

REINHARD BONNKE'S GOSPEL

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And Billy Graham's and most Churches today

By Arnold Kennedy

The Bonnke organisation informs us that every house in Britain has received its booklet, MINUS TO PLUS, which is presented as the gospel of Christ.

It is a sad indictment upon Christians today, when many accept any form of "evangelical" message, without first bringing it under the light of the Word of God. Such is the case with the *MINUS TO PLUS* booklet promoted and written by REINHARD BONNKE. Scripture exhorts us to be as the Bereans, who examined even the apostle Paul's doctrine to see if what he taught was the truth. (Acts 17:1 1).

Reinhard Bonnke is an evangelist, who claims not only to receive messages direct from God, but also to heal people, in a similar fashion to that of the apostles. His charismatic ministry, according to the man himself has seen him bring millions of souls to *respond* to the gospel of "Christ". "Christ" here does not necessarily mean "Jesus The Christ" and His Gospel.

DEATH OR SLEEP?

However, upon examination the "gospel" according to Bonnke is awry at its foundation - its view of man. Clearly in his view, our first parents did not bring "death" to mankind as God promised they would- (Genesis 2:17) if they disobeyed him and broke the covenant of works-.[1 Corinthians 15:22]. Rather, the Fall sent Adam and Eve to sleep! True, Bonnke does not actually teach that (and would be foolish to do so), but it is most certainly implied in the booklet.

If Bonnke believed God's Word at this point how could he expect sinners, "*dead in trespasses and sin*" (Ephesians 2:1-3), to drop everything and "come to Christ" without the initial conviction and drawing power of God the Spirit? -(John 16:8). Jesus provided the definitive theology when he categorically said, "NO MAN CAN COME UNTO ME, EXCEPT IT WERE GIVEN UNTO HIM OF MY FATHER." (John 6:44-65)

Bonnke evidently disagrees...

"JESUS RELEASED THE POWER OF GOD'S MERCY, AND FORGIVENESS, AND HEALING TO ANYONE WHO WOULD COME TO HIM AND SIMPLY ASK FOR IT," (p. 14).

"THE SAVING POWER OF GOD'S LOVE IS RELEASED FOR EVERYONE WHO ASKS FOR IT,." (p. 18).

SIN AND THE LAW

In the light of the marshy ground upon which the Bonnke "gospel" is built, it is not surprising there is an absence from the booklet of the teaching relating to man's natural depravity. It does not seem to feature in Bonnke's thinking. Instead what we find is a failure to understand the significance of God's holy law and the profound sinfulness of sin. Bonnke is correct when he defines the latter according to the Greek as literally, "missing, the mark" ("*hamartia*") but at that point he ignorantly or wilfully places an unscriptural connotation upon the well-known phrase.

"Missing the mark" is related to the ten commandments, when such is the sinner's plight even when he aims to obey the moral law(as if aiming a dart at the bulls-eye) he always misses. This is what Paul meant when he reminds us, "*for the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do ... I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*" (Romans 7:15). The "mark" has been missed.

In other words, the definitive description of 'sin' is that it is "*the transgression of the law*" -(1 John 3:4). The sinner is charged with breaking the law (he cannot do otherwise because of his natural condition) and having offended the perfectly righteous God whose law it is, has incurred retribution to satisfy justice. As Ralph Venning puts it, "*The desperately wicked nature of sin is that it is not only ... high treason against the majesty of God, but it scorns to confess its crime. It is obstinate and will not that he reign over it. It is not only not subject, but it will not be subject, nor be reconciled to God. Such is its enmity.*" ("The sinfulness of sin", p.30).

Bonnke twists the meaning of the phrase "missing the mark", **disconnecting it from any reference to the law**, and instead places it within an entirely different context - familiar to those who teach a universal

salvation. In his message, the phrase is now described as meaning a falling short of what God has intended each sinner to be. That is a mischievous variation on the old biblical theme.

Then we arrive at the centrality of the revealed gospel, the atoning work of Christ. Given an opportunity, how every Christian loves to proclaim it! If millions of pounds were available, as they were for Bonnke to publish his booklet, no chance would be missed to exalt Christ as the Sacrifice for sin at Calvary. He would tell the reader how the Son of God satisfied divine justice on Calvary, fulfilling the demands of the broken law, and was "made sin" in doing so -(2 Corinthians 5:21). He did it for his "sheep" only-(John 10: 15), who were by nature and in practice law-breakers. They only have to remember the Sermon on the Mount to realise this (Matthew 5:21-28), and James who was writing to the twelve Tribes, underlines this truth when he states that "*whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*" (James 2: 10).

ABELARD OR JESUS?

How strange then that Bonnke the veteran "evangelist" overlooks these central and vital truths, being ultimately less interested in Christ's exaltation and the glorious crucifixion, than in what man can gain from them. But there is something far more sinister than that in Bonnke's teaching, expressed in his statement, "JESUS' DEATH RELEASED THE POWER OF GOD'S LOVE INTO THE WORLD"- (p.3).

Apart from the fact this implies that God's love was unknown prior to Calvary, a teaching which has no basis in Old Testament fact, there is a strong hint here of Abelard's MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY. Contrary to the plain teaching of God's Word, the Abelardians rejected the concept of propitiation for sin, and instead taught that Christ's death merely revealed the divine love. In His death they claimed Christ identified himself with human suffering taking it upon himself, but in this way, he hoped to have a "moral" influence over mankind and lead it to repentance. Does the reader not recognize this heresy in much that passes for "gospel" preaching today? Certainly, Reinhard Bonnke has more in common with Abelard than with Jesus and his apostles, when he suggests that at Calvary (as quoted above), "THE SAVING POWER OF GOD'S LOVE IS RELEASED..." -(p. 1 8).

