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THE DEMISE OF GOSPEL PREACHING IN THE MODERN EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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"For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1Corinthians 1:22-24)

An alarming convergence of theological and cultural trends in contemporary evangelicalism is pushing gospel preaching out of many churches. Even in "Bible believing" churches, people are being asked to make a "decision for Jesus," without being told who Jesus is, what He has done, or why they need Him. Furthermore, in the Bible conversions through faith by God's grace are the goal, not decisions.¹ In many cases, those who are failing to preach the gospel vehemently deny that they are so failing. In this article I will show from the New Testament what the gospel is, how it was preached by Christ and His apostles, and how contemporary evangelism often fails to preach the gospel. I will suggest a simple remedy to the problem: **gospel preaching**.

THE GOSPEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word "gospel" is a translation of the Greek work *euaggelion* from which we get our English word "evangel." By definition "evangelical" means those who are committed to the gospel. Therefore, to claim that "evangelicals" are not preaching the gospel is a strong indictment. However, the sad fact is that many are not. To show this we shall examine New Testament gospel preaching and compare it to today's popular messages in many evangelical churches.

Mark begins his Gospel using the word "gospel": "*The beginning of the*

gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Right here we learn something about its content -- Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah and the Son of God. "Christ" means Messiah. This calls to mind the Old Testament promises such as the one given to Abraham in **Genesis 12:3**. The Jews were looking for one from the tribe of Judah (**Genesis 49:10**) and from the lineage of David (**2Samuel 7:14; Jeremiah 23:5**) who would bring salvation. So the gospel of Jesus Christ includes the idea of the fulfillment of ancient Messianic promises.

Mark also claimed that He is the "Son of God." Jesus existed as God and with God from all eternity. The gospel writers used Old Testament scripture to prove this. For example, **Psalms 110:1** was quoted several times to prove this: "*The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.'*" Jesus quoted this Psalm in **Matthew 22:42-45** to refute the Pharisees. Jesus asked that since David called Messiah "Lord," how could he then be David's son? The answer is that in His deity Christ is pre-existent, thus was David's Lord; yet in His humanity he was born of a virgin, and was the legal descendant of David. This argument is expanded fully in Matthew, but is contained in Mark's brief statement about the gospel. Do modern hearers of the gospel need to know who Jesus is? Of course they do! Man's need has not changed. Peter quoted **Psalms 110:1** when he preached on Pentecost

(**Acts 2:34-36**) making it clear to his hearers that Jesus was "both Lord and Christ."

Modern Gospel hearers must learn these truths about Jesus: He existed with and as God from all eternity (**John 1:1**), had a supernatural, virgin birth, and lived a sinless life. Thus Jesus is God and man. Just citing the name "Jesus" does not fill in all this information in the minds of contemporary listeners. Perhaps there was a time in America when most people grew up in churches that taught all their members the facts about Jesus. Even then it was not safe to assume that in a large crowd there would not be people who had false ideas about Jesus or no idea at all. Today, given the paganization of America, it is safe to assume that **most** people hearing the name Jesus **do not** know the facts that are necessary for believing the gospel. Mark says that He is the Christ, the Son of God. These terms need to be explained. It is commonly believed that there are many "Christs" (anointed ones) and that all humans are sons of God. We need to show that only Jesus is the Christ and that He uniquely is the Son of God. Sinners do not come pre-equipped with this knowledge.

THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Christ was mentioned 19 times in the book of Acts.² It was the main theme of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The fact of the bodily resurrection of Christ was the reason why Peter's hearers were told to repent (**Acts 2:32-38**). When Paul described the content of the gospel, he referred to the resurrection. This passage is fundamental to the Christian gospel:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold

fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1Corinthians 15:1-4)

Without the resurrection of Christ there is no gospel! Paul was so emphatic about this, that he also explained the consequences if there were no resurrection: “[I]f Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” (1Corinthians 15:17). Faith that is not based on the truth of the gospel is worthless.

