

The Invincible Gospel and the Modern Evangelical lie

By Richard M. Bennett

By far the most dramatic episode in my life was the accident I had in 1972 in Port of Spain. I fell down the steps of the home of a family that I knew, and I fell in such a way as to damage my spine. I was unconscious and close to death for three days in the hospital. When I did regain consciousness, I was in great pain. A neurologist explained the cause of the pain to me one month later while I was recuperating in a nursing home. He told me that I had damaged some sections of my spine, thereby disturbing the whole metabolism of my nervous system. Three months later, I was released from the nursing home. It was at this point in my life that I began to really search in the Scriptures for the message of salvation.

I boasted at the time that I was not conscious of any mortal sin in my life, yet, had I died on that eventful day, I did not have any assurance that I would have been with the Lord. While I had always been quite devout in all my religious exercises, I had no distinct peace with God. The next fourteen years I spent searching the Scriptures to understand how man is made right with God. I compared Catholic teaching to the Scriptures and I listened to some famous Evangelists on both short-wave radio and medium wave radio stations. I sent to England and the United States for some of tracts by Evangelists. This aspect of my search was quite frustrating. What I found in many radio messages and pamphlets was quite similar to what I already knew in the Catholic Church. I read the Bible, however, in a personal way each day in search for an answer to the question: how is one right before the all Holy God? I made some quite interesting discoveries that I want share with you. They came as a great surprise to me because what I found in the Scriptures, I neither heard on the radio nor found in the Evangelistic tracts. The tracts, for the most part, told me the amount of dedication or commitment I needed in order to make a decision for Christ. In a similar way, the evangelists on the radio told me about dedication and “how to accept Jesus into my heart”.

Wrestling for the answer

After an agonizing search of many years, I discovered that the first thing that must be understood biblically about the Gospel is that it is “*concerning Jesus Christ our Lord.*”¹ While the Gospel is proclaimed to all, it is not about us or about anything that happens in us. It concerns what Jesus Christ did and His death and resurrection.

I found out also that the Gospel is an historic fact. Biblical faith is not concerned with recommending techniques, whether mystical or ethical. Rather, the Bible proclaims the fact that God has, in concrete historical fact, saved all His people from destruction. The Gospel “*by which ye are saved*”² is regarding the finished and complete work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The God before whom we are saved

What seemed to be totally missing from modern Evangelical circles was “the knowledge of the Holy”. The Bible defines knowledge as the awareness of All Holy One, “*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.*”³ “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*”⁴

How could I begin to see that I even needed to be put right with God until I asked the question, “*who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy.*”⁵ I saw that unless one under-

¹ Romans 1:3

² I Corinthians 15:1-4

³ Proverbs 9:10

⁴ I John 1:5

stands something of God's holiness, there is no reason to desire the perfect righteousness of Christ in salvation. One verse in particular really challenged my heart to continue to seek, "*who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*"⁶ God can no more stop being holy than He can cease to be! As His Word proclaims, "*the LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*"⁷ and "*Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne.*"⁸ Consider for a moment this essential character of God—for unless we come to terms with God as holy, we can never have any peace with Him, and our religion is meaningless.

The finale of my years of searching

After fourteen years of searching, I discovered that right standing is God's gift to the believer, which is credited to him based on Christ's finished work on the Cross.⁹ I saw that right standing is God's righteous judgment of the believer, declaring him both guiltless in regard to sin, and righteous in regard to his moral standing in Christ before the Holy God. This judgment by God is legally possible because of Christ's vicarious perfect life and sacrifice. Right standing is first and foremost God's legal judgment of the believer, in the words of the Apostle, "*therefore as by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto right standing of life.*"¹⁰ How I understood this truth was especially in studying the chapter three of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans.¹¹

Right standing is in Christ's faithfulness

The Apostle Paul loudly proclaims, "*but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.*"¹² Righteousness of God is that perfect faithfulness to the law of God in heart and life, which the holiness of God requires. This, the Apostle enthusiastically announces, is now established—for **Christ's** faithfulness is revealed! Before God's all holy nature, sin had to be punished and true righteousness established. This has been accomplished in the faithful obedience of the Lord Christ Jesus to live perfectly under the law, which includes His perfect sacrifice on the cross. The Apostle continues, "*even the righteousness of God which is by [the] faith[fulness] Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.*"¹³ The great news is that this absolute faithfulness of Christ Jesus under the Law now rests upon the believer. He actually possesses it, wearing it as a robe, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD...for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.*"¹⁴

Authorized identification between Christ and His people

Romans 3:21-22 is showing in legal terms how exactly the true believer is identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. God has provided Christ's righteousness to sinners who believe. Thus, when one understands that

⁵ Revelation 15:4

⁶ Exodus 15:11

⁷ Psalm 145:17

⁸ Psalm 97:2

⁹ Romans 4:5-8, II Corinthians 5:19-21, Romans 3:21-28, Titus 3:5-7, Ephesians 1:7, I Corinthians 1:30-31, Romans 5:17-19

¹⁰ Romans 5:18

¹¹ I spent much time also studying Ephesians, Philippians and Isaiah 53.

