

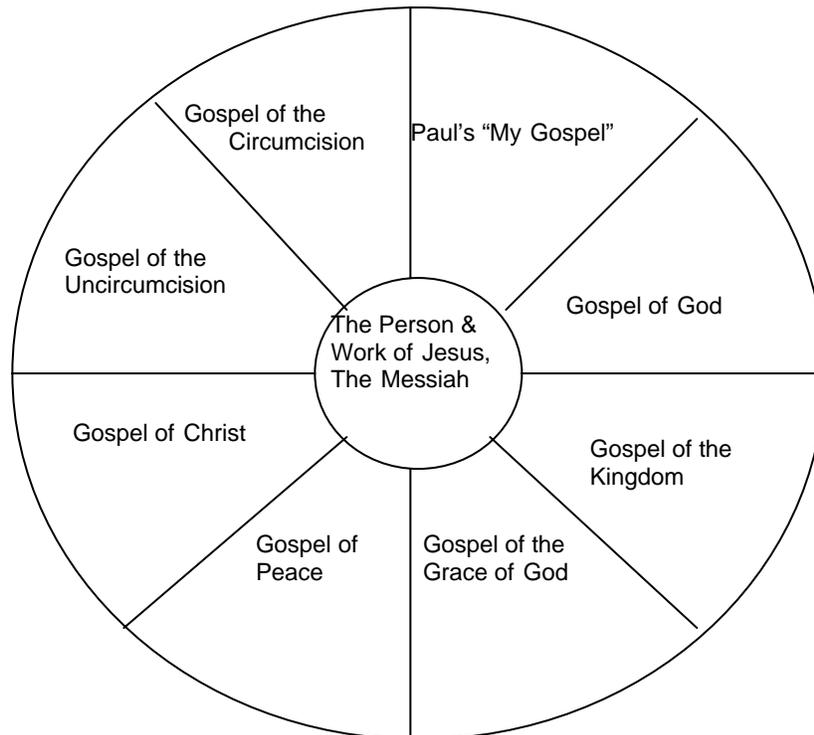
The Church of the Servant King

Soteriology Series

SO_3_Just What is the Gospel of Salvation? – Part 2

Introduction

In the last lesson (SO_3_Just What is the Gospel of Salvation? – Part 1), we looked at the various gospel messages contained in the Bible. We saw that even though there are different gospel messages, the essential elements concerning the Person and Work of Jesus as the Messiah have been the same regardless of dispensation. This fact is a wonderful illustration of the continuities (similarities) between various dispensations of history. The chart below depicts this principle quite well in the way of summary of our last lesson.



Examples of Distortions of Elements of the Gospel Message Throughout the Church Age

Throughout the Church Age, Satan has inspired the unbeliever to produce messages contrary to or not containing one or more of the essential elements for salvation. These messages or pseudo-gospels have denied either Jesus' humanity, deity, or His all-sufficient, efficacious work on the Cross. Examples follow:

- *Ebionism or the doctrine of the Ebionites* – 1st Century A.D. Denied the deity of Christ. The roots of Ebionism can be traced to the Judaizers. Paul wrote the book of *Galatians* to counter the message of the Judaizers. The Ebionites were strongly monotheistic and wrestled with the deity of Christ. They denied the virgin birth. They believed that the Christ nature descended upon Jesus at His baptism. They taught that Jesus was a mere man who

by his scrupulous obedience to the Law was justified and thereby became the Messiah.¹ Near the end of Jesus' life, the Christ withdrew from Him. They rejected the apostolic authority of Paul's letters and teaching in their attempt to resolve the tension between Jesus being fully man and fully divine at the same time. In doing so, they had to deny Scripture that referred to Jesus' pre-existence and the virgin birth.² John's Gospel (the 4th Gospel) refuted this heresy.

- *Doceticism* – 1st Century A.D. Takes its name from the Greek word *dokeo* (δοκέω – to appear). It is the diametrical opposite of Ebionism in that it denied Jesus' humanity. All matter was evil, so God could not become human. Their problem with the virgin birth was that if Mary had carried to term the baby Jesus, then she would have contributed something material to him. They believed that Jesus just passed through Mary like water through a tube without her having contributed anything. The 1st and 2nd Epistles of John were written to refute this heresy (see 1 Jn 1:1-4; 4:2; 5:6; 2 Jn 7).
- *Gnosticism* – 1st and 2nd Century A.D. The name was derived from the Greek word *gnosis* (γνῶσις) meaning knowledge. This philosophy included the idea that some creatures had a superior capacity for knowledge. This system denied the humanity of Christ and in extreme form it even denied the reality of His human body. Gnostics believed that the body was evil. Some practiced an extreme asceticism, whereas others concluded that what is done with the body is spiritual irrelevant. The latter engaged in licentious activity.³ The 1st Epistles of John were written to refute this heresy (see 1 Jn 1:1-4; 4:2; 5:6; 2 Jn 7).
- *Sabellianism* – 3rd Century A.D. Arose from earlier attempts in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries to define the nature of the relationship between Christ and God. The two major categories of thought in this regard became known as dynamic monarchianism and modalistic monarchianism. The former (dynamic monarchianism) derived its name from the belief that God was "dynamically" present in Jesus, but Jesus was not God, only a man in whom there was the force of God at work. Dynamic monarchianism never became widespread.