Paul ties belief in the resurrection of Christ with salvation: “[I]f you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Romans 10:9). Christ in His resurrection conquered sin and death. Therefore we cannot believe that His death avails for our sin problem if we do not believe in the resurrection. When Paul preached the resurrection to the Athenian philosophers they responded negatively: “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, we shall hear you again concerning this” (Acts 17:32). This negative reaction did not cause Paul to change his message. As shown in the 1Corinthians 15 passage cited above, Paul preached the resurrection of Christ in Corinth, his next destination after Athens. Whether sinners like it or not, they cannot be saved unless they trust Christ whom God raised from the dead.

CHRIST'S SUBSTITUTIONARY DEATH

I mentioned the resurrection first because of the primacy the New Testament gives it in explaining the gospel. Christ's resurrection proves all His claims and demonstrates the efficacy of His death for sins. That Jesus died is not unique. All other founders of religious movements died. Only Christ proved His claims by predicting His

own resurrection and then emerging from the tomb and appearing before many credible witnesses. The others died because all sinners die. Jesus was not a sinner and proved it by His resurrection. He died for sins, but not for His own sins - He had none (Hebrews 4:15). He died for **our** sins: “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1Peter 3:18).

The idea that Christ's death was for our sins is a necessary part of the gospel. In Paul's summary of the gospel in 1Corinthians 15, he said, “Christ died for our sins.” (Verse 3). The Bible teaches throughout that the penalty for sin is death. This includes eternal death, away from the presence of God (2Thessalonians 1:9). When the gospel is preached, it must be made clear that all are sinners, have broken God's Law, and are liable for eternal punishment. If people do not believe they are truly lost and headed for hell, then they will see no need for Christ's death on their behalf. This is particularly true in our day. People think they have many needs, but they do not think that they are actually headed for hell. Therefore they do not see their true need for the gospel. It is the preacher's duty to make this need clear. Paul preached coming judgment and repentance to philosophers in Athens: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30,31).

The need for a payment for sins is revealed in the blood atonement. Christ's shed blood averts God's wrath. Christ paid the penalty that we owed to God for our sins. This is foundational to the gospel and God's means of justification. Paul makes clear the role of Christ's blood: “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Romans 5:9).

Being saved from God's wrath is every human being's most urgent need. How ironic that many fail to preach this for fear of being “irrelevant” to “felt needs.” Suppose a man was living in an upper floor of an apartment building and did not know that the building was on fire. Someone who was aware of the fire knocked on the man's door and said, “Sir, I am a Christian and would like to meet your needs, so please tell me what they are.” The man says, “Well, actually, I am out of milk and have no transportation. Could you run to the store and get me a gallon of milk?” Would the Christian leave him in danger of perishing while the Christian went off to meet this more “practical” need? Clearly not. How much greater is the danger of facing God's wrath at some unknown but imminent time? We want to be kind to our fellow humans in meeting their needs, but we are cruel if we fail to tell them of their real danger.

When Paul preached, “Christ crucified” (1Corinthians 1:23), he included the key facts about who Christ was and what He did, but also included the reason why it was urgent that the facts be believed: we have offended the most holy and awesome God; His wrath is revealed from heaven against our great sin (Romans 1:18); Jesus took that wrath upon Himself so that all who believe in Him would be saved from it. Even the most famous verse in the Bible about God's love mentions averting judgment: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “Not perishing” is about averting God's wrath as is clear from this verse in the same chapter of John: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). Notice that according to this verse, failure to believe is to be disobedient. The gospel commands people to believe under threat of wrath; it is not some paltry invitation to a happier life.

Many preachers who would cheerfully cite John 3:16 simultaneously deny that people are in danger of perishing. While visiting another city, I was invit-

ed to attend a church service. The pastor confidently assured us that, "God does not punish sin." Evidently, there are people in churches singing hymns and citing creeds, who are there to be religious, but have no idea of their need for the gospel. If we never were in danger of perishing for all eternity, then what was the point of God sending Jesus to die for us? Although the church mentioned above was obviously a liberal one, far too many "evangelical" churches today simply neglect altogether the truth that God does punish sin. To fail to deny something is not the same as to preach it. "God does punish sin and you need a savior," is the message that ought to be preached.