Does not the New Age teach the same thing with their 'Christ'? Although God's love was behind the atoning sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16), nevertheless, Calvary essentially reveals not love but "light" - divine righteousness -(I John 1:6). At Calvary, "*mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*" -(Psalm 85: 10). We have seen why. Calvary was the trysting place where the righteous truth of God's law, through the Son of God's gracious ministry, embraced the mercy and peace of which the redeemed are recipients.

FAITH OR WORKS?

But how are the benefits of saving grace received to anyone at all? "*Simple*", says Bonnke, "*just do something about it !*". ACTION is an important word in Bonnke's vocabulary. Not believing that "*the sinners of My people*" are "dead" in God's sight, Bonnke tells us that, "THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS CANNOT DO US ANY GOOD UNLESS WE [meaning anyone at all on earth] TAKE ACTION OURSELVES"-(p.20). True, sinners everywhere must heed the divine injunction to repent (Acts 17:30), but one suspects that in his theologically clumsy way this is not what Bonnke is telling his readers. From the above quotation, Arminianism has been let loose with gay abandon, "sleeping" sinners being told merely to wake up!

This is substantiated by his view of faith. To Bonnke, everyone in the world has the ability to exercise this quality; all that is required is for it to be exercised. Thus he employs the strange metaphor of the rip-cord: "FAITH IS AN ACT NOT A FEELING. YOU DECIDE TO BELIEVE, EVERY PERSON ALONE FOR HIMSELF OR HERSELF, CAN PULL THAT FAITH RIP-CORD. FAITH IS NOT SOMETHING THAT SOME HAVE AND SOME DO NOT HAVE. FAITH IS ACTION AND DECISION"-(p.22). This is a devilish notion, seemingly talking about "faith", but actually teaching justification by "works".

But what of those who refuse to pull the "rip-cord"? Bonnke's booklet contains no warning about eternal retribution, the word "hell" is mentioned only once, and one has cause to wonder whether the author believes in its existence. Perhaps, like many contemporary "evangelists", his policy is to overlook Jesus' warnings about the dreaded place lest sinners might be frightened off -(Matthew 5:29,30). A pragmatic preacher is one looking for God's frown upon his ministry. Equally, a false prophet is known not necessarily by what he says, but by what he refuses to say.

The final section of Bonnke's booklet provides specific instructions on how to pray for the "close encounter" with almighty God. As one would expect, against the humanistic and Arminian back-cloth of the booklet, the emphasis is upon the sinner rather than upon God. As if arising from sleep, man must awaken to heaven's universal appeal and open his own heart to the person and ministry of God the Holy Spirit. I expect Lydia, "*whose heart THE LORD opened*" is rather glad she "*attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul*" and was not left by the river reading Reinhard's booklet! -(Acts 16:14)

WORK OF GOD OR MAN?

To be intensely serious, there is a grave danger in Bonnke's teaching as in much of which passes for evangelism today. The inference is that upon receipt of the instructions given in what are in effect carnal efforts to please God, "*parrot-fashion praying*" and "*slot machine salvation*", sinners are provided with assurances that they have had a "close encounter" with God. Like the tragic victims of priest-craft, baptized pagans, they may find themselves one day hearing the most chilling of all words from the Judge himself - "I NEVER KNEW YOU" -(Matt.:22,23). That is without doubt what could happen to the "millions" Bonnke claims to have "influenced" for Christ, multitudes in whom there may well have been no real work of grace. Sadly, men like the author of the booklet are doctrinally upside down, their methods inside out. The gospel is simply not about "influencing" people. People can be influenced apart from the Grace of God, but that will not redeem them.

THE REAL PROBLEM - UNIVERSALISIM.

Billy Graham, Boonke and modern churches back up many Papal statements, presenting something that has no solution because it is totally un-scriptural. Billy Graham denied the work of Jesus in his universalism when he said,

"I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, whether they're conscious of it or not, they're members of the Body of Christ. ... whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world, or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ, because they've been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus, but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven".

There is no such universalism found through the Bible.

THE SOLUTION

What then is the answer? It is to bear in mind the essential order of priorities within church life: the worship of almighty God, the edification of his people and then thirdly the outreach to the lost. In that order, never deviating, but when we do an imbalance is created, the kind found in Bonnke's booklet "*MINUS TO PLUS*".

The only evangelism which God recognizes exalts Jesus Christ in all his offices to Israel as Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15), Priest (Zechariah 6:13) and King. (Revelation 19:16) That having been faithfully accomplished, God honours the ministry by gathering in the elect. The elect are not everyone on earth. They are *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*: Grace and peace are multiplied to them alone. Those '*foreknown*' are only the same people God says that He '*knew*' in the Old Testament. In turn they are convicted of their offending sin, God's awesome righteousness and the terrible judgment to come for those of them who die unredeemed -(John 16:8). Reinhard Bonnke's booklet is far removed from Scripture, and ultimately will do great harm to the cause he claims to serve.

What Bonnke is following is Rome's doctrine of universalism, ignoring what is summed up in Romans 9:18 "*Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth*". As we read in Jonah 2:9, "*Salvation is of the LORD*" and Rom. 9:16, "*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*". Paul often defines the limitation given, e.g. Rom 9:27, "*Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved*", or as Jesus says in, Matthew 15:24, "*But he answered and said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*".

Neither Reinhard Boonke, Billy Graham, nor the Roman Catholic church believe this. Most churches have likewise been seduced by this leaven of Rome. People like Benny Hinn are in love with Rome as the Pope as Billy Graham and Robert Schuller are. What does that tell us about them and their gospel?