

Americans and the Gospel  
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“Last Kiss Theology” I want everyone in this room and watching on the internet or television, to understand what it is and how *wrong it is*. Now “Last Kiss” is not some new cult. I am referring to the song written and done by Wayne Cochran in 1961, made popular a few years later by J Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers, and then revived by Pearl Jam in 1999. It is a song about a car accident where the girl gives her boyfriend one last kiss before she dies. He survives and sings this chorus, “Where O where can my baby be? The Lord took her away from me, she’s gone to heaven, so I’ve got to be good. So I can see my baby when I leave this world.” Now, “The Lord took her away from me” is not how the Bible describes a tragic accident, but the last part is what I call “Last kiss Theology.” “She’s gone to heaven, so I’ve got to be good, so I can see my baby when I leave this world. Do you catch that? I’ve got to be good, so I can join her in heaven. The way to get to heaven is to *be a good person*. That is the path to salvation...according to Last Kiss. Folks, Wayne Cochran was not the first or last person to believe that being good is what gets someone to heaven.

In a survey done this past spring for Arizona Christian University, George Barna found that 48% of Americans Adults agreed with the statement “**A person who is generally good or does enough good things for others will earn a place in heaven.**” Only 33% of all Americans said they believed they were going to heaven because they accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. So, more people hold to “Last Kiss Theology” than to the Bible, Christian Theology. What I find surprising and maybe most disturbing is that even among those who attend Evangelistic churches is their confusion on this most important issue. 41% of people who attend an Evangelistic church, a church like ours, said *being a good person* was the way to earn themselves a place in heaven. Now, 72% from Evangelistic churches say accepting Jesus as savior is the way to heaven, when which means some apparently think one needs to do both, accept Jesus as savior and try to be a good person.

Folks, in my opinion, every sermon I preach from this pulpit is kind of important. This is not because I am so important, but because every Sunday, the Lord speaks to us through His word.

And whatever God says is important. Yet, it is hard for me to believe there is any topic *more important* than this one. “Getting the Gospel,” and getting it right, matters more than almost anything, because the eternal destiny of our souls depends on it. So let’s pause and pray the Lord will enable us to hear and faithfully apply the truth He speaks to us this morning.

Friends, my promise today is this: There is a big contrast, a big difference, between “Last Kiss”

theology, you get to heaven by being a good person, and the Bible Gospel. By the term “Gospel” I mean the Great News of the salvation God provides for us through Jesus Christ. The basis of this Gospel is Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The Apostle Paul describes it this way in **1 Corinthians 15:2-4 – The gospel I preached to you, which you received and by which you are being saved. <sup>3</sup> For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** That is the foundation of the Gospel. It focuses not on what we might do, but on what Jesus has done for us. And when I considered all that the Bible teaches on this topic I reach this conclusion. The way to get to heaven, salvation, is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Some of you recognize those as four of five “Solas” of the Protestant Reformation. This is also what I believe and really what Chisholm Baptist Church believes. It means our salvation is totally undeserved, we receive it only because God graciously chooses to save us. It is experienced through trusting not in ourselves or accomplishments, but by placing our faith in Jesus Christ and what he He has done for us. He alone is the source of our salvation. And the ultimately God will be glorified because the salvation is a result not of anything we have done, but because of what He has done.

The verse in the Bible that best sums this up is **Ephesians 2:8, 9 (NLT) – God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. <sup>9</sup> Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.** Now, I

think it is obvious that this salvation the Bible describes is in stark contrast to Last Kiss Theology, which says, "Salvation is experienced by those who are generally good people and who do good things." It claims salvation is not experienced by grace, but is earned. It is not received through faith, but through doing good things. The ultimate source of salvation is not Jesus Christ, but the individual who does the good things that makes him or her a good person. So who gets the credit for salvation? God? Or that person who has "earned" a place in heaven? That is one problem with "Last Kiss Theology." It robs God of the glory that really belongs to Him.

