

THE DANGERS OF A DILUTED GOSPEL

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AN AMAZING FACT:

In 2005, cancer patient Georgia Hayes won a \$2.2 billion court settlement against her pharmacist, who had diluted her chemotherapy drugs with water. In the process, she had lost her best chance for recovery. While \$2.2 billion is a lot of money, it's little comfort when you don't have long to live.



Dilute: to make thinner, to lessen strength, to adulterate, to reduce value or efficiency, to make fainter, or to water down

What could be more deadly than diluted cancer medication? Maybe placebo pills for a cardiac patient. Or diluted insulin for a diabetic.

Actually, the most deadly medicine is a watered-down gospel—because the tragic results are eternal.

Jesus says there will be two groups of people in the end times. One group He calls few, the other He calls many. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? ... and done many wonders?’ ... And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Evidently, the majority of Christ's professed followers are self-deceived. They know His name. Their religious activities seem to have the marks of genuine ministry, but Jesus, with a broken heart, will declare to them, “I don't know you.” Why? Because they live a compromised life full of sin.

This is a popular characteristic of people in the last days. They are “lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ... haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:2–4).

Of course, when Paul describes the last-day conditions above, he's describing what has always been typical in the world. But here he's saying that it will infiltrate the church. All these lawless behaviors so prevalent in the world are going to be common in the church. Christians will have all the “form of godliness” but lack the power (2 Timothy 3:5).

They have a medicine bottle and a label, but they're taking diluted drugs that can never heal them.

SIN ISN'T JUST A CASE OF THE SNIFFLES

Perhaps you know somebody with hay fever. Maybe even you.

There are some over-the-counter pills you can take to fight the symptoms. Sometimes, depending on the pollen, you can take half a pill and be okay. Sometimes, though, you have to take the entire pill. If you don't take the right dose, you might leave the house thinking all's well, but then later it hits you: Your eyes start itching and your nose starts running. You're miserable. You just can't wait until winter arrives.

Getting the right medicine in the right dose makes a world of difference.



So it is with the gospel. If we don't get the full strength, we could be deceived into thinking we're really healed when we're actually getting worse. Likewise, the devil is mass-distributing a watered-down version among God's people. He's content to let you go to some churches because the medicine there is often so diluted it won't make any transforming difference in your life.

"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3, 4).

In this verse, Paul describes a problem in the pulpit *and* in the pew.

You have preachers who are not sharing a straight message, and you have people who don't want a straight message. The people don't want to take anything that's hard to swallow. They generally want what's easy and sweet to the senses. They want someone who will give them a prescription for candy-flavored, chewable medicine.

"Savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29).

The gospel gets watered down because preachers want to be popular and some, for pride or money, want to draw away disciples after themselves for power and influence. (See Ezekiel 13:10.)

UNTEMPERED MORTAR

Instead of warning the lost to turn from their sins, false teachers tell people to be at peace in their sins because God is too full of grace to expect them to change. They give diluted medicine, which gives people a false sense of security.

The Scriptures refer to false teachers as those who build a wall and "plaster it with untempered mortar" (Ezekiel 13:15). In Bible times, lazy builders would stack bricks with no mortar and then put a plaster veneer over the bricks to hide it. Without the

mortar, there's no stability. (Today we use concrete to hold the bricks together.) The wall might have looked solid from the outside, but a donkey could have kicked it over because it had no real strength.

More than 500,000 were killed or injured in the 2010 Haitian earthquake. One of the principal causes of these casualties was untempered mortar. Greedy contractors skimmed on the percentage of concrete they mixed into the mortar and expensive iron rebar, which reinforces the concrete. It made for pathetically weak walls, and as soon as the massive earthquake struck, the fragile buildings crumbled.

There are walls for Christians too. The Ten Commandments are a wall, built to protect your freedom and happiness. When someone gets an STD because of promiscuous living, he reads the seventh commandment and understands that wall was put there to protect his happiness, not to prevent happiness.

The wall of obedience protects our lives, freedom, and contentment. But if the mortar gets diluted, whether from the pulpit or the pew, then, when the storm comes, like a house built on sand the wall implodes.

DILUTING THE PROSPERITY

Naturally, I always want a big crowd in church. That's understandable, right? But this desire carries risk. In order to draw people to church, I'll always be tempted to make my sermons as attractive as possible.

