

More than a Social Gospel

The ill and a cure



By Joshua Stucki

“You will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the Word of life” – Philippians 2:15b+16

Restoration Movement Literature

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THE GREAT SOCIAL ARM OF CHRISTIANITY

Almost all original public schools¹ to hospitals² to food pantries³ to child care⁴ in America and many other places around the world have their origin in Christianity. To this day, faith-based organizations are a tour de force unlike any other in providing many social needs of people around the world.⁵ Therefore, it can be said without a doubt that believers everywhere are helping meet many needs of both believers and unbelievers alike around the world originating out of their love for Christ.

Christ Himself of course gave the example for Christians to help meet the needs of others: in both actions and words, He presented the ultimate case for helping the poor (Matthew 14:13-21), the needy (Mark 8:1-8), the blind (Luke 18:35-43), the imprisoned (Matthew 25:36), the disabled (Mark 2:-12), the lame (John 5:1-9), the deaf (Mark 7:31-37), and any others (Matthew 25:35). Truly, His example and teaching have inspired more charity and influence in the world than any other person in all of history.⁶

HOWEVER, JESUS TAUGHT MORE THAN A SOCIAL GOSPEL

What has often become misplaced in all of the above wonderful charity work is the primary work and message Christ actually came to do and to give. Jesus Himself states it best in Matthew 20:28 (stated also in Mark 10:45), “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

¹ <http://www.cityofboston.gov/freedomtrail/firstpublic.asp>

² http://www.vhi.org/hguide_beginning.asp

³ <http://www.firstfoodbank.org/learn-more/our-history>

⁴ <http://www.slideshare.net/michellemoon67/history-of-orphanages>

⁵ <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/abstractdb/AbstractDBDetails.aspx?id=202135>; also see

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448385/>

⁶ <http://ideas.time.com/2013/12/10/whos-biggest-the-100-most-significant-figures-in-history/>

So Jesus was not just a good moral teacher, nor was He just a good charitable man. He was not just a giving person, but the sacrificial Lamb of God given for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2, 4:10).

Jesus Himself states this fact in John 6:51 – “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Jesus also stated the following: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Christ’s Apostles and other New Testament authors and characters also stated the same as to why He came:

Matthew 1:21 – “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Romans 3:25a – “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,^[a] through the shedding of his blood”

Romans 5:8 – “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:17+18 – “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.”

1 Corinthians 15:21+22 – “For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

Ephesians 5:25b-27 – “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

1 John 4:10 – “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

1 John 4:14 – “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”

Hebrews 1:3 – “The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

Hebrews 2:14+15 – “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

Hebrews 10:19+20 – “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,”

1 Timothy 1:15 – “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.”

It is clear from the above that Christ not only came to help, heal, and teach, but primarily to be the perfect sacrifice necessary in order for sins to be forgiven, for sin was (and is) the much greater problem.

A common misconception about Jesus is that His teaching was only about being inclusive, heart-warming, kind, and all about love. However, the same Jesus who did teach the above also taught repentance, judgment, hell, the fear of God, and division if it meant choosing sin over God’s ways:

Matthew 4:17 – “From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Mark 1:15 – “¹⁵“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Luke 13:3 – “I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

John 5:22 – “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,”

John 5:27 – “And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

John 5:30b – “I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”

John 9:39a – “Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world”

John 12:48 – “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.”

It is a fact that no one in the Bible speaks more about hell than Jesus did:

Matthew 5:22 – “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Matthew 5:29+30 – “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Matthew 10:28 – “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Matthew 18:9 – “And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”

Matthew 23:15 – ““Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.”

Matthew 23:33 – ““You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”

Mark 9:43 – “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.”

Mark 9:45 – “And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.”

Mark 9:47 – “And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,”

Luke 12:5 – “But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

And, Luke 16:19-31 (Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus).

Jesus also spoke of fearing God, and people who witnessed Jesus' great power feared Him:

Luke 1:50 - “His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.”

Luke 8:37 – “Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear.”

Luke 12:5 – “But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

Jesus also spoke of fearful things to come for those who reject God:

Luke 21:11 – “There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”

Even other people knew to fear God because of Jesus:

Luke 23:40 - “But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”

Jesus spoke of the fear of those who do want their lives judged according to what is right and good:

John 3:20 – “Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.”

Finally, Jesus teaches that one of His purposes was to actually divide those who would obey God from those who would not:

Matthew 10:34 – ““Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Luke 12:49 – ““I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!”

Luke 12:51 – “Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.”

Jesus even advocated His disciples to defend themselves while they were traveling between towns to preach:

Luke 22:36 – “He said to them, “But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.”

So it is clear from Jesus' own words and the like words from His followers that Christianity is far more than helping one's neighbor, although that is a key component (Luke 10:25-37): it is about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ above all (1 Corinthians 1:23, 2:2, 15:3-5).

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A "SOCIAL GOSPEL" IS GIVEN WITHOUT THE ACTUAL GOSPEL GIVEN?

According to Jesus' own words, if the actual Gospel is left out for only the sake of physical aid, it will result in the ultimate perishing of man:

Luke 13:3 – "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

If we do not listen to the above, Jesus tells us what will happen:

John 12:48 – "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day."