The foundation of this salvation is what the Bible calls "Justification." It maybe seems like a big word, but is is one worth remembering. The Apostle Paul borrowed the term from the first century Roman court room to refer to someone who is declared righteous. He spells it out in his letter to Christians in Rome. **Romans 3:23-26 – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; <sup>24</sup>they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. For God presented Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.** And this conclusion **Romans 5:1 – There fore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Over the years I have tried to come up with illustrations and analogies to explain what God has done for us. This is the best one, though if you have a better one please let me know. In the great test of life all of us are getting a failing score. "For all Have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This is a test that requires 100% to pass and only one person has ever attained that score, Jesus Christ. So on this test, which essentially reflects whether our actions and attitudes are pleasing to God, I might be getting a score of 43% and Pastor Mark may be getting a 82%. However, we are both failing. We both deserve punishment, God's eternal wrath. We are both in trouble, big time.

However, in His grace, God is willing to erase my failing score, and put Jesus' perfect score of 100 in it's place. When God looks at the grade book, that is now my score, 100%. This is called the Great Exchange. Jesus takes my sin, pays the penalty for it, while I receive His righteousness. This is more than just having my sins forgiven. The righteousness of Jesus is now credited to me, and considered to be my own. There is not a blank beside my name in the grade book, but a perfect score.

All I need to do for this to happen is to *receive* this grace. I need to accept Jesus' score as my own. This happens by trusting in, believing in, having faith in Jesus, rather than in myself. Now, choosing to receive this grace is not a decision I can make apart from God's spirit. Both Calvinists and Arminians agree on that. However, it is necessary I make that choice for Jesus' score to become my own. This is what justification by grace, through faith is all about. The Apostle Paul describes it this way in **Philippians 3:9 – So that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ the righteousness from God based on faith.** Again any righteousness we attain on our own, all of our efforts to be a good person and do good things for others, will never be enough to save us and get us into heaven. Only the perfect righteousness from God based on faith in Jesus Christ can provide salvation.

Now another part of my analogy may help folks better understand the Gospel message. The story does not end when Jesus' perfect score is placed beside my name. Even though that 100% is truly my new score, there is still that pitifully low score of 43% when it comes to how I am actually living . God is not really happy with that. And it is not good for me or anyone else that I live like that. Through the Holy Spirit and other means, the Lord works to raise that score, helping me to become more like Jesus in how I live each day. The Bible calls it the process of sanction, becoming more Holy and less sinful. By God's grace, slowly, but surely my score is going up, getting closer to the 100% written beside my name. That process will not be complete, however, until I am in heaven, in the presence of God. Then my attitudes and actions will finally match my score of 100%.

The Bible teaches there are three dimensions or aspects of our salvation. Justification is the first part. As a believer in Jesus I have already been justified. I have already been declared righteous by God. Again this involves both the forgiveness of our sin, and Jesus' righteousness being considered as our won. We are saved from the penalty our sin deserves. This is what a Christian means when he or she says "I have been saved." The second part of salvation is Sanctification. This is the process which begins after I trust in Christ, after I have been justified, where God, through His spirit, helps me avoid sin and obey God's commands. Sanctification saves us from the power of sin and the Bible sometimes calls it *being saved*. The third part is Glorification, which occurs when a Christian arrives in heaven. At that point my Sanctification will be complete. My actions and attitudes will be totally pleasing to God. I will be free not just from sin's power, but from its presence. This is the aspect of salvation the Bible speaks of in the future tense. We will be saved. Our salvation through Jesus has a past, present and future dimension. We have been freed from the penalty for our sin, we are being freed from the power of that sin, and ultimately we will be freed from the presence of sin, any contamination of sin, when we are in heaven.

Folks I hope this maybe, just maybe, clears up some confusion. People who spend eternity in heaven will indeed be good people. That is what the Holy Spirit does in our lives. Through Sanctification and Glorification the Lord makes all believers in Jesus "Good People." Yet, in contrast to "Last Kiss Theology" our salvation depends not on what we do, but on what Jesus Christ has done, is doing and will do for us. Salvation, is by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone..for the glory of God alone. And folks, this is important truth we need to understand and remember. Ok. That is my rebuttal of "Last Kiss Theology," thinking that trying to be a good person, trying to do good things will earn one a place in heaven. It is almost certain the most common error people make when thinking about salvation. However, it is not the only one.

