

After the Twin Towers were brought down by passenger planes during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a story circulated, which I will never forget. After one of the buildings was struck, people in the upper floors started to call down to the ground floor and ask the operators for advice. Some responded, "Remain where you are," while others urged, "Calmly leave the building." On that morning, life or death depended on who you listened to. The same thing is happening now in a spiritual sense. Today, there are two different gospels being preached. Your destiny may depend on which one you choose to listen to.

The Two Different Gospels

The first version of the gospel says, since it is impossible to overcome sin on my own, I'm doomed to a life of sin, but Jesus lived a perfect life to cover my defects. As a result, I have no choice but to live in sin all my life. Still, even though I live in sin, because of the merits of Jesus, I will be saved anyway. The other says, although it is impossible to overcome sin on my own, I'm not doomed to a life of sin, because Jesus lived a perfect life to help me overcome my defects. As a result, I must use God's power to overcome my sin. If I continue in sin and refuse to access the power of God to overcome sin, I will not be saved.

These competing gospels which are warring against each other are polar opposites and, like the messages of September 11, your destiny may depend on which one you choose to listen to, so let's consider each one carefully. First, let's summarize the two. The first gospel says, Jesus overcame sin so we don't have to. The second gospel says, Jesus overcame sin to give us power to overcome. Both of these have elements of truth in them, but only one of them is the true gospel, while the other is a clever

counterfeit which the apostles warned adamantly against (2 Cor. 11:4).

Do We Have to Overcome Sin?

First, let's consider the idea that Jesus overcame sin so we don't have to. Is this idea taught in the Bible? Let's look and see. John says that Jesus was "manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). While it may appear to a surface reader that Jesus lived a perfect life so that we don't have to, as we read further, we find a different story. The text continues, "Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him" (1 John 3:6).

John continues, "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin" (1 John 3:8, 9). Pretty clear. The idea that Jesus lived without sin so that we could continue in sin is simply not found in the Bible. This idea that Jesus overcame sin so we do not have to is not true. It is a false gospel that has crept into the church, and many gullible victims have fallen for it.

God Calls Us to Holiness

Throughout the Bible, God calls His people to overcome sin and strive for holiness and perfection of character. Jesus said, "be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). God says, "be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). If we didn't have to overcome sin, why would Jesus say, "Sin no more" (John 5:14, 8:11)? And why would God tell Cain, "sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7)? Clearly, God calls us to overcome sin.

Furthermore, according to the Bible, "sin is lawlessness," or breaking God's law (1 John 3:4). That means, in calling us to overcome sin, God is calling us to obey the Ten Commandments. That's why, when asked how to get to heaven, Jesus replied, "Keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). John says, "by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments," and "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3, 5:2, 3). While many Christians today regard any talk of obedience to the commandments as legalistic, they ignore the simple teachings of the Bible, which clearly call us to obedience.

Partial Truth and Partial Error

Still, the false gospel that claims Jesus lived a perfect life to cover my defects is partly true. Jesus does cover unknown sins (Acts 17:22), as well as our slips and falls into sin. John says, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1). Of course, this is only on the condition that after we slip into sin, we repent and then continue making efforts to overcome our sin. Those who live in sin without repenting and trying to overcome will not have their sins covered. We cannot continue to live in sin and still expect Jesus to cover our defects and let us into heaven anyway. Peter cautions us against "using your liberty as a cloak for vice" (1 Pet. 2:16). Those who expect to get to heaven without striving for holiness are clinging to an empty hope.

While there are some truths mingled in the false gospel, the gospel that says we do not have to overcome sin often produces Christians who say things like, "Since we're under grace, we don't need to focus on law or obedience" and "God, made me this way, so He'll just have to accept me like I am, with my sins and all." Tragically, those who refuse to overcome their

sins will not be saved in the end. The truth of the gospel is that God is offering us the power to overcome sin right now.

The Good News of the Gospel

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is offering to come into your life and give you the power to overcome your sins. While it is impossible to overcome sin on our own, the Bible tells us that "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26)! That means you are not doomed to a life of sin and failure. Jesus overcame sin, and now He offers to come inside you to enable you to overcome as He "also overcame" (Rev. 3:21). He offers to give you the power to overcome your sins, so you can say, "I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (Col. 1:29).

Jesus is now offering this same golden opportunity to every person alive. Christ is offering us the power to overcome our sins and obey His Ten Commandments, but those who refuse to make use of this amazing offer to overcome their sins in this life will finally receive the sentence, "depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). According to the Bible, only those who "do His commandments...may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). Just as there are two gospels today, in the end, there will be two sentences; "he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still" (Rev. 22:11). The choice is yours.

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Two different gospels are competing for the lead. Which one are you listening to?