**1 Thessalonians 5:21**

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**The Social Gospel Deception**

* Last week, in my exposition of 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, we examined Paul’s instruction to the Thessalonian church regarding his three commands . . .
	+ His first two . . . negative . . . commands, in v. 19-20 were that the Thessalonians ***stop extinguishing the Holy Spirit*** in their midst.
	+ And the reason they were at risk of ***extinguishing the Holy Spirit*** was because they had ***a low regard for the prophetic ministry* of the Holy Spirit in their congregation.**
	+ And the reason for that low regard for the gift of prophecy in their midst was because false teaching regarding the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ had been sown into their teaching by the enemy.
* Because some false teaching had encroached into their teaching, the Thessalonians were tempted to reject all of the prophetic teaching of the Holy Spirit. And to this Paul commands that they **stop! Do not reject the prophetic teaching of the Holy Spirit merely because a false teacher has deceived you!**
* Then, following his first two negative commands, in v. 21 Paul then prescribes the corrective action to their false teaching dilemma . . . ***examine everything carefully***.
	+ Just as the apostle John commands of the Ephesian church in 1 John 4:1 to ***test the spirits to see whether they are from God***, in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 Paul gives the same command.
	+ In both Paul’s and John’s commands we learn that **we are responsible for exercising discernment in accepting or rejecting any teaching that comes to us.**
	+ We are required to exercise discernment and biblical knowledge in ***testing the spirits***. Rather than accepting everything blindly, we are to examine all teaching through the lens of Scripture. If a teaching disagrees with the word of God, it should be rejected.
* As I stated at the end of my message last week, it is providential that we studied Paul’s instruction to the Thessalonians regarding the requirement to ***examine everything carefully.*** As it turns out, there is currently a new teaching that has entered the 21st century church that has ignited a firestorm of controversy.
	+ The new teaching that is at the center of this firestorm is known most commonly as **the social gospel** or **the social justice gospel***.*
* Earlier this week I sent out an email to everyone in this congregation that I have email addresses for with a 3 page document defining some of the significant terms in this controversy so that you would be able to get a head start learning about this controversy.
* The very heart of this controversy is immediately found in its name . . . **the social gospel**.
	+ The very name should immediately cause alarm bells to go off in our heads. The fact that this “gospel” . . . this “good news,” as the word *euggelion* means . . . accompanied by the adjective **social**, implies that **the social gospel is a different gospel than “the gospel of Jesus Christ.”**
* But, therein, **I believe**, is the problem. With this title, **the social gospel**, there is a renewed effort on the part of our great enemy to re-define **the gospel.**

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**What is the gospel?**

* To begin with, let me ask you . . . **what is the gospel? What is the *euggangelion* . . . the “good news”?**
* Surprisingly . . . and shockingly . . . if you were to survey the professing church in America, I would be willing to bet that more than 50% of professing Christians cannot even define the gospel.
	+ In other words, if you were to walk up to a professing Christian and ask them what the gospel is, most professing Christian would be unable or only poorly explain to you what the gospel is.
	+ My friend, Chuck, has relayed stories to me over the years of his conversations with friends and co-workers on this very subject. During his conversations with men and women who profess to be Christians, Chuck has been amazed and appalled that when asked what the gospel is, most people could not tell him the gospel.
	+ It’s amazing how many people, when asked to define the gospel will stammer and say something like . . . **“it’s the Bible” . . . “it’s God” . . . “it means you should be a good person” . . . or some other lame statement.**
	+ It is truly amazing how many professing Christians cannot succinctly explain what the gospel is. And even worse, **many wouldn’t recognize it if they heard it.**
* The gospel . . . the “good news” . . . is that Jesus Christ, the second member of the triune Godhead . . . came to earth in human form for the purpose of taking upon Himself the penalty for our sins. In His crucifixion, Jesus Christ took upon Himself the wrath of God for our sins so that we would not have to. Following His death, Jesus was resurrected on the third day as evidence that God had accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. In the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we are justified . . . declared not guilty of our sins . . . in the sight of God. Jesus Christ took upon Himself the penalty for our sins, while, at the same time, imputing His righteousness to us so that we can stand before God as righteous.
	+ **That is the good news. Jesus suffered and died on behalf of all who believe in Him so that we would not suffer God’s wrath, but have eternal life with God in heaven**. And most professing Christians cannot get anywhere close to explaining that to you.
* And **that** is the problem. If you don’t know what the **true gospel** is, how will you know if someone is bringing a **false gospel** to you? **You won’t!**

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**The history of the Social Gospel**

