

RLJ-995 APPENDIX

The Dangers of the Gospel of Accommodation

A sermon given by David Wilkerson at an Assemblies of God headquarters chapel service.
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By David Wilkerson

I am not coming to you as a pastor but with a prophetic word. God so shook me recently with this message that I should bring it somewhere, sometime in Springfield. This morning the Lord, by His Spirit, spoke to my heart that this is the time. He has called me to be one of His watchmen, and I have wept over this and prayed that He will help me deliver the message in a spirit of love. This is not a chastisement but a warning for the Assemblies of God.

A New Gospel

Accommodate means to adapt, to make suitable and acceptable, to make convenient. A gospel of accommodation is creeping into the United States. It's an American cultural invention to appease the lifestyle of luxury and pleasure. Primarily a Caucasian, suburban gospel, it's also in our major cities and is sweeping the nation, influencing ministers of every denomination, and giving birth to megachurches with thousands who come to hear a nonconfronting message. It's an adaptable gospel that is spoon-fed through humorous skits, drama, and short, nonabrasive sermonettes on how to cope—called a seeker-friendly or sinner-friendly gospel.

To begin with, those terms are unscriptural. The gospel of Jesus Christ has always been confronting—there is no such thing as a friendly gospel but a friendly grace.

This new gospel is being propagated by bright, young, talented ministers. They have come upon a formula which states you can go into any town or city; and if you have the right formula, within a short time you can raise a megachurch.

If you are a young man and have certain skills, you find those skills and a part of the city that would best suit you. You move into that area, poll it, and find out what the nonchurchgoers want:

"You don't like choirs. Well, would you go to a church that didn't have a choir?" Yes.

"You don't like to wear suits. Would you go where it's informal?" Yes.

Then you go to your computer and design a gospel that will not confront but will shoot out the desires and the needs of the people. After you have gathered a handful of people, you keep interviewing them to find out what they want; then you design your message to help people cope with their needs. The program you design is intended to make the church comfortable and friendly for all sinners who wish to attend.

This gospel is fast becoming the most prosperous and flourishing of all religious movements. Thousands attend these churches. The pastor is the CEO, and it becomes a business. They make no bones about it: They are following Madison Avenue tactics and can make a success of it. Their formula for quick church growth is cleverly packaged and is being sold especially to young ministers—those who want to be a part of the big boys and what's happening on a fast track. They want it to happen quickly.



Paul's Warning

Paul warned of the coming of another gospel and another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4). He warned the church that it's really not another gospel but a perversion of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. If you hear any other gospel, he said, let that preacher be accursed. In other words, no matter how pleasant, how pious, or how sincere, if the message is not the death of sin through the cross of Jesus Christ, let it be accursed.

I tremble when I read in the Scriptures that in the last days Satan is going to come right into the church posing as an angel of light. He's going to take ministers who, at one time, had the touch of God, and he's going to transform them into angels of light to become his tool of deception. That's frightening. It causes me to fall on my face before God for such false, deceitful workers transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. No marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it's no great thing if ministers also are transformed as the ministers of righteousness whose end shall be according to their works.

Paul said they are going to glory in the flesh, in their bigness, their numbers, their influence, and their contemporariness. They will boast they are contemporary, that there is a gospel that is out of style that doesn't reach human need anymore. They will glory in the world's acceptance. Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15). The context of that warning was: "Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it" (verse 14).

His warning was to beware of the wolves who are going to say it's really not that narrow and straight—they are going to come posing as submissive sheep. Jesus put His finger on the cause: ambition—ambitious ravening wolves. In the Greek it means "starved for recognition and quick gratification, quick growth."

Jesus left no doubt about His meaning. For example, He was addressing a struggling pastor who has worked for years and hasn't seen the kind of growth he wants to see. A young man with an accommodating gospel moves into town and within a very short time has a megachurch. People are flocking there because there is entertainment; it's a gospel of fun. I've been in some of them. It's the gospel of entertainment that has no conviction whatsoever. There is very little in their gospel that speaks to sinners of repentance, brokenness, and cross-bearing. A Christ is preached, Jesus' name is mentioned, but Paul said their's is another gospel, another Jesus.

Paul warned that if you are caught in this trap, if you want that hook of entertainment, that hook of sudden growth, this is the hook: The enemy will put in your path a teaching.

I have two preacher sons. One of them confessed to me, "Dad, I was that close to being sucked in because I fasted and prayed and didn't see the growth I wanted to see, and I saw these others grow. That hook was there, and I almost bought it."