Marketers try to convince you that if you use their product, you will live longer, look better, have more money, and be more popular. Does the Bible tell us that's how we're to market

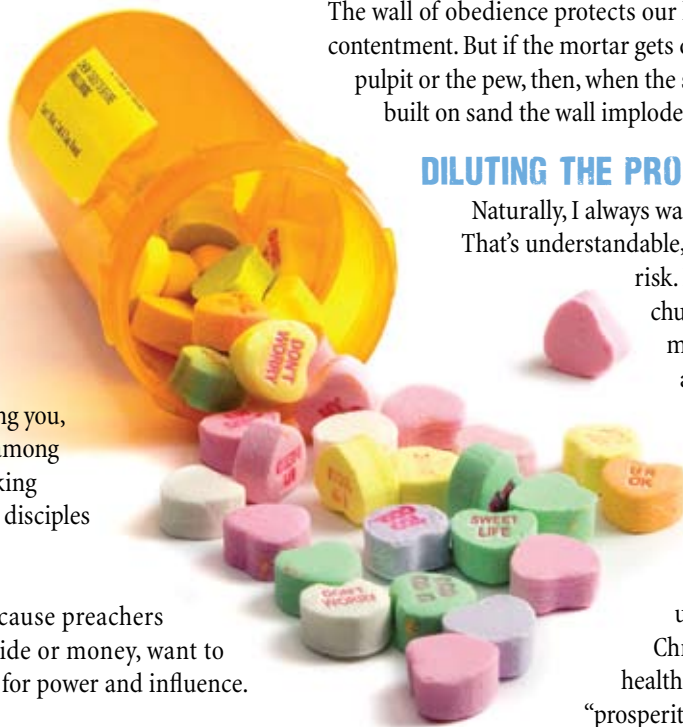
Christianity? Does Jesus promise health and wealth and popularity? Is "prosperity preaching" right?

There's a lot of good in the good news.

There are many blessings, but Jesus also says, "Take up [your] cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Deny yourself daily—we don't hear that very often. Jesus said the real key to happiness is to put God and others first. Today, however, it's all about putting "me" first.

A lot of people hear this diluted version of the gospel and believe it's good medicine.

But good medicine is really just the beginning. Jesus said we are to be doers of the Word. A Christian isn't defined by church attendance. A Christian is defined by a transformed heart that influences his



actions. Jesus asked, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). We can’t call ourselves Christians if don’t do what He says. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Part of the gospel we’re not hearing today is that He wants us to be a people who obey Him. Giving the industrial-strength prescription of gospel truth will heal the symptoms of sin.

We are not saved by obedience, of course. That is legalism. But obedience is not legalism if it’s a response to God’s love, a response to having already been saved. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

One way the gospel gets diluted is when people are encouraged to have enough faith to believe that God will forgive them, but not enough to believe that He will keep them from sin. It’s a gospel that says God accepts you as you are and doesn’t care if you change. The Bible says the gospel is not just about justification, but also about sanctification. You can come to Jesus just as you are. That’s good news. But He loves you too much to leave you that way. That’s good news too! You can be changed to be like Jesus. He can transform you so you become a new creature. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). That’s great news!

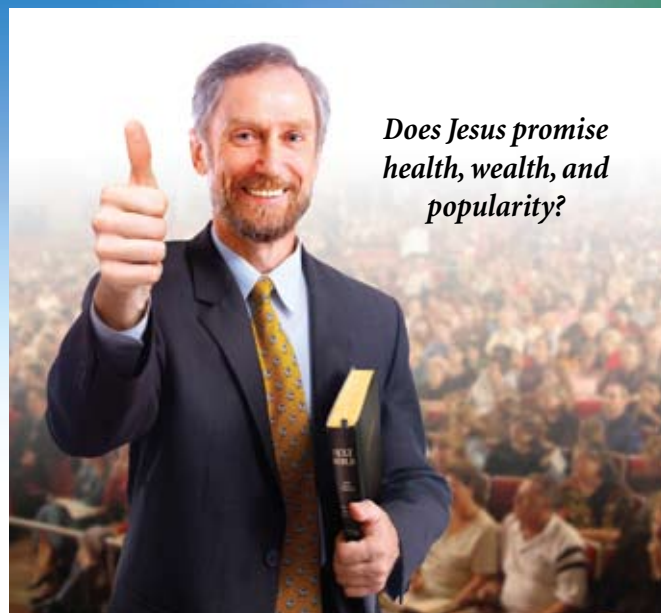
SHOW, DON'T TELL

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, [from falling,] And to present you faultless Before ... His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24). I want to have a life where I don’t stumble all the time. How about you?

