

‘Sowing and sleeping’

In Matthew 13:24-30 the Lord told a parable that is known as the parable of the wheat and the tares. It tells of how a man sowed good seed [‘wheat’] in his field but whilst his servants were sleeping an enemy came along and sowed corrupt seed [‘tares’] and then went his way. As harvest approached it was only then that the true identity of the ‘tares’ amongst the ‘wheat’ was noticed. The Lord later in the chapter gives a full explanation of the parable to His disciples in verses 36-43.

The Lord identified this parable as a picture of ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’. Currently the future citizens of ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’ [‘wheat’] are being rescued from their sin and its condemnation through the preaching of the ‘good seed’ of the true gospel and the ‘germinating’ work of God the Holy Spirit. The task of preaching the true gospel has been committed to the members of God’s true Church that is to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” [1st Timothy 3:15].

Even in the first century, God’s enemy, Satan, was seeking to sow ‘corrupt’ seed [‘tares’] via false ‘gospels’ in order to deceive and destroy people by convincing them that they had believed God’s gospel and were part of His true church. Many of the New Testament epistles contain warnings to God’s people, especially those in leadership positions, to be constantly on their guard against the corrupt ‘gospels’ of false teachers.

Sadly, as a result of the work of these false teachers, many people will discover to their eternal sorrow and loss that unlike the ‘wheat’ [true believers] that will be gathered into God’s barn at harvest time [see Matthew 13:30 & 43] they will be ‘bundled and burnt’ [sent to everlasting punishment in hell – see Matthew 13: 30 & 40-42].

Earlier I referred to corrupt seed that results in ‘tares’ and in recent times here in Belfast [4th-6th April] I believe that such corrupt seed has sadly been sown and I fear that as a result many more ‘tares’ will sprout up, mix in church circles [see Matthew 13:30] and will only discover how they have been deceived when Christ returns to harvest His ‘wheat’.

The Lord identifies ‘the field’ of verse 24 as ‘the world’ [see verse 38]. The ‘good seed’ He sows [verse 24] are ‘sons of the kingdom’ [true believers – see verse 38] but the corrupt seed sown by the enemy [verse 25] are ‘sons of the wicked one’ [unbelievers deceived by Satan – see verses 38-39].

Over the weekend of 4th-6th April 2008 an initiative called ‘Celebration of Hope’ featuring Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, was held at the Odyssey Arena in downtown Belfast. It attracted very large numbers and herewith are snippets from coverage by one newspaper –

‘Thousands of people queued for hours in the bitter cold at the Odyssey arena yesterday in the hope of getting in to hear evangelist Franklin Graham the son of legendary preacher Dr Billy Graham...All the VIP boxes were commandeered and another 2000 people took part in the event at the six Storm cinemas which had been set up to cope with an expected overspill at the 10.000-seater Odyssey...Mr Graham called his three-day Celebration of Hope event a “festival for the soul” and judging by the response it was a message that appealed to a huge number of people here...his father held an evangelistic crusade in Belfast in 1961 and thousands flocked to hear him speak. Jeff Anderson who is director of crusades for the Billy Graham Association said trying to deal with such huge crowds was a great situation to be in and over the three days until last night

when the event wound up they expected almost 40,000 people to have attended' [Belfast Newsletter: Monday 7th April 2008].

'Tares' appear as a result of 'false gospels' being preached so how do I assess the 'gospel' message that would have been preached by Franklin Graham? On Sunday 6th April, stand-in presenter Will Leitch interviewed Franklin Graham on Radio Ulster's 'Sunday Sequence' programme.

Without going into all the details but based on the interview I would simply summarise the 'gospel' message presented by Franklin Graham as a re-run of his father's crusading 'easy-believism gospel mantra' that is condensed into a few phrases such as 'God wants to have a relationship with you: God loves you; Christ died for you but you have to invite him in'.

Some of the preliminaries at the meetings were described to mark the contrast between this current event and his father, Billy Graham's visit here in the 1960's. At this event there was Irish traditional dancing and contemporary and rock 'Christian' music. In the interview claims were made that 150 people had become Christians at the Friday night meeting and on the Saturday, a day very much devoted to young people, Franklin Graham claimed that "2000 (kids) MADE DECISIONS for Christ" and added " I enjoy preaching...it's so much FUN to be able to tell people that God loves them" and earlier he declared "God loves everyone who is listening right now [*to the radio interview*] – he has a plan and purpose for their life". It all sounds so wonderful and appealing – but is it an accurate reflection of what God's Word, the Bible teaches?

Before I answer that let me state that I have a close personal Christian friend who was converted by God when he attended a Billy Graham crusade meeting in Belfast many years ago – the evidence of a true Holy Spirit work of regeneration is everywhere evident in his life.

