

THE GOSPEL
Feb. 19, 2005
Gal. 1:8-9

INTRO: Our topic again is the gospel. In the last message I spoke to you of a gospel called the social gospel. The word gospel means good news. It is the good news of salvation. But we learned from Paul in Galatians 1:8-9 that there are other or different or false gospels. They present themselves as good news but there is death in the pot. We saw the lofty goals of the social gospel, that of feeding and clothing a needy world, and bringing peace and justice to the world. As good as those goal sounds, I viewed that as an unbiblical goal for the church.

Should Christians help the hurting? Should they feed the poor? Should they clothe the needy? Yes! But not as the main aim of their faith, but rather, as a byproduct of it.

Now tell me, how much more effective could the devil become for his cause than by forging a gospel that Christian ministers or so called Christian ministers would preach? Surely he could not get much more effective than that. And how is he going to get Christian ministers to preach his forged gospels? Well, by staying as close to the truth as possible, and maybe by using very effective means. What minister does not want to be very effective and have many people in the church where he preaches? And so we realize that for this to happen, it must sound biblical. And then, if it can be effective in bringing in many people, now that is alluring. It is such a gospel we want to view this morning.

Again, I want us to read Galatians 1:8-9 (read).

II. THE SALEABLE GOSPEL

A. Definition of the Saleable Gospel

There is a relatively new gospel on the scene now. I have called it the saleable gospel. I could have called it the seeker sensitive gospel. I do not know if I have fully captured what the teaching is by the name, the saleable gospel, so let me explain. By saleable I mean you can sell it. The Gospel becomes marketable, just like cars or shoes. So this gospel is promoted by a strategy called *marketing the*

church. Is such a thing possible? Can the gospel be promoted by marketing it? Well, apparently so. And, to top it off, it is highly successful.

Churches that use this new gospel are known as seeker friendly or seeker sensitive or user friendly churches. And so I want to recommend a book for the library. It should be a priority for any church library and it is called, "This Little Church Went to Market" by Gary E. Gilley. One of the big names in marketing the church is George Barna. Gilley writes, "Perhaps no single source carries as much weight in the 'seeker sensitive' church than George Barna and his Barna Research Group. Barna, the evangelical counterpart to George Gallup, has ignited a number of fires in Christian circles with such books as 'The Frog in the Kettle' and 'Marketing the Church'. In his book 'The Step by Step Guide to Church Marketing, Breaking Ground for the Harvest', Barna declared that he, and his adherents have won the ideological battle over the issue of marketing the church. That is, only a few old-fashioned stick-in-the-muds still question the validity of the market-driven strategy. Barna, by the way, defines marketing as 'a broad term that encompasses all the activities that lead up to an exchange of equally valued goods between consenting parties'... Barna assures us that churches sell (or market) their product the same way Wal-Mart sells shoes and Sears sells tools" (44).

The big name in this movement is the Willow Creek Church. The key books are 'The Purpose Driven Life' and the 'Purpose Driven Church' etc...

Key motivators? Fun, entertainment, Tim Hortons in the church etc... etc... John MacArthur has written, "Many Christians have the misconception that to win the world to Christ we must first win the world's favor. If we can get the world to like us, they will embrace our Savior. That is the philosophy behind the user-friendly church movement" (Gilley, 23).

So how do these seeker friendly churches become so successful at marketing the gospel? Well, great research is done on church growth and that has led to eight key things to bring all this about. And what principles are used? Are they ungodly principles? No.

Listen to these eight main principles: 1 Empowering leadership, 2 gift oriented ministry, 3 passionate spirituality, 4 functional structures, 5 inspiring worship, 6 holistic small groups, 7 need oriented evangelism, 8 loving relationships. How does all that sound, evangelically speaking? Great!

Now I ask, is marketing the church biblical? Well, in my estimation, I think of those 8 we might well endorse 7, but not for the same reason. Here is point #7, "Need oriented evangelism." Listen to Barna again, "Ministry, in essence, has the same objective as marketing - to meet people's needs. Christian ministry, by definition, meets people's needs by providing them with the biblical solutions to their life circumstances."

"So", you might well say, "what is wrong with that?" Do you remember the question I asked, "If the devil came with a false gospel he wanted Christians to endorse, would he come with something far off in left field, or something that sounds good"? Do you remember as well what fault I viewed in the social gospel? Here it is: it is humanistic, or man centered. Let me read the statement again and see what it has to say about God or sin or offending Almighty God: , "Ministry, in essence, has the same objective as marketing - to meet people's needs. Christian ministry, by definition, meets people's needs by providing them with the biblical solutions to their life circumstances."

