

A Gospel with a Hole or a WHOLE Gospel?

A Review by Bruce Bauer

A Brief Look at the Book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009, 2010, by Richard Stearns

Recently, I was given a copy of a best-selling “Christian” book entitled, *The Hole in Our Gospel: The Answer that Changed My Life and Might Just Change the World*. The author is Richard Stearns, President of World Vision U.S.A. My instant reaction upon reading the title, “The Hole in Our Gospel,” was **OUTRAGE!** How dare this author declare that the beautiful saving gospel of Christ Jesus, of **God’s magnificent magnanimous loving offering of his only begotten Son to die IN OUR PLACE FOR OUR SINS ON THE CROSS**, the **good news** of salvation, the blessed hope declared in the Bible could in any way **be deficient? What a slur, what a terrible affront, I thought!** I read on to see if some way, somehow, I could be mistaken. Perhaps Stearns didn’t really mean it that way. Perhaps he just used the title simply to kindle some attention. Maybe he will explain his way out of the title. Sadly, he meant what he said and he expanded upon his position.

I will cite a few quotations from the book to demonstrate the objective of the author, but first let me state that as a relief organization, World Vision has done much good around the world in helping to alleviate starvation, illiteracy and poverty. I have no beef with that organization. I have a number of family members who have supported World Vision children. Second, let’s look at how the Bible defines the Gospel and later we can compare Stearns’ “gospel” with the Biblical Gospel.

The Gospel of the Bible

Ephesians 2:8-9: (We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.) “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”

John 3:16-17: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

Acts 16:30-31 “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you **the gospel** which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also **ye are saved** if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas [Peter], then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen by James; then of all the apostles; and last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

Richard Stearns’ Lordship Salvation/Social Welfare “gospel”:

Quotations from the book *The Hole in Our Gospel*:

P. 1 “I am a Christian—perhaps you are too. But what does that mean exactly? To even *be* Christians, we must first believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That in itself is no small idea. If it is true, it changes everything, because if Christ is God, then all that He said and did is deeply significant to how we live our lives. So we believe. But God expects more. . . . What is God asking for, really from you and me? Much more than church attendance. More than prayer too. More than belief, and even more than self-denial. God asks us for *everything*. He requires a total life commitment from those who would be His followers.” [My comment: This

brand of justification is called "commitment salvation." It is characteristic of many lordship salvation teachers like Francis Chan.]

P. 2 "The idea behind *The Hole in Our Gospel* is quite simple. It's basically the belief that being a Christian, or follower of Jesus Christ, requires much more than just having a *personal* and transforming relationship with God. It also entails a *public* and transforming relationship with the world. If your personal faith in Christ has no positive outward expression, then your faith—and mine—has a hole in it." [My comment: Standard addition of works added to faith to truly be saved, common to all lordship faith teaching.]

p. 3 "Belief is not enough. Worship is not enough. Personal morality is not enough. And Christian community is not enough. God has always demanded *more*."

P. 5 "The whole gospel is a vision for ushering in God's kingdom—now, not in some future time, and here, on earth, not in some distant heaven." [A "*Kingdom Now*" gospel]

P. 15 "So how can our gospel have a hole in it? As I mentioned in the prologue, the word *gospel* literally means glad tidings, or good news. It is shorthand, meant to convey the coming of the kingdom of God through the Messiah. . . . The amazing news of the gospel is that men and women, through Christ's atoning death, can now be reconciled to God. But the good news Jesus proclaimed had a fullness beyond salvation and the forgiveness of sins; it also signified the coming of God's kingdom on earth. This new kingdom, characteristics of which were captured in the Beatitudes, would turn the existing world order upside down." [Comment: Stearn's reveals his perceived *deficiency* in the true Gospel of the Bible]

p. 17 "More and more, our view of the gospel has been narrowed to a simple transaction, marked by checking a box on a bingo card at some prayer breakfast, registering a decision for Christ, or coming forward during an altar call. . . . we just had to get them to pray the 'sinner's prayer' and then move on to the next potential convert. In our evangelistic efforts to make the good news accessible and simple to understand, we seem to have boiled it down to a kind of 'fire insurance' that one can buy. Then, once the policy is in effect, the sinner can go back to whatever life he was living—of wealth and success, or of poverty and suffering. As long as the policy is in the drawer, the other things don't matter as much. We've got our 'ticket' to the next life. There is a real problem with this limited view of the kingdom of God; it is not the whole gospel. Instead, it's a gospel with a gaping hole." [My comment: It only has a gaping hole because you *misdefine and caricature* the TRUE GOSPEL of the Bible, as laid out at the beginning of this article. Mischaracterizing and belittling the Christian gospel is the standard operating procedure of lordship faith teachers. John MacArthur, in particular, frequently caricatures and berates the biblical Christian gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. His book *The Gospel According to Jesus* is chock-full of such slanderous false statements.]

p. 21 "When we talk today about proclaiming the gospel, we typically mean evangelism, a verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation and how it can be received by anyone by asking God's forgiveness and committing his or her life to Christ. But this is not the whole gospel." [My comment: This statement of Stearn's is stunning! I am left in disbelief and his callous disregard for and rejection of the Biblical gospel.]

Final note: I could go on and on with more quotations from this unbiblical book, this declaration of a false gospel, but I think that you have seen enough to get the point!