That is something this Movement and every movement is going to have to look at and deal with: It is possible, through unholy ambition, to be transformed from a man of God, who has been seeking God and getting a word from heaven, to an unholy ambition and a tool of Satan. Let every pastor heed this warning: The moment you begin to consider the "competition," seeds of accommodation will be planted in your heart. Suddenly, Satan will put in your path a wolf in sheep's clothing—a man who will try to seduce you into ungodly ambition and achieving church growth at any cost. Yet the truth is, it could cost you your soul.

The Right Formula

If you find the right formula, according to the accommodation gospel, you can succeed in any field of endeavor.

An editorial in the New York Times (March 1, 1998) was entitled, *How To Manufacture a Best-Seller*. It told the story of John Baldwin, a 53-year-old carpenter and a would-be writer, who had struggled for years to make a living from writing. He determined to become famous and rich overnight by writing a best-selling medical thriller. He studied five or six best thrillers. After 7 years' research he found 10 steps to producing a

best-selling medical novel. He honed it with some Hollywood writers and agents, and here is the 10-step formula he used:

1. The hero is an expert.
2. The villain is an expert.
3. You must watch all the villain's activities over his shoulder.
4. The hero has a team of experts behind him, working in various fields.
5. Two or more on the team must fall in love.
6. Two or more on the team must die.
7. The villain must turn his attention from his initial goal to the team.
8. The villain and the hero must live to do battle again in the sequel.
9. All deaths must proceed from the individual to the group.
10. If the story bogs down, just kill somebody.

John Baldwin had the formula but no story, so he read of research by John Marr who was studying the epidemiological causes of the 10 plagues, hoping to explain their causes scientifically. The two men formed a partnership, and using Baldwin's 10-step formula, together wrote a 640 page manuscript called *The Eleventh Plague*. Harper Collins bought it for almost \$2 million.

Baldwin, who has no passion for writing, said, "If I get the formula, I'm going to be a multimillionaire and famous." Well, he's going to make another \$3 million on the movie rights, and he's laughing all the way to the bank. His philosophy: "If you have the right formula, you can be a success at anything."

You see, this is the gospel of accommodation—the formula. You get the formula, you get what people want, and you can be a success. I am here to tell you that a formula-based, accommodating gospel is contrary to everything in the Scriptures.

God's Method

Certain men of God met at Antioch to send out men to preach the gospel and establish churches (Acts 13). Here is God's method:

1. They ministered to the Lord and fasted. This was their planning session—worshiping, fasting, waiting on the Lord, and calling for direction from the Holy Ghost. They did not move until the Holy Ghost spoke. There were no formulas, no surveys, no door-to-door asking people what they wanted and then serving it to them.

2. They prayed—no strategizing, no network, and not one step until the Holy Ghost spoke His mind. Then and only then did they lay hands upon them, anoint them, and send them out in the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost.

Paul lived his whole religious life on religious formulas, and he said they didn't work. He gave up on formulas and said, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul boasted unashamedly, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). He was saying, "Gentlemen (he was talking to his peers), they want us to accommodate. The Jews are looking for signs in our gospel. The Greeks want the wisdom. They want to know how to cope, but I'm not compromising. There's only one message. Our gospel has been and will be the Cross and its demands as well as its victories. As for me, I'm determined to preach nothing among you but Christ and Him crucified."

What the Gospel of Accommodation Does (1)

I see three things in the gospel of accommodation:

1. It is the accommodation of man's love for pleasure.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers...of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4). The Greek for *pleasure* is "sensuous, lustful, voluptuous, exciting,

gratifying, sensual pleasure." If you move toward this gospel of accommodation, you are going to have to accommodate the people's lust because they are not going to give up their love for excitement. They've made gods of sports, pleasure, and lust. Unless that is confronted by the gospel of Jesus Christ, unless there is a truth that comes forth, you have to accommodate this lust that is in the American lifestyle.

I was shocked by an article in the *New York Times*.¹ Philip Wogaman, President Clinton's pastor, said, "Sexual misconduct does not automatically render a leader immoral. Morality should also be judged by indicators like courage, concern for the poor, fostering world peace, running the economy responsibly, and furthering racial equality. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are merely cultural expressions." In other words, Mr. Clinton has been told that he has enough good indicators to overrule another that would be immoral in his life.

God said that men who preach doctrines like these resist the truth; they are men of corrupt minds counterfeiting the faith.

In disbelief I watched a televised Sunday night service of a seeker-friendly church—seeker-friendly by its own admission. To a packed church where thousands attend, the pastor said, "This is fun night, a David Letterman night." The youth pastor came out and did his monologue as David Letterman. Then they showed 10 of the most boring things teenagers do during preaching. Three of the 10 were throwing spitballs, yawning, and picking their noses. The crowd went crazy. After the service, the pastor brazenly announced, "We're not here to offend people, but to make church comfortable for everyone." I wept.

