

How to preach the Gospel falsely

2 We were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

3 For our exhortation *did not come* from error or uncleanness, nor *was it* in deceit.

4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness -- God *is* witness.

6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children.

8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. **1 Thess 2:2-8**

Introduction

There is a dearth of true Gospel preaching in the modern church.

I cannot think of a time in history when there was so much confusion, deceit and error in the Gospel presentation. During the Dark Ages, when the Roman Church dominated Europe, there was much superstition and errors but true Christians living in minority isolated groups had no doubt that Romanism was unscriptural.

After the Reformation the Gospel was given liberty in many European nations and it flowered, bringing improved civilisation in its wake. Though Protestantism soon fragmented there was still a general agreement on basic Gospel truths. The Gospel message of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Bucer, Bullinger, Beza, Turretin, Cranmer, Perkins, Ames, and many more, was essentially the same.

Today, there is utter confusion. The Liberal Movement at the end of the 19th century brought doubt about the authority of the Bible and questioned even the words of Jesus. Yet still the basic Gospel continued, even in some liberal institutions. However, the Charismatic Movement has been a Trojan Horse that brought heresy after heresy, and aberration after aberration into the churches. As this movement fragmented it spawned extremely radical variants that took heresy into ever-deeper depths. There are churches today that have absolutely nothing to do with a Biblical church in any sense, and yet are called 'Christian'.

Thus, today, the Gospel has been ruined by doctrinal error, unscriptural proclamations, a false theological basis, errors of presentation, untrue claims, wrong directions to the sinner, adoption of mystical techniques, use of occult methodologies, use of mind-control and hypnotic suggestibility, use of worldly strategies such as marketing or seeker-sensitive promotions, syncretism with false religions and cults and many more errors.

This level of appalling deception has never been manifest in history before.

However, the basic principles of the false Gospel have been in evidence from the very beginning and Paul had to deal with it from the start. In the passage above we see Paul's itemisation of certain techniques used by false Gospel preachers and this is useful for us to observe. Modern heretics fall into one or another of these brackets as a major heading of the many errors we find today.

Characteristics of false gospel preaching

Error

This is a huge subject that warrants a whole book all of its own. Indeed, there have been many books on heresy that detail errors of the Gospel throughout the centuries. We cannot afford time to fully analyse all these here.

I will demonstrate the basic tendencies of errors in the Gospel message. These are:

Emphasising the natural ability of man to save himself through good works.	Emphasising the ability of man to co-operate with God in initiating salvation.	Emphasising the necessity of functions of the church in order to be saved. Sacramentalism.	The attempt to combine Semi-Pelagian co-operation with God and the sovereignty of God in salvation	The use of worldly, sinful, occult and mystical methods
Pelagianism	Semi-Pelagianism	Roman Catholicism	Amyraldism	New Age ideas in church
Finneyism (Oberlin Theology)	Semi-Augustinism	Eastern Orthodoxy	Four-Point Calvinism	Emergent Church
Universalism	Arminianism	Cults	The Free Offer	Seeker-sensitive churches
Socinianism	Wesleyanism	Federal theology	Marrowmen	New Calvinism's mysticism
Grotianism	Roman Catholicism			Alpha Course
Abelard theology	Lutheranism			Many Charismatic practices
Roman Catholicism	Common Grace			Quakerism
	Free-willism			The Shakers
	Decisionism			Quietism

We could add more examples but this is sufficient for our needs here. I will break this down just a little bit.

Emphasising the natural ability of man to save himself through good works

This needs little explanation; yet so many people fall for this nonsense. There are various forms.

- Pelagianism teaches that man's nature is not totally depraved and can obey God's law by following Christ's example and using prayer etc.
- Charles Finney taught that a man can regenerate himself and that a revival can be humanly initiated through the right planning and preparation.
- Universalism teaches that there is no hell and everyone will be saved. Certain famous preachers were Universalists, such as CH Dodd or William Barclay.
- All those who teach that God loves everyone and that he is not angry with sinners necessarily result in universalism. The vast majority of modern Christians believe that God loves everybody; where does this put them?
- Roman Catholicism teaches a combination of an infusion of unbiblical universal grace and sacramentalism resulting in meritorious good works that save.

The key doctrines that are denied here are 1) total depravity and total inability (man can do nothing to initiate salvation); justification by faith ALONE.

