

How False Is False?

How do we determine if a church is a false church?

You may have heard the saying... “Don’t teach me what counterfeit currency looks like, just teach me what to look for in the real thing so that when I see a counterfeit, I will know it is not genuine.” Well the same idea applies to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we just focus on knowing the true gospel, it should not be all that difficult to spot a false gospel. But then what do we do with this knowledge? When do we apply it? What if we know someone who goes to a church or is in a denomination that preaches a false gospel? Should we warn them about it? Or to put it another way:

How false does a false gospel have to be before we brand it as such and before we mark those who preach it as false preachers?

For example, I was once a member of an Assembly of God (AOG) church. This is a major Pentecostal denomination that believes in “speaking in tongues” among other things. Is speaking in tongues a gospel issue? I don’t think so. But let’s look at what the AOG believes about issues that are directly related to the gospel. Please note, I am referring to the teachings of the denomination and not the beliefs of any and all individuals who attend an AOG church, although they tend to be synonymous:

1. The Sovereignty of God and His prerogative to save whom He pleases when He pleases. The AOG does not believe this. They believe that the sinner chooses God, and that God “is a gentleman” who would not force His will on anyone. That kind of God is not the God of the bible, therefore, the AOG does not believe in the real God of heaven and earth.

2. The total depravity of lost mankind, sinners who because of their lostness are unwilling and unable to turn to God in true repentance prior to regeneration. The AOG does not believe this. They believe that lost sinners can repent and turn to God before regeneration and must do so in order to become regenerated (born again). They teach that one must “accept Christ” in order to be saved, leaving salvation the responsibility of the sinner and God at the mercy of the sinner. Since this is a seriously wrong view of the lostness of man, it is a false view of this aspect of the gospel.

3. The efficacy of the atonement (saving work) of Christ - its ability to save the sinner once and for all time, being a full payment of the sins of the redeemed person. The AOG believes that saved sinners can lose their salvation, based on the sinner “backsliding”. This belief calls God a liar when He declares that “he is able to keep them from falling and present them faultless” in Jude 1:24. This belief in losing one’s salvation is also based on a salvation plan that depends on the performance of the sinner, and not on the accomplishment of the Savior.

SUMMARY: if a church or denomination:

- A. does not believe in the sovereignty of God and His right to choose whom He wills to salvation, and
- B. does not believe in the complete lostness (spiritual deadness) of mankind, and
- C. does not believe in the complete satisfaction of God's wrath by Christ's atonement at Calvary

then I ask you, how can any true Christian say that we as believers should ignore such gross error and treat these people as fellow saints when the apostle Paul did not hesitate to say:

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”
[Galatians 1:8-9]

I can understand keeping silent if the issue was one that might cause unnecessary division among believers but when crucial spiritual truths are being swept under the carpet for the sake of unity, we are treading on very dangerous ground. We are showing that we are more concerned about the opinions of men than the word of God. In addition, we are showing that the truths of the gospel are not worth fighting for and we are siding with Pontius Pilate rather than the Lamb of God:

“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?” [John 18:37-38]
