

# The Social Gospel

15 August 2004

## Introduction:

Problems in society gained wide recognition during the industrial revolution (~ 1880's through 1930's). Society saw problems of poverty, racial tension and segregation, unfit labor conditions, extreme low wages, overworking, and problems with human rights. Conscience men began leading a progressive religious movement to solve the ills of society known as the "social gospel." This movement sought to involve the church and Christian morals to society's injustice, poverty, and general tension. Men such as Walter Rauschenbusch [1861 – 1918] lead the way of the social gospel as he sought to rectify economic and social injustice with Christianity. Rauschenbusch was well known for his doctrine of the separation of church and the kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch "formulated the essential elements of Christian progressivism: work in this world to establish a kingdom of God with social justice for all" (The Reader's Companion to American History; Robert M. Crunden). Here was a view of America being a utopia for all workers. No poverty, equal rights for all, and no tension. Mr. Rauschenbusch seemed to forget one very important thing; i.e., the Word of God. Jesus said, "*For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always*" (Matt. 26:11). No amount of world collected funds by the most renown associations will rid the world of poverty, misery, and tension. Under the growing pressure of society, many churches have entered the effort to cure the ills of society with the "social gospel." This lesson shall examine the social gospel, the nature and work of the church, and practical applications.

## I. Defining the "social gospel"

- A. The social gospel = "also known as Christian socialism, was a moral reform movement of the late nineteenth century that helped pave the way for the progressive movement (one who supports popular modern reforms)" (The Reader's Companion to American History).
- B. "A liberal movement within American Protestantism that attempted to apply biblical teachings to problems associated with industrialization" (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia Copyright 2003).
- C. Modern examples of the "social gospel's" efforts to combat social problems and eliminate youth's boredom with plain preaching and teaching.

## II. What the word of God has to say about the nature of the church:

- A. The Kingdom of God is the church (Matt. 16:19; Heb. 12:22-28).
- B. Jesus is the King of His church (Col. 1:13).
- C. The church is a spiritual institution (not social) (cf. Rom. 14:17).

## III. What the word of God has to say about the work of the church:

- D. Build up and strengthen its members in the knowledge of the doctrine of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).
- E. Evangelizing the world through preaching (Acts 13:1-5; I Cor. 9:1-14; Eph. 3:10; Phil. 4:15).
- F. Caring for its own needy saints (I Tim. 5:9ff).

**IV. What the word of God has to say about the work of the individual:**

- A.** The individual is separate from the church (Matt. 18:15ff).
- B.** We are to be compassionate as was our Savior (Matt. 14:14).
- C.** We should visit those in need with intent to help (James 1:27).

**Conclusion:**

Shall we construct a kitchen in our building to accommodate the needy of our society? Shall we use the church's treasury to pay the electric bills of the needy in our society? Shall we employ entertainers to perform concerts and theatrical events to attract our youth who are so bored with preaching? What shall we do with the collected funds? No one seems to have a disagreement over mandatory first day of the week giving, but what to do with all that money. This becomes a question then of authority! We shall do with the treasury what the Lord commands, nothing more and nothing less (Col. 3:17)!