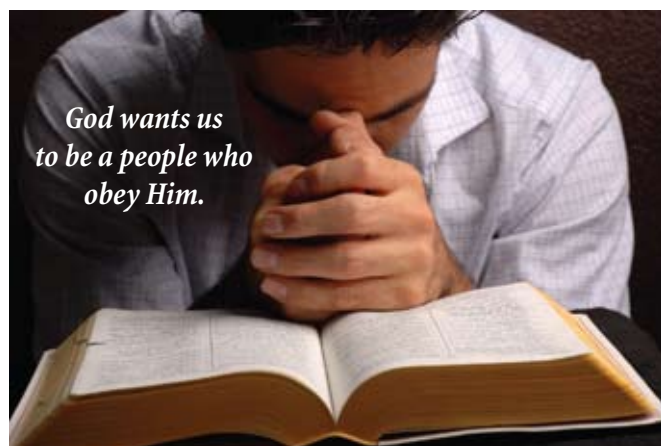
But Christians hear so little of that, and the results are obvious. People have to explain they’re believers because they don’t consistently live it. Instead, we ought to be lights on a hill so people say, “Wow. Her life is distinctly different.” “He’s not just like everybody else.”

“What’s different about you?” And we answer, “I believe in Jesus. He saved me. He changed my life.”

*Let’s not dilute
the power of the cross.*



*Does Jesus promise
health, wealth, and
popularity?*



*God wants us
to be a people who
obey Him.*

Prior to the Dark Ages, the church thrived even though the Christian religion was forbidden. They were being thrown into lion dens and being burned at the stake. They couldn’t practice it in the open, so they dug catacombs under Rome for the first 200 years of Christian history. You can still visit these Roman mines. Some Christians etched on the walls, “Vita, vita, vita,” which means, “Life, life, life. I have life.” They were suffering and dying in these dark mines—and yet they were joyful.

Then something happened in Rome. Constantine wanted to build his empire because of the civil war between him and Maximus. He claimed to have had a vision and was now supposed to fight under the sign of the cross. They didn’t know anything about Christianity, but his soldiers painted Christian symbols on their shields. They were all pagans, but they marched into the Tiber River for battle and called it a baptism, figuring they were Christians when they came out the other side. It became the in-thing to be a Christian, but they hadn’t been taught the whole truth.

When the emperor made Christianity acceptable, pagans came pouring into the church. The leaders didn't handle it well. They didn't want to lose the new converts, so they began to dilute the message, just a little. The pagans would have to make a lot of lifestyle changes, and if they didn't like it, they might go back to persecuting Christians.

One such problem was idols. One historian wrote, "There were more idols in Rome than Romans." These new Christians wanted to do what was right and asked the priests what they should do with their statues. Some of the priests said, "Throw them out!" But many of the pagans balked. So some of the other pastors suggested, "Ease them into it. Tell them to give Christian names to their idols and we'll take care of it later." So they named their idols Peter, James, John, and Mary. Many pagan practices crept into the church so that in one generation Christianity became the commingling of paganism and Scripture. They diluted the gospel for the sake of having quantity instead of quality—and it ushered in the 1,260-year Dark Ages.

HOW TO GROW THE CHURCH

It's a constant temptation churches face when measuring success. They ask, "Is it growing?" Very rarely do we measure the success of a church by how godly the people are. Instead, we measure success by numbers, and that can be a mistake. We're tempted to make it easier to be a member. It becomes a mindset to just get them in the door and worry about the rest later. So we dilute the message little by little to make the medicine easier to swallow.

Even today, I hear pastors saying, "Don't insist they quit smoking or drinking before they join the church. Make it easy for them to come to Christ and baptize them. The Lord will deal with these things in His own time." Then they come in and years later they're still chained to these destructive habits.

