To prevent becoming a casualty in the spiritual battle, and to be useful and victorious in this life, the Christian must arm himself with the panoply of prayer (Eph 6:10-20), faith (1 Jn 5:4), and the Word of God (Mt 4:4, 7, 10), combined with an understanding of the enemies tactics (2 Cor 2:11), all the while realizing that our ultimate victory is found in Jesus Christ.

Recommended Reading:

Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today by Merrill F. Unger, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1994.

The Myth of the ‘Carnal Christian’

Beginning a little over a hundred years ago a new breed of Christian began populating the church pews of North America. This new class of Christian was, and continues to be propagated by teachers who promote the erroneous assertion that there are three classes of men, - the unconverted man, the “carnal Christian”, and the “spiritual Christian”. This article will contend that dividing Christians into two separate classes is unbiblical, and will seek to demonstrate the dangerous implications and contemporary results of this teaching.

Before undertaking the discussion of the carnal Christian theory, it must be understood what is *not* being said in this article. It is not being denied that Christians can, and do act and think in a carnal manner. In fact just the opposite is true. Every Christian acts and thinks in a carnal way to one degree or another in some area(s) of his/her life. Not all are at the same level of spiritual maturity, and there are many degrees of sanctification (2Pet.1:8). However, whether or not a Christian behaves in a carnal fashion at various times in his/her life is not the question under consideration. The issue is, does the Bible separate men into three categories? Or, to be more specific, does the Bible provide for two classes of Christians?

The Origin of the Myth

The pervasiveness of the carnal Christian teaching can be attributed to three major influences. For many years the teaching of three classes of man has been popularized in the notes of the *Schofield Reference Bible*. Then in 1918 Lewis Sperry Chafer published *He That Is Spiritual* in which he promoted the concept that 1 Corinthians 2:15-3:3 describes two classes of Christians, carnal and spiritual. Finally, for many years Campus Crusade for Christ utilized a tract depicting three circles, each representing a different class of man, with the last two being the carnal Christian and the spiritual Christian respectively.

As is evident from the *Schofield Bible* notes and Chafer’s book, this doctrine is built on a misinterpretation and wrong application of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. This passage is set in the context of petty squabbling and one-up-man-ship within the Corinthian church. The problems of this church flowed from one source, the carnality of its members. It is important to remember how Paul first addresses the Corinthians. In chapter one he refers to them as “sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (2), they were the recipients of God’s grace (4), they were enriched in everything (5), and they were “not lacking any gift” (6). The confusion rests on the interpretation of the adjective “fleshly” in 1 Cor. 3:3. The

Greek term *sarkikoi* and its Hebrew counterpart *basar* often refers to man’s frailty, fallibility, and fallen nature (Rm.7:14), and such is its use in this passage. Never is it used to distinguish one class of Christian from another. The old fleshly nature is not eradicated when God brings us to salvation (Rm.7:16-20), this is why we eagerly anticipate the redemption of our bodies (Rm.8:23). Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for their spiritual immaturity and carnal behavior *in one area of their lives*, not for failing to live up to a higher form of Christianity. Later on in his letter, the apostle praised the Corinthians for holding firmly to the traditions which he had taught them (11:2). Clearly their lives were not characterized by a form of carnality that made them indistinguishable from an unbeliever. The Apostle Paul only knew two classes of men which he delineates in 1 Cor. 2:14-15. The *natural* man is a person who is devoid of the Spirit of God, whereas the *spiritual* man understands “the things of the Spirit of God” (v.14), even if incompletely. He may be a babe in maturity and his faith may be flabby from lack of exercise, but there is discernable fruit in his life which confirms a genuine conversion (1 Cor. 1:6).

True from False

Another major error of this teaching is that it fails to distinguish between true saving faith and false, spurious faith.

False faith is belief, a mental assent to the facts of the gospel, without a changed heart. This type of specious faith is illustrated throughout the Bible; from the nation of Israel, who honored God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him (Is. 29:13), to the hypocritical Pharisees (Mt. 23), to the people who sought Jesus only for the temporal benefits (Jn. 6:26). Many flee to Jesus only when faced with the consequences of their sin, instead of seeking to be cleansed from the sinfulness of their sin. The “carnal Christian” theology assumes that all who make a profession of faith are genuine believers, regardless of any evidence to the contrary. Those who fail to live and act like Christians are relegated to the second class rank of “carnal Christian” when in fact they may not be true believers at all. Indeed, the true believer will struggle with sin and experience growing pains in the process of sanctification. If one does not experience these growing pains, it is unlikely that one possess a genuine faith. And this is the real tragedy of this teaching; it provides many people who are not truly Christians with a false sense of security that they are actually true believers. To delude people into thinking they are Christians when they are not must rank among the most heartless, evil, and unloving actions perpetrated by man. As long as those who have been misled by this teaching continue to believe it, they

will never seek a true salvation. The short epistle of 1 John was composed by the apostle to give his readers the assurance that they were genuine Christians (1 Jn 5:13). Contrary to the teaching of carnal Christianity, the apostle John stresses that a true believer does not live a lifestyle of habitual sin (1 Jn 3:7-10). The writer of the book of Hebrews equates saving faith with obedience to Jesus (Hb 5:9), and affirms that for the true believer in Jesus, holiness is not an option (Hb 12:14). Anyone who does not have a genuine heartfelt desire to be obedient and pleasing to God forfeits any right to an assurance of their salvation and seriously calls into question the validity of their faith (2 Cor. 5:9).