¹² Romans 3:21

¹³ Romans 3:22 There are several passages in which faithfulness of the Lord is mentioned. In each case, the name of Jesus Christ is in the genitive case indicating that faithfulness is a character quality that He possesses. Galatians 2:16 is an example of this usage, "*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith[fulness] of Jesus Christ.*" Knowing that the law must be fulfilled for God to declare a person righteous, the faithfulness of Christ must be also understood as applying specifically to this context.

¹⁴ Isaiah 61:10

the faithfulness of Christ is vicariously applied to the sinner by a one time gracious act of God alone¹⁵, he realizes that Christ satisfied the law on his behalf. The Scriptures teach that Christ was, in a strict and exact sense, the **representative** Substitute for His people. By divine appointment and of His own free will, Christ assumed all His peoples' liabilities, and bestowed on them all of His perfection. In the wonderful words of the Apostle John, "*of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.*"¹⁶

The Basis for the Gospel

The huge difficulty for me, and for so many "good Catholics", was to accept the premise that Paul had already laid out—"There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God."¹⁷ According to my human nature and all that I had been taught, I saw myself as a fairly good person, and therefore a candidate for salvation. Paul, however, started with a totally different premise, as he made clear in his letter to the Ephesians, "*you who were dead in trespasses and sins.*"¹⁸ In the present passage, he summarized it by saying, "*for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*"¹⁹ I struggled for many years to reach the position whereby I could accept before the All Holy God that I was spiritually dead and capable of doing nothing to merit right standing. A big part of my difficulty was the teaching of Vatican Council II, which was popular at the same time that I was searching the Scriptures. The Council taught that man was simply incapacitated or wounded by sin, and that one could decide one's own destiny in the sight of God. Vatican Council II states,

". . . Nevertheless man has been **wounded by sin**. He finds by experience that his body is in revolt. His very dignity therefore requires that he should glorify God in his body, and not allow it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart. . . . When he is drawn to think about his real self he turns to those deep recesses of his being where God who probes the heart awaits him, and **where he himself decides his own destiny in the sight of God.**"²⁰

The Council has here built upon the idea that there is within the human heart an essential goodness, which, in turn, gives one the capacity to make a dignified decision regarding one's own destiny. This really appealed to me; but it also worried me that such teaching was quite like Hinduism. I had written a paper on Hinduism in my final year of philosophy, and knew what the Hindu pundits in Trinidad taught, (and what Hinduism still teaches), "The intrinsic and real nature of all beings is their soul, which is goodness. All is in perfect balance. There are changes, and they may appear evil, but there is no intrinsic evil. Aum."²¹ I had come to realize that the Hindu idea of intrinsic ability within the human heart, like the traditional good works to make ourselves holy and righteous, leads only to more and more in personal pride. How could I break out of the deadly goodness-pride circle? I fell back again on the straight word of Scripture for my guide. By the grace of God, I saw that I was worse than "dead in the water". I was, as the Apostle expressed it, "*dead in trespasses and sins.*" It was only from studying the Scripture that I could get past the false teaching of Vatican Council II and Hinduism. When by God's grace I came to accept the truth of the Scripture—that there was no essential goodness in me and therefore I could decide nothing regarding my own destiny—I was free from my bondage to a lie, which in the beginning I had, as a sinner, loved. This is of utmost importance because God only saves sinners!

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:8-9

¹⁶ John 1:16

¹⁷ Romans 3:10-11

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:1

¹⁹ Romans 3:23

²⁰ Vatican II Documents No. 64, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 Dec 1965 in *Documents of Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin P. Flannery, Ed. New Revised Edition, 2 Vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975, 1984) Vol. I, Sec. 14, p. 915 All Vatican Council II documents are taken from this source unless otherwise stated.

²¹ www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/atma.htm 02/12/2

The Inquiry and the Solution

I still needed to know how could I have peace and assurance before God. How could I personally have the righteousness of Christ? The answer was in the passage, as the Apostle continued, “*being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*”²² Here, the matter of right standing is explained. The moving cause of right standing is the free grace of God. Grace is defined as the unmerited favor of God. The design of God is highlighted by the adverb “freely”. This excludes all consideration of anything in or from man that should be the cause or condition of right standing. The highest expression of the loving kindness of God is grace. Grace freely given denotes the very nature of God. Therefore, the Scripture insists, “*that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us, through Jesus Christ. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*”²³ Salvation, then, issues forth from the sheer goodness of God!

