

Gospel of Christ or Social Gospel

~1 Corinthians 1:21~

Thesis: Church has become something we do and not what we are in the modern times we live in. Some denominations have dropped their identifying names and rebranded themselves as community and mega-churches boasting membership in the 1000's. Elizabeth Cook's thesis *Would you like your Jesus upsized: McDonaldization and the Mega Church*, writes about the modern church becoming more social than gospel, meeting the needs of the community in the areas of marriage counseling, gymnasiums, Starbucks, sports leagues, day-cares, welfare centers, trade schools, a one-stop-shop-get-some-Jesus-get-some-self-help-get-some-entertainment-get-some...and-leave-your-money. (Cook) The New Testament church grew greatly, but not with Olympic size pools or basketball leagues. America has scrapped the biblical pattern of growth and evangelism in favor of the more progressive models.

Introduction:

1. **1 Corinthians 1:21** - "...God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe". God's plan was to save the lost through the simple and plain preaching of the Gospel, without the need to dress it up to make it more palatable and desirable. Man's wisdom muddles the simplicity of the Gospel and waters it down making it of none effect. (Rangel)
 2. Not everything about the social Gospel/mega churches is wrong, there are some things they do right and we should take note. (**Luke 16:8**)
 - a. Very friendly and show it to visitors
 - b. Worship leaders dress with reverence and respectable
 - c. Church starts on time and worship flows
 - d. Preachers are well prepared and good communicators
 - e. Excellent sound systems
 - f. Warm and welcoming buildings with comfortable seating
 - g. Clean facilities
 - h. etc.
 - i. Notice that many of these things are external and pleasing to the eyes and comfort - not wrong- Church should never go beyond what is mandated and allowed in order to "bring" more people to Christ.
 3. **1 Timothy 3:15** - Church is the pillar and support of the truth - this is our mission and we cannot change it in any way. "The truth is in no danger of collapse as long as the church fulfills her task." (C Michael Moss)
- I. **First-Century Church Growth - Antioch (Acts 11)**
- A. Strong, generous and evangelistic (**Acts 11**)

1. Why and how? - "...speaking to Jews and Greeks...preaching the Lord Jesus." (**Acts 11:20**)
 2. Result? - "...large number believed and turned to the Lord..." (**Acts 11:21**)
 3. Follow-up - Church at Jerusalem "...sent Barnabas off to Antioch..." to encourage them (**Acts 11:22-23**), "...and considerable numbers were brought to the Lord..." (**Acts 11:24**)
 4. Additional help needed - Barnabas brought Paul to help him and for a year they worked together at Antioch and taught considerable numbers (**Acts 11:25-36**)
 5. Time for mission work - Antioch had 5 teachers and could spare Paul and Barnabas to leave and teach elsewhere (**Acts 13:1-4**)
- B. Antioch had a heart for benevolence: A need arose in Judea and they sent relief by the hands of Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 11:27-30**)
- C. Antioch used the Gospel of Christ to bridge the cultural divisions between Jew and Gentile. When the church does things God's way she will be blessed. No mega church mentality was needed.
- D. Compare 1st century church mission statement to 21st century mission statement:
1. **1 Timothy 3:15; Matthew 28:19-20**
 2. Sevier Heights Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. "To bring people to Jesus and His church, to teach and to equip them for ministry, resulting in gain for God's kingdom and glory to his name" (Cook).
 3. "To market vehicles developed and manufactured in the U.S. that are world leaders in quality, cost, and customer satisfaction through the integration of people, technology and business systems and to transfer knowledge, technology and experience throughout GM." (Aker)
- E. **1 Corinthians 1:21** - Foolishness of preaching or the preaching of foolishness?
1. **1 Timothy 3:15** - Church belonging to Christ is obligated to uphold the truth no matter what
 2. **Revelation 3:8** - Church belonging to Christ must be the keeper of the word, not the denier of it
 3. **1 Thessalonians 1:8** - Church belonging to Christ must sound forth the word of the Lord
- F. Church's mission statement is one that ministers to the soul of man and not to the flesh of man, it should prepare the soul for eternity. Today's religious landscape is full of gimmicks of gas cards, gift baskets and raffle tickets, but the power of the Gospel is in the Gospel and not in the gimmicks.
- II. **Cheapening the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:23)**
- A. Mega churches and denominations are not the only ones given to gimmicks to draw the crowds.