A third fault in the ‘carnal Christian’ teaching is that it virtually excludes the necessity of repentance in the conversion experience. This is implied by the inference that demonstrable change in the life of the convert is not a requirement of conversion, and that one can continue to live in the same state of sin as before his conversion. This runs contrary to all sound apostolic teaching. The apostle Paul pointed to the radical change in the lives of the Corinthians as evidence of their salvation (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The call to genuine repentance was an integral part of the ministries of John the Baptist (Mt.3:2), Jesus Christ (Mt.4:17; Lk.24:47), and the early church (Acts 2:38, 20:20-21). When

repentance is presented as optional, or the mark of a higher, more spiritual class of believer, the consequence of sin (i.e. separation from God) is no longer seen as an obstacle to a saving relationship with God. This low view of sin is not new in the history of Christianity. It is the old doctrine of Antinomianism² dressed up in a brand new garb. Paul dealt with this misuse of grace when he asked the rhetorical question, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase (Rm.6:1)?” For the teachers of carnal Christianity, Paul’s emphatic, “May it never be (6:2)!” has been replaced with, “Yes, you can. You’re just a carnal Christian.”

The most serious error of the ‘carnal Christian’ teaching is that it minimizes the efficacy of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, along with the demands of discipleship. Carnal Christianity also divorces sanctification from justification, something the Bible emphatically contradicts (Phil.1:6; Jude 24;), and it implicitly denies the Bible’s warnings of

² Antinomianism is the belief that the moral law is nullified through faith, and that faith alone is sufficient for salvation. The term was coined by Martin Luther to describe the views of Johannes Agricola. However, the concept of antinomianism is addressed by James in his epistle (Jm 2:14). The implied answer to his rhetorical question, if faith devoid of works can save, is obviously, No! Faith and works are opposite sides of the same coin. The New Testament never defends or promotes antinomianism.

living for the flesh (Rm. 8:12-14; Gal. 6:7-8). Through the cross of Christ, the believer has been set free from the power of sin and death (Rm. 6:20-22, 8:2). The false gospel of carnal Christianity completely misses the import of the cross. The gospel which Jesus preached calls for a complete denial of self succeeded by a habitual pattern of following after Christ (Lk. 14:27). Some theologians have tried to soften Jesus' demands for discipleship by drawing a distinction between being a disciple of Christ and a believer, making the demands for a mere believer less stringent than those of a disciple.³ However, the Bible makes no such distinction. The necessity of cross-bearing as a prerequisite for true discipleship was given to the multitudes in Mark 8:34, indicating that these conditions apply to all, not just an elite class of believers. The call to cross-bearing is a call to submission to the One to whom we were in rebellion. Thus the teaching of carnal Christianity has fostered one of the most damaging misconceptions of what constitutes a true believer. This doctrine teaches that one can accept Jesus as Savior, yet treat submission to His lordship as optional. Often the appeal is made to the 'carnal Christian' to "make Jesus the

³ Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1971), 25.

Lord of your life." What these teachers fail to realize is that Jesus *is* Lord. The only question is if one will submit to His lordship or not. Jesus cannot be divided. He is both Lord and Savior (Acts 2:36). One cannot have Jesus as Savior and refuse to submit to Him as Lord. The Bible has strong warnings for those who would attempt to undermine the lordship of Jesus and turn God's grace into a license to sin (2 Pet.2:1-3; Jude 4).

The Tragic Consequences

The 'carnal Christian' gospel is the consequence of a shallow, numbers driven, man-centered evangelism which seeks to gain converts at any cost, even at the expense of men's eternal souls, and a faulty methodology of evangelism. This modern model of evangelism has replaced genuine repentance and saving faith, manifested in a changed life and followed up with consistent discipleship, with a "decision for Christ" (which in itself is a wholly unbiblical terminology). As a result, "decisions" are treated as if they are real conversions, despite any evidence of a work of the Holy Spirit in the person's life, resulting in countless numbers of people who are left with the false assurance they are genuine Christians. The only cure for the false gospel of carnal Christianity is a return to the biblical model of evangelism. Only then will people learn that it is not enough to merely profess

belief in Jesus (Mt.7:21; Jm. 2:19-20), but will realize that any profession of faith must be backed up with biblical evidence that one has received a changed heart. The false gospel of carnal Christianity has swept modern Christendom, creating one of the greatest mission fields today; the local church.

Recommended reading:

The Gospel According to Jesus by John MacArthur. Zondervan, 1994.

What Should We Think of 'The Carnal Christian'? by Ernest C. Reisinger. Banner of Truth Trust, 1978.