The meritorious cause of justification is the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Such redemption presupposes a former state of captivity to sin, “*dead in trespasses and sins*”, mentioned above. It is through Christ’s payment alone that the believer is justified. The vitalizing message I eventually heard and received was that Christ Jesus had indeed purchased “*everlasting righteousness*”²⁴ and that I was “*complete in Him which is the head of all principality and power.*”²⁵

Biblical right standing, therefore, is perfect and a finished work of God, “*salvation is of the Lord.*”²⁶ **Right standing is God’s work alone. It reveals His righteousness and the fact that He alone saves.** Once God has justified any person, He views that person “*in Christ*”,²⁷ for God, having forgiven the sinner, reckons to his account Christ’s righteousness. Thus, right standing is by faith alone “*without the deeds of the law.*”²⁸

In the Lord Jesus, the believer has a righteousness without spot or blemish, perfect and all glorious. It is a righteousness that has not only covered all that individual’s sins, but also satisfied every requirement of the law’s precepts. It is not a transfusion of Christ’s righteousness unto those who are to be justified so that they could thereby be inherently righteous. Rather, it is a divine and legal right to eternal life and the title to an everlasting inheritance. The believer can claim with the assurance of the Apostle to “*be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith[fulness] of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*”²⁹

Questions

What has been presented here might appear quite new. One might easily ask if this understanding of the Gospel is something that has been just recently discovered. Then the reader will remember that I began the whole topic of the Gospel by explaining that I had listened to many evangelists on the radio and had read their pamphlets and tracts. By implication, therefore, I have said that modern Evangelicals do not teach what I have laid out. Two things must be considered. First, is the Gospel is something recently discovered, and second, why is it that modern Evangelicals present a Gospel message that is quite different?

²² Romans 3:24

²³ Ephesians 2:7-9

²⁴ Daniel 9:24

²⁵ Colossians 2:10

²⁶ Jonah 2:9

²⁷ The concept in Christ (in the Beloved, in Him, in Whom etc.) occurs eighteen times in Ephesians Ch 1 and 2.

²⁸ Romans 3:28

²⁹ Philippians 3:8-9

The Gospel message from Eternity

The Gospel message is not something new. It has been known in the New Testament for the last two thousand years. It was known to the early church and is found through all of Christian history. It was lost centuries ago in Catholic and the Orthodox churches, for the most part, with a few notable exceptions. The Gospel itself is presented and was known to the believers in the Old Testament. Many of the most beautiful expressions of Christ's righteousness resting on the believer are, in fact, from the Old Testament. *"This is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord Our Righteousness."*³⁰

Most encouraging, however, is the fact that the Gospel predated even the existence of the world. The Gospel was an agreement from eternity between the Father and the Son. *"Thine they were, and thou gavest them me,"*³¹ is the way that the Lord Himself explained the accord in His prayer to the Father. The reference was to the Father's choice of true believers before the creation of the world, *"according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."*³²

The Interchange between the Father and the Son

The believer is given to Christ by way of reward as explained in the Scripture, *"when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."*³³ The believer was also given to Christ Jesus that He should take care of him, *"and this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."*³⁴

The covenant made between the Father and the Son regarding the application of Christ's redemption to those who are His own is not something that could ever be broken. In the words of the Father, *"my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."*³⁵ The pact between Father and Son is the surety for the believer. The agreement of God from all eternity is the believer's assurance. God's veracity is eternally promised for the fulfillment of every iota of the grand charter between Father, and the Son. Therefore, not a promise can fail; not one chosen vessel of grace will be cast out. There can be no failure, for nothing is left to depend on the creature. As the Scripture declares, *"He will ever be mindful of his covenant."*³⁶ Here indeed is security. God will not change His mind, revoke His choice, or violate His pledge. Therefore, the believer can boldly affirm that there can be no failure in the divine design concerning his faith in Christ. The Father verifies His promise based on His most solemn oath.³⁷

Evangelicals and the Gospel

Evangelicals, for the most part, have known and presented the Gospel since the time of the Reformation. In recent times, however, there has been a great falling away.³⁸ What I had experienced about thirty years ago is even more prevalent today. Many modern Evangelicals give what they call "the Gospel" in such words as, "Accept Jesus into your heart." "Give Jesus control of your life to be saved" and "Give your life to Jesus to be saved." This is quite similar to Catholicism in so much as it looks for salvation in the human heart, and is

³⁰ Jeremiah 23:6

³¹ John 17: 6

³² Ephesians 1:4

³³ Isaiah 53:10-11

³⁴ John 6:39

³⁵ Psalm 89:34

³⁶ Psalm 111:5

³⁷ Luke 1:72, *"and show faithful love to our ancestors, and so keep in mind his holy covenant."*

³⁸ This is fully documented in *Evangelicalism Divided* by Iain Murray (Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

brought about by man's own decision. It is necessary, therefore, to examine these messages of modern Evangelicals.