So, is marketing the church biblical? So man gets his needs met, what does God get in equal exchange? But let me ask a second question, "Is marketing the church new? Is this a new gospel?" In our Bible studies we were recently studying in 2 Corinthians 2. Turn with me to this passage (2:14-17 read).

God diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place by those who bring it there. Paul says, "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." So what aroma does a Christian bring to a Christian? And what aroma does he bring to the non-Christian? Well, look at verse 16 (read). Why, our aroma to the lost is the stench of death. They hate it. How are

you going to market the stench of death? Well, they found ways in Paul's day to do it. They marketed the gospel back then. Notice it in verse 17 (read). How did they do it? Well, in the opposite way Paul did. Paul says we are not as many, peddling the Word of God... How did they do it? They peddled the Word of God. They became seeker friendly and sold them something.

Now I want to show you something. Note the word peddling in verse 17. What is that? It is marketing. It is the word, kepeleuo. It means to be a retailer, to make money by selling something. So what do we have here? The saleable gospel, no less. That is 2000 years ago.

B. The Text of the Saleable Gospel

Now is there a text for this gospel? I haven't found one. But I think there is a text that paved the way for the saleable gospel. That is Matthew 7:1, "Judge not that you be not judged." Once you have been convinced you ought never to be critical or test things, the seeker friendly movement becomes palatable. The venom of the serpent has entered the body and insensitivity has set in.

Let me tell you what I mean by being critical. I checked the dictionary on the word critical. It meant: 1 Given to faultfinding or severe judgements; carping. 2 Exhibiting careful, precise judgments and evaluations; analytical. It is the second meaning that I have in mind.

One of the key words of our present age is tolerance. And Matthew 7:1 gives us the text for tolerance in the church. Do not judge people by how they come to church. If they come in shorts or bikinis, do not judge them. Furthermore, make them feel comfortable. The last thing you want in a seeker friendly church is conviction of guilt feelings. That will scare people away. No, you just make them feel comfortable, and in time they will start asking questions, and then they will get saved.

But are we never to judge? Look at verse 6. How can you obey it without making a judgment as to who is a

dog? Look at verse 15. How can you beware of false prophets if you are not to judge? You must make a judgment to know someone is a false prophet. And on what basis do you make your judgement? Well, verse 16 tells us how.

Go to 1 Corinthians 5. A Christian has fallen into a serious sin and the church has not dealt with this problem. Now if they were to make no judgment, they would not be able to deal with the situation but look at verses 3-5 (read also 9-13). Now look at 1 Corinthians 6:1-5 (read).

So what does Matthew 7:1 mean? Well, the complete context is 7:1-5 (read). Who is not to judge? The hypocrite. The one who has a plank in his own eye!

Matthew 7:1 is further supported in the present tolerance movement by Romans 2:1 (read). Does this mean no one should not judge? Of whom is Paul speaking here? Well, verse 2b and 3 clearly tells us of whom he is speaking (read).

C. The Methods of the Saleable Gospel

What are the methods of the saleable gospel? I think #1 is this: Find out what people's felt needs are and minister to those. Does that sound good or bad? Well, it sounds good. But what is the outcome? Do you know anyone who has a felt need for pride his or her pride to be exposed and dealt with? If you minister to people's felt needs then they will soon heap up for themselves teachers who will tickle their ears and make them feel better by meeting their felt needs.

I will never forget the first time I came in contact with this message. I was the superintendent Prairie Tabernacle Sunday School. I attended various seminars and a pastor friend of mine from the Prairie Tabernacle and I went to Edmonton for a special seminar. A teacher from Briercrest Bible College told us how to run Sunday School. You have a questionnaire and find out what people's felt needs are and then you minister to those needs. No use teaching things people have no interest in. It is much easier and much more successful to teach things people are interested in.

Well, a few little red flags waved in my mind but it took me years before I could put my finger on the problem. The teaching of those years were the beginning of the seeker friendly church.

Well, if you seek to meet people's felt needs, no one feels the need for guilt about sin or conviction for sin. Anyone here, you sense a deep need for sin to be exposed in your life so that guilt and conviction will set in? Of course not, and that includes me. I have a strong aversion for guilt feelings and I just hate it when conviction sets in. But afterwards yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness, just like discipline by God does!

Do not make people feel uncomfortable. Make them feel at home. It does not matter if they come to church in shorts or with long hair or no hair. Make them feel at home. That is the "seeker friendly church" or the "user friendly church." You woo them into the church by non-convicting methods and then once in the church you make them feel at home. And once they have become used to things and see that this is a better way of life, then they will ask about it and then you help them. So you have the church as casual as you can so as to not make them feel out of place. Those are the methods of the seeker friendly church.

