

## Issues That Divide Us – Lesson 2: The Social Gospel

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Our focus today is the Social Gospel.
2. In addressing this I am assuming certain things to be true of your view of Bible authority (which we addressed). If not, this for you is “much ado about nothing!” I am assuming that you believe...
  - A. The N.T. is the word of *God* spoken through *Jesus* and revealed by the *Spirit* to the *apostles*.
  - B. The N.T. has complete authority over the teaching and actions of the local church and our lives.
  - C. That we must limit our service to God to what is revealed in the N.T. (i.e., when God says nothing, He means “no”).
  - D. All things must be authorized by a command, statement, example, or inescapable conclusion [necessary inference] from the N.T. (without one of these, we cannot act/teach).
3. The Social Gospel:
  - A. Summarized:
    - i. “A movement in American Protestant Christianity initiated at the end of the 19th 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 teachings of Jesus Christ.*” (*Webster’s New International Dictionary*) NOTE: It did not say hearts or lives, but social order.
    - ii. **Rubel Shelly**, who taught at both Freed-Hardeman and Lipscomb College, summarized it in *The Second Incarnation* (pp. 166, 169): “The call to follow Jesus’ example of self-emptying service is the **justification** for **every kind of help program that churches wish to pursue**. Counseling, day care, literacy, food and housing, drug and alcohol treatment programs—all are ways of caring for and nurturing people...The church must be a do-good agency...**The church should be an agent to bring about a better world, a world more congenial to all of God’s creatures.**”
  - B. It teaches the gospel’s primary focus is *social reform* and that churches must, therefore, focus on man’s plight in this world.
    - i. It first meant churches got involved in trying to stop war, hunger, political/social injustice, as well as women’s right to vote, labor reform, prohibition, etc.
    - ii. It led to churches focusing on other earthly things like entertaining and socializing their members, which is what often comes to mind when we hear S.G. But, as you can see, changing the social order is still prominent in certain churches of Christ and other churches, with the Salvation Army and the Catholic Church being the poster children for this doctrine.
  - C. The foundational principal of this doctrine is that only after the social/physical needs/wants of man are met can the spiritual issues of man be addressed. Thus, the S.G.’s approach:
    - i. The physical over the spiritual
    - ii. Man’s social ills over his sins
    - iii. The need for social reform over spiritual regeneration
    - iv. The here and now over the hereafter
4. With these things in mind I want to talk about the *social gospel* as it relates to *the gospel*.

### BODY:

#### **I. The social gospel and churches of Christ:**

- A. The S.G. among churches of Christ was originally adopted and *adapted*.
  1. That means that in COCs it was not so much about broad, militant *social activism*, as it was about changing the way local congregations worked to save the world and their members.
  2. It caused COCs to change their focus from primarily preaching the gospel to save the lost to evangelize through help programs, etc.
  3. But as we have seen in the quotes above and will see, the S.G. has grown more and more to include addressing the social order.
- B. The S.G. introduced into churches of Christ...
  1. **General benevolence** (helping people physically/financially) as a **form of evangelism**.