“Accept Jesus into your heart”

It is unscriptural to think that salvation begins by Christ first coming into the sinful heart of a man. The dead and ungodly person can be made acceptable to God only as he is “*in Christ*”, as the New Testament makes so clear. According to the biblical concept, salvation is being made accepted in Christ. The whole theme of Ephesians chapters one and two is summarized by verse 6 of Chapter one, “*to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.*” Compared to this, the terminology “accept Jesus into your heart” is literally backward. It assumes that the human heart is a fitting place for Christ to dwell and it takes for granted that the human person initiates salvation. Often we will hear such as the following, “Accept Jesus into your heart, as He Himself asks you in His Word, ‘*behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*’”³⁹ To misuse this text to imply that salvation does in fact begin in the human heart is a serious deception. The invitation expressed in Revelation 3:20-21 comes after the Lord had given a list of disgusting and offensive sins committed in the church of Laodicea, and then warned them of His chastement and judgement. They were then commanded to repent, “*I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*”⁴⁰ Fellowship with the Lord presupposes repentance and faith in the Lord. So to misuse the text by totally ignoring this vital groundwork of repentance and faith in the Lord, is soul damning.

A person's only hope lies outside of himself, and in Christ Jesus by His worth and power. Christ Jesus Himself proclaimed the spiritual deadness and wickedness of the human heart. He said, “*that which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*”⁴¹ In the Scripture, salvation is seen consistently to be in Christ. In all of the letters of the Apostle Paul, salvation is always expressed as being in Christ. In a similar way in the Apostle John's writing, eternal life is in Christ, “*this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*”⁴² Salvation is given as individuals are made acceptable in Christ before the All Holy God, “*therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*”⁴³ Until one realizes the condition of man's heart as being spiritually dead before the All Holy God, one will never properly appreciate God's grace and the security that comes with being, “*accepted in the Beloved*” and “*complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.*”⁴⁴ The all Holy Lord Christ Jesus stands not waiting on any man, He commands all men everywhere to repent and believe on Him.

“Give your life to Jesus to be saved.”

This teaching is error for two reasons. First, man in his natural condition is “*dead in trespasses and sin*”. Sin is what separates a man from God. Only God Himself can bestow forgiveness and eternal life. Eternal life is a gift.⁴⁵ A person does not give anything for a gift. God gives this gift to a person when He places that person in Christ Jesus. With the gift of salvation also comes the gift of faith to believe that this is what

³⁹ Revelation 3:20-21

⁴⁰ Revelation 3:19

⁴¹ Mark 7:20-23

⁴² I John 5:11

⁴³ II Corinthians 5:17

⁴⁴ Ephesians 1:6, Colossians 2:10

⁴⁵ Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 5:15-18, 6:23

God has done.⁴⁶ Second, such phrases as “give your life to Jesus” wrongly presume that a person has something worthy of God to give. Spiritually dead people cannot give anything that will save them from their sins. Because man is dead in sin, Christ Jesus gave His life for the sins of His people, “*Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.*”⁴⁷ There is no Bible verse that says or teaches that a lost, spiritually dead person gives anything, not even his life, in order to be saved.

When a lost person is taught to “give his life to Jesus” to be saved, he may think that he has to give his service, time, works, money, etc., to be saved. This may lead the lost person into a “works gospel”, which can never save. Being right with God is not some sort of a “trade-in” by which a person gives something to Jesus to be saved. A person is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and nothing else. Repentance is also a **God-given change of mind that comes as a consequence of the work of the Holy Spirit** and not a human “trade-in” item; “*Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*”⁴⁸

There are other humanistic ways, too, in which modern Evangelists give a so-called gospel. The two examples given here are just cases in point to illustrate the wholesale departure from the true Gospel that is taking place in the modern world.

The Right Attitude to the Gospel

The Gospel is so serious that Christ Jesus called it “*the work of God*”, showing that it is necessary to believe on Him alone. His own words imply both commandment to believe, and the grace to do it, “*this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*”⁴⁹ How one is to come to God as a sinner is made abundantly clear in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The man who cried out, “*God be merciful to me a sinner,*”⁵⁰ went back to his house justified. For true assurance and peace with God, stand on the Lord’s promises, “*for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*”⁵¹ “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*”⁵²

There is only One who can furnish right standing and peace with God. Repent of all else and rest on the faithfulness of Christ Jesus alone, “*forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*”⁵³ ♦

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⁴⁶ See also John 5:24-25.

⁴⁷ Galatians 1:4

⁴⁸ Acts 5:31

⁴⁹ John 6:29

⁵⁰ Luke 18:13

⁵¹ Romans 10:13

⁵² Psalm 51:17

⁵³ I Peter 1:18-19