

True Gospel vs. Social Gospel

Romans 1:15-17

Understanding the Social Gospel

- Has a desire for popularity as its beginning point
- Seeks to make the message more attractive to man
- Minimizes or eliminates the parts of truth which offend or are unpopular
- Maximizes or adds elements which meet the current desires of people
- Decision to subtract offensive or add non-biblical elements based on popular appeal
- Success or failure judged by the numbers attracted to participate

But What About The Church & The True Gospel?

Church Has Spiritual Mission: *Proclaim the Truth of the Gospel*

- Equipping of the church shows nature of its mission: *Ephesians 4:11-16*
- Description of the church shows its purpose: *1 Timothy 3:15*
- Record from book of Acts confirms this spiritual work was the central focus of first century church's purpose

What Gospel Was Taught In The First Century?

Romans 1:15-17

- Paul's coming to Rome was advertised on the basis of *preaching the gospel*
- Paul kept this focus of attraction because he was *not ashamed of gospel*
- Gospel seen as *God's power* to salvation
- Those attracted to gospel are drawn by the *righteousness revealed therein*
- What is drawing power of another focus?

What Gospel Was Taught In The First Century?

1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5

- Paul acknowledged *most would reject gospel* message when it was the focus
- Gospel was *the power of God*
- Gospel was *the wisdom of God*
- When presenting the gospel, *power of gospel was stressed*, not appeal to man
- Gospel *not changed to enhance appeal*

What Gospel Was Taught In The First Century?

2 Corinthians 4:1-5

- *As Paul had obtained mercy* though the gospel, *even so* he continued declaring it
- Renounced *crafty or deceitful handling* of the word of God
 - ◆ Did not handle in a way to trick hearers
 - ◆ Did not draw with one & substitute another
 - ◆ No "bait & switch" tactics of advertising
- If *gospel veiled*, image of *God not seen*
- **Attraction not in man, but in gospel**

Gospel Has Offensive Elements

- Condemns immorality (*1 Cor. 6:9-10*)
- Convicts all of sin (*Rom. 3:23*)
- Speaks of eternal punishment of wicked in hell (*Matt. 25:41- 46; Rev. 21:8*)
- Warns of false doctrine and false teachers (*Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Jn. 9-11; 2 Tim. 2:15-18*)
- Many elements of the Gospel message were and are offensive to those in the world

Nevertheless, Pure Gospel Must Be Preached In Its Entirety

- Example of Paul in Ephesus affirms necessity of preaching whole gospel (*Acts 20:20-27*)
- Charge to Timothy confirms the need to preach all truth at all times (*2 Timothy 4:1-5*)
- Why were those teaching first century Gospel persecuted if message could be altered to avoid offense?

Gospel Preached to Thessalonians

- Historical account: **Acts 17:2-4**
- Paul's recounting of his preaching:
- *1 Thessalonians 1:3-10*
- *1 Thessalonians 2:3-6, 9, 13*
- *1 Thessalonians 3:1-13*
- *1 Thessalonians 4:1-8*
- *2 Thessalonians 2:13-15*

History of Social Gospel

- Darwin's theories affected the "clergy" heavily due to education where theories accepted
- As preachers lost faith in Bible message, faith was also lost in spiritual mission of church
- Left them with an "institution" seeking another purpose (physical rather than spiritual)
- Many churches became places to address social ills of society & other physical purposes
- If they were succeed in changing society as a whole, they had to attract large numbers
- Accomplished by entertainment & popular appeal of message ("P.M.A. Movement")
- Attracted people with popular methods & replaced the Bible as focus of appeal

Destroying the Foundation: Denominational Preaching & Social Gospel

A *Time* (Sept. 29, 1980, p. 85) article entitled "**A Pallid but Personable Faith?**" reviewed a study documenting this philosophy in modern denominationalism. The subtitle summed up the findings saying, "Study says many Protestants want pop psychology, not theology." The study was conducted by the Association of Theological Schools to determine what kind of "ministers" the denominational "laity" desires. The following are quotes from the article:

1. "The most desirable traits: 1) 'Open, Affirming Style' (*as opposed to preaching which contained negative or condemning elements - HRO*); 2) 'Caring for Persons under Stress' (with no mention of any religious content); 3) 'Congregational Leadership.' To a striking extent, many people put appealing personal qualities well above traditional pastoral concerns for doctrine and spiritual life, or otherworldly values based on the teachings of the Bible."
2. "For example, members of the huge (though declining) United Methodist Church... want clergy who are 'open, accepting, self-critical, patient, participatory and exemplary.' All these qualities involved with psychological jargon, interpersonal relationships and group dynamics."

3. "According to the study, Episcopalians tend to have little interest in the Bible as a source of specific moral guidance. Parishioners' approval of a minister depends not so much on his faith as on how well he gets along with people...."
4. "The United Church of Christ... is noteworthy in how little interest its members displayed concerning a pastor's religiosity, biblical faith, evangelism, piety or explicit emphasis on spiritual renewal and liturgy."

Social Gospel Principles Personified in Robert Schuller

An article entitled "**Apostle of Sunny Thoughts**" reviewed the work of Robert Schuller, the ultimate example of the positive mental attitude approach in preaching (*Time*, Mar. 18, 1985, p. 70). Notice the emphasis of Schuller's preaching:

1. "... Schuller combines an affirmative outlook with old-fashioned piety to assure his audiences that self-esteem and success are desirable and achievable. During an hour that sometimes resembles a celebrity talk show, Schuller speaks earnestly of the abiding desire for self-worth, of 'every person's deepest need - one's spiritual hunger for glory.'"
2. "For Schuller, an acknowledgment of self-worth, more than a confession of sinfulness, is the path to God. Says he: 'We can replace inferiority complexes with a new self-image, one with divine roots. God is my Father; I am somebody!'"
3. "Says Schuller: 'I'm trying to be a source of emotional nourishment to people.' People, he adds, who would ordinarily have nothing to do with a church."