* So, let me define what the current controversy is that has the church in an uproar. At its core, **the social gospel is a political movement that was started by a group called “The Gospel Coalition.”**
* The Gospel Coalition is a Marxist globalist organization, financed by some very deep pockets . . . including 2 notorious billionaires . . . that was formed for the purpose of advancing a Progressive political agenda of **social justice in the church.**
	+ And by advancing Progressive ideologies within the church, they are trying to make the traditionally conservative church more receptive to Progressive ideologies.
	+ But knowing that they could not make a frontal assault, politically, the Gospel Coalition was formed to disguise their Progressive ideology, cloaked in palatable biblical language.
* **The basic tenet of the social gospel is the Marxist, globalist dream of . . . open borders, social justice, racial equality, economic equality and the elimination of poverty.**
	+ Does that sound familiar? It should. Those are at the heart of Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* . . . **communism**.
* But to show you that our enemy, the devil, plays the long game, I want to point out that this current effort toward the social gospel has its roots in the early 20th century.

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* The origin of the social gospel is found in the book, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, written in **1917** by Walter Rauschenbusch.
	+ Where Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*, written in 1848, set forth a goal of taking over society through political change, Rauschenbusch’s book has the goal of taking over society through religious change . . . to change society through the infiltration of the church.
* Karl Marx and Walter Rauschenbusch have the same goal . . . the creation of a global socialist utopia. But they saw its accomplishment through different means.
	+ Marx saw its accomplishment through political means, while Rauschenbusch saw its accomplishment through the church.
* In order to accomplish his goal, Rauschenbusch knew that it was necessary to get the church to embrace a new theology . . . a new gospel.

* + To accomplish this, Rauschenbusch had to change the gospel. To accomplish this Rauschenbusch taught that the Gospel’s primary consequence on Earth is not the forgiveness of sins, but the solution to racism, social or economic inequality, poverty, crime, environmental problems and other social ills.
	+ Furthermore, Rauschenbusch explained that **the goals of social improvement could be reached and enthusiasm for its completion intensified if only a theology could be created that was designed to promote those goals.**
	+ In other words, **get the church to embrace a new theological thought. If ignorant people could be persuaded that the social gospel was taught in the Bible, Marxism would have a foothold in the church.**
* But, by its creator’s own admission, Rauschenbuschism is “an ideology in pursuit of a theology.”

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* + In other words, Rauschenbusch’s social gospel is a work of fiction seeking someone to come up with a theological theory to give his fiction plausibility.
	+ And Rauschenbuschism has found its theological fiction writers and deceivers in The Gospel Coalition.

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**A Real World Example**

* The unprecedented degree of biblical and theological ignorance in the current professing Christian church has made this an opportune time to introduce the heresy of the social gospel.
	+ With so many professing Christians being ignorant of even what the true gospel is, they have become unsuspecting and willing dupes to this false teaching.
* At its core, **the social gospel advocates for** **works righteousness . . .** **salvation through good works.** The following account, written by Phil Johnson, clearly highlights the magnitude of the problem . . .
* When the morning worship service ended, a woman came up to Johnson and said she wanted to help Johnson understand the “social justice” issue.

“Despite what you think,” she said, “social justice **is** a gospel issue. Injustice is everywhere in the world. I am fighting it full time. Right now I have several lawsuits pending against injustice in the health-care industry. Don’t tell me that’s not gospel work. **You’re not being a faithful witness unless you’re fighting for social justice. It’s built right into the gospel message: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

Johnson replied, “That’s surely one of the most important tenets of God’s moral law, and it **does** distill the idea of human justice into a single commandment. But be careful how you state it. **That’s not the *gospel*. That’s the Second Great Commandment.”**

To which the woman replied, “Oh, right. **I meant to say the gospel is ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.’”**

Johnson then corrected her again, “**Well, that’s the *First* Great Commandment**. **That’s still law, not the gospel.”**

“What do you mean?” the woman demanded. “I can show you those verses in the Bible.”

Johnson replied, “Yes, ma’am, I know. It’s [Matthew 22:37-40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2022.37-40%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). But that’s a summary of the law. It’s not the gospel.”

**“But it’s in the Bible,” she protested. “So it’s a gospel issue.”**

Johnson then went on to clearly state the gospel to her . . . “The gospel is the good news about Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Its themes are atonement for sin, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the justification of sinners. It’s the answer to the dilemma of the law.”

She interrupted at that point. “But **you can’t preach forgiveness to people who treat other people unjustly,” she said. “That would just compound the injustice.”**

“Scripture says the opposite,” Johnson replied. “Christ died for the ungodly. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and*just* to forgive us our sins. Christ, who never committed a single act of injustice, gave his life as a ransom for other people’s sin—the just for the unjust. He paid sin’s price and thus satisfied both the wrath and the justice of God on behalf of sinners, so God can be just and still justify sinners who turn to Christ in faith.