Emphasising the ability of man to co-operate with God in initiating salvation

Perhaps the vast majority of Christian churches teach some form of this. The most common factor is Arminianism which has come to dominate the western churches since the late 19th century.

The essence of this is the claim that salvation has been purchased for everyone (Christ died for everyone), no man is unable to believe (denial of total depravity, election and irresistible grace) and thus man chooses to believe. His free will action initiates salvation; however, his future sins and unbelief can lose his salvation.

Different theologies have different variations of this. For example: Continental Arminianism denies total depravity and emphasises man's natural ability; Wesleyanism (Evangelical Arminianism) admits man's depravity and teaches that there is an unbiblical prevenient grace available to all men to overcome this. These positions are similar to historic Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism.

Emphasising the necessity of functions of the church in order to be saved. Sacramentalism

This is when a certain church ministry is vital in order to be saved, such as the sacrament of baptism or confirmation or the intervention of a priest to forgive sins. The Roman Church is the prime example of this but all those cults that claim that salvation is only available within their church are equally guilty.

The attempt to combine Semi-Pelagian co-operation with God and the sovereignty of God in salvation

Amyraldism was the attempt to unify Calvinism with Lutheranism at first, but later to unify Calvinism with Arminianism. It taught that God loves everyone and desires to save everyone but since not all believe, God elects certain people to be saved. It is nonsensical and contradictory positing a division in God's will (God desires to save all but then only saves some).

This is a common device used to soften the edges of Calvinism to make it more acceptable to the world. It is a complete theological failure but that has not stopped it being widely popular today in moderate Calvinists, New Calvinists, and Four-Point Calvinists.

It is impossible to logically hold that Christ dies for all but then only died for some; that God desired the salvation of all but then only elected some; that God calls all equally to salvation but then also calls some specially to actually be saved. It seriously undercuts the Biblical doctrine of sin and total depravity. How can God love all when they are sinners that have no covenant inclusion and saviour?

The use of worldly, occult and mystical methods

This column covers a very wide variety of instances out of necessity due to the width of A4 paper.

Worldly methods include: preaching for financial gain, preaching for fame, preaching out of selfish desire, using worldly forms and so forth.

Occult methods include: the use of occult techniques to manipulate people, such as Kundalini yoga (as found in the Toronto Blessing). Also using occult practices to gain things (making the Gospel like magic spell) to make the Gospel attractive to outsiders.

Mystical methods include: using hypnotic techniques and passivity to induce a mystical trance that pretends to be an act of God, such as making a person fall over. Another mystical technique is the use of medieval Catholic transformational mystical techniques in prayer.

The truth

Of errors there are no end but the truth is this:

The truth of the Gospel is based on the theology of the doctrines of grace, which affirm the sovereignty of God in salvation. These are:

- Man is totally depraved and cannot do any good work or initiate salvation.¹
- God unconditionally elects from eternity certain people to salvation from his own goodwill, not because of any good works that these people may do in the future. Those not elected are reprobate and doomed.²
- Jesus Christ only died for his people, the elect that God chose.³
- God's calling is irresistible. He gives grace to his elect and they respond by believing. There is an outward external proclamation of the truth to all, but there is only irresistible grace given to the elect. Grace is not universal, common or given to the reprobate.⁴
- God preserves his elect people to the very end. They are sustained by grace and cannot fall.⁵

Thus the Gospel message is: man is doomed to hell unless he repents and seeks the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ the only saviour and mediator for men. Hell is the place of God's just condemnation and judgment on sin and the fierce anger of his wrath. This can only be avoided if a man repents from his sin and believes in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as his personal Saviour. A man should prove this belief in Christ by being baptised in water. All those who genuinely seek Christ as Saviour, believe in Christ in their heart and call on him, and confess his name to others, will be saved.

Any substantive theological addition or subtraction to this is an error.

Uncleanness

There are many forms of this but we can mention the following examples.

- When Gospel preachers use their authority to seduce young women, as happened with a Charismatic pastor in Sheffield some years ago. Sadly this has been a common occurrence.

¹ Gen 6:5, 8:21; Ps 51:5, 58:3, 143:2; Eccles 9:3; Isa 64:6; Jer 17:9; Mk 7:21+; Jn 3:5-7, 8:44; Rm 3:9ff, 8:7-8; Eph 2:1; Col 2:13; Tit 1:15; 1 Jn 1:8ff, 3:10.