PREACHING REPENTANCE

The term "repent" means more than merely changing one's mind. Some assert that to repent is no more than to change one's mind, based on the word's etymology. But context, not etymology, shows the author's meaning.³ The Biblical idea of repentance is to turn from serving self to serving God. Repentance in the New Testament has to do with conversion.⁴ Paul's concept of what true repentance looks like is shown in his description of the effects of the Gospel in the Thessalonian Christians:

For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.
(1Thessalonians 1:8-10)

Conversion is turning to God from idols. The self is the universal idol of fallen man. To repent is to be converted.

Some accuse those of us who teach the necessity of repentance of teaching

salvation by works. Nothing could be further from the truth. By preaching the gospel and including a call for repentance, we are appealing to the need for grace, not to human ability. The New Testament sees repentance as something God grants:

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2Timothy 2:24-26)

Preaching human guilt before God's holy law shows people their need for the gospel. By including the preaching of repentance, we show the sinner his utter need for God's grace. One must be fully converted, turned around completely - made to serve God rather than self and the world. Preaching anything less than this gives the sinner hope for self-improvement through works. Preaching the whole demand of God's righteousness shows that outside of God's gracious provision through the gospel we are all hopeless sinners. Preaching repentance is central to the message of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus preached repentance: "And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14, 15). When the gospel spread to the Gentiles, here is how the apostles responded: "And when they heard this, they quieted down, and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life'" (Acts 11:18). It is obvious that the gospel is not "self-help." God "grants" repentance, but through His ordained means - the preaching of the gospel. Preachers who do not make the gospel clear and do not preach repentance are not preaching for conver-

sions. They may be preaching to get people interested in joining a church, or being religious, but the idea of a radical conversion that turns a hell-bound sinner totally around to being a heaven-bound saint is absent in many supposedly evangelical churches.

What is amazing about the resistance to preaching repentance in order to convert sinners through the gospel is the fact that preaching repentance is included in the Great Commission: "He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:46,47). C.F.W. Walther comments on this section of Luke:

Why is repentance required as well as faith? Our Lord gives the reason in these words: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick . . . I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Matt. 9:12, 13. With these words the Lord testifies that the reason why contrition is absolutely necessary is that without it no one is fit to be made a believer. He is surfeited and spurns the invitation to the heavenly marriage feast.⁵

If the need for repentance is never placed before the perishing, we do a disservice to the gospel and the Great Commission. Walther also asserts that repentance is not the cause of forgiveness, but is what happens when the Law shows the sinner the need for forgiveness. God graciously opens one's eyes to this need. Walther writes, "As long as a person has not been reduced to the state of a poor, lost, and condemned sinner, he has no serious interest in the Savior of sinners."⁶ Forgiveness is received by faith.

I see repentance and faith as two aspects of the same conversion experience. Repentance is turning from self to God. It emphasizes the turning away from our previous sin of trusting self. Faith is trusting God through the gospel

for our salvation. The whole of conversion is granted by God's grace and is not a meritorious human work. John MacArthur explains:

Conversion occurs when a sinner turns to God in repentant faith. It is a complete turnaround, an absolute change of moral and volitional direction. Such a radical reversal is the response the gospel calls for, whether the plea to sinners is phrased as "believe," "repent," or "be converted." Each entails the others.⁷

Repentance cannot be taken out of gospel preaching without changing the idea of what it means to come to Christ. Without repentance we are just adding Christ to the self we intend to continue serving.

THE FAILURE TO PREACH GOD'S LAW

Paul wrote three chapters of Romans about man's failure before God's law before he explained the doctrine of justification. He obviously thought that sinners needed to know the true nature of their lost and fallen condition. Sinners need to know what it means to be lost, and that one day they shall face the holy and righteous Judge. They need to know clearly that they have disobeyed God's law and desperately need a savior. Those who preach the law and the gospel are preaching for conversions, not just religious followers.

