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Jesus Plus Nothing

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A preacher once boasted, "I preach faith, and *it* works." I wanted to respond. Perhaps I should have said, "I preach Christ crucified, and *He* works."

In 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, Paul, the apostle, made this claim, "I preach Christ crucified." He was arguing against the teachings of a sect of Jewish converts to Christ who had wormed their way into the belief system of new Gentile believers. They were preaching Christ plus circumcision—proclaiming that the non-Jewish believers had to first be circumcised as Jews in order to be of Christ. These false teachers were referred to as Judaizers, or the circumcision party.

Paul lamented, "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" Galatians 3:1.

This is the trend if we do not carefully guard the truth of the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ: When we preach "Christ plus something," it soon reverses into "something plus Christ." Left unchecked, it becomes "something plus nothing." The "something" else becomes another gospel. Christ is omitted altogether. That is not good news! Ultimately, though, when we come to understand the fullness and sufficiency of Christ in us, we will resolve to preach Christ plus nothing.

The "something else" we tend to add to the good news of Jesus Christ may be the outgrowth of a true revelation or teaching that the Holy Spirit has given. It usually has an element of truth in it. Certainly, we may receive divine and up-building revelations that need to be preached, believed, and practiced. There is always a bit of truth in most everything we camp around.

Yet, when we legalize it, preach it as essential to our salvation, and make it the gospel we preach, we are preaching another gospel, thereby making the word of God of no effect through our traditions. Mark 7:13.

These streams of thought stretch across the spectrum of our religious traditions, rituals, doctrines, codes of dress and behavior, and supposed revelations. You who are spiritual have been around long enough to know what these are: our brand of denominationalism, rapture, prosperity, faith confession, Jewish roots, ultimate reconciliation, King James only. What's yours?

The list is extensive! The deception is subtle! The consequences are enormous. These are the issues that divide us, enslave us, harden us, and lure us away from our first love—Jesus.

Jesus plus something is why we have a New Hope Church on one corner and an Old New Hope Church on the other. That is why we have Southern Baptist, Primitive Baptist, Reformed Baptist, Missionary Baptist, and numerous other Baptists on the list. That is why we have two churches of the same denomination in a small town with one believing it is scriptural to have a kitchen in their building and the other believing it's not, damned you are if you go to the wrong one.

We veer off the narrow way that leads to life onto the broad way that leads to destruction once we embrace one of these "somethings." The contemporary seeker-friendly churches have gone so far around the mountain that they can no longer see Calvary from where it all began.

Think about the last religious argument you heard. The issues being argued were most likely over one of those "plus something" things. Both sparring partners were in error if they were contending for something other than the simplicity and purity of devotion to Jesus. Have you ever fallen out with another believer over your love for Jesus?

Here are some markers to tell if we are in a "Jesus plus something:"

- When we camp around it and fail to get up and follow the Holy Spirit when the cloud moves.
- When it sparks a movement that evolves into a new church group, denomination, or cult with an authoritarian charismatic personality in at the top.
- When it is taught at the exclusion of other biblical truths, resulting in imbalance.
- When it fails to take in the whole counsel of scripture.
- When many scattered and isolated verses are used as proof texts though the doctrine itself is not specifically taught in scripture.
- When it garners a label.
- When it stirs up carnal controversy.
- When it makes you angry if challenged.
- When one doctrine leads to another deception that becomes a further departure from orthodoxy.
- When it is exaggerated and becomes the Gospel we preach.
- When it appeals to something for Self. Seeking something for self is contrary to the call of Jesus to deny self, take up your cross and follow Him. Self-denial is merely a heart decision to pray, "Not my will, Lord, but Yours."
- When it becomes the abundance of our hearts and all we talk about. We can know what is in our hearts by what comes out of our mouths.
- When we find ourselves going after revelation (or revelations) instead of the Lord Jesus—seeking more revelation of the revelation for the sake of knowing more revelation.

- When we try to convert others to our way of thinking instead of to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- When it points to itself and not the Lord Jesus.
- When it holds believers hostage to it rather than liberating them.
- When what we preach is an “IT.” Jesus is not an “IT.”

Many demonically inspired false teachings are blindsiding seasoned teachers and well-meaning believers today. We want to be discerning, remembering that in the last days “there shall be false teachers among you, who privately shall bring in damnable heresies...” 2 Peter 2:1.

Remembering also that the time will come when believers “will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 2 Tim. 4:3-4. Is this that time?

We are in safe harbor when we stick to preaching Jesus Christ crucified. Jesus plus nothing else!

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Galatians 5:1.