1. Churches claiming to be churches of Christ have succumbed to similar practices. One such church promoted the “World’s Largest Hot Dog,” and invited the public to “come and take a bite.” (Wilson)
 2. The Gospel according to Any Griffith (Associated Press) and clown costume Sunday - is it about Christ and Him crucified?
- B. Simple message should not be watered down or clouded with gimmicks - **1 Corinthians 1:23**
- C. Entertainment is fine, but it must be understood that it is just entertainment and not worship, therefore it has no place as worship. - ***Either we will promote the Gospel of Christ or the social gospel of man.***
- D. The desire has been for church growth, unfortunately at any cost. What is needed for church growth? Same as what was needed in the 1st century church.

III. **Musts for Church growth**

- A. Strong Bible teaching - **2 Timothy 4:2**; Growing churches appeal to the Scriptures and challenge people with it, to change and grow, to live as pilgrims and prepare for heaven. Cotton candy teaching does not challenge.
1. People need to know biblical boundaries and absolutes, right and wrong and not generalities.
 2. People need to know biblical relevancy - there is no need for creativity to make the Bible relevant to modern time, it already is (**Hebrews 13:8; 2 Timothy 3:16**)
 3. **No need to be embarrassed to explain away truths - it is not my truth to explain away, it is God’s truth!**
- B. Committed Christians - **1 Corinthians 15:58** “...always abounding...”
1. There is the Sunday **crowd** - Sunday folks
 2. There is the **congregation** - People who show up most of the time
 3. Then there are the **committed folk** - involved, stewards, active, faith with works - not pew potatoes but commitment that goes below the surface - that makes a difference when it comes to growth!
- C. Love for souls - **Acts 11:23-24** - Guests may not grasp the concept of providence or the reason for the Lord’s Supper on a weekly basis on their first visit, but what most can grasp immediately is whether or not they are welcomed.
- D. Moral Lives - **Philippians 2:15** -
1. Loins girded with truth must be connected with the breastplate of righteous living (**Ephesians 6:14**)
 2. Does no good to profess a form of godliness but to live in fornication, drink alcohol, smoke, cheat on our taxes, lie, etc...
 3. Morality does not mean being gloomy and sadness, like sucking on a lemon. Christians should be happy and should show it! (**Matthew 5:16**)
- E. Warm and caring environment - **John 13:35; Romans 16:16**

1. Modern technology has made many people cold and distanced...some can't make eye contact and have poor social skills. Some can carry on an hours-long texting conversation but can only manage a 2-minute face-to-face conversation.
2. People need person-to-person contact and conversation.
- F. Worship in spirit and in truth - [John 4:24](#); [1 Corinthians 14:15](#); [Psalm 100:2](#) -
 1. Giving God our best and our all, or giving God inferior and Amazon Prime ordering, or watching sports games...is not in spirit and in truth.
 2. Worship is to be taken seriously
- G. Solid Bible studies - [Acts 8:30-31](#); [2 Timothy 3:14-15](#) -
 1. When a family visits and sees their child in Bible class they know the church is committed to growth and evangelizing the community.
 2. Bible class teachers must be committed to studying and teaching.
- H. Strong and steady leadership - [Acts 14:23](#) -
 1. Leadership lead the ship in the direction it ought to go, leadership corrects and adjusts when the ship is heading off course.
 2. God's plan for the leadership of the church is imperative for growth.

Conclusion:

1. Every Christian should be committed to preaching the Gospel as the Father intended and be faithful to His Son's church.
2. The church should not be caught up in passing fads and man-made business-like approaches to church growth. Any plant that God has not planted will eventually be uprooted.
3. Let us simply preach the Gospel of Christ ([Romans 1:16ff](#)) for in it is the power to save, transform and open the doors to heaven.
4. Sermon adapted from Adam's GPS study workbook (Adams 41-55).

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