Sadly I have another friend who, having watched a televised Billy Graham meeting, 'made his decision' but today his life shows precious little if any evidence of a true work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. This last sad scenario has also been the experience of Christian friends who have done door-to-door evangelistic work in Northern Ireland. Regularly on doorsteps they have met people who have no real interest in 'things spiritual' but yet profess to be Christians on the basis of having 'made a decision for Christ' earlier in their lives and in many cases at the meetings held by Billy Graham.

Is it right to tell everyone, everywhere that God loves them and that Christ died for them. It is certainly true that "**Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners**" [1st Timothy 1:15] but did He come to save everyone? The angelic message to Joseph was "**thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save HIS PEOPLE from their sins**" [Matthew 1:21]. In John 10:27-28 the Lord said "**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish**".

In the verse preceding this [in verse 26] the Lord made this challenging statement to the Jews who had been asking Him to answer whether or not He was 'the Christ' – He said "**But ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep**". That probably doesn't sound right to those who proclaim their 'easy-believism gospel message' – they would probably want to rephrase it as the Lord saying '**Ye are not of my sheep because ye believe not**' yet the Lord says exactly the opposite. He says they do not believe *because* they are not His sheep. If they were His sheep, they would believe. Christ's sheep *really* believe. Those who are not Christ's sheep *really* do not believe. The Bible truth is that unless someone is a sheep of Christ, they cannot believe.

Should this Bible truth impact on how the gospel is preached? I believe it should – I believe it rules out and should prohibit faithful preachers suggesting that sinful man has an ability to ‘make a decision’ and so become a true Christian. That message attributes to man an ability to assist in his own salvation and I believe that it is responsible for many of the woes that beset professing Christendom.

In the ranks of the professing church are I believe many sincere, but misguided and still unregenerate people who have been deceived into thinking they have become Christians through ‘making a decision’ – one of the results of this is that false teaching can so much more easily infiltrate the professing Church because many within its ranks do not possess Holy Spirit discernment to recognise the errors being introduced.

How has this situation arisen? Going back to the parable the Lord said, **“while men slept, his [Christ’s] enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat”**. Over the last few hundred years in particular God’s evangelical people have ‘slept’ and allowed men to come in and preach **‘another gospel which is not another’ [Galatians 1:6-7]** – they encourage sinners to place ‘their faith’ in Christ by ‘making their decision’ – the reality is that saving ‘faith’ is a gracious gift from God as we read in Ephesians 2:8 and is given to those whom the Holy Spirit sovereignly regenerates.

In the run-up to this Franklin Graham ‘Celebration of Hope’ event I was asked to speak in a church on the concerns that I had about it. As part of my presentation I quoted from a little booklet called **‘Decisional Regeneration’** by an American pastor, **James E Adams**. I want now to include here in this article the sections I quoted in my talk and my sincere prayer is that God will awaken His people so that the activities of Satan will be discerned and exposed to the light of God’s truth.

‘In the nineteenth century few controversies were so heated as the one over Baptismal Regeneration...Baptismal Regeneration teaches that the “new birth” is conveyed by the waters of baptism. The sacrament is performed by man and is in his control. But the twentieth [and now 21st] century Church has in “DECISIONAL REGENERATION” a more subtle falsehood to combat. “Decisional Regeneration” differs from Baptismal Regeneration only in the fact that it attaches the certainty of the “new birth” to a different act. This doctrine, just as Baptismal Regeneration, sees the “new birth” as the result of a mechanical process that can be performed by man...’Decisional Regeneration’... prescribes a counselling procedure...There are many variations of this type of counselling, but they all have in common a mechanical element such as the repeating of a prayer or signing of a card upon the performance of which the individual is assured of his/her salvation...

The counselling of “Decisional Regeneration” produces statistics that would encourage any Christian – until he follows up the so-called converts. In one heartbreaking experience forty “converts” of such counselling were contacted and only one person of these forty was found who appeared to be a Christian... C H Spurgeon invited men to come to Christ, not an altar...Invitations such as Spurgeon gave directing men to Christ and not to aisles are needed today. “Just as I am” the precious hymn perhaps most frequently sung for the altar call, was written in 1836 by Charlotte Elliott:

**Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.**

The phrase “O Lamb of God, I come, I come” has been widely used to encourage people to “come” down the aisle. But it is significant that Miss Elliott wrote the hymn for the infirm and that it first appeared in a hymnal prepared especially for invalids. [John Julian: *A Dictionary of Hymnology: London 1907: p 609*] To Miss Elliott, coming to Christ was not walking an aisle...Men need to be reminded today that coming to Christ is not walking an aisle...

