

The "Social Gospel"

(by Bob Pulliam)

What is the "social gospel"? You might be able to surmise from the combination of words what it refers to; but lest we misunderstand, let me define it for you. The "social gospel" is the effort to expand the spiritual activities of the church to include physical needs and/or desires. Notice that some of these are 'needs'; but that does not make them the responsibility of the church.

All of these may be good and wholesome activities, or even very helpful; but the question remains of whether the church has the authority to act in these. These may include gymnasiums, medical missions, kitchens, game rooms, busses for outings, etc... We can view this as simply a matter of finding an activity that helps, and then put the church in charge of it; or, seeking what God has designed the church to be and do. We can read of members of the church eating together (Acts 2:46); but never find the church providing the facilities to do such. Apostles healed the sick (Acts 19:11f), but the church never provided medical facilities to accomplish this. The work of healing was accomplished to confirm the gospel that was being spoken (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:4).

It's big business. And when you view the church as a business, it can only survive by one of two philosophies. By the first, it ceases to be the Lord's church. This method involves competing with other churches with social programs and/or activities like those mentioned above. Not only does it cease to be the Lord's church, it also begins a never ending circle of competition with other churches. Sometimes this philosophy begins in very simple, seemingly unobtrusive ways. But with time, the initial abandonment of authority leads deeper and deeper into error.

The second is to offer only the truth. This is the precious commodity the church clings to, for by it's precepts and truth she exists. The building may not be as full as many others in town, but the stand for truth is essential for her salvation as well as her continued existence (Eph 4:14ff; 5:25ff).

Conclusion...

Are you tired of the commercialism of modern churches? Are you tired of their begging for money, and concocting fund-raising programs to gain funds from unbelievers? Are you tired of the multi-million dollar complexes that provide all manner of recreation and exercise under the sun? Open your Bible and study it carefully. God's plan for the church did not include all of these "whole man" schemes. The church is the wisdom of God (not man), and can be understood and applied just as given.