² Deut 10:14ff; Ps 65:4; Mt 11:27, 22:14, 24:22ff; Lk 18:7; Jn 5:21; Acts 13:48; Rm 8:28-33, 11:28, 9:10ff; Eph 1:4-5; 2 Tim 1:9; 2 Thess 2:13.

³ Isa 22:14, 53:11; Mt 1:21, 20:28, 26:28; Lk 1:68; Jn 6:35ff, 10:14ff, 17:1-11, 17:20+; Acts 11:18, 16:14, 20:28; Rm 1:6ff, 8:30, 9:22-25; Heb 9:28.

⁴ Jn 1:13, 3:27, 5:21, 6:44, 65; Rm 8:14, 9:16, 22-25; 1 Cor 12:3; Eph 2:1ff, 4:4; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 9:15; Jm 1:18; 1 Pt 1:15, 2:9, 5:10; 2 Pt 1:3; 1 Jn 5:4; Jude 1; Rev 17:14.

⁵ Ps 30:5; Isa 43:1-3, 54:10; Jer 32:40; Mt 18:12ff; Jn 3:16, 3:36, 5:24, 6:35ff, 10:27ff; Rm 5:8ff, 8:1, 29ff, 35ff; 1 Cor 1:7-9, 10:13; Jude 1

- When Gospel preachers teach that fornication is acceptable because God's mercy is wide and his forgiveness continual (licentiousness). This is antinomianism.
- When Gospel preachers get their people to use fornication as a means of propagating the Gospel. An example of this was the 'flirty-fishing' of the Jesus People when David Berg enticed young women to have sex with young men to attract them into the church community.
- When Gospel preachers teach that polygamy is acceptable.
- When Gospel preachers engage with prostitutes. This has happened with several famous Pentecostal pastors.
- When Gospel preachers are secretly homosexuals. This has been the case with several famous leaders in recent years.
- When Gospel preachers commit adultery. Sadly, this has been all too common.

Deceit

Deceit is leading people astray with errors. This can take many forms, such as teaching theological errors, which we have covered.

But it also includes many other forms of deceit; for example:

- Teaching people to practice aberrations saying that they are Biblical. E.g. 'deliverance ministry' to exorcise demons from Christians has no Biblical precedent whatsoever.
- Giving people false counsel so that they are led astray. Sadly, bad counsel is all too common in churches these days.
- Bringing in new things in the church meeting that have no Biblical precedent saying that our freedom allows such things. E.g. instrumental music or dancing.
- Using false experiences in church meetings, such as mystical or occult methods. E.g. advocating being 'slain in the Spirit', which is neither being slain or of the Spirit; it is an occult aberration that is common in cults, especially Hindu cults. Another example is advocating occult visualisation techniques to gain desired objects by magic.
- Stopping people doing Biblical things and using casuistry to convince people that it is acceptable. E.g. terminating women's head coverings; teaching that giving thanks before a meal is legalism etc.

The point of deception is a satanic attack on the church to make it ineffective and useless. Satan does not care if a church has huge numbers, loads of money and a TV ministry, as long as it is unbiblical – then it can do him no harm.

When people are supposedly 'converted' through deceit by believing a false Gospel, they then spend their lives in church in frustration, fruitlessness, futility and suffer continual problems. They also spread their deceit by passing it on to other unsuspecting, vulnerable people.

Pleasing men

Sadly this is also far too common and affects both the congregations that seek to please their pastor and the pastors that seek to please their congregation.

This is a form of idolatry whereby men put something in the place of God. Church leaders must be people that do the will of God, even if that makes them unpopular. As soon as leaders begin pleasing themselves or pleasing others instead of doing God's will, the church is finished.

One form of men pleasing is when churches are part of large denominations that have a single authority figure, such as an apostle, prophet or bishop. Often men will seek their own advancement rather than the good of the church and will be centred upon pleasing the authoritarian leader above them and keeping in his good books to gain advancement.

The prime example of men-pleasing in the Gospel presentation is Seeker-Sensitive churches. These completely focus the church and the Gospel on sinners rather than the Word of God and the glory of Jesus. Everything is done to entice and please sinners, resulting in denial of multiple denials of God's law, such as stripping any mention of hell or condemnation from the actual Gospel message.