- a. It teaches that benevolent acts of churches are evangelistic efforts—that church run benevolent programs are ways of bringing people to Christ.
- b. This change resulted in an emergence of all sorts of “benevolent evangelism” endeavors, including various types of church-supported benevolent homes, “medical evangelism” (i.e., clinics, hospitals, etc.), adoption agencies (Agape), childcare/daycare services, etc.
2. S.G. grew to include **Secular education and development**:
  - a. Though bible classes and worship had originally been sufficient to equip the saints, churches began to open schools (Ezell Harding at Tusculum), teach self-help and life classes, etc., for member and community good with the hope of it being evangelistic.
  - b. The Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, TX has “FaithWorks”: “FaithWorks of Abilene offers three 13-week career development training sessions each year for the under employed and/or non-employed. Students study a 10-week job skills curriculum and are also equipped with individual and small group counseling, professional clothing, mentoring, computer training **and a weekly Bible class**. Students are able to research their preferred career choice and are also placed in an internship with Abilene businesses.” (<http://www.highlandchurch.org/faithworks-of-abilene>)
    - i. Note the S.G.’s primary focus on improving this life, not preparing for heaven.
3. **Changes and additions** to the local church’s organization and facilities.
  - a. Though a place to meet for worship and teaching were sufficient for the N.T. church, the S.G. resulted in churches adding fellowship halls, daycare facilities, game/music rooms, gyms, cafeterias, coffee shops, etc.
  - b. Though Biblical elders, deacons, evangelists, and faithful members were sufficient to accomplish the N.T. churches’ *spiritual* goals, the S.G. resulted in churches adding financial counselors, psychologists, addiction counselors, youth/recreation directors, child care workers, body life ministers [church gym workers], etc.
  - c. As a result of these changes, the local church’s facilities and programs have become a major part of the members’ lives. The church and its facilities are now...
    - i. The place to play ball, socialize, party, go to weight loss programs, learn to sew, etc.
    - ii. The means of fulfilling one’s benevolent responsibilities through the benevolent programs, including money distribution, food pantries, clothing closets, etc.
    - iii. The way to evangelize, seeing members invite people to various church events, including sporting events, financial classes, potlucks, entertainment, etc., and people like what they see/experience and want to be part of it all. So, they must obey the gospel to be part. And so, you have recruiting, rather than converting going on.
- C. I have personally been a part of much of this, being raised in a church heavily involved in the social gospel and being a youth minister for a short time.
  1. I grew up with church sponsored, or paid-for...
    - a. Youth parties in the “fellowship hall” on a weekly basis where we watched movies, played games, ate pizzas made and cooked there at the church building that the youth minister sold us, drank soft drinks from the Coke machine there in the basement, etc.
    - b. Halloween and Christmas parties, along with Christmas plays, etc.
    - c. Volleyball, basketball, softball, and ping pong (I won one of our ping pong tournaments).
    - d. Youth trips to baseball games, theme parks, and Sunday “sunrise services” at the park.
  2. During my time as a youth minister in Dayton, OH, I was expected to teach Bible studies, organize “puppet worship” for the kids, take the young people to Niagara Fall and to summer camp, and to help them put on a Vaudeville show and an old-timey carnival in the building with an old-timey parade through the building with young girls in immodest attire doing flips in front (to which I protested and was told to drop it).
  3. These changes and much more are commonly part of most churches of Christ today and most all denominational church, just possibly more so, all from the S.G.

## II. Biblical problems with the social gospel:

- A. The social gospel perverts the nature of God's kingdom:
1. Teaches that the kingdom is a social/political institution!
  2. "The **kingdom of God** is a great **social** synthesis which **includes the whole life of man, spiritual, moral, mental and physical; its field of manifestation is man's personal, family, social, political and industrial relations...**" (*The South Mobilizing for Social Service*; "Social Service and the Church"; Samuel Batten, D.D.; 1913; p. 515).
    - a. This may seem strange, but do not forget "FaithWorks" and Rubel Shelly's quote.
    - b. So, the kingdom is said to be about the here and now, about physical matters.
  3. Jesus' kingdom is *spiritual*.
    - a. It is *not of this world* (John 18:36 – "Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."").
    - b. It has a spiritual focus (Rom. 14:17 – "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."").
    - c. These verses are in opposition of the S.G.'s view of the kingdom.
- B. The social gospel perverts the Great Commission:
1. **Phillip Eichman** in discussing how the church should follow Jesus' ministry said this of the G.C. in the book *Medical Missions Among The Churches of Christ* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., chpt. 1; [www.ovc.edu/missions/medical/medbook1.htm](http://www.ovc.edu/missions/medical/medbook1.htm)): "Unfortunately, we can no longer heal by laying our hands upon the sick as Jesus and others at that time were able to do. We can, however, still pattern our ministry after that of Jesus. Medical missions is one way that we, as the church, can combine a ministry of both healing and teaching. Mission programs often emphasize evangelism, which seeks to reach the spiritual needs of individuals primarily through teaching. **This is, of course, a part of the Great Commission—to go and "make disciples of all nations."** The approach of medical missions, or perhaps a more descriptive term, medical evangelism, **is broader**, seeking to reach both the **spiritual and physical needs** of those who are served."
    - a. The S.G. teaches that the G.C. includes meeting both the world's spiritual needs as well as its **physical** needs.
  2. The Great Commission (like the kingdom) is *spiritual*.
    - a. Matt. 28:19-20 – "Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen."
    - b. Mark. 16:15-16 – "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to every creature. He who **believes and is baptized will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned."
    - c. Luke 24:46-47 – "Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and **that repentance and remission of sins should be preached** in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."
    - d. Where is the ministering to the whole man, social reform, medical clinics, etc.? Here was the perfect opportunity for the Lord to include it, but He did not!
- C. The social gospel perverts the purpose of Jesus' *ministry* and *miracles* (also of the apostles').
1. **Gaston Cogdell** (preached in COCs): "Surely that same divine love which led Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8), and to **feed the hungry** multitudes, **most of whom followed him mainly for the loaves and fishes**, and to **heal the sick** and diseases **just because they needed healing**, will lead His body the church to do what it can to **alleviate human suffering, and to meet human needs** wherever and whenever possible, even of those who are unsaved, recognizing always that the ultimate goal of all such efforts is the saving of the souls of those who are aided." (*The Cogdell-Turner Discussion*, p. 91)

