

The Barbed-Wire Gospel

Starting tomorrow I'll be off 5 weeks for a mini-sabbatical. While we worship with other churches, your preachers will be Pastor Keith Sensenig, Ron Bare, Todd Harmon, and Pastor Bill Stoner from Calvary Monument. I know you will give them the attention they deserve.

The elders have asked me to take this time off for which I am quite grateful. For you who have expressed concern, I'm just a bit tuckered out. Some is due to the normal press of ministry, and some, the complications of a growing church.

These 5 weeks are meant to give me a breather, not fix things. The elders are aggressively analyzing what changes should be considered. While off, I will relax, perhaps go away a few days. You can reach the secretaries, other pastors, and elders as needed. But you are the ministers; be the church and minister to each other.

We'll save the next section in Acts until I come back because I have a group of 4 messages I'll preach on it.

If you were asked, "So, what is the difference between Christianity and other faiths?" what would stand out as differences? 2 weeks ago, a caller on talk radio chided host Sean Hannity for claiming Islam is not an evil, bloodthirsty religion. The caller said, "It is!" Sean—a devout Catholic—insisted terrorists have *distorted* Islam.

He continued, "I believe all people are basically good. I'm a Christian but all faiths pretty much teach the same things. We all worship the same God." Sean's thinking fits with the group I identified last Sunday: the 26% of Christians who claim to be *born again* but think Christianity's simply one of many ways to God. He doesn't understand the barbed wire nature of the gospel, of Christianity.

In 1868, Joseph Glidden invented the barbed wire fencing that is still used today: twisted wire strands with rigid wire clips pointed outward at regular intervals. It was effective, but painful. Animal injuries were common enough for—not animal rights groups, but religious groups—to protest its use. They called it "The Devil's Rope."

Barbed wire keeps livestock *in*, and all others out. That's why it's a good metaphor for the gospel. Christianity's edges are barbed wire, not flexible like velvet or cotton. Other so-called truths can't cross over into Christian territory. Gospel truths are too distinct, too unique. So, what are the essential differences?

First, let me define terms I'll use this morning.

- Christianity: all denominations that worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God who saves apart from works. Catholic, Protestant, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, EV Free, Amish, and Methodist. In every group are genuine Christians and phony ones, but that's not our concern this morning.
- The Gospel: Synonym for Christianity with all its implications. The gospel is:
 - All people are sinners
 - Jesus died & rose from the dead, for sinners
 - Sinners can be saved from sin's penalty (hell) and sin's power by surrendering to Christ.

- Converted sinners live their lives for Christ
- Other religions: Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and so on (*not* other Christian denominations).

1. Different Works: consequence of salvation

Can good works save anyone? Buddhists try to work their way to heaven—Buddhism’s version of heaven. Instead of a 12-step program, Buddhism offers 17-steps: accept the 4 Noble Truths, follow the 8-fold Path, and obey these 5 precepts:

- Kill no living thing
- Do not steal
- Do not commit adultery
- Tell no lies
- Do not drink intoxicants or take drugs

Muslims have a 5-step plan to get to heaven: observe these pillars of faith:

- The creed
- The prayer (5 times a day)
- Almsgiving
- Fasting
- The Pilgrimage (at least once in a lifetime)

In fact, every world religion requires work for salvation, for its heaven—except Christianity. So why do 38% of born again Christians think you can earn your way to heaven? Let’s see what the Bible says. READ Heb.4:10; Tit.3:5, Eph.2:8-9; Rom.3:20; Gal.2:16. Jesus died needlessly if good works could get you a spot in heaven. Even the OT saints were made right by faith, not works. READ Rom.4:1-8.

So what *is* the role of works in the gospel? Answer: consequence of *being* saved, *evidence* of salvation. READ Eph.2:10; 2 Tim.3:17; 1 Thess.1:3. We’re saved *for* works, not *by* them. If works surface, likely there’s saving faith, and if they don’t, likely there isn’t.

So, the role of works inside the barbed wire gospel, is...