Also very common in modern Gospel presentations is the centring upon all the good things that come from being saved and ignoring conviction of sin. People are told that God has great things in store for them, that they can be prosperous, that they can be healed, that their lives will be full of happiness and so on. All such things please men but are not part of the Gospel at all. The Gospel, in short, is repent and believe in Christ. Many times in history that did not mean a life full of happiness and prosperity but immediate death from persecution.

The Gospel does not seek to please men; it seeks to make men please God.

Flattering words as a cloak for covetousness

Flattery takes many forms not just boosting a person's ego. The basis of flattery is to convince a person to do something that suits your interests and you gain from it. As well as insincere praise it also includes using a false, unrealistic, favourable expectation of something.

Thus modern Charismatic Gospel preachers tell people how blessed they are, how powerful they are, and how they can take authority over all things to their good. The preacher says that if the people give him money he can pass on the secret of getting blessings, such as healing, or financial prosperity.

The basis of these lies is not seeking the well being of the congregation but fleecing them for profit. The basis is covetousness.

The hordes of American TV evangelists who promise everything under the sun but demand every last penny are a total disgrace to human dignity. They are not even a disgrace to the church because they have nothing to do with Christianity. They are charlatans who are a disgrace to human dignity.

I have covered this many times and the matter is familiar to all, so I do not need to explain it further. The sight of these men with fleets of limousines, Lear Jets, and multiple mansions, who still ask for money from poor, desperate people, is sickening. Inexplicably, such terrible charlatans are growing in number and now have a foothold in every nation, even New Zealand.

Salaried men

Part of the problem here is the wrong idea that Gospel preachers are to be given a salary. There is not a shred of evidence in the NT that church leaders are salaried. It is true that leaders can be given money to assist them in their tasks but this giving is to be a) individual; b) informal and not established; c) irregular, as God leads and thus leaves the leader in the hands of God, to whom he should seek resources as God promised.

One reason for the rise of salaries is the unbiblical church structures that arose in history. If churches are Biblical, being small and meeting in home with a team of elders, then there is no need for full-time ministry and no need for a salary. Church elders rarely need to be full-time; however itinerant ministers, such as evangelists, do need more support as they are travelling about to preach, but even these do not need a salary. Paul was an itinerant and yet supported himself and others.

Can this be done? Of course it can. Permit me a rare personal testimony. Over many decades I served the church. I planted churches, I led churches, I was on a leadership team in churches, and all the time I worked in secular employment. Indeed, at one point when I was solely leading a church that I had planted in the 1970s, I was not only working 50 hours a week and preaching three times, but I also had a family with three children and I was rebuilding my challenging Victorian house from top to bottom, even building my own windows and doors as I had no money. Do I recommend this? No, it is too much and others should have stepped up to help; but my point is that it can still be done. At no point did I take money for this service; neither did I have a holiday.

Today there are church leaders who expect to be paid in six figure annual sums and given a free house. There are pastors that also have multiple foreign holidays every year.

Seeking glory from men

Some leaders don't seek money as much as they seek the adoration of people. Their egos are so huge that they need to constantly grow their fame and reputation.

History has been full of such people who have no ministry from God but seem to have a hold over people. Some, even recently, have been held in such honour that they enter the church meeting like royalty with flowing robes, music playing and people bowing. These people are the antithesis of Christ, who came from heaven as a servant. They ignore the words of Christ who stated that church leaders are last of all and the servant of the people.

Examples of wrong Gospel preaching

Invite Christ into your life

Perhaps the commonest thing said in modern evangelism. This seems to have been inspired by American presentations and was widespread in early Campus Crusade for Christ tracts and speeches to students in the 1970s.

The problem is that this phrase never appears in the Bible at all. No apostle preached the Gospel using this approach.

Then again, what does it actually mean? When a man marries a woman he does not say to her, '*I invite you into my life*'. I don't think anyone in history would have said such a thing.

It also gives man the priority, almost as if you are doing God a favour by letting the Lord Jesus into your circle of friends.

Similar to this message are the following:

- 'Give your life to Jesus and you will go to heaven.'
- 'Ask Jesus into your heart.'

Neither of these has any Biblical pedigree.

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life

This was the title of a widely distributed Campus Crusade tract.

For a moment let us ignore the multiple denials of Biblical theology.⁶ Let us initially ignore the multiple contradictions of straightforward Biblical texts.⁷ Let's just mention some obvious problems.

