The “Therapeutic Gospel”

Michael d'Offay 15 September 2016



The really frightening thing is that 5 million people have bought Your Best Life Now, and a good portion of those have probably walked away thinking they have read the Christian gospel.[1] When best-selling books have words like ‘God’, ‘Jesus’, ‘gospel’ and ‘cross’ in it, we assume that it must be biblical and good. We assume it must contain the Christian gospel. Yet some of these authors end up giving you a false picture of Jesus and a faulty gospel. One of these half-truth gospels is what some have called the “Therapeutic Gospel.” The Therapeutic Gospel teaches that Jesus is there to make you feel good about yourself and to help you be happy. It espouses a feel-good message with the aim of you experiencing personal worth and significance. Jesus becomes a kind of religious therapist, your best friend who is always in a good mood towards you, who loves you as you are, and who wants you to realise your inner potential.

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Therapeutic Gospel Symptoms

Here are some symptoms that will show if you are possibly on a Therapeutic Gospel diet:

- You never think about or talk about **the cross** and the mercy of God in your life.
- Phrases such as 'confessing my sin' are never spoken of, and practicing **ongoing repentance is not done**.[2]
- You believe God **never wants you to experience suffering** (see my article on suffering here).
- You **follow your heart's desires** and think that God will bless that, because He wants you to be happy.
- You often find Scriptures and prophetic words to confirm God's endorsement of your desires (this is called '**confirmation bias**' – when we try to validate our carnal desires by spiritualising them).

If you have the symptoms I've described above, the Bible would at best call you a carnal Christian (and at worst, a false Christian). In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul had strong words to say to the believers who had become self-centred. He called them 'people of the flesh.. infants in Christ'. Being 'of the flesh' means living in a way that puts yourself at the centre – independent from God. In this state, you can never be pleasing to God and never receive the spiritual food He desires to give you (see 1 Corinthians 3:1).

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I've struggled with being 'of the flesh' at times. Rather than taking Jesus' command to follow Him, I've expected Jesus to follow me and to order His agenda around mine! I've fallen into the trap where my faith becomes about what makes me feel good. Prayer becomes a handy tool to try to get what I want (see James 4:2-3), and memorising Scripture becomes a way to practice positive thinking, rather than getting to know and obey God better. For many of us, the Therapeutic Gospel is so appealing because it emphasises self-esteem over self-denial, and happiness over holiness, and it teaches a Jesus which is foreign to the God of the New Testament. It is a substitute gospel that makes much of us but little of God, which actually makes it not good news.

Facing Sin and the True Gospel

The Therapeutic Gospel never addresses the real problem that every single person faces: indwelling sin. For unsaved individuals coming into the church, they need to hear that their very nature is fundamentally sinful. Their sin is so serious that they need a new birth. They are so offensive to God that only a radical death to the old will do, and that is only found in Jesus. The Therapeutic Gospel only tells people how much potential they have, how good they are, and how

much God loves them. Giving someone this message is like arming a soldier with a wooden sword – it is totally inadequate in the battle against sin. These are half-truths and if the whole message is not given, this 'gospel' will send them straight to hell.

> The true gospel is not about a better life, but about a new life.

The gospel is not about us collaborating with God to make our lives more successful and happy. The true gospel is not about a better life, but about a new life. It is about the mystery of new birth found in Christ's death and resurrection. Let's not forget that we were so bad and corrupted that we needed a saviour. We were so lost that God came on a search-and-rescue mission to save us. The true gospel is packed with life-transforming power that brings hope and peace with God. May we never settle for a cheap substitute that tickles our ears but lacks the true grace of God.

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[1] https://9marks.org/review/your-best-life-now-joel-osteen/

[2] To this day, there are elements of indwelling sin that still lurk within each of us (see 1 Peter 2:11, Galatians 5:17, James 4:1). We still have desires that are self-centered. This is why we need ongoing repentance and an ongoing reminder of the power of the cross. Yes, the penalty of sin has been dealt with, but we still face the presence of sin until Jesus returns.