- a. The S.G. claims Christ miraculously fed the multitudes and healed the sick *simply because there was a need*, which is authority for *churches* to do the same today, with the goal of ultimately saving souls.
  - b. Note again how the S.G.'s addressed the physical first, then the spiritual.
  2. The S.G. perverts the purposes of Jesus' ministry and miracles because...
    - a. Jesus came to bring spiritual *salvation*, not physical relief (Lk. 19:10 – “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”).
    - b. Jesus' salvation will cause *suffering* and *hardship*.
      - i. Mt. 10:34-36 – “**Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth**; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.<sup>35</sup> For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;<sup>36</sup> and A man's enemies will be the members of his household.”
      - ii. 2 Tim. 3:10-12 – “Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance,<sup>11</sup> **persecutions, and sufferings**, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!<sup>12</sup> Indeed, **all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**”
    - c. Jesus' miracles were done as **signs**, or to **prove**, that He is the Christ.
      - i. This is seen in the result of Jesus feeding the 5000 with five loaves and two fishes (Jn. 6:14 – “Therefore when the people **saw the sign which He had performed**, they said, “**This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.**”).
      - ii. Jesus said his works **prove** he is the Messiah (Jn. 10:24-25 – “The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the **works that I do** in My Father's name, **these testify of Me.**”).
      - iii. John said Jesus miracles were signs, proof, of him being the Christ (John 20:30-31 – “Therefore many other **signs** Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;<sup>31</sup> but these have been written so that you may **believe that Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”).
      - iv. **NOTE:** If the church is to duplicate Jesus' ministry, how does a church providing food, job training, fun, etc., **prove** Jesus is the Savior? They do not!
  3. The SG promotes a purpose for Jesus' ministry/miracles that He and the N.T. never claimed.
- D. The social gospel **perverts the true Gospel's appeal**.
1. **Marvin Phillips (preached in COCs):** “I am interested in submarines and skateboards if they are effective in leading souls to Christ...Bus evangelism is **psychology**. If we are to get riders we must **motivate them by the sizzle**. Sure, **they come for the wrong reason**, but so did all those on Pentecost in Acts 2.” (Emphasis added, *Speech* at the Tulsa Workshop, quoted in Dee Bowman, “Do We Still Believe It?,” *The Southside Reminder*, May 11, 1983, 7:37:2)
    - a. The S.G. advocates the church using “bait-and-switch” evangelistic tactics.
    - b. Churches are to draw people by *fleshly incentives*, causing people to come *for the wrong reasons*, so that the church can *expose the gospel to them later*.
    - c. Just to say it should help us see it is wrong!
  2. The gospel has a *spiritual* appeal.
    - a. Jesus rebuked and refused to feed those who came to Him **for the wrong reasons** (John 6:26-27 – “Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the **signs**, but because you **ate of the loaves and were filled**.<sup>27</sup> “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”).