All Biblical Christians agree that hell exists and is true.⁸ Since hell will be filled with the devil, his demons and sinners, how can anyone say to a person, 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life'? Since most of the Gospel audience is going to end up in hell (few are saved, Matt 20:6) then such a claim is a blatant lie and actually blasphemes God. It totally misrepresents the truth of God. It can only be true if everyone is saved and there is no hell.

In fact, the whole thing is false.

God does not love everyone and there is no Scripture that says that he does.⁹ However, there are very many that say that he hates sinners and various people. He hates the iniquitous (Ps 5:5). He hates the deceitful and bloodthirsty (Ps 5:6). He hates the wicked and the violent (Ps 11:5). He hated the Canaanites and fully destroyed them (Deut 7:2). He hates the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15). He hated Esau (Rm 9:13).

Far from having a wonderful plan for sinners that do not repent, God plans their doom from eternity (Prov 16:4; Job 21:30; Rm 9:22; 1 Pt 2:8; 2 Pt 2:3, 9; Jude 1:4).

Being a mixture of Pelagianism and Arminianism, this message denies the theological truths of all the doctrines of grace.

This false Gospel message is a very serious problem and all who submit to it are going to develop very erroneous theology. Indeed, apart from the grace of God, which overrules the mistakes of men, people cannot be saved by the message.¹⁰

Give your heart to God

This is also very common and has a longer history than '*invite Christ into your life*'. In one sense it is OK if it means 'submit to God as Lord', but it does not mean that to many people.

Most people would attribute an emotional content with this phrase and that is not the basis of the Gospel. The fundamental issue in evangelism is the will, bowing the knee to God, rather than the emotions (which may be involved as a side issue).

Then there is the matter of a man giving God something in order to be saved. Sinful man cannot give God anything at all. These sorts of statements are very Arminian.

Are you covered in the blood?

Very common in Classic Pentecostal circles; but what does it really mean?

⁶ Such as the eternal election of some not all or total depravity.

⁷ Such as Ps 5:5-6, 11:5-6.

⁸ Yes some evangelicals have denied that hell is eternal punishment but these are not being Biblical.

⁹ Jn 3:16 does not say that he loves 'everyone' but the world, that is the world of the elect. If it meant 'everyone' in verse 16 then it means 'everyone' in verse 17, which would mean that there is no hell.

¹⁰ In fact, God overruled that in my case. I was initially converted by this very message but in God's grace I very quickly learned that it was false and became a Calvinist.

Now Christians would understand that this is talking about remission of sins through blood atonement, propitiation and redemption. However, sinful non-Christians would have no clue what this means. Since the basic principle of evangelism is communication of something, then speaking in riddles to men is stupid.

I was once a manager of a unit where a zealous fellow Christian would keep going up to workers saying, *'Are you covered in the blood'*. Firstly, with no mention of Jesus, what is the point of such a question? Secondly, he got their backs up and caused some problems by doing this. I took him to one side and explained that this did no good for the Lord but did unsettle his colleagues and made him look like a nutter. He stopped doing it and became a better evangelist.

Demanding certain actions in order to be saved

Both evangelicals and non-evangelicals do this.

The basic true principle is that man can do nothing to gain or even initiate salvation. Total depravity teaches us this and many Scriptures affirm it. Yet many people insist that to be saved a man has to do this or that; such as:

- Going to church.
- Listening to sermons.
- Reading the Bible.
- Attending Mass.
- Confessing sins to a priest.
- Being baptised in a church.
- Disciplining oneself (asceticism).

And so on. While the first three are certainly not bad things, nothing we do can initiate salvation. God regenerates his elect and gives them faith and repentance and only then do they do something. We can counsel people to do good things, such as attend a church or read the Bible, but we must never give the impression that these things are necessary preparations for conversion. The thief on the cross had no time to do anything except submit to Jesus as Lord.

Getting people to fall over backwards after some experience

I find it incredible that any sane person could think that a sinful man is saved by falling over. Show me an example of this in Scripture.

The real problem with this is that the falling over is the result of a series of events, for example in Alpha Courses or Charismatic meetings. This usually involves hypnotic suggestibility after music and repetitious singing, followed by an authoritarian person pushing you backwards.

This can be just as easily done in a non-religious setting because it involves certain psychological factors. Derren Brown, the TV magic entertainer, has done this many times and has even mimicked Charismatic preachers. The situation also arises very often in occult rituals and false religions. It means nothing substantive whatsoever.