I ask you, how long do you think that audience would stay in church if the pastor was gripped by the Holy Ghost, convicted for "entertaining" people toward hell, and suddenly preached a message entitled, "Be sure your sins will find you out"? How long would people keep coming back if a gospel of holy living and separation from the world was preached? Two things would happen: (1) Those who are misguided, hungry, and didn't know any better would weep and run to the altar. (2) Those who are judiciously blinded by their pleasures in madness would flee from the church and never come again. The church doors would close.

I keep this foremost in my mind and before my eyes, because every minister of the gospel one day has to face it when he stands before the Lord. He will say, "Son of man, I made thee a watchman. You were to hear the words of My mouth and give them warnings from Me. You were to tell the wicked, 'Thou shalt surely die.' And you gave them no warning nor spoke to warn the wicked to turn from their wicked ways to save their lives. These same wicked men died in their sins, but their blood I'll require at your hands."

What the Gospel of Accommodation Does (2)

2. This gospel of accommodation accommodates all man's aversion to self-denial.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is one of self-denial. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Self-denial is not something you give. It's someone you give up—the giving up of yourself, giving up everything you are. It's a living sacrifice to the Lord Jesus Christ to present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. God has every right to say to His church, "If you expect to give Me your body, your resurrected body, all through eternity, I have every right—it's only reasonable of Me and your reasonable service—to ask your body why you're here on earth. I want every part of you. I want you to be spiritually minded. I want to possess you."

The gospel we preach must bring people under the total possession of the Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise, it's a gospel of accommodation.

The seeker-friendly gospel accommodates the body. The human body belongs to Him. What we see in America is a neognosticism where you take your physical body on one side and do as you please as long as your spirit is right with God. This is coming even out of the White House, this dividing of personality. No, we are one personality, and it all belongs to Jesus Christ. This neognosticism is destroying the faith of many throughout the nation.

What the Gospel of Accommodation Does (3)

3. There is an accommodation of man's offense to the gospel.

The Scriptures state, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offense." Paul spoke of the offense of the Cross. This is the heart of God's anger. We're not called to the Cross but to go *through* the Cross—to experience the same thing Jesus did, not only coming to the Cross but dying and going into the grave with Jesus Christ and then being raised from the dead to a newness of life.

It's cruel, pastor, to lead sinners to the Cross, tell them they are forgiven by faith, and then allow them to go back to their habits and lusts of the flesh, unchanged and still in the devil's shackles. If the preaching of grace doesn't have as its goal the producing of a walk of righteousness, then it's another gospel, another Jesus.

I listened in horror to a man, who attended one of the largest seeker-friendly churches, being interviewed by CBS. He said, "I come to this church because I'm comfortable. I'm never made to feel uneasy. I bring my Jewish friends and my business friends, and I know nothing will ever be said that will offend them. The best part of it is, the whole thing only lasts an hour."

Take it from me: You can get your big church and be one of the big boys, but it's going to cost you your soul if you preach with a focus only on earthly things, rather than on the things of God.

I've lived in New York City 35 years. We have 103 nationalities from all walks of life—from the poorest to the richest. Probably 300 or more from the United Nations live there. But I look over a congregation (so does my dear friend, Jim Cymbala, in Brooklyn) and see men who have just walked in from the porno shops and are wild animals. I see a businessman friend who was CEO of a multimillion-dollar company, but he started snorting coke, lost everything, and is now a bum on the street. He sits in the congregation. A little 14-year-old girl with AIDS is up on 8th Avenue performing lewd acts before dirty old men. She comes to church and keeps saying, "Pastor Dave, I've got to get out. I've got to get help."

I'm not about to put up a silly skit and preach a 15-minute message on how to cope to a multitude of people who are dying and going to hell. I tremble at the thought.

People don't like to hear this, but we're headed for perilous times—just a few years away from a collapse like the world has never known. When that happens, all who preached prosperity are going to disappear because the people will say, "Your gospel has failed me." When that time comes, I want to grasp onto Jesus, and I want everyone I've preached to to have faith in the keeping power of Jesus Christ. I want them to know Him in His fullness. I want to know that I've done it in love, in grace, that they would know the difference between the holy and the profane.

May God, in Jesus' name, spare the Assemblies of God forever. If I have ever given a prophetic message in my lifetime that God intended for a purpose, it is now.

Many are being deceived. If they are not awakened, what I warn you about will happen.

I pray that God will keep the Assemblies of God in its original purposes. In New York City, He has proved that the people come to hear a straight gospel, and thousands will come where the Word of God is being preached without compromise and yet with grace. May the young men who are discouraged in the Movement not try for a shortcut but be broken and on their faces before the Lord.

May we get our eyes off growth and onto a new revelation of who Jesus is.

Endnote

1. *New York Times*, 1 March 1998, sec. A, p. 16.