

“The Social Gospel”

The social gospel refers to the idea advanced by many that the primary purpose of the church is to provide for the here and now and focus upon the physical and social needs of man. This is indeed “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6-9) as the gospel of Christ provides for the spiritual need of all men, i.e., the salvation from sin (Romans 1:16).

The social gospel manifests itself in many ways. Many brethren have gotten caught up in such by getting the church involved in providing recreation and entertainment activities as an important part of their work. This has resulted in churches sponsoring ball teams and building facilities for social and recreational activities. Some brethren who would be opposed to churches providing these things from the church’s funds are just as guilty of promoting the social gospel.

When churches begin to use carnal attractions to get people to attend this is a part of the social gospel’s appeal to the flesh. We see this in the announcements of young people’s lectureships where churches plan lectures for young people with a picnic or fun and games following. Usually a disclaimer appears stating that the picnic and games are not the work of the church, but are provided by individuals. This was same thing brethren did 50 and 60 years ago when they started such and now they have their gymnasiums and other facilities for social and recreational activities. The young people attending these lectureships don’t care who pays. It was announced by the church. It was used by the church to encourage them to attend. To say the least, it is a step in the wrong direction.

Another example of the social gospel is when sermons are preached claiming that the strength and growth of the Jerusalem church was to be attributed to their socializing and eating together. The Bible teaches that their strength and growth was due to their continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42) and their dedication in preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Their closeness and association together was the fruit of their faithfulness and not the cause.

If parents want to plan picnics and recreational activities for their children and invite other young people to come that is fine, but let’s not get the church involved in such by using such as an encouragement to attend Bible lessons, etc.

Also, the gospel message is for all. Why should the church select a certain age group and decide we are going to have lessons just for them. Are we soon to see announcements of “Old Folks Lectureships”? What about the Middle Aged? Let’s get back to having the church preach the gospel of Christ to all and cease using carnal attractions to get them to come.

✍ James Hahn