What does the seeker-sensitive church say about its methods? They say that the change is not in the message, but in the methods.

Lee Strobel, who wrote the books "The Case for Christ" (former Teaching Pastor at Willow Creek Community Church now on board with Warren) writes, "*Objections [to the market-driven church] generally relate to the method that's used to communicate the Gospel, not the message itself and consequently we're free to use the God-given creativity to present Christ's message in new ways that our target audience will connect with*" (*Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, by Lee Stroebel, p. 168).

D. The Outcome of the Saleable Gospel

I am not a business man. But there are a few things about business I know. Tell me, those of you in business, is this not so: the customer is always right. In reality we know that is not true, but in business you treat it that way. Now if you let the customer have his way, he will be back, and maybe others too. And if you stand on what is right, he may go elsewhere.

Do you know what happens to the preacher who views the opinions of the consumer too highly? Do you know the dangers of such an approach to the gospel? What happens is that in not too long a time, people heap up for themselves teachers according to their own desires, having itching ears. And soon, there is no true gospel (1 Tim. 4:3).

What is the outcome of the saleable gospel? If I have assessed and understood this movement rightly, the seeker sensitive churches have subtly led Christians away from theology to experience. Experience has become the measuring tool of success. If it makes me feel good, it is good. If it makes me feel better, it must be right. If it works, it must be right.

Recently I spoke over the phone with a friend of mine from a Pentecostal church. He was deeply concerned about his own church's lack of discernment. He told me, "I work with a large company. I recognize Warren's market driven strategies. We learn them in business all the time." And then he sent me an article which says this:

"In the video that accompanies the "40 Days of Purpose," (By the way, churches all over our land are doing or have done this 40 days of purpose thing.) Warren leads his listeners in prayer at the end of the first session. The prayer goes like this:

"Dear God, I want to know your purpose for my life. I don't want to base the rest of my life on wrong things. I want to take the first step in preparing for eternity by getting to know you. Jesus Christ, I don't understand how but as much as I know how I want to open up my life to you. Make yourself real to me. And use this series in my life to help me know what you made me for."

Warren goes on to say: *"Now if you've just prayed that prayer for the very first time I want to congratulate you. You've just become a part of the family of God."*

I quote again from the same article: "John MacArthur is on target when he writes, 'Listening to a seeker-sensitive evangelical preacher today, we're likely to think it's easy to be a Christian. Just say these little words, pray this little prayer, and poof! you're in the club.' Admittedly, salvation is received by faith alone in Christ alone, but it is not received by mouthing a little prayer lacking in biblical content and understanding, with the hopes that you will find purpose in life. As a matter of fact, one evangelical leader is reported to have entitled a sermon in response to the seeker-sensitive gospel, 'How to Fill Your Church with Tares.'

MacArthur warns, "People are breezing through those wide, comfortable, inviting gates with all their baggage, their self-needs, their self-esteem, and their desire for fulfillment and self-satisfaction. And the most horrible thing about it is they think they're going to heaven."

What is the outcome of the saleable gospel, or the seeker sensitive gospel? It is the same as that of the social gospel: Many who sat in darkness, are sitting in darkness still. Only, in the seeker sensitive experience, they think they are in the light. And to this light the Scripture says, "If the light that is in them is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23). Jesus says in Matthew 23:15 that these kind of proselytes are twice as much a child of hell than their teachers.

CONCL: I must conclude. I have asked, if the devil were to come with a message acceptable to Christians, would he come with something blatantly obvious, or something very close to the truth? We well know the answer.

Let me now ask this question: Have I now caught us up with what is happening in the church with regard to false gospels? No! Amazingly, we were barely into the seeker sensitive age, when it was overtaken by what is now called the Emerging Church. The emerging church is not happy with the results of the seeker-sensitive church and it is furthering the errors. I have been told that whereas the seeker sensitive church led away from theology to

experience (feelings); the emerging church led from experience to mystical experience. This path has led many Christians from Protestantism to Greek orthodoxy and Catholicism. I cannot see otherwise than when the Emerging Church is done, we will be back where we were before the reformation, only now we will be enlightened to understand what we missed back then. And then we will see the false church in full blossom, which I believe is pictured in Revelation 17-18. (Dave hunt here)**

And so, what is the final outcome of the saleable gospel? Well, new converts or prosylites are made. And I cannot see otherwise than that many who are led to think they are Christians are not saved at all. And now they are twice as lost as before.

Read Avant article. (I am not sure if I can discern yet fully between that which comes from a seeker-sensitive mindset or from the Emerging Church. But it seems that this Avant article may be geared more to the emerging church than the seeker-friendly church?.)