“Decisional Regeneration” does not bring men to Christ any more than does Baptismal Regeneration. It is true that some are converted under such preaching but this is in spite of the false methods used, not because of them [Cecil’s comment – And sadly multitudes are deceived into thinking that they have been converted through such false methods]... True repentance and saving faith come as a result of the “new birth” and are never the cause of the great change. Repentance and faith are the acts of regenerated men, not of men dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1&5)... The apostles taught that God saves His elect through the foolishness of preaching. All new methods devised by man can only fall far short of this ordained means of converting the sinner...

J H Merle d’Aubigne (1794-1872) in his history of the Reformation in England states: **“To believe in the power of man in the work of regeneration is the great heresy of Rome and from that error has come the ruin of the Church”**... One of the greatest American theologians, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) also points out the danger of this teaching: **“No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves and repent and believe just when they please”**...

Can a man be “born again” by answering, “yes” to a certain group of questions? Can a man be “born from above” by walking to the front of a building? Can a man become a true Christian by responding to an invitation as a result of being crept up on unawares? What is man’s spiritual state? Man is spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins” [Ephesians 2:1] and “cannot please God” [Romans 8:8]. A man cannot make himself a Christian. Only the Spirit of God can create a new man in Christ. God in His grace gives men new hearts (see Ezekiel 36:26-27). Only then can they willingly repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ...

The greatness of God’s power in saving sinners can only be seen against the background of man’s desperate condition. What a glorious doctrine is the “new birth” to the helpless sinner! It is not a time to be silent; it is time to speak out...with every passing week thousands are being counselled into a false hope! Men are directed to walk aisles when they should be pointed to Christ alone... In the midst of this darkness let us pray that God may be pleased to revive His Church again...Men must turn afresh to His directions for counselling, to His free invitation to sinners and to the preaching of His gospel. Only then will our labours bring glory to God: and if God grants, many sinners will be converted for His glory.’

Let me refer back again to something Franklin Graham said in the course of the radio interview when he stated - **“God loves everyone who is listening right now [to the radio interview] – he has a plan and purpose for their life”**. I wonder at the meetings did Franklin Graham explain fully that God’s **“plan and purpose”** for His true people may involve them being hated and martyred for the sake of His truth.

That was God’s **“plan and purpose”** for all but one of Christ’s chosen disciples. That was His **“plan and purpose”** for hundreds that suffered violent deaths either by fire or by circus-lion under the Roman Emperor, Nero. That was His **“plan and purpose”** for countless thousands that suffered cruel, tortuous deaths at the hands of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the dark and middle ages – martyrdom that his father, Billy Graham and his Billy Graham Evangelistic Association ‘hushed up’ by removing and eradicating from the pages of the Henry Halley Bible Commentary entitled *Pocket Bible Handbook* when they acquired the printing rights to it for a 1962 Billy Graham Crusade. They deliberately erased the documented record of Rome’s butchery of groups like the Waldenses and the Huguenots.

That has been His **“plan and purpose”** for countless, often unreported, Christians that have been murdered in recent decades for His sake under the ideology of Islam – Christians such as Pastor Necati Aydin, his fellow Turkish convert, Ugur Yuksel and their friend, a German missionary called Tilmann Geske. Thinking they were going to hold a Bible class with a number of young Turkish Moslems they in fact were going to

be killed for the sake of Christ in a very violent, Koran-directed way by those same Moslems on 18th April 2007.

Would it really be so much **“fun”**, as Franklin Graham phrased, it if he were to spell out the reality of what it means to be a Christian in a world that hates God, hates His Christ and hates His true people? This ‘Celebration of Hope’ will I fear, in the fullness of time, bring much eternal despair to many who have ‘made their decision’ on the basis of the message conveyed at these meetings.

In conclusion, let me also say that a mark of being a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit given ability to not only discern error and false teaching but to separate from it. The Apostle John addresses this extensively in **2nd John**. Regrettably this is an ability that neither Billy Graham nor his son Franklin have demonstrated, particularly when it comes to the erroneous and false Roman Catholic system headed up by the papal antichrist.

According to a report of a 2nd April, 2005 American TV interview that Billy Graham had with Larry King, Billy Graham apparently stated that because of his own ill-health Franklin was going to represent him at the installation of Pope Benedict XVI and his daughter Ann would represent him at the funeral of Pope John Paul 11. That is a collective **‘fruit’** of their ministries and concerning the **‘false prophets’** of **Matthew 7:15** the Lord said in **Matthew 7:20** **“by their fruits YE SHALL KNOW THEM”**. A little phrase from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, although primarily intended as an exhortation to unbelievers, also seems very appropriate for many of God’s people today - **“Awake thou that sleepest” [Ephesians 5:14]**.

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 8th April 2008