

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: Spiritual Fake News, Matthew 7, Galatians 5, Titus 2

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INTRODUCTION: The title of my message today is Spiritual Fake News.

I continue to be fascinated by how gullible people are with fake news. Fake news has been around since the Garden of Eden, yet people talk about fake news as if it's a new phenomenon. I think President Trump coined the phrase "fake news". In the past, we used the word "hoax". There are several reasons fake news spreads. Yes, it is clear there are lots of dumb, gullible people—one reason for the spread of fake news. Sure, many people let others do their thinking for them, and they are led astray by the next sensational story. Certainly, there are plenty of uninformed people whose life experiences are so few, they have no comparison by which to rate a potential fake story. Certainly, there are people whose knowledge of history is so limited they'll believe the latest revisionist twist.

I believe the main reason people are sucked in by fake news is because they really want to believe it is true, and somehow, they believe if they believe it and spread it, it will become true.

Interestingly enough, people are making a living verifying whether news is real or fake. Snopes.com, truthorfiction.com, and other sources research to determine the validity of stories. But some don't trust these sources either.

ILLUSTRATION: This week, I posed this question on Facebook: *Why do people choose to believe lies? When I sense a fake news story on Facebook and verify on Snopes or other credible sources, I reply with a post and statement that it's fake. I did this on several friends' pages who continued their posts, fully believing her stories, even though they were clearly false. Also, I've challenged a few FB friends who've posted partial quotes which lead to false assumptions - and they don't respond. They want their lies to be true and deceive themselves into thinking if they perpetuate the lie, then perhaps the lie will become true.*

A friend of mine named Denise answered: *See your problem is that you tried to convince people that the koolaid they've been sipping on is actually moonshine. It's too late, they are already under the influence and no matter how much evidence you provide will change their mind. I've tried in the past as well. So now I sit back and watch the moonshine rot their brains. I pray that they get into so sort of truth based rehab before their brains shrivel up into useless clumps of gray matter but the odds are not in their favor.*

From the beginning of time people have had to deal with fake news. It would make a really interesting study if someone would start in Genesis and make a list of all the times people made up stories to deceive others. I assume the lies would carry some recurring themes, and probably the people who believed them would have some similar characteristics.

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Today I want to expose spiritual fake news to you. There are three main points to the message today:

1. Believing you are saved by merely reciting a prayer is spiritual fake news.
2. Believing you can do whatever you want because Christ paid for your sins is spiritual fake news.
3. Believing your eternity is secure because your name is on a church roll is spiritual fake news.

I'll be reading first from Matthew 7, then Galatians 5, then Titus 2.

First, BELIEVING YOU ARE SAVED BY MERELY RECITING A PRAYER IS SPIRITUAL FAKE NEWS.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*

ILLUSTRATION: When I was a boy, I remember a few teenagers who seemed sincere with their Christian lives, but every few months they'd think they weren't saved. They'd go through the motions of praying the sinners' prayer once more. I felt sorry for them because I could not figure out what did not take. Eventually, I guess they gained assurance of their salvation because they quit doing it over and over, and as I recall, they went into the ministry. Looking back, I believe what happened is they had heard so many sermons about praying what we call "the sinners' prayer" and realized nothing had changed in their lives. At some point, they realized salvation is not about the words you say but rather, the condition of the heart.

ILLUSTRATION: It is possible to say something and not mean it. Last year, I was having supper with a friend who had two sons. One of them was mean to the other, and his father required him to say he was sorry. He clenched his teeth as he said he was sorry. He wasn't sorry; he just said the words. I don't think I've ever heard anyone pray for forgiveness and salvation with clenched teeth, but I believe there are people who have a problem. They think praying to be saved is the quick fix. Or, they are with another friend who sincerely prayed to be saved, and they just went along with it.

ILLUSTRATION: We have some people here aspiring to become American citizens someday. The oath of citizenship is in writing, so anyone, anywhere could recite the oath. But, would that make them citizens? No. They have to go through a process demonstrating their sincerity about becoming citizens.

