

The Church in Babylon

Study Notes

Session Seven

“False Gospels Within the Evangelical Church”

A. False Gospels Within the Evangelical Church

1. The Gospel of Permissive Grace

- a. **Babylon:** One of the reasons Israel fell into sin and was later exiled to Babylon is because the false prophets in Jeremiah’s day preached a “*gospel of permissive grace*.” They often reminded the people that since they were God’s chosen nation, they could expect His unending favor despite their lifestyle. “*They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace*” (Jer. 6:14). In other words, because of grace, regardless of what you do or how you live, God is always going to bless you.
- b. **Modern Problem:** Like most false teachings, the “*gospel of permissive grace*” continues to be preached extensively today. Some have labeled this the “Hyper-Grace Movement.” There are at least three ideas emphasized in this teaching.
- c. **Grace means that God loves you unconditionally**, to the point that He offers unconditional acceptance to one’s lifestyle. In other words, God never gets angry or grieved over our sin. While the gospel does offer God’s unconditional love to those who trust Jesus to save them, God is not always pleased with our conduct, and He will discipline those who belong to Him.
 - **Hebrews 10:30-31** – “*The Lord will judge his people...it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*”
 - **1 Peter 1:16-17** – “*You shall be holy, for I am holy.... Conduct yourselves with fear and trembling throughout the time of your exile.*”
 - **Problem:** Some preachers seek to dismiss the offense of sin by quoting, “*God hates the sin, but loves the sinner.*” While this statement contains a little truth about God’s love toward sinners, the late R. C. Sproul once pointed out, “God doesn’t send the sin to hell, he sends the sinner.” We must never do anything to diminish God’s anger toward sin, nor give the impression that He is happy with those who persist in sin because of His grace.
 - **Example:** Television minister Joseph Prince said, “*God is not judging America (or any country in the world today). America and its sins have already been judges! Where? At the cross of Jesus! Sin has been judged at the cross.*” Such teaching is false and contains elements of universalism, not to mention a false sense of eternal hope and earthly prosperity.
 - **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9** – “*When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those*

who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”

d. **Grace means that the law of God is the enemy**, to the point that it’s wrong to call people to obey what the Bible teaches. In other words, since we are under grace, God never expects us to follow the law – otherwise, we might become guilty of trying to be saved by works. Such a view is called “antinomianism” (no law). Those who advocate such teaching do not directly encourage sinning, but if one happens to sin it’s not that big of a deal to God. He doesn’t expect us to follow the law, only live by grace.

- **Problem:** Obviously, this teaching is attractive to the fleshly person because it insinuates that obedience to God’s Word is anti-gospel (anti-grace), and no one would want to resist the gospel. So, live how you want, and let grace clean up the mess.
- **Quote:** *“We are not putting ourselves under the law if we seek to obey the New Testament commands of Scripture; we are putting ourselves under the law when we think that obedience, without heart change, is all that God requires.”* – Lutzer
- **Grace:** True grace makes keeping the law more attractive, as an instinct of knowing God and being forgiven in Christ. John writes, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome”* (1 John 5:3).

e. **Grace means that believers must never confess their sins**; otherwise, such a confession indicate that one hasn’t been covered by grace upon belief in Christ. This teaching is tricky, because the gospel does teach that all of our sins – past, present, and future – have been forgiven in Christ. Rather than confessing our sins and asking for God’s forgiveness, we should just remind ourselves that we are under grace.

- **Matthew 6:12** – *“Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors.”*
- **1 John 1:9** – *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
- **Grace:** Believers don’t confess sin to find justification; that was settled on the cross when Jesus died in our place. However, believers confess sin as a means of sanctification, the process of shedding the unredeemed flesh and being made into the likeness of Christ. Daily confession and repentance is vital for a growing Christian. As Puritan pastor Thomas Watson said, *“Until sin be bitter – Christ will not be sweet.”*

2. The Gospel of Social Justice

a. **Problem:** “Social Justice” can mean many different things, but the most general definition indicates giving people the good they deserve.

- **Marxism:** Some understand this in terms of Marxism, which is the notion that resources have to be equally distributed through government intervention, control, and ownership

– such action will result in a “just and fair society,” totally eliminating all forms of oppression.

- **Liberation Theology:** “Salvation” is freedom from economic and social oppression. For example, allowing same-sex marriage would free LGBT couples to enjoy life to the fullest. To deny this status would be to deny them the societal good they deserve, thus keeping them enslaved.
- b. **Gospel of Social Justice:** The goal of the Christian faith is to help and provide for those who are disadvantaged and enslaved by the difficulties of the fallen world – combatting poverty, racism, injustice, disease, and other social problems. In this sense, salvation comes by helping people get out of their personal issues, which allows them to have the good they deserve. This movement sprang out of the theological liberalism of the 19th century, where belief in the person and work of Christ waned during the scientific revolution. Some church leaders and theologians no longer believed in miracles, supernatural works, nor the resurrection – which ultimately ruptured the classic message of the gospel that Christ lived a perfect life, died as a substitute for sinners, then was raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:1ff). If Jesus didn’t atone for sin through death and be raised to new life, then the gospel can’t be about forgiveness of sin and avoiding eternity in hell, it must be a more practical, earthly message, that helps people here and now.
- **Opposite Extreme:** In response to this movement, some took the opposite approach, which is also unbiblical, in neglecting any type of social ministry aimed to help people with practical needs. They confined themselves to the urgent need of individual conversions, but neglected the social implications of the gospel.
- c. **Example:** The *Social Gospel* movement is really attractive to Millennials (25-40), where they have abandoned the doctrine of personal repentance and opted for what they see as a more practical gospel, helping the poor and needy.
- d. **Quote:** “[There are Evangelical missionaries in Africa who] no longer come to do church planting but are focused on social relief, with the church tacked on as a theological addendum...by all appearances, there has been a mega-shift in evangelical missions away from church planting and leadership training toward social justice and social action.”
- e. **Danger:** Always be watchful for “spiritual leaders” and “churches” that deemphasize or neglect such doctrines as the sinful nature of man, Christ’s substitutionary atonement, the need for personal conversion to Christ (being born again), God’s eternal judgement in hell, etc. Those who neglect these topics reveal that they are not interested in the biblical gospel.
- f. **Gospel:** The true gospel is not opposed to helping people with vast social needs, but rather than seeing such help as “salvation,” the true gospel explains that our first need is to be right with God through the atoning work of Christ – then, our natural response should be to share the love of God with others through practical means. In fact, such practical ministries open the door for gospel conversations. However, the gospel urges men and women to repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ alone for their eternal salvation.

- **Mark 8:34–35** – *“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”*
 - **John 3:3** – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*
 - **Acts 3:19** – *“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out”*
- g. **Quote:** *“If compassion motivates us to help alleviate the suffering in this present world, how much more should compassion motivate us to share the good news to alleviate their suffering in the world to come.”* – Lutzer