**“That’s the gospel.** And God’s Word emphatically condemns anyone who proclaims the law instead of the gospel, or mingles the law with the gospel.

* This exchange between Phil Johnson and this well-intended woman highlights several problems with the social gospel.
* **First**, and foremost, this woman demonstrates that **she doesn’t know what the gospel is**. She quotes the two great commandments of **the Law** as the gospel.

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* + That’s what the Jews do! The Jews reject the gospel of Jesus Christ and cling to the Mosaic Law for their salvation. This woman makes the same error.
* **Second**, this woman declares that **“Injustice is everywhere in the world. I am fighting it full time.**
	+ The social justice warriors see themselves as the holy warriors of justice on the earth. They have identified injustice, assigned by their own values, and have set out to bring offenders to justice.
	+ Nowhere is God mentioned in this statement of self-righteousness
* **Third**, **this woman has Scripture to back up her error**. She claims that she can prove from Scripture that she is right . . . to which Phil Johnson cites Matthew 22:37-40 as her incorrect source.
* **Fourth**, when confronted with the correct meaning of Matthew 22:37-40, **the woman angrily protests, “But it’s in the Bible, so it’s a gospel issue.”**
	+ Here, in this statement, the woman, in effect, becomes **a Judaizer**.
	+ What did the Judaizers do? They added the works of the Law . . . specifically, circumcision . . . to the gospel. The Judaizer came in behind Paul and taught the Gentiles that in order to be saved, a person had to believe in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior **and** continue to keep the Mosaic Law.
	+ But this is adding the works of the Law to grace.
* **Fifth**, **the woman rejects the gospel message of grace** when she says that you can’t preach forgiveness to people who treat other people unjustly,” she said. “That would just compound the injustice.”
	+ **And therein lies the problem with the social gospel. This woman claims that it is unjust to extend grace to those who have sinned.**
	+ This woman is saying that **it is unjust to forgive people for this sins. They must make atonement for their sins in order to be forgiven. But this atonement is not made to God, but to society, whom they have sinned against. Hence . . . SOCIAL JUSTICE.**
	+ In other words, it is not enough for God to forgive sin, sinners must make atonement to society for their sins.
	+ Not only is this a doctrine of works righteousness, but God’s forgiveness is deemed unacceptable and insufficient in the eyes of society. Society’s need and right for justice outweighs God’s power and willingness to forgive sins.

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**The true, diabolical motive behind the social gospel**

* So, having seen where the social justice gospel goes wildly off the rails in the interaction between Phil Johnson and a social gospel proponent, I now want to point out **the true motive and purpose behind The Gospel Coalition and “the social gospel.”**
* **First**, **unsuspecting and ignorant professing Christians are being deceived and manipulated** into believing that feeding, clothing, and sheltering lost people is a requirement of **the Great Commission**.
	+ Social Gospel evangelists cite Jesus’ command in Matthew 28:19-20 . . .

***Matthew 28:19-20— 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. 20 And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.***

* + In citing **the great commission**, social gospel evangelists state that it **is a** **gospel mandate to believe in and help to advance the progressive idea of social justice.**
	+ In other words, if you don’t believe in open borders and the plight of the poor and do everything you can to help the poor people who are flooding into our country, you are being disobedient to **the Great Commission.**
* **Second, the social gospel encourages a “victim mentality.”** Social gospel rhetoric says that “it’s not your fault, you don’t need to repent. You’ve done nothing wrong.”
	+ Walter Rauschenbusch writes that it is the “sinfulness of institutions” that are responsible for the actions of victims.
	+ And according to The Gospel Coalition, the most sinful institutions in American society are **rich people and white people**. Those two “institutions” are the most culpable for creating victims in American society, and it is these institutions that are guilty of all the evil and crimes that are committed by the poor “victims” of their privilege.
		- Where the comedian Flip Wilson used to declare, “the devil made me do it,” modern victims can claim “the privileged class made me do it.”
	+ In modern American society “victimhood” is now seen as empowering and perceived privilege of any sort is seen as the root cause of “victimhood.”
	+ And since “victimhood” is now celebrated as empowering, the actions of “victims,” even if evil, are seen a justified, in light of their “victim” status.
* **Third, privilege, of any sort, is viewed as something for which apology and atonement should be made.**
	+ Not only is “victimhood” celebrated and used to justify actions, but “privilege,” in any form, is something for which a person must apologize and seek to remedy.
	+ The theme of “victimhood” and “privilege” is a common topic on college and university campuses today as America’s youth is being indoctrinated in the social gospel.
	+ To show you how crazy it has gotten on American college campuses, last year The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington had a “day of absence” in which white students and faculty were asked to voluntarily leave campus as punishment and protection of minority students for their “white privilege.” It’s no wonder freshman enrollment this year has plummeted to only 300.
* In evaluating these motives behind The Gospel Coalition and their social gospel, we have to understand and remember that the purpose and goal of The Gospel Coalition is not to cure or help society’s ills. The purpose and goal of The Gospel Coalition, in service to their billionaire masters, it to foment strife and conflict in American society by creating disunity between the various racial and ethnic groups in American society.