Finally, there have been very many people that have fallen over after a Charismatic meeting and were declared saved as a result. In fact, the person was not saved at all and said so later. Even reporters for newspapers have had this experience investigating the Alpha Course and wrote articles about the falsity of the matter. This has occurred many

times in history where emotional revivals led to hysteria and many people falling over. The claimed many converts later proved to be completely false.

Mystical and occult mumbo-jumbo

In the Signs and Wonders Movement introduced to Britain by John Wimber, many young American evangelists came to help present this new type of message. Although the main point was talking about miracles and healing, it also involved preaching the Gospel to attendees of large conferences, often including very needy people.

Because the Signs and Wonders Movement involved many rogue elements of mystical and occult traditions (emanating from Quakerism, mystical Catholicism, Hinduism, the Shakers, and cults) the young people said some very strange things to people they were praying for. I saw this with my own eyes. In fact, they were talking about outright occult experiences and applying them to church issues.

The sort of things that were said as they counselled people included:

- ‘I can see the glory of God on your chest, it is really strong.’
- ‘There is a pink (blue, gold, red etc.) aura all around your body which means ...’

I have heard from others that there were also references to astral travelling, totemism, dryads and other nature demi-gods, the evil-eye (curses), and much more.

These come straight out of occultism and have nothing to do with Biblical Christianity. At the beginning we did not realise that Wimber was directly influenced by many occult factors; this only became known later.¹¹

This sort of mumbo-jumbo became accepted in various churches and continues to this day. It is just occult nonsense.

Examples of Biblical Gospel presentations

They went out and preached that *people* should repent. **Mk 6:12**

As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. **Jn 1:12-13**

Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. **Jn 3:15**

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. **Jn 3:36**

Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. **Jn 6:40**

If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. **Jn 7:37-38**

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. **Acts 3:19**

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. **Acts 16:31**

God ... now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness. **Acts 17:30-31**

¹¹ I have explained before that Wimber believed in multiple occult matters as well as Catholic mysticism and miracles. The occultism came from his new ‘eastern paradigm’, a new way of thinking like Hindu mystics.

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. **Rm 10:9**

Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. **Rm 10:13**

The components of these statements

Repentance

This is a complete change in thinking and behaviour following regeneration. A person who has exercised true faith given by God will change their behaviour and show that they are truly converted. Thus the word 'repent' is shorthand for a number of things: believe in Christ, be convicted of sin, turn away from sin, turn towards God and obey his law, submit to Jesus as Lord.

Receive him

As John himself explains, this is equivalent to believing in Jesus.

Believing in Jesus

In NT Gospel presentations the apostles tend to say 'believe in/on Jesus' rather than say 'have faith in Jesus'.¹²

This is the exercise of faith that comes from God by grace to the elect. It is not ordinary human faith. Thus it is not the exercise of mere assent, trust or confidence in something. It is not even belief in the words of the Gospel (i.e. feeling sure that they are true). The grace of heavenly faith is the power to apprehend spiritual things in Christ. It grabs the substance of heavenly things (Heb 11:1).

Thus an elect person after being regenerated, by faith, has the power to apprehend and appropriate Christ, becoming one with him in spiritual union.

Drinking Christ

This is a synonym for receiving Christ.

Be converted

Conversion is the process of being saved. It comprises of regeneration that leads to faith and repentance.

Confession

This is the public acknowledgement that Jesus is your Lord and Saviour following conversion. It is vital that this occurs to prove conversion. For some people this can be very costly.

Calling on the name of the Lord

This is a catch-all term used to denote faith and submission. It is the act of submitting to Christ as Lord and seeking salvation from the Saviour. It is an act of prayer.

Those who call on the Lord are the same as those whom the Lord calls and it results in deliverance (Joel 2:32).

¹² Mk 11:22 says, 'have faith in God' but this was a word from Jesus to disciples not sinners.

Conclusion

Jesus warned us that at the end there would be massive deception and false leaders would abound. We are living in such times. Never has the gospel been so perverted and twisted to suit all sorts of human depravity and greed.

Paul warned us that there are preachers of the Gospel that do so from covetousness, pride, deceit, error or uncleanness and we should listen. We must test those who claim to preach the Gospel and walk away from those who fail the test. It does not matter how great the church is, how friendly the people are or even if there is no other church locally; do not submit to a false Gospel preacher.

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