

#99 “The Social Gospel Versus the Preeminence of Christ”

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When Jesus began His public ministry, He quoted from Isaiah 61:1 which says, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners." This is why our Lord came, to deal with the hearts of mankind (Isaiah 29:13) by redeeming their souls from eternal hell (John 3:16-17) and to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus Christ was anointed by God to bring the gospel to those in need, to those mired in sin, and to those enslaved to evil and the ways of the world. His mission was to free those held captive by the devil to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26). Yes, He healed the sick and made the lame to walk and the blind to see. But these were done to authenticate that He was indeed the Son of God. His purpose, however, was, first and foremost, not to heal every sickness on the earth and rid the world of disease, poverty, and hunger. Rather, it was to go to the cross to redeem man from a cursed and fallen nature in a cursed and fallen world so that, in the life to come, they could be blessed in all ways.

The curse had to be broken so that all the world could be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3), and Christ had to become the curse on our behalf so that we might be saved (Galatians 3:13). He didn't bear the curse and the wages of our sin so that we could be wealthy, perfectly healthy, and well fed. Surely, God cares about these things, and ministering to physical and material needs is an important and valid part of the believer's commission (Matthew 10:42). However, it is not our primary and Great Commission. Neither was curing the world's social ills the central mission and purpose of Christ. Christ commanded His church in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Our primary mission is to be about making disciples and teaching them all that Christ has commanded.

Romans 10:15 says, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" Is Paul referring to good news of a social gospel that meets physical needs and compromises or ignores the ultimate and eternally important spiritual needs? Absolutely not, and may it never be. May it never be that we give someone a cold cup of water "in Jesus name" and fail to preach the gospel to them when we have the opportunity. We are sent to preach, and good social works open up those opportunities (Matthew 5:16). Yet they are not to be our ultimate agenda. Our ultimate calling and mission must be to preach the Word, for it is the gospel that "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). If we shrink away in shame at this gospel and at the call to preach a message of repentance and an exclusive way to heaven through faith in Christ, we have failed our Savior. We will have missed the purpose and entire foundation for the church. The social gospel is not God's plan but the devil's.

If the social gospel was our purpose, then the greatest human achievements would be eradicating disease, eliminating poverty, and bringing the world together under some kind of system of unification. If these were our intended ends, then it would make complete sense to partner with anybody and everybody, regardless of religion and beliefs. But to cure the world of social ills and to yet leave it in sin is not our purpose. Furthermore, we as Christians have an inside track on what can really solve the world's problems. A regeneration by faith in Christ is the world's only hope. For example, AIDS, though many innocents suffer from this, is not the fundamental problem. Homosexuality and sexual immorality is. So I ask, "What possible kind of solution is there to solving the AIDS crisis when we miss the fundamental problem of sin?" We can have all the influence and resources in the world at our disposal, but if we disregard sin, holiness, and rebirth in Christ, what can we possibly truly accomplish? The Holy Spirit's ministry is to "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). How sad is it when God's people Who are indwelt by God's Spirit (if said persons are truly reborn) don't speak out for righteousness, don't tell the world that judgment is coming, and don't stand for righteousness? The issue is sin, the call is repentance, and the means is the grace of God through faith in Christ. This is what the world needs, and this is its only hope.

In Luke 12, Christ told a story of a rich man who stored up all of his possessions so as to enjoy this life only to have his life required of him that very night. Christ said, "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (v. 21). The only question that matters is whether or not we are rich toward God. What good is it if we gain the whole world and lose our souls? What good is it if we solve the world's social ills (if such was even possible without Christ) and let people die in their sins? Continuing in v. 22-23 of Luke 12, Jesus says, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing." God cares about food and clothing, but He cares far more that we deal with sin, that we repent, and that we submit to His rule in our lives (Romans 10:9-10). In other words, Jesus didn't preach a social gospel.

Colossians 1:18 says, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." It is Jesus that makes the difference and enables love and good will to even exist. He must be the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Without Him, there is no real gospel and no real hope.