EXPLANATION: True repentance means turning from sin and trusting God to help you live a life of holiness. We know because our souls are attached to this mortal, sinful body, we will struggle with sin. However, true repentance indicates true sorrow for sin. Trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior means following him as a lifelong disciple. It starts at the moment of your conversion and continues the rest of your life.

Let me throw this out there—I want to be very careful how I say this. It's not my desire to make true believers doubt their salvation, but if there has been no change in a person's life, then there has been no salvation.

Second, BELIEVING YOU CAN DO WHATEVER YOU WANT BECAUSE CHRIST PAID FOR YOUR SINS IS SPIRITUAL FAKE NEWS.

Galatians 5:22-26 ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

EXPLANATION: In the early Church, there was the belief that since Jesus died on the cross and paid the penalty for sin, it was OK to sin and to push the limits of sin. I just preached through the book of Ephesians, where the Apostle Paul dealt with some of this. Paul warned the Ephesian people against sexual immorality.

At the end of the message last Sunday, I posed the question about how the Church fared. We went to the book of Revelation where the Church at Ephesus was directly addressed. The church was commended for detesting the practices of the Nicolaitans, but the Church at Pergamum was condemned for tolerating the teaching of the Nicolaitans. There is nothing else mentioned about this teaching in the Bible, whatever it was. So, of course, my curiosity got the best of me, and I began reading different theories about the Nicolaitan teaching. Some of the early Church fathers talked about it, and today, scholars hold varying ideas. However, most believe it was some type of justification for hedonistic lifestyles because Jesus paid the penalty for sin. Whatever the teaching was, it didn't stand the test of time.

I wonder, however, whether or not those who were promoters of the Nicolaitan teaching thought their salvation went back to a one-time experience—"I prayed the prayer, so I must be saved."

Apparently, the Nicolaitans declared certain things were not sinful, and therefore, it was OK to indulge in those things.

SCRIPTURE: Titus 2:11-13 ¹¹ *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God*

and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Third, BELIEVING YOUR ETERNITY IS SECURE BECAUSE YOUR NAME IS ON A CHURCH ROLL IS FAKE SPIRITUAL NEWS.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 4:8-12 ⁸ *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

ILLUSTRATION: My heart went out to a shut-in woman who wanted to see me a few years ago. A few of you will know who I am talking about. When I went to her home, she shared with me her fear that she was going to hell because her name was not on any church roll. She was a member of a church that closed its doors years ago. She had no idea what happened to the people or the membership roll. I felt sorry for her because of her age and emotional state.

As we talked, I asked her about her salvation experience. Her testimony was convincing. She was saved and baptized at an early age and had lived for the Lord the best she knew how. For some reason, however, she believed the fake news that part of her salvation hinged on being on a church roll. I did my best to convince her this was not true, and we relieved her anxiety by making her a member of the church.

Do you know how many church rolls God is going to audit some day? NONE!

CONCLUSION: If you believe fake news in the media, the only real consequence for you as an individual is you’ll look like a dummy. There are larger consequences if all of society believed fake news. We may be headed in that direction if people don’t get wiser.

But what will happen to the person who believed fake news about how to get to Heaven without Jesus? Or, even closer to home, what will happen to the person who said a prayer when he was eight-years-old and whose life showed no spiritual fruit? For both of these it means an eternity in Hell.

Fake spiritual news should be easy for the believer to detect. Occasionally, there may be fake spiritual news so subtle, it might take a while to detect, but I believe if we are people of the Word, and we remain people of the Word, then we will have the discernment to know what's fake and what's real.

The early Church had the Gnostics, the Judiazers, the Nicolaitans, and other purveyors of fake spiritual news. We have them today, just under different names.

Jesus said "I am the way" (John 14:6), and "I am the door" (John 10:7). Jesus is the gatekeeper of Heaven.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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