Other folks believe religious rituals are the path to salvation. I do not have a 60's song that reflects this, but it is an understanding many have. Here is the thinking: If I get baptized, if I take communion, if I attend church regularly, then I

will be saved, I will get to heaven. Now, being baptized, taking communion and going to church are great things. I am all for them. Yet, doing them does not enable me to gain God's favor or earn a place in heaven. Now, I am aware other churches and denominations have a different understanding of Baptism and the Lord's Supper than we do here at Chisholm Baptist Church. I do not agree with them, but I am not real concerned as long as their beliefs do not obscure the Gospel, the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. For example, my friend Sue believes that taking communion helps her focus on Christ and trust Him more. If that is the case and if she is truly trusting in Jesus and not trusting in taking communion, then I can live with her being wrong about the nature of bread and wine. Trusting in Jesus Christ, and Him alone to provide salvation is what really matters.

Now all churches have rituals and that is fine. Yet, if they obscure the Gospel message, those rituals are a problem. In our church I sometimes have to remind people no one will ever be saved by going forward in a meeting or by repeating a prayer. Those are external actions. Trusting in Jesus is something that happens inside your soul. Sure, sometimes people place their faith in Jesus *when* they go forward or repeat a prayer, but there are also times when people do the external actions, the rituals, but never truly trust in the Lord Jesus. And praise God, many, many people are true believers in Jesus even though have never gone forward in a meeting or repeated a particular prayer.

Another, very dangerous mistake is when people claim to be trusting in Jesus, but then add some type of ritual that they say is necessary to *complete* their salvation. I know folks who obscure the Gospel by claiming the way to get to heaven is to believe in Jesus and *speak tongues*, or to believe in Jesus and *follow the Levitical Diet*. Some might even claim that salvation only comes to those who believe in Jesus and support a particular political party or maybe even a particular football team. But remember, anytime someone says, "You are not really a Christian unless you do this...they are adding to and distorting the Gospel. And the book of Galatians is clear: that is a deadly error. Jesus Christ plus anything equals spiritual disaster. Salvation is found in Christ alone. Trying to add

good deeds or religious rituals as requirements that people have to follow is never a good idea.

So why do people do this? That is a question I have been prayerfully pondering in recent months. I have a friend...This is a real person, not like Joe or Sue, so I have to be careful not to give too much detail. He has been adding to the Gospel. He has served the Lord for many years, but he has dropped out of the church and embraced this new understanding. He still believes it is necessary to follow the Old Testament law. This includes keeping a seventh day sabbath, observing the Old Testament feasts, and eating a kosher diet. It is clearly a case of Jesus plus something else, and as I said, it leads to disaster. But why has he done this? Why would someone give up the freedom he has in Christ, and choose to follow the Old Testament law? In **Galatians 5:1** Paul warns **So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.** That warning indicates that people will be tempted to do just that. Why?

Well, I think when people, including believers are not really finding their identity in Christ, when for whatever reason they are feeling a deep inner dissatisfaction, they try to add to Jesus, hoping that makes things better. My friend has some baggage from the past, he has been wounded by a number of different people. I am afraid he is looking for a way to show God and show other people that he is really worthy of respect and love. And by zealously following the Old Testament law, I believe he thinks he can prove that. But it is a dead end! Striving to keep the law perfectly is like Paul said, "Slavery." What is the solution? The Gospel. The freedom that comes from knowing that God has declared us righteous, has adopted us as His children, and loves us with an everlasting love. We do not need to prove anything to Him. And we do not even need to receive respect and love from other people, because God has given us these in an overwhelming measure. Now, He enables us to respect and love others. That means we often receive it back, which is great. But even when we do not, if we realize what our identity in Christ really is, we are ok with who we are.

Friends, we have covered a lot of ground today. Be assured God is not going to give you a theology test as you arrive at the Pearly Gates to see if you get in. In fact, you can have all the correct answers

in your head, but if you are not truly trusting in Jesus Christ I am afraid you will be in big time eternal trouble. And if you really are trusting in Jesus, but say some kind of stupid things as you try to explain your faith, you will still be in heaven. **John 3:36** says **The one who believes in the Son (Jesus) has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.** That is the bottom line. But because the stakes are so high, because whether or not someone believes in the Son, the Lord Jesus, determines his or her eternal destiny, it is important that we understand for ourselves and explain the Gospel clearly to others. If you still have questions about what this means, make sure you talk to someone before you leave. Friends, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest news there is. May the Lord help us embrace, celebrate and share this Great News today and in the days ahead.