1. A Christian’s assignment (normal response to conversion).
2. A Christian’s verification.

2. Different Leader: Redeems from sin

The gospel has a different take on works. And, has a different kind of leader. In other religions, the leaders are moral teachers or teachers of wisdom; or, a prophet at best: Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna, Confucius. All teach their followers: rise above sin or evil by doing this or that. In other words, you become your own deliverer. But how can a slave deliver himself?

A shackled slave can’t set himself free. He’s at the mercy of free men shopping with money in their pockets: buy me, buy me. Then set me free! The bidder who *does* such a thing does so at great personal cost. He *redeems* the slave; buys him and frees him.

In Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Judaism, there’s no one to buy sin slaves and free them—though the Jews wait in *hope* of one. Today’s hottest religion—secularism—conveniently dodges the question, “How do *you* take care of people’s sin?” by replying, “There’s no such thing.”

Quote Rom.3:10-18, 23. Quote Rom.5:12. We're all sinners. Is.64:6 says even our good deeds are stained with self-serving goals and prideful motivations. So the guy redeeming slaves, the only one with money in his pocket, is Jesus. Since He alone never sinned (Heb.4:15), only he can buy the rest of us, set us free, and replace our badness with his goodness. People need a Redeemer. They need Jesus. READ Rom.5:6.

3. Different Access: Faith (not works)

Jesus worked so we wouldn't have to; he died so we wouldn't have to die; He made our freedom possible. But how does someone *access* Jesus' work, his death, the offered freedom?

An ATM card only gets you money at the machine *if* you have a pin number. You have to have the code to access the money. What code accesses Jesus' work? We've already seen that it's not works.

Some believe there *is* no code. Jesus' death gave heaven to everyone: universalism. But if that's the case, passages about hell, are nonsense. READ Rev.20:15. Sounds like *somebody's* not headed for heaven.

The secret codes is faith. I access Christ's work and gain his forgiveness through faith/belief. READ Rom.5:1-2. Trusting in God to save, not in *me* to save. Faith. So simple compared to the complicated duties that one must perform in some religions to win the approval of the gods. These people do, do, do. Jesus has already "done."

4. Different claim: Only one way

To many people today, this claim is the most offensive thing about the gospel. Some religions like Hinduism, by nature and doctrine, make room for other faiths. Supposedly. You wouldn't know that by all the Hindu violence in India in recent years. Attacks on Christians and Muslims. But the great problem in Hindu missions has been, they simply add Jesus to their already long list of Gods to worship, without realizing that Jesus says you can't spread worship around: it goes only to the three in one God.

And when Christians say it's our way or no way, moderns bristle. It's so intolerant, so disrespectful of diversity." Actually, there is more tolerance in Christianity than in most faiths. As people of other religions killed our missionaries over the centuries, they handed out food, dug wells, providing medicine, built hospitals, and gave away staggering sums of money. That's true tolerance: I love you all over; let me give you Jesus too.

READ Jn.14:6; Acts 4:12. Our claim is quite different from some faiths: there's only one way. One of the most evil things we could do, would be to tell people dying for hell, "take any road you want, any one at all. They'll all get you to the right place for hell.

Concl:

Since I doubt many of you are that interested in becoming a Buddhist, or a Hindu, or a Muslim or a Jew, I had other purposes in today's words:

- Conversion: some of you have ignored Jesus' invitation to surrender to Him because you believe Christianity's just a religion among religions; no better, no worse than others. Listen to Is.45:21: *...there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior, there is none but me.*

- Clearing up fuzziness: Perhaps some of you are so infantile in your faith that you're more of a danger to others than a help. READ Heb.5:12-13. ¹²*In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!* ¹³*Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.* Infantile, not because you're new to Christ, just stagnant. Never really grown. With the Bible a foreign book to you, your faith is dangerously undernourished and you need to these basics to mature in your faith.
- Challenging false perceptions. And perhaps there are some of you who profess Christ, who suspect Christianity is just a better faith among faiths; a truth among other truths. Watch out. That kind of thing inevitably led Israel to the mountain groves to worship Baal, Chemosh and Ashteroth. It will probably lead you to worship nothing: secularism.

It is a barbed wire gospel: no way but faith in Christ, not works. Dorothy Sayers observed, *The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man... The plot pivots upon a single character, and the whole action is the answer to a single central problem: what think ye of Christ?*