

What's Wrong With a More Social Gospel?

Sidetracking the Mission of the Church with the Social Gospel

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January 6, 2010
NewsWithViews.com

In a recent article for Christianity Today titled, "A More Social Gospel," C.L. Lopez writes about a new evangelical emphasis emerging on college campuses:

"There has been a definitive shift in how campus ministries think about connecting with students," said Kara Powell, executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary. "More and more campus leaders are realizing that the gospel is both personal evangelism and justice."

The gospel is "justice"?

If there is any "justice" to the gospel, it is that the Lord Jesus Christ took our "justice" on the cross to satisfy the debt we incurred in our rebellion against God. But that's not what "social justice" or the "social gospel" is about.

Lopez continues:

Scott Bessenecker, associate director of missions for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, said students within the organization's 850 groups on 562 campuses have focused more on social causes in recent years.

As Mr. Bessenecker points out, their "focus" is "more on social causes" which, frankly, is not the gospel Christians are called to proclaim. Still, he added:

"[We] want to engage students with a Jesus who walks among the marginalized," Bessenecker said. "InterVarsity is trying to help

students embrace and engage the social dimensions of the gospel in a way that will inspire individuals to say, 'I want to follow this Jesus.'

How many Jesus' does Mr. Bessenecker think there are?

First of all, when one talks about the "marginalized" in general, they are usually referring to those outside the mainstream of society. But then, one could make the case that all minorities feel "marginalized" at some point along life's way, from African Americans to fundamentalist Christians to homosexual activists to witches.

In fact, I would dare say that most individuals have, at one time or another, felt to some degree, "marginalized." So, in this context, statements like Jesus "walks among the marginalized" might have a universal appeal and even sound compassionately Christian, but in reality, may not be at all biblical or even relevant with respect to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. And that is my concern here.

Moreover, it has been my experience that whenever someone refers to "a Jesus," they're probably not talking about *the Jesus* of the Bible, but instead, a less scriptural and more worldly personality that appeals to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" – a "Jesus" more useful in advancing earthly agendas than those of heaven.

"For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him." – 2nd Corinthians 11:4

The social gospel and its increasingly popular "social justice" campaign is not an acceptable substitute for preaching repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Its promoters all too often set aside the vertical, spiritual and eternal issues of sin, rebellion, obedience, holiness and reverence toward God in order to redirect the focus toward more horizontal, physical and temporal values. In the end, the flesh is, for a time, fed and comforted, but the souls of sinners are left abandoned to biblical ignorance because disobedient do-gooders have spiritually sidetracked the Church and its mission.

And then there was this in the Christianity Today piece:

Josh Spavin, an intern with the University of Central Florida's (UCF) Campus Crusade for Christ chapter, said traditional evangelistic outreach still works, but times have changed with this generation.

It "still works, but times have changed?" Sounds like dialectic doubletalk to me – designed to carefully steer the undiscerning in a new worldly direction without alarming or offending anyone.

The article went on to say:

"Students tend to not just take it unless they experience it or see it in someone else's life," Spavin said. "It is still the same gospel and it is still the love of Christ that is being shared – it is just a different tactic."

"For by *tactics* are ye saved?" Is that what the Apostle Paul taught in Ephesians?

The "love of Christ" is obedience to His Word, not doing what is right in our own eyes to "connect" with people and win their favor so they might hopefully hear the truth someday. If we put our relationships with each other over and above our relationship with Jesus Christ and withhold the whole counsel of God so as not to offend, not only are we breaking the two greatest commandments given, we are yielding to the flesh and prince of this world.

I would say the greatest failure of the Church today is its unwillingness to say and do the unpopular thing. Too many Christians busy themselves these days trying to come up with new ways of being admired and desired by the world rather than simply being obedient to the Lord they claim to love.

With a self-sustaining focus on acquiring evermore results and relationships (i.e., "church growth") by way of pragmatism and consensus, none of which is biblical, today's Christians are, by and large, being persuaded and trained week after week to embrace surveys, marketing principles, public relations programs and people skills as their new commandments with dialectically-trained consultants and facilitators posing as prophets and preachers –

people pleasers who know how to work the crowd and steer the herd while selectively applying the scriptures as needed to maintain a biblical appearance of righteousness and religiosity.

We're essentially giving people what they want at church these days in hopes they will reciprocate with more participation and support. How is this "tactic" any different from those used on Wall Street and in Washington D.C.?

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." – 1st Corinthians 1:18