Evangelist Ray Comfort interviews people he is preaching to and finds that the vast majority do not believe they are sinners heading for hell.⁸ Comfort points out that when we tell sinners, "come to Jesus and have a better life" we are likely to create disillusionment. He calls this "life enhancement" preaching. I call it "better living through Jesus." Whatever it is, it is **not** the gospel. The gospel is "good news," not "nice news." The "nice news" approach offers the possibility of things going better in this life if one becomes religious. The good news is that hopelessly lost, hell-bound, sinners can be saved from

the wrath of God through the finished work of Christ on the cross. All this is a gift of grace, received by faith.

The sad fact is that few who hear Christian preachers on radio and TV ever hear the gospel. We evidently have millions of dollars to spend putting out Christian material, but very little time to use these resources for gospel preaching. This statement sometimes shocks people. You can see for yourself if this is true. Turn on a Christian TV network like TBN, and listen. Check out the Angel Network on satellite TV. Take my challenge. Listen to the preachers. Count how many times you hear the gospel preached, if ever at all. I have done this myself and rarely have heard the gospel even after dozens of hours of listening. The demise of gospel preaching is not just a melodramatic statement: it is the sad, harsh reality.

The Christian media most people see and hear is not the gospel. The preachers mention Jesus, but they do not tell us who He is or what He did. They preach about better living, but never tell us how to escape God's wrath against sin. They rarely explain the cross and its implications. They preach a morality of sorts, a Christian morality of works righteousness that is not derived from God's grace. The implication is that we can be better people than those around us by being Christian. But this is more the preaching of a Christian culture than a gathering of redeemed sinners whose only hope is in Christ and His cross.

THE HUMANISTIC GOSPEL

At the heart of the demise of gospel preaching is what may have begun as a subtle shift. In Jonathan Edwards's day, evangelical preachers preached for conversions. They believed the lost were truly lost and powerless to do anything about their wretched condition. The only hope was the grace of God through the gospel to convert sinners. The nineteenth century marked a major turning point in American evangelicalism. The turning point is epitomized by Finney's "new measures."⁹ Because Finney believed in human ability (as Edwards did not), Finney preached to "arouse

dormant powers."¹⁰ From Finney's day on evangelism changed and has continued to change. We have gone from belief in conversions through gospel preaching to "decisions for Jesus." This seemingly subtle shift is actually a major chasm that is as deep and wide as the chasm between heaven and hell.

If this shocks some people that may be what is needed. I have recently attended several evangelistic functions. In each case I did not hear the gospel. I heard stories about people who had made decisions for Jesus and now had better lives. Who Jesus is, was never explained. Why do we need Jesus? - to find meaning in life that we are now missing. We did not hear about the resurrection. We did not hear about the blood atonement. We did not hear the demands of the Law or the promise of the gospel. But every one there was given an opportunity to make a decision for Jesus.

I do not say this to criticize the motives of those who organize such events or many others who approach evangelism the same way. I know many of these people and believe that they truly love God and want to reach the lost. However, well-motivated or not, there is a huge difference between the gospel as preached by Jesus and His apostles and the idea of "making a decision for Jesus." Some are converted through the efforts of such evangelicals. If somewhere, somehow, buried under the many layers of activities and evangelical culture, those who get involved eventually do find out who Jesus is, what His claims are, and their need for the blood atonement, they may indeed be converted. But why should the conversion of sinners be pushed to the background so that a slick, user-friendly Christianity is all that is apparent to most observers?

