

Simplicity of the Gospel

As the proponents of evolution receive more information from scientific discoveries using more advanced technology, the evidence is becoming clearer that the universe and life involve far greater complexity than they ever imagined. In addition, the discoveries do not fit with their long-held notions of the origin of the universe and life. Therefore, rather than change their views to admit the obvious and simple explanation that there must be a creator, they are coming up with more and more complex solutions, such as dark or undetectable matter, that would possibly allow their notions to still be held.

In a much different way, the modern Evangelical world is making serious mistakes with the issue of complexity in regard to the understanding of salvation. The gospel is simple. Jesus died for our sins. We are forgiven. We do not need to do anything to contribute to our salvation. However, the law and God's providence are not simple at all. Because the modern Evangelicals do not want to rely just upon the message of the cross for assurance of salvation, but want to mix in some law, namely a conversion experience or a "personal relationship with Christ", they set about to make the law and God's providence simple also.

The ten commandments are the foundation for the teaching of the law. Every other command in the Bible can be connected back to one of these commandments. But the application of these commandments can span thousands of subsequent commands, as found in the scripture. Most of the verses of the Bible are law. Even then, there is no statement in the Bible that these are a complete list of how to deal with every situation in life as God would have it dealt with. With the amount of sin in the world, and with our own dim consciences, it is still sometimes very difficult to make the correct decision in many situations in this world, with our minds and thought processes also so affected by this sin.

Similarly, the providence of God is something so complex that we just have to stand back in holy awe and wonder at the mystery of His actions. They are beyond our limited minds. One small event that will probably go unnoticed by the media in this world can eventually have huge consequences for many people in the world. One person treating a neighbor child nicely can possibly prevent that child from turning into a heartless criminal someday. Also, we really don't have any idea of what God is doing behind the scenes in this world, nor how he is working to draw people to salvation.

The modern Evangelicals, though, try to present a simple explanation of salvation based upon a simple explanation of law and providence. The use of steps and methods is common, both in reference to evangelism and to a conversion experience. Many of them have a list of questions to go through when approaching non-believers, and have also a list of responses to any answers they might receive. If they do not receive an answer that the person either has had a conversion experience or has "a personal relationship with Jesus Christ", the goal is to lead the person through such an experience, again using more pre-prepared steps. Then, the person is encouraged to use that experience for assurance of salvation. This process is labeled "presenting the gospel" by the evangelicals, but it

has a completely different meaning than what would be meant by Lutherans.

The simplicity of this quick, efficient process (and its success) is seen as evidence by the evangelicals that it is correct. They would view the complexity and lack of complete understanding of how God might work using a Lutheran teaching of salvation as proof that they are right and Lutherans are wrong. Lutherans would teach that the same salvation will occur in a baby as in an adult, that salvation is received through baptism and communion, as well as through hearing the word, that salvation may be lost by someone who does not avail themselves of these means of grace. This is complex to the evangelicals, and the complexity calls into question a Lutheran's salvation.

They would like to be able to approach anyone, ask them if they have had a conversion experience or a personal relationship with Christ, and know right there by their answer whether the person would go to heaven if they dropped dead on the spot.

However, this method is not gospel. The gospel is that Jesus died for our sins. What actions people take here on earth involves law. That includes what actions anyone takes in an encounter with the evangelicals.

A favorite technique of the evangelicals is to ask someone where they would be if they died tonight. This question can have its place, but a conversion based only on the desire to avoid the wrath of God in hell or to gain the pleasures of heaven as a kind of insurance policy can prevent a deep ongoing conviction of the terrible effects of sin, the wrath of God against all kinds of sin, and the sweetness of the gospel message. Instead, the response will be "Oh, I have had a conversion experience, so everything is fine between me and God."

The Bible seems to have somehow missed a clear presentation of these evangelical methods, so they have cobbled together verses here and there to support these simplified methods of evangelism. However, while evangelical's methods are not clearly delineated in the scripture, the Bible itself, including records of Jesus's encounters and teaching, seems to reflect a great breath and depth in its approach to spreading God's message of salvation.

An objection of the Evangelicals to the Lutheran teaching about salvation is that because it would not allow them to easily distinguish between those going to heaven and those who are not, that it must be faulty. But the desire to play God, to need to understand how He works, or who is going to heaven and who isn't, is just a result of a converted old nature, and not a new nature given from God. The old nature would love to find a way so that our salvation could be based, at least partially, upon our own actions. Then, we have a reason why we can feel that we are going to heaven, while some others are not. The new nature given us by the spirit, through the gospel, realizes that all forms of assurance based upon actions taken by us in this present world are inadequate to measure up to God's standards, and the only hope is in the gospel. But then that hope will grow far stronger than any hope based upon actions taken in this world. His Spirit will bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Those who trust only in their simple

conversion experience will be left wondering why they still are struggling with sin, if they are really willing to regularly confront the demands on their behavior by a thrice-holy God. If they are not willing to confront it and instead trust a conversion experience, that is probably even a more serious situation.

It is entirely possible for the old nature to convert to Christ to for the purpose of self-preservation and the avoidance of the wrath of God to come. Such a conversion does not produce true salvation. For a new nature to enter a person, the Bible says it must be through the preaching of the law and the gospel and baptism. This is nourished the rest of the believer's life by the remembrance of baptism, through exposure to the preaching of the law and gospel, and through communion. This will produce a true new nature that will struggle against the old nature.

Many or most evangelicals also hold simplified explanations of many areas of doctrine, and generally dismiss anything that seems complex or mysterious, including election. Indeed, many seem to sense that God would require more than a conversion experience lasting only a few minutes to meet his demands, and tend to dismiss anyone who doesn't go on to live a certain type of life as not truly converted. Unfortunately, this opens the door to more law to enter into the assurance of salvation, and has lead to attempts to simply the law also. Legalism has often resulted. Even simplicity for the gospel was lost. Evangelicals, such as Baptists, have often wound up with a complex view of the gospel and a simplified view of law and providence. Neither is correct. Both are dangerous.

The gospel is simple. The law and the providence of God are not. What goes on here on earth is often mysterious and very complex. While we might try to understand some of it to try to advance the gospel, our salvation is based upon the simple gospel.

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