

The Social Gospel

2 Timothy 3:1-7

Introduction: Worldly churches use many gimmicks to draw people to their services. They have dinners, theatrical plays, bands and orchestras, coffee and donuts, church wide garage sales, etc. I have heard of a Baptist church in Texas with a McDonalds inside and another church with a Jiffy Lube. Even in Rapid City a church held a rodeo.

The term “social gospel” to describe these gimmicks. “Social” because these attractions are all social activities. “Gospel” because the rationale behind these attractions is meant to draw people into church so they can be taught.

People defend this method of spreading God’s word by pointing to the attendance record. The logic is if people come because of these attractions and God’s word is being taught, how could it be wrong. It’s the end justifies the means philosophy.

However, the church is not a social institution and the Bible does have some things to say about the social gospel.

I. The social gospel in the first century.

A. The money changers in the temple (John 2:13-17).

1. Didn’t Jesus understand that the sales drew people to the temple?
2. Was Jesus against free markets?
3. Or was Jesus upset because of the perversion of spiritual things at the temple?

B. Paul bore record of these type of people (Rom. 10:1-3).

1. In their zeal they made the house of God a house of merchandise.
2. In their zeal, their actions were without knowledge.
3. By failing to understand God’s purposes we see how easy it is to pervert the Lord’s work.

C. Consider the situation today.

1. What would Jesus do (WWJD)? [cartoon]
2. In righteous anger Jesus would say to these people, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”

D. Lovers of self and pleasure do not mind the things of God (2 Tim. 3:1-7).

II. Our attitude toward such involvement on the part of the church.

Notice Paul’s attitude toward perverting spiritual things for the pleasures of carnal appetites (1 Cor. 11:20-22).

1. The thing condemned here was turning the gathering of the saints into an occasion for a common meal (1 Cor. 11:34).

2. Could they have eaten their meal before gathering?
3. Why would any church prepare dinners and eat in the church buildings when Paul condemned it in scriptures?
4. Paul said we despise the church by eating in it and we bring shame upon many others.
5. Paul said such action brings judgment to those who do such things.
6. Likewise, we should conduct social affairs in those places where it is proper. At church is not such a place.

III. Inducements

A. If worship was left to man to determine what was appropriate, then gimmicks would be all right. However, notice what Paul says should induce us to worship God (1 Cor. 2:1-5). We should be induced not by man's gimmicks but by the power of God! Even a good speaker could be the worse thing for a congregation!

1. What kind of people is gained by any other method? The kind of people that left the Lord when the food stopped (John 6:26-27, 66).
2. When people have had their fill, they will quit that which attracted them.

B. Inducing people to attend does not convert people to Christ. Examples:

1. I met a lady through a correspondence course who was shopping for a church. She wanted to know what the church might offer her. When she lived in Utah, the Mormon church gave her a car, a place to stay and some money from time to time. When she moved to Missouri, did she stay a Mormon? No, she was only induced by material things, but she was never converted.
2. I had a phone call from a lady who was asking for money. I asked if she was going to church anywhere. She said she went to one of the local Baptist churches but quit because they wanted to have Bible studies with her and she just didn't have time for that. I told her that if she would put the Lord first, the Lord would take care of these things. But she didn't have time for the Lord. She just wanted the money.

C. Inducements amount to saying, "If following and worshipping Christ is not enough, we'll give you coffee and donuts as well."

1. I even had a visitor tell me if we would just offered coffee and donuts in the foyer, we could get a lot more people to attend.
2. But is that the kind of person the Lord wants to worship Him? Someone who is so shallow that it takes a gimmick to get him to come to church (Matt. 6:33; 1 Cor. 3:11-15)?

Conclusion: Let us commit our souls to God (1 Pet. 4:17-19). Let us not add anything (like gimmicks to induce people to attend services) to God's word (Rev. 22:18). If we love the Lord and desire to be partakers together in His promises that is all the inducement anyone needs (Col. 1:12-14).