DECISION THEOLOGY

There are problems even when some are actually converted through the popular "decision for Jesus" approach. If they eventually do find out the true nature of the gospel, those truly converted then realize that they have been sold a bill of goods. The gospel does not promise

better living in this world through a simple decision. The gospel calls us to take up our cross and live in this world as ones already condemned to die. Furthermore, the truly converted who are in the evangelical culture soon find themselves dying of spiritual starvation because the Word of God is not being preached. How much better to tell our hearers up front what the gospel is, and then when they come on that basis they can, like the early Christians in Acts, "rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."¹¹

There are a number of problems with the "decision theology" of modern evangelicalism. The most prominent one is that the Bible knows nothing of, "inviting someone to make a decision for Jesus." The main proof text used by the teachers of decision theology is **Joel 3:14**: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." The valley of decision in Joel is eschatological and has to do with Israel and the surrounding nations who would destroy her. The context of **Joel 3:14** shows that God as the Judge makes the decision! Charles Feinberg comments, "The prophet sees the nations assembled in innumerable hosts in the valley where God (not they) will make His decision."¹² This is a description of the judgment of nations. God is about to arise and come forth from His chamber and issue His decision.

The idea of imminent wrath is clear in Joel, and that is surely something that ought to be preached. God's coming judgment is reason to repent and flee from this perverse, sin cursed world system. But the only escape is through the gospel. So far from teaching human decision, the key passage used by proponents of "decision theology" teaches the coming of God's decision in judgment. Only the gospel offers a way of escape from this horrific valley of decision.

The misuse of the Joel passage illustrates what is wrong with much modern preaching. What is portrayed is the idea that God is awaiting our decision. We go into our chambers to issue our

verdict based on whether we find God to our suiting or not. We make our decision about God and tell Him the verdict. This is dishonoring to God. The Biblical teaching is that we should fear God's verdict and find a way of escape from the wrath of the Judge. James wrote, "[T]he Judge is standing at the door" (**James 5:9**). We make ourselves the judges and put God on trial. This is not Biblical.

Another problem with decision theology is that it discounts the sin nature and appeals to non-existent human ability. No sinner in his or her natural state finds the cross appealing. Here is Paul's description of the fleshly mind: "[T]he mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (**Romans 8:7,8**). God's Law makes sinfulness and inability evident, but only the gospel can change them. Decision theology has the fleshly man deciding if he will "accept Jesus" while totally in his unregenerate, fallen condition.¹³ True gospel preaching shows sinners their lost condition and the reality of God's wrath against sin. Convicted before God's Law and found guilty, their only recourse is to repent and believe the Gospel. God uses gospel preaching to bring His gracious gift of faith to those who will be saved: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (**Romans 10:17**).

Decision theology comes in various packages. What they all have in common is that God has to await man's determinative decision. Many times sinners are told, "Jesus stands at the door of your hearts; you must decide to let Him in." This is based on a passage in Revelation and the famous painting of Jesus at a door. Decision theology proponents even use details of the painting to build their theology. They say, "When you look at the painting of Jesus at the door, you notice there is no door knob on the outside; you have to let Him in." I wonder if those who preach like this realize what they are doing. They have a strong, decisive sinner and

a weak, needy Jesus. The sinner has the final say. Jesus is portrayed as standing "out in the cold," wanting in but unable to enter. What a sad contrast to the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ- this Jesus whom you crucified" (**Acts 2:36**). Peter had just told them that Jesus was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father, in all authority and majesty. They were accountable to Him for their sin. What a far cry from Jesus out in the cold hoping that the sinners would be nice and let Him in.

The passage in Revelation about Jesus knocking at the door is given as an ironic rebuke to a church. The Laodicean church had become complacent and self-satisfied. Jesus would "reprove and discipline" those He loves (**Revelation 3:19**). Jesus tells them to repent and open the door and so restore fellowship with their Lord (**Revelation 3:20**).¹⁴ This was written to a church, not the lost. Its misuse in evangelism obscures the true nature of the gospel and the power of God. When Jesus saved Paul in **Acts 9**, He did not knock on Paul's door to see if Paul would decide whether or not to let Him in.

THE PROBLEM WITH "WOING"

Another belief system that hinders gospel preaching in evangelical churches concerns "woing." This means that God is doing all He can to attract people to Him; and He needs our help. God is portrayed as a suitor who desires the affections of a potential spouse, but is being rejected. The reason for the rejection is that "seekers" have not seen the right portrait of who God is. Christianity must be made more appealing, they say, if we want people to "accept Christ."