After first giving up the dependence on Bible teaching and authority, every imaginable gimmick has been tried to attract people uninterested in spiritual matters. Mainstream denominational churches have become churches for people who do not like church. They abound with the trappings of the social gospel. A few examples follow:

Denominational Entertainment

- Godstock 7 with golf tournament, volleyball, scavenger hunt...
- Providence Knob Baptist Church with fish fry, hush puppies, fries, cole slaw & no preaching!
- **Stryper:** *"We are rock-n-roll evangelists. Stryper is a modern-day John the Baptist crying in the world of rock for those who don't have the life of Christ to turn on the light switch."*
- **Mylon & Broken Heart** concert promoted as "action packed event" with "explosive light show" and "58,000 watts of state of the art digital sound reinforcement by Peavey."
- Greg Fast (program director for a "gospel pop and rock" radio station): *"We don't play trashy lyrics or tell dirty jokes. We give you fun and good clean songs without hitting you over the head with the Bible."*
- Steve Taylor (Gospel rock artist): *"The people who buy my records like danceable, modern music, but they don't want to feel guilty supporting music with trashy lyrics."*
- Rock music in, psalms & spiritual songs out! Common in "contemporary worship."
- Heaven's Saints Motorcycle ministry with biker games (trophies awarded)
- Power Team weightlifting exhibition with karate chops through ice blocks

Examples of the Social Gospel Among Institutional Churches

Johnson Street - Alvin, TX

- Flyer says they are “endeavoring to follow the pattern and teaching of the original church built by Jesus Christ almost 2000 years ago.” What is included in pattern?
- “Pacesetters” - senior citizen activity group
- “Social activities for the youth group”
- “First Place: Christian Weight Control”
- Lil’ Lambs & Lollipops Preschool program

Twickenham Church of Christ

- “**Community Class Series**” free to public
- October 20: **Woodcarving & Window Treatments**
- October 27: **Wallpapering**
- November 3: **Basket Making**
- For Men Only! Featuring Dr. James Flatt “**Fun Facts About Your Prostate**”

Southwest Central Church (Houston, Texas)

- 1) Calling All Kids – Giant slide, moon walk, obstacle course, sumo wrestlers
- 2) Calling All Teens - Giant slide, moon walk, obstacle course, sumo wrestlers + food
- 3) Basic Auto Upkeep
- 4) Career Counseling
- 5) Shady Acres Chorus

Bering Drive - Houston, TX

- White-water rafting trip
- City-Wide Sports Day & Concert
- 300 foot hot dog

“An Expression of Concern”

- In the late 1980’s, about 200 institutional preachers signed & published joint statement:
- “We are deeply disturbed over the liberalism that is so evident in the brotherhood today.”
- “The typical emphasis of the denominational world on recreation, entertainment, & solving the social ills of society has been incorporated into the thinking and programs of many congregations, supplanting the God-given work of meeting the desperate spiritual needs of those within & without the body of Christ.”

Trends Among Non-Institutional Brethren

Christianity Magazine Letter & Decreased Dependence on Bible

- "Generally speaking, two or three passages should provide a sufficient base for such articles -- perhaps even one."
- "Obviously, what we are after is a piece of journalistic writing. The thrust of the article should be practical, speaking to the real needs of people. The style of the writing should be popular. We urge you to be your creative best: think of interest-catching leads, sharp illustrations, and, if possible, sprinkle in a little wit."

Skyview Church – Pinellas Park, FL

- 1) First version of “Activities” page
- 2) Second version of “Activities” page

Youth Lectureship - West Side Church (Irving, Texas)

MTV video clip shown on Windows Media player

Kirkland, WA Youth Lectures & Meeting Announcements

- "Fun social events"
- "Reception" & "Potluck"
- Picture of couple in mid-thigh shorts

Henderson Boulevard Church - Tampa, FL

- "The Christian & Money: Stewardship of Spending and Saving"
- Speaker: "Follower of Jesus Christ and Certified Financial Counselor"
- "Coordinator of the Financial Peace University"
- "An ordinary person who learned the painful lessons of debt and wants to prevent others from experiencing the same"

Lakeview Church in Columbus, IN

- Weekend young people's sessions for high school & college age
- Older brethren not to participate in discussion sessions
- *"Great News! Ralph Walker has agreed to preach Sunday night at 5:00 p.m. as well. He will bring a lesson for all ages entitled: 'Who Moved Paul's Cheese?' (What do you do when things aren't as you expect them to be?)"*

Ad with Rock Music from West Side Church (Irving, TX): An Expedient?

- Justifications from preacher who designed it:
- "Music videos are very popular today -- we chose that format because it speaks to young people."
- "'Why rock music?' Because it gets young people's attention. It helps us get the lectures noticed."
- "So I am going to argue that the music in the clip is an authorized expedient. I do believe it helps us to preach the gospel because it sets the stage for the clip, makes it have the look and feel (and sound) we want it to so that young people will pay attention to it."
- **Liberal brethren make same argument for their gyms & kitchens -- “expedient; gets them there”**

What Must We Do?

- Preach the pure Gospel of Christ
- Do not change it for popular appeal
- Do not change the work of the church away from spiritual towards social
- Keep focus on the real need of all: **SALVATION FROM SIN**
- Live in a way which shows our focus & the importance of the Gospel to us

First Tuesday Class - May 2003

South Livingston church of Christ

Material prepared & presented by Harry Osborne