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* + In fact, most of you received an email from Chuck this week in which one of the primary supporters of The Gospel Coalition and The Social Gospel admitted his true purposes in funding these projects.
* But why? Why create disunity among the various ethnic groups in American society?
	+ Because in causing racial and economic strife in American society, globalists hope to remove the greatest obstacle to achieving their goal of global influence and control, with them in the positions of leadership.
* America has a long history of defending religious freedom, standing up for the rights of the poor and the unborn, and defending civil rights. And it is the traditional American values that are under attack by globalists and their goal of world-wide control and influence.

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**Is the social gospel found in Luke 4?**

***Luke 4:18-19— 18 "the Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.  He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD."***

* In light of the things I have just spoken of, regarding the social gospel, I want to now cite an example of how the Bible is being misused and misinterpreted . . . either intentionally or unintentionally . . . by those who want to find Scripture to support their view.
* In a recent article by Michael Bird it was pointed out that in Luke 4:18-19, when Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2, His quote seems to support the concept of social justice . . . in particular, the phrases . . . ***to preach the gospel to the poor*** and ***to proclaim release to the captives***.
	+ Do these phrases, in fact, affirm the social justice gospel?
* While these passages has been cited by some who claim it affirms the social justice gospel, an examination of the context refutes this view.
* In Luke 4:18-19, what is the Lord teaching?
	+ In quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2, the Lord is declaring, at that moment, that He has come to the Jews to proclaim His kingdom. On that day, if the Jews had believed in Jesus as their Messiah, He would have established His kingdom and those events would have occurred. But because of their rejection, none of those events were yet fulfilled.
	+ So, contrary to what the social gospel proponents say, Jesus is not declaring or advocating for a social justice gospel.
* As I study more and more about the social gospel, I realize that there is a great disparity in what various advocates teach.
	+ Some people have embraced the Progressive political bent that open borders and racial healing are desirable in our society, while others have gone “full social justice warrior” and are militantly denouncing anyone who doesn’t strictly agree with ever tenet of the social gospel.
* But as I have studied this controversy, **I keep coming back to the fact that the social gospel is just another effort to deny the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.**
	+ Whether it is the addition of works righteousness to grace or the outright denial of God’s grace in the gift of salvation through His Son, we must be diligent to understand what this new teaching means.
* As I have studied the social gospel, I have been reminded of Paul’s teaching to the Galatians.
	+ Having evangelized the Galatians, Paul had no sooner left Galatia than he received reports that the Judaizers had come in behind him and were undoing the work he had invested into them. To this, Paul writes the Galatians in Galatians 1:6-9 . . .

***Galatians 1:6-9— 6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.***

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***8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!***

* I suspect that this controversy over **the social gospel** or **the social justice gospel** is going to become very divisive and damaging to the professing church.
	+ We are already seeing men and women hurling accusations of “false teaching” and “heretic” from both sides of this controversy.
* But, even in the midst of this often-ugly controversy we must not forget that **God is working to accomplish His good purpose.**
	+ If God uses this false teaching to hone and strengthen your faith, it is serving a good purpose in you and in our congregation.
* My exhortation to each of you this morning is the same exhortation Paul makes to the Thessalonians and John makes to the Ephesians . . . ***examine everything carefully*** and ***test the spirits to see whether they are from God***.
	+ Be a Berean. Read all you can and compare everything to Scripture.
	+ Form your opinion based upon the prayerful leading of the Holy Spirit . . . that He will lead you and guide you to understand and remain true and faithful to the word of God.
* As the apostle Peter warns in 1 Peter 5:8 . . .

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***1 Peter 5:8— Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***

* + The **“devouring”** of Satan does not mean “destroy,” but “to overwhelm.” While Satan knows that he cannot causes us to lose our salvation, he does **continually** try to deceive Christians and to damage the church by inserting heresies into the church that might lead it astray.
* And what are the heresies that Satan is continually trying to introduce into the church? While there are many heresies that Satan has been able to introduce into the church over the centuries, **the primary heresy that Satan continually tries to introduce into the church concerns the person and work of Jesus Christ and how the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross is insufficient.**

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