

Pleasant Valley
Church of Christ

3317 Amidon
Wichita KS 67204
(316) 838-4195
www.letjesusleadus.org

Schedule of Services

Sunday

Classes 9:30 am
Worship 10:30 am
Evening 6:00 pm

Wednesday

Classes 7:30 pm

The Pleasant Valley Church of Christ is a non-denominational group of believers who are committed to following Jesus in our attitudes, our relationships, and our worship. If you want the same thing in your life, please contact us. We'd like to help.

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the New King James Version Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Wings



*"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31)*

May 16, 2010

The social gospel

by David King

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7).

Historically, the social gospel was a reform movement that sprang up in liberal Protestant churches in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Outraged by the degrading effects of urban poverty, child labor, and unbridled capitalism, adherents of the social gospel believed it was the duty of the church to address these evils directly. Their goal was to create the kingdom of God on earth by applying the teachings of Jesus to the social ills of humanity. The first World War destroyed the optimistic ambitions of the movement, but its philosophical foundation lives on in the myriad social programs that dominate modern churches—homeless shelters, homes for unwed mothers, recreational activities, and so on.

The key flaw in social gospel theology is the identification of social reform as a legitimate, even primary, target of the church's mission. The social gospel treats social reform as a separate objective beyond personal salvation, or in some cases, even more important than salvation. The idea is that spiritual healing cannot be achieved until people's physical needs are addressed.

In fact, the exact opposite is true. The purpose of the gospel of Christ is the salvation of the individual, not social reform. To be sure, salvation will improve the social relationships of

the saved; they will become better spouses (Eph. 5:22-33), better parents (Eph. 6:1-4), better workers (Tit. 2:9-10), employers (Col. 4:1), neighbors (Tit. 3:1-2), and citizens (Rom. 13:1-7). As greater numbers of individuals become disciples of Jesus and adopt this life, society will gradually begin to enjoy the benefits. Like leaven in the loaf (Matt. 13:33), the gospel of Christ will slowly permeate society with its wholesome goodness, and social justice will flourish. But that is a natural by-product of the gospel, not the primary objective.

Slavery, for example, was an entrenched social evil in the first century, but Paul did not attack it directly. Instead, as with Philemon (master) and Onesimus (slave), he dealt with it one person at a time, by converting them to the Lord. Over time, the transforming power of the gospel in individual lives led to the demise of that institution in the Roman Empire.

The social gospel seeks to bypass this gradualistic approach, and force change upon society directly. By treating social problems apart from the personal attitudes and behaviors that spawn them, the social gospel treats only the symptoms, not the causes, of social issues. That's why, after over a century of heavy involvement in social activism, modern churches are no closer to creating the kingdom of God on earth than when they began.

The social gospel is doomed to fail, because it is a perversion of the true gospel. When churches commit themselves to the goal of social reform, they lose sight of their real mission—the salvation of human souls.