On the surface of things, there is something very wrong with the wooing approach. Why should the only perfectly beautiful being in the universe have to be "dressed up" to look good to sinners? The problems are many: 1) Sinners by nature are attracted to sin, and God is perfectly sinless. 2) Wooing

requires that the needs and concerns of the unregenerate determine the message of the church: thus the movement to preach to “felt needs.” 3) The Bible says that the message of the cross is foolishness to the Greeks and offensive to the Jews (**1Corinthians 1:23**). Furthermore, it is considered foolishness to the perishing (**1Corinthians 1:18**). The perishing are supposedly the target of God’s wooing. 4) God chose to bring salvation to the Jews first through a Jewish Messiah. The world has hated the Jews since the beginning of their existence. A Jewish Messiah would hardly “woo” the world.

As with the other perversions of the gospel, those who promote the wooing idea have a proof text: “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself*” (**John 12:32**). They interpret this as follows: “all” means universally all people, and draw means “attract.” Thus the lifting up of Jesus attracts all people to Him, in the sense of wooing. Let us study this verse in its context to see if it supports this idea.

First, it is clear that the phrase “lifted up” means “crucified,” not “held up in awe.” We know this because the next verse tells us: “*But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die*” (**John 12:33**). So the claim this interpretation makes is that the crucifixion of Christ would attract all the inhabitants of the earth to Jesus, universally. However, this is in direct contradiction to what Paul wrote in **1Corinthians 1:23**: “*but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness.*” The message of a crucified Jewish Messiah is not attractive to either Jew or Gentile. Plus, it is clear from the facts of history that the cross does not attract all people universally to Christ.

Second, the word “draw” does not mean “attract” or “woo.” It means “drag.”¹⁵ The idea is that the cross is the means God would use to bring people to Christ (by grace) who by nature would be repulsed by the cross. Since this “dragging” is effective, the “all” cannot be universal. Not all come to Jesus. The context of **John 12** shows that the appearance of Greeks asking about

Jesus on the occasion of the triumphal entry causes Jesus to give these teachings about this death bringing “all” to Him, i.e. Jews and Gentiles.

Therefore **John 12:32** does not teach wooing. It teaches God’s grace through the cross to take dead rebellious sinners and bring them to Christ. The irony is that many who believe the wooing doctrine have fallen into the “seeker” movement and removed the preaching of the cross from their churches. If they really believed that the cross “woos” people to Jesus they would preach the cross with great boldness and clarity. If they did so, God would indeed save people through the gospel in spite of their misinterpretation of the passage. The preaching of the cross is effectual in saving those who will be saved. This is so, not because it “woos” them, but because it is God’s ordained means whereby He calls forth His elect out of the mass of perdition.

WHAT MUST WE DO?

We must be confident in the effectiveness of God’s ordained means. The pressure to lay aside gospel preaching is all around us. We are bombarded with everything but gospel preaching. However, God has sovereignly ordained the means by which He will save all who will be saved. In **Romans 10:14-17** we see the call to send preachers of the gospel so that people will call upon the Lord and be saved by faith. The insidious forces inside and outside the church to lay aside gospel preaching must be resisted at all costs.

We must not allow the fear of man to become a snare for us. We naturally want to be accepted, so it is a difficult thing to preach what people naturally do not want to hear. Yet in the face of this rejection, Paul said, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*” (**Romans 1:16**). The gospel is the power of God for salvation, and thus must be preached with all fervency. People must hear that they have offended the Holy Judge, broken God’s Law, and desperately need a savior. They need to know who Jesus is, what

He did, and how His death on the cross can avert God’s wrath for those who believe. They must know that God raised Christ from the dead. These are strong words, but they are the gospel.

