

# “Ready to Give a Defense”

## Answering Our Friends’ Religious Questions

### Lesson Twelve - The Social Gospel

**Introduction.** The historical movement known as the “Social Gospel Movement” involved religious groups shifting their focus away from an emphasis upon the next life and seeking to cure social problems through applying Biblical principles. In our own day even among those who still emphasize the next life there is an increasing emphasis upon appealing to man’s social needs as a way to motivate interest in spiritual matters. This may involve anything from churches building gymnasiums and playgrounds, to providing medical treatment to those in needy countries. In this lesson we will consider what the Bible teaches about the “Social Gospel” approach.

#### I. How does the Gospel Address Man’s Social Needs?

- A. Man’s nature is both physical & spiritual. (Ecclesiastes 12:7; II Corinthians 4:18; Galatians 5:