Jesus even goes so far as to tell us that if we do not repent of our sin entirely, the following is the consequence:

Matthew 5:29+30 – "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."
(also see Matthew 18:9 and Mark 9:43, 45, 47)

Jesus also tells us what happens when we aid the physical but neglect the spiritual:

Matthew 10:28 – “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Finally, we must realize that God the Father is to be feared, not only loved and worshipped:

Luke 12:5 – “But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

Jesus Himself says He is not only our Savior, but also the Judge!

John 5:22 – “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,”

John 5:27 – “and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”

John 9:39 – “And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”

The rest of the New Testament further informs us that Christ Himself, our Savior, is also the Judge of the Living and the Dead!

Acts 10:42 – ““And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”

Acts 17:30+31 – “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Romans 2:16 – “on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

Romans 14:10b – “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

2 Corinthians 5:10 – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

2 Timothy 4:8 – “in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Finally, at the end of time, Jesus will judge all:

Revelation 19:11 – “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.”

So when a “Social Gospel” helps people physically, but does not help them spiritually, they are effectively acting against Jesus, and thus aiding in the condemnation of people lost in their sin, walking into hell with their belly full of food but their head full of unfortunate lies.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIANS WHO ONLY PREACH BUT NEVER HELP PEOPLE?

This is the common assertion given by those participate in “social gospel” programs in criticism of those who they view only sit in church and “tithe to themselves”.

This is actually a historical complaint: Benjamin Franklin made a similar statement, “I wish it (Christianity) were more productive of good works ... I mean real good works ... not holy-day keeping, sermon-hearing ... or making long prayers, filled with flatteries and compliments despised by wise men, and much less capable of pleasing the Deity.” - Works, Vol. VII, p. 75

So we can see this is not a new complaint!

However, regardless if it is modern day critics, or a Founding Father of our country, they are in fact wrong in the vast majority of cases:

Virtually all churches give to “missions”, which combined Gospel preaching with charity work in almost all cases.

Virtually all churches give “benevolently”, which has become a term coined by churches meaning to help those in their local community.

Virtually all communities have food banks and pantries sponsored and staffed by local churches.

And as we have already covered at the beginning of the article, public schools, hospitals, and even child care originated with Christians, and to this day, still receive large support and volunteer workers from Christian populations.

Quite simply, the idea that there are Christians and churches that do not help their communities in their physical needs is largely a myth; the very small minority that is all inclusive in their “giving” has simply received the majority of the press.

HOW DO WE BRING THE ACTUAL GOSPEL TO WHERE ONLY A SOCIAL GOSPEL IS BEING SERVED?

This may sound radical, but this preacher does not personally financially support or volunteer in aid organizations who do not also offer evangelistic services to their beneficiaries. So, step #1 is not to support those organizations who only want to feed people bread but not the Bread of Life.

Many Christians serve in these organizations, thinking they are doing good (and they are, but only in the temporary sense) but are actually feeding the problem as it now stands. As long as Christians who believe and teach the actual Gospel also support those organizations who do not, the problem will simply continue as it is, unabated.

Christians also need to understand the hypocrisy of the Social Gospel movement – virtually no soup kitchen, orphanage, hospital, or otherwise came into existence by these people. No, they are almost always parasites that took an organization originally committed to preaching the actual Gospel along with benevolent aid to a liberal organization that only gives the aid part. Virtually none of these organizations today began as benevolent-only organizations.

Therefore, there is an underlying, ulterior, malevolent motive behind social gospel-only organizations. They not only do not preach the Gospel, but actually **oppose** it.⁷

This is why it is important “not to feed the beast”, per say. As unfortunate as it is, when we give people physical aid but not any option to receive the much more important, eternal, spiritual aid their immortal soul needs above all, we actually simply help people walk into hell with a full belly.

Compare this to the Parable of the Prodigal Son: what drove the Prodigal to return home to His Father? His need!!

Luke 15:16-20 – “¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.”

When Christians offer physical aid without spiritual aid, we squash the very “need” that drove the Prodigal home. What if some random “religious” person entered into the story and gave the Prodigal basic housing, food, water, and medicine without any conditions? His need would have been gone, and so would had his desire to return home! The Prodigal would have received welfare instead of his rightful place back home and he would have received bread instead of the fatted calf! He would have received pity instead of a party, and a house instead of a

⁷ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/approachingjustice/2013/06/11/charity-vs-justice-part-2/>; also see http://www.rejesus.co.uk/blog/post/soup_kitchen

home! What grave injustice does the Social Gospel render when God has in mind such greater and everlasting blessings!

Second, churches should make available publicly their list of missions. Most churches do this, so this is not a major concern, but many in today's society assume their local churches are self-absorbed instead of charitable entities. It is not a matter of bragging but honestly depriving the devil of his lies to our community!

Third, churches should make an active effort to make visible their charitable efforts in the local community from time to time. Again, this is not a matter of bragging, but simply demonstrating love – showing fruit – of the actual Gospel in Christians' lives.

Fourth, individual Christians should volunteer and support those aid organizations that also present an evangelistic message to their patrons. Of course, the message should not be forced, nor should aid only be given to those who accept the message: the point is that the message is delivered, and it is delivered with love and grace. Without the actual saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, we would all be dead in our sins, no matter how full or empty our bellies were. But in Christ, there is hope in all, for all!!