By believing in God’s sovereignty, we have full assurance that if we preach the gospel faithfully and accurately, God will always use it to save all who will be saved. It is not our business how many that turns out to be. It is our business to be faithful; God will save all those He has chosen from all eternity. We must preach to all because we do not know who they will be. They will be saved through the gospel, not apart from the gospel. May God give us boldness and grace in proclaiming the only way whereby we must be saved.

END NOTES

1. See John F. MacArthur, Jr. *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, (Word: Dallas, 1993). MacArthur writes, “Decisionism is the idea that eternal salvation may be secured by the sinner’s own movement toward Christ. A ‘decision for Christ’ is usually signified by some physical or verbal act – raising a hand, walking an aisle, repeating a prayer, signing a card, reciting a pledge, or something similar. If the sinner performs the prescribed activity, he or she is usually pronounced saved and told to claim assurance. The ‘moment of decision’ becomes the ground of the person’s assurance.” 196,197. MacArthur rightly rejects this approach as unbiblical.
2. Acts 1:22; 2:24,31,32; 3:26; 4:2,10,33; 5:30; 10:40; 13:22,30,33,34,37; 17:18,32; 23:6; 26:23.
3. See John F. MacArthur, Jr. *The Gospel According to Jesus*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1994) 38.
4. see Theological Dictionary of the New Testament; G. Kittle ed.; (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1967) s.v. *metano’o* - 1000 - 1006. It is argued that the idea is conversion, which is a radical, once for all change that is caused by God’s grace.
5. C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, (Concordia:

- St. Louis, 1986) 249. Originally published 1897. Walther is the founder of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church.
6. Ibid.
7. MacArthur, *Apostles*, 33,34.
8. Ray Comfort, *Hell's Best Kept Secret*, video; available at: <http://www.crosstv.com>
Look for video # wp0017.
9. see CIC issue # 53, July/August 1999. <http://www.twincityfellowship.com/cic/articles/issue53.htm>
10. Finney wrote: "There must be excitement sufficient to wake up the dormant moral powers, and roll back the tide of degradation and sin." *Lectures on Revival, Lecture 1*, 8. Ages Software, CD ROM (Ages Software: Rio, Wisc.; 2001). After writing this Finney goes on to claim that revival is not a miracle or act of God, but the right use of means. Here is what he says: "A revival is not a miracle according to another definition of the term 'miracle' — something above the powers of nature. There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It consists entirely in the right exercise of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else." Page 9.
11. Acts 5:41; see also what was in store for Paul; Acts 9:16
12. Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, (Moody Press: Chicago, 1948, 1990 edition) 84.
13. John MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1994), writes "It may surprise you to learn that Scripture never once exhorts sinners to "accept Christ" . . . The great miracle of redemption is not that we accept Christ, but that he accepts us. 113.
14. See John Owen, *Communion With God*, 54. Ages Software, CD ROM (Ages Software: Rio, Wisc.; 2001). John Owen often cited this passage about the blessed communion the Christian has with His Lord. For example, he wrote: "Revelation 3:20, '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.' Certainly this is fellowship, or I know not what is. Christ will sup with believers: he refreshes himself with his own graces in them, by his Spirit bestowed on them. The Lord Christ is exceedingly delighted in tasting of the sweet fruits of the Spirit in the saints." Also, John Gill writes in *The Cause of God and Truth*, Part 1, Section 60: "This church was in a sleepy, lukewarm, indifferent, secure frame of spirit, as appears from (vv. 15-18). Christ will not suffer her to continue so, and, therefore, takes his rod in his hand, stands at her door, and gives some severe knocks and raps to bring her to herself, and out of this indolent, supine, and self-confident state and condition she was in; which sense is confirmed by the preceding verse, as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten be zealous, therefore, and repent." Gill rejects the interpretation that applies this to the unregenerate.
15. The same word in the Greek is used in John 21:6&11 for drawing in a net full of fish; John 18:10 for Peter drawing his sword; in Acts 16:19 for being dragged into the market place; Acts 21:30 for being dragged out of the temple; and James 2:6 for being dragged into court. It hardly means, "attract."

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