

The Messenger



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

A Weekly Publication of the Christians Meeting at
2291 Highway Z, Wentzville, Missouri
Website: westlakechurchofchrist.org

Dedicated to the Proclamation of the Truth in the Spirit of Love (Ephesians 4:15)

Volume 13, Issue 43

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Nov. 11, 2012

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The Social Gospel

by Dempsey Collins

Many churches, especially in the last fifty years, have redirected their focus. The attention of churches has shifted from convicting the individual of sin, and the salvation of his soul, to providing his social, psychological, physical and recreational needs.

It is for this same reason that many churches today make gymnasiums, kitchens, dining halls, recreation rooms, etc. standard additions to their buildings and why it is common to see churches with ball teams and various other social clubs. The content of sermons is more social and political in nature; church bulletins are laden with social and recreational events. Either these churches have fully accepted the tenets of social gospelism or they have been influenced by this movement and may not even know it.

Webster's International Dictionary defines the social gospel as: “A movement in American Protestant Christianity initiated at the end of the nineteenth century and reaching its zenith in the first part of the 20th century, and dedicated to the purpose of *bringing the social order into conformity with the teaching of Jesus Christ*” (emphasis mine, D.C.).

There are two important things to note about Webster's definition:

1. It says nothing about sin, or salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ.
2. It says nothing about bringing the individual into conformity with the teachings of Jesus. Because this is *not* its purpose! Its purpose is to bring the “social order” into conformity with the teaching of Christ.

PRIMARY ERRORS OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT (Gal. 1:6-9)

A. It perverts the nature of Jesus.

1. Jesus is not just a great teacher or ideal human being, not just a champion of social causes, but **much more**. He is **God the Son** (Col. 1:16-20).
2. Social gospelism ignores such plain statements (John 14:6).

B. It perverts the mission of Jesus (Luke 19:10).

1. Jesus came to save the lost from their sins, not from poverty, illiteracy, pollution, government oppression or other social ills.

2. Redemption from social ills does not require the death of Jesus, but forgiveness of sins does (Col. 1:22, 23).
3. The Gospel was given to address man's #1 problem, SIN - not social problems - and to prepare man for eternity (Rom. 6:23).

C. It perverts the kingdom of Christ

1. Note scriptural teaching on the nature of the kingdom: John 18:36; Rom. 14:17; I Cor. 11:22, 34; I Tim. 3:15.
2. Churches today completely ignore these Bible admonitions and have turned the church into a social and recreational service.
3. Listen to many sermons and the content is more about community affairs and the social needs of man than the message of the cross.
4. Church bulletins are laden with social and recreational activities to satisfy our "social needs."
5. Churches have indeed perverted the purpose of Christ's church by accepting social gospelism.

D. It perverts the nature of our hope.

1. The one hope (Eph. 4:4) is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not (I Pet. 1:3-5).
2. Social gospelism focuses on the here and now: a kingdom on earth, the ideal society, the salvation of society (Gal. 1:6-9).
3. The social gospel teachers a different savior, mission, kingdom and hope. It is truly a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

Conclusion:

Social gospelism has become a Trojan horse within the Lord's church, an enemy that has crept in unawares. More and more we see a trend away from the spiritual work Christ has given, to social and recreational concerns. More and more actually believe this is part of the work of the church (Rom. 14:17). **If something is done long enough and by enough people then we stop questioning its authority or right to be done!**

We are now seeing even churches of Christ with ball teams, gymnasiums, kitchens, etc. for social purposes, even though 50 years ago such was hardly ever seen.

Social and recreational activities do have a place in our lives, i.e. in our individual and family lives (I Cor. 11:22, 34), but let's let the church be the church and do the work God ordained and for which Christ died (I Tim. 3:15).

We are here to preach the gospel and to address the problem of sin. If we want to truly help the problems of this world, the best we can do is to take care of sin in our own lives and teach others to do the same (Rom. 3:23 and 6:23).

I MET THE STRANGEST MAN

He said he believes the Bible is the Word of God, but he never reads it.

He said the church would be more effective if more of its members were really dedicated, but he isn't.

He said he feels the church assemblies are times for edification and praise, but he never attends.

He said the younger generation needs stronger spiritual values, but he doesn't exemplify them in his life.

He said the church is not doing the work the Lord intends it should do, but he is not working.

He said that he believes God hears and answers prayers, but he does not pray.

He says he knows the Lord is coming again, but he lives as though the Lord will never come.

Author Unknown