- i. These people were drawn to Jesus for physical reasons, for food and filling their bellies, which is the draw used by S.G. churches of Christ today!
  - ii. Since Jesus severely rebuked them for being drawn to him for these reasons, how can this be a legitimate evangelistic tool today?
  - b. The Gospel's evangelistic weapon are *spiritual*.
    - i. Only God can draw one to Jesus through being taught the gospel, not through food, fun, etc. (John 6:44-45 – “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws** him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘and they shall **all be taught** by God.’ Therefore everyone who has **heard** and **learned** from the Father comes to Me.”).
      - 1) Churches ought to be quaking in their boots for drawing people with food, fun, entertainment, etc.
      - 2) They are drawing people to something that has nothing to do with Jesus!
    - ii. The weapons supplied to Christians by Christ are spiritual—designed to bring the heart and mind under Christ's control (2 Cor. 10:3-5 – “For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war according to the flesh**,<sup>4</sup> for the **weapons** of our warfare **are not of the flesh**, but **divinely powerful** for the destruction of **fortresses**.<sup>5</sup> We are destroying **speculations** and every **lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God**, and we are taking **every thought captive** to the **obedience of Christ**”).
    - iii. Paul's ministry in the gospel involved offering one incentive—salvation from sin through the cross of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:2 – “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”).
  - c. Most every weapon of the S.G. is physical, is of the flesh. So, how can churches' use of these carnal weapons be biblically legitimate? They cannot!
  - d. Why use the “bait-and-switch” approach except that these people have lost faith in God to draw people by teaching them the gospel?
- E. The social gospel **perverts N.T. fellowship**.
1. Churches of Christ that follow the S.G. often defend their recreation, entertainment, and social programs as being Christian *fellowship*.
    - a. “We are told to have **fellowship of the righteous** (Psalm 55:14; John 13:34; Romans 15:1). This coming Sunday evening after services we are all encouraged to have **fellowship of the righteous**. Bring your freezer of ice cream and join us on the back parking lot. It is a wonderful opportunity for the whole congregation to **fellowship together**. I hope to see each of you there.” (Bulletin article, via Mark Roberts, “Striving For Unity,” *Abundant Life*, May, 1998, 31:5:6).
  2. Biblical fellowship connected to the local church...
    - a. Is not recreation, social meals, ice cream suppers, etc. (Freed-Hardeman professors)
    - b. Is not based on a command for churches to provide “fellowship,” or “sharing,” activities, allowing any activity *shared*, or where *sharing* takes place, to be a work of the church!
    - c. Is learned by *specific examples* of the church's work described as “fellowship,” such as...
      - i. Coming together to *share* in being edified by the word, in giving of our means, in partaking of the Lord's Supper, and in prayer (Acts 2:42). All spiritual!
      - ii. Sharing together in helping needy saints (2 Cor. 8:3-4).
      - iii. Sharing together in supporting the preaching of the gospel (Phil. 4:15).
    - d. This is the extent of “fellowship” activities connected to the local church!
  3. So, the S.G. is wrong because it perverts N.T. fellowship by changing its focus from *spiritual sharing* to that of sharing in trivial things like ice cream suppers, sports, and entertainment!

#### CONCLUSION:

1. I am all for helping those who truly need help, eliminating social injustice, people having better jobs, and Christians getting together for recreation and social activities.
2. I am opposed to the S.G. because:

- A. Perverts the nature of Christ's kingdom
  - B. Perverts the Great Commission
  - C. Perverts the ministry and miracles of Jesus
  - D. Perverts the spiritual appeal of the Gospel
  - E. Perverts N.T. fellowship
3. The S.G. indicts God's wisdom by teaching that God's spiritual redemption through Christ crucified and the saving message of the gospel is not enough. We must address physical matters first!
  4. Jesus came to save you from yourself and your sins. Will you accept Jesus as your Savior in F-R-C-B-LF?