Denominational Doctrines – Part 3

The Social Gospel

Introduction:

A. The “Social Gospel” influence is evident in almost all denominations today.
   1. It arose in the last quarter of the 1800's under the influence of major university divinity schools.
   2. It shifted the emphasis from “personal sin and salvation” to “social sins and salvation”
   3. It viewed the coming of the kingdom of God as when the “gospel” produced a utopian society.
   4. It believed the role of church and “clergy” as facilitating their view of the kingdom.
   5. It emphasized improving man’s life here rather than preparing man for life hereafter.
   6. It influenced churches to minister to the “whole man” rather to man’s spiritual needs.
   7. It caused many “fundamentalists” to unwittingly adopt socially oriented programs.

B. In this lesson we will notice:
   1. The evidence of the social gospel influence upon the churches of today.
   2. The subtle differences between the “social gospel” concept and the gospel of Christ.

Discussion:

I. The Social Gospel Influence upon Churches Today.
   A. The rapid growth “multi-purpose” facilities in the late 1900's.
   B. The greater involvement of churches in political and social issues.
   C. The increase in the number of “ministries” and “ministers” listed by churches.
   D. The introduction of cultural and entertainment events into the churches’ calendars.
   E. The involvement of “the clergy” in social and political activism – leading demonstrations.
   F. The “Salvation Army” is a great of the social gospel carried to its logical conclusion.

II. The Subtle Differences Between the “Social Gospel” and the Gospel of Christ.
   A. The emphasis of the gospel of Christ is personal and the social gospel is societal.
      1. John dealt with Herod’s personal sin, not the ills of his government (Matt. 14)
      2. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, not to settle all problems of society (cf. Lk. 19:10; 12:14).
      3. The gospel assumes that sin is individually based, the social gospel that it socially based.
   B. The gospel treats the problem (personal sin), the social gospel treats the symptom – society’s problems.
      1. Society is improved as individuals are improved, not vise versa.
      2. Personal sin is minimized and social ills (sins) are magnified by social gospel.
      3. Personal sins are seen as socially based, rather than the opposite.
   C. The gospel of Christ and the Social gospel have two different views of the church.
      1. Institution ministering to spiritual needs rather than social and temporal needs (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:11-16).
         a. Provides opportunities to worship God and study His word.
         b. Provides means to preach the gospel to the lost and the saved.
      2. Institution with very limited role in benevolence rather than general welfare (Destitute saints).
   D. The gospel of Christ forbids the church’s involvement in social activities (1 Cor. 11:22, 34).
   E. The gospel of Christ ministers to the spirit of man, the social gospel attempts to minister to whole man.

Conclusion:

A. As individuals, Christians are pilgrims in the present world and must be interested in the temporal.
   1. There are various temporal and social agencies through which he may work.
   2. There is only one spiritual or religious agency and that is the church.
B. The church was neither designed nor equipped for all temporal needs or man – it is spiritual.