

Liberalism and Institutionalism:

Issues That Divide Us

The Issues

- **Biblical Authority**
- **The Social Gospel**
- **Human Institutions**
- **Unlimited Benevolence**
- **Sponsoring Church**



Authority Presuppositions

- God's word is our all-sufficient **pattern** – 2 Tim. 1:13, 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3
- We must have **Bible authority** for everything we do – Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11
- All things must be authorized by **command, statement, approved example, or inescapable implication.**
- We must **not deviate** from God's instructions – 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Jn. 9-11; Rev. 22:18-19
- When God says **nothing**, He means "**No**" – 2 Sam. 7:1-7

The Social Gospel

Emphasizes This

Physical

Social Ills of Man

Social Reformation

Here & Now

Rather Than This

Spiritual

Sins of Man

Spiritual Regeneration

Hereafter

The Social Gospel

“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)

The Social Gospel

“**Social Gospel**, in U.S. history, a religious **social reform movement** that was prominent from c. 1870 to c. 1920, especially among liberal Protestant groups dedicated to the betterment of industrialized society through application of the biblical principles of charity and justice...Labour reforms—including abolition of child labour, a shorter work week, a living wage, factory regulation, and improvement of the working conditions of women—constituted the Social Gospel’s most prominent concerns.”

(Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 10, p. 920)

The Social Gospel and Churches of Christ

Rubel Shelly: “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.” (*The Second Incarnation*, pp. 166, 169).

The Social Gospel and churches of Christ

Social Gospel and Churches of Christ

- S.G. principles were adopted and *adapted*.
- Not so much about social activism, but changed the way churches worked to save the world.
- Changed focus from preaching the gospel to other approaches and new works.
 - Incorporated **general benevolence** as a form of **evangelism**.
 - Benevolent institutions, medical evangelism (i.e., clinics, hospitals, etc.)

Social Gospel and Secular Education

- Churches opened schools, day-care centers, etc.
- **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>)

Social Gospel: Inward Focus

- **Oran Rhodes:** “What does our Lord see among His people today? If He looks in some places, he finds **‘Jumping Jacks For Jesus,’ ‘Cookies For Christ,’ ‘Clowning Around For The Lord,’** and **‘Bicycles For Bringing One.’** In other places he sees the church to be the champions—of the church Basketball League—with the newspaper clipping reading, **‘Church of Christ Kicks Baptist For City Championship.’** If these were not real, or if they were only isolated cases, it would not be worth the space used here, but these kinds of things go on regularly throughout the land. God forbid.”
- These activities were justified as aids to evangelism and fellowship.

A Change in Mission Brought...

- A change in **personnel**.
- A change in **facilities**.
- A change in **focus** which caused the **local church and its facilities to become...**
 - The place for playing ball, socializing, weight loss programs, learning to sew, etc.
 - The church treasury is the means to fulfill benevolent responsibilities.
 - The way the evangelize through its social/recreational programs.

Biblical Problems with the Social Gospel

Perverts the Nature of the Kingdom of God

The Social Gospel:

Kingdom Is About the “Here and Now”

- **Samuel Batten:** “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...**For this reason also all those programs of the Church which contemplate anything less than the making of a new Christian social order fall below the program of the kingdom. The conception of the kingdom of God fairly commits the church to the task of seeking a Christian type of human society.” (*The South Mobilizing for Social Service*; “Social Service and the Church”; Samuel Batten, D.D.; 1913; p. 515).

Christ's Kingdom is Spiritual

- It is “not of this world” – John 18:36
- It is not about eating and drinking, but about righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit – Rom. 14:17
- All aspects of the social gospel must be judged by this standard!

Perverts the Great Commission

Social Gospel:

The G.C. Is About Physical Needs

- **Phillip Eichman:** “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.**” (*Medical Missions Among The Churches of Christ*, 2nd Ed., chpt. 1; www.ovc.edu/missions/medical/medbook1.htm)

The Great Commission Is Spiritual

- **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.”
- **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.”
- **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.”

The Great Commission Is Spiritual

- **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 behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- **Mark. 16:7-8** – “Do not be alarmed, for you will be standing before the world and all flesh. He who is with you will be with you and will be with you.”
- **Luke 24:46-48** – “It was written, and it has been fulfilled, that the Christ should suffer, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

**Where is the social
reform, medical
missions,
entertainment, etc.?**

The Gospel Is Not About Changing the Social Order

- **Colossians 3:22 – 4:1** – “Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”
- The gospel is about changing the inner man, not the conditions of society!

Misuses the Ministry of Jesus

The S.G. makes Jesus into a Social Reformer

Gaston Cogdell: “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)

The S.G. perverts Jesus' Ministry

- Jesus' work was always about saving souls, not making life physically better – Lk. 19:10
- Jesus' miracles were about proving He is the Messiah.
 - The miracles were *signs* that He is the Christ – Jn. 6:14; 20:30-31
 - Jesus **rebuked** those who followed Him **for the food** – Jn. 6:26-27

Perverts the Appeal of the Gospel

The S.G. Appeals to the Flesh

- The S.G. advocates drawing the world to God through fleshly incentives.
- **Marvin Phillips:** “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)

The Gospel's Appeal Is Spiritual

- Although the people at Pentecost may have come without understanding, they were not offered carnal/fleshing incentives!
- The gospel is the **power of God to salvation** – Rom. 1:16
- The **weapons** of Christ and Christians are **not carnal** – 2 Cor. 10:3-5
- The **drawing power** of God is through **teaching the gospel** – Jn. 6:44-45

Perverts N.T. Fellowship

Food and Fun are Fellowship

- “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).
- The S.G. makes fellowship apply to anything from ice cream suppers to a day at Disney World.

Biblical Fellowship is *Spiritual* Sharing...

- In our relationship with God – 1 Jn. 1:3
- In Christ's suffering – Phil. 3:10
- In our sharing of the Lord's suffering of the
Lord's suffering of the
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- In helping
**We must leave
fellowship in its spiritual
context!**
- In supporting the preaching of the gospel – Phil. 4:15
- In doing the Lord's work – 2 Cor. 8:23

Conclusion

- I am for helping the needy and for brethren getting together in recreational activities, etc.
- But, I am opposed to the S.G. and how it changes the church's focus to physical/earthly things.
- The Social Gospel...
 - Perverts the nature of Christ's kingdom.
 - Perverts the Great Commission
 - Perverts the ministry of Jesus
 - Perverts the appeal of the Gospel
 - Perverts N.T. Fellowship