Baptism represents a new beginning, a liberation, a changed life. It doesn't mean you're instantly perfect. It does mean addictions to sin should be repudiated and left behind. One of my favorite Christian authors said it this way:

"Men and women have many habits that are antagonistic to the principles of the Bible. The victims of strong drink and tobacco are corrupting body, soul and spirit. Such ones should not be received into the church until they give evidence that they are truly converted, that they feel the need of the faith that works by love and purifies the soul. The truth of God will purify the true believer.

He who is thoroughly converted will abandon every defiling habit and appetite. By total abstinence he will overcome the desires for health-destroying indulgences" (*Bible Training School*, July 1, 1902).

As we learned earlier, the Dark Ages were a result of bringing people into the church before they really understood, before they had surrendered their hearts. The church becomes diluted, enfeebled, weakened. The power of being a follower of Jesus loses its strength, and pretty soon we're coming together, going through a ritual once a week, and living like the world. Instead of winning souls to Christ and living godly lives, we're doing exactly what the devil wants in weakening the power and the efficacy of the gospel.



"GOSPEL LITE"

The mega evangelical churches have something they call "gospel lite."

They want visitors to be comfortable, so they make the worship experience as easy as possible. They offer coffee and donuts before and after service. They encourage relaxed dress, even just T-shirts and shorts. They have theater-like seating so you don't have to squish together in a pew with strangers. If you offer enough enticing perks, you can get anybody to visit for an hour. Then once you get them in, you can't preach the hard

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things or rebuke their pet sins because they might not come back.

Feed them on clichés about the power of positive thinking. Entertain them with animated music, laser lights, and dramatic presentations. Then you think it must be the truth because after all you have 10,000 people coming to church.

But how many have repented of their sins and really know Jesus?

So how are you going to know that you're not getting a diluted gospel from your pastor? You must study the Bible with guidance from the Holy Spirit. You need to search it out for yourself.

There are a lot of preachers out there who are wolves in sheep's clothing. They measure success by numbers, so they preach a diluted gospel. Pastor John MacArthur says, "Watered down, diluted theology will fail to produce deep reverence, deep worship, deep repentance, deep humility, deep understanding of God's nature, His work, His ministry, His laws, His standards, His principles. It fails to make people of God, people that are God-centered." He's right.

An undiluted gospel is going to involve real repentance for sin, a sorrow for sin, and a turning away from it. Repentance means "remorse, regret, contrition for past sin. To change for the better as a result of remorse or contrition for one's sins." The first thing John the Baptist said when he started preaching about the kingdom of God was, "Repent." The first thing Jesus said was, "Repent," and if He tells us to repent, it means we can and we should.

Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:13).

The first church leaders said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). First comes the baptism of repentance, then comes the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The full-strength gospel medicine precedes reception and filling of the Holy Spirit.

Along with repentance must be restitution and reform. "If the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die" (Ezekiel 33:15).

In 1858 revivalist Jeremiah Meneely brought his preaching to Belfast, Ireland. He talked about repentance, reform, and committing yourself to the Lord. The men there worked in a



shipyard and were so convicted of their sins, they repented and began to return the tools they had pilfered during the previous years. The response was so complete the shipyard had to build extra sheds to take in all of the returned tools! Eventually, the management asked that there be no further returns of stolen property! You know the Holy Spirit is working in a community when people start living like real Christians and make tangible changes in their lives. This is the fruit of the real gospel.

WHAT GOSPEL DO YOU DESIRE?

Is it your desire to be filled with the Spirit and to have an undiluted message in your life and in your church? Let us encourage one another to be real Bible Christians by studying for ourselves to know what constitutes having a relationship with the Lord and being saved.

I have a friend who is still crippled today from a small plane crash. While flying with friends in a South American country, they trusted a stranger to fill up the tanks in their aircraft. It turns out that gas was badly contaminated with water. Unfortunately, they did not discover the polluted fuel until they were 600 feet off the ground. The engine coughed, lost power, and they crash landed in the jungle.

Friend, do you know that you're getting the pure, high-octane, unadulterated, industrial-strength fuel of God's truth? Many will be deceived by bright lights and promises of wealth, but a few will study for themselves in the Word and be changed. Which one are you?