The latter (modalistic monarchianism) was strongly committed to the full deity of Jesus. However, it did so at the expense of denying the Trinity. There was one godhead with different names. The modalistic monarchists were the philosophical forerunner of the modern-day Oneness movement in this respect. Sabellius developed this view in its most complete and sophisticated form. The result of this philosophy was a denial of the existence of the Son of God as a distinct person prior to the incarnation. The union between the divine and human natures of Christ was only temporary.⁴

- *Arianism* – 4th Century A.D. Denied that the Son was of the same essence as the Father, but held that the essence in both was similar. This heresy was much more developed in its philosophy than Ebionism and it was the philosophical forerunner of the modern day Jehovah Witnesses movement. The conclusion was that Christ was created even though the greatest of all creatures.⁵ This movement also had trouble with the concept of the Trinity.

¹ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1995), 50.

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 694.

³ *Ibid.*, 1197.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 333-34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 695-98.

- *Apollinarianism* – 4th Century. Viewed Christ as possessing a human body and soul like animal life, but not possessing a human spirit defined as rationality and intelligence. In its place was the divine nature of Christ. The result was that Christ was not completely human. Like doceticism, it denied Jesus' full humanity. Unlike doceticism, it acknowledged that Jesus was human, but not fully human. Apollinarianism truncated the humanity of Jesus. Jesus had a human body, but not a human soul.⁶
- *Friedrich Schleiermacher (19th Century)* – Understood Jesus as one who so opened Himself up to God that his person was subsumed in the divine – so much so that He came to be called the Son of God. Accordingly, this represented a denial of the deity of Christ as well as a denial of the necessity of His work on the Cross. Jesus did not have a divine nature, just a divine consciousness. Conversion is our doing as did Jesus, opening ourselves to be filled by God. Assurance of one's salvation is related to our feeling of being in relationship to God. Schleiermacher is known as the father of modern liberalism.⁷
- *Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Herrmann, Adolf von Harnack (19th Century)* – Each of these men built upon the Immanuel Kant's idea of ethics as 'true religion' together with Schleiermacher's reconception of Jesus Christ as our example of salvation.⁸ The philosophies of these men effectively denied that there is only one way to be saved, i.e. placing one's trust in the efficacious work of Christ, the Son of God. In place of the true saving gospel a system of ethics is substituted as the center of the Christian faith. This 'liberal' thinking is the basis of modern ideas of universalism (all will eventually be saved) and pluralism (there are many ways to the same God). Once orthodox denominations have split over this issue and the more liberal groups now struggle with defining the gospel.⁹
- *Karl Barth (1886-1968)* – While Barth affirmed orthodox doctrines such as the Trinity and the incarnation; however, he was a universalist believing that Christ's death saved all mankind.¹⁰ We certainly believe that Christ's death paid the penalty for the sins of all mankind so that whosoever will may believe and be saved. However, it is an entirely different thing to say that Christ's death saves all mankind.
- *Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976)* – Bultmann's philosophy is difficult to explain; however suffice it to say that his philosophy denied the deity of Christ, but promoted the idea that Jesus had an extraordinary experience of God the Father. This experience was the prototype of all who would follow Christ in faith.¹¹ Bultmann's 'Christ event' was something that occurred in one's consciousness (i.e. relative or subjective) and not an objective event in history. Bultmann effectively denied both the deity of Christ and the salvific nature of His work.

⁶ Ibid., 714-15.

⁷ Dr. J. Scott Horrell, "Soteriology" (Unpublished class notes in Systematic Theology 404N, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 17.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ An example of this is the subject of an article by Susan Hogan/Albach, "Presbyterians Struggle Over Path to Salvation," *Dallas Morning News* (June 15, 2001). I should note that the Presbyterian denomination discussed in this article is the more liberal and larger of the two prominent Presbyterian denominations, i.e. the Presbyterian Church (USA) with approximately 2.5 million members. The other prominent Presbyterian denomination is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) with approximately 260,000 members.

¹⁰ Horrell, Class Notes, 20.

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

Hopefully, these examples serve to illustrate just a few of the many attempts throughout Church history by Satan to detract from and distort the true gospel related to the Person and Work of our Savior. Satan's most effective strategy has been to confuse the masses via a message that appeals to our innate tendency to earn, by our good deeds, the respect of God. Another way of saying the same thing is that Satan understands the ascetic trend and influence of the sin nature in man to produce human good. In the name of religion, man produces human good deeds out of a desire to gain the approval of God. We know from Scripture that human good will be rejected as a basis for entry into heaven (e.g. Rev 20:11-15 – the "works" recorded in the "books" verses the names written in the Book of Life). As long as the message that is proclaimed by the church (i.e. the universal body of Christ) is garbled and unclear regarding the gospel, then to that extent Satan will be effective in maintaining a blinding influence upon the world.

In our next lesson, we will begin examining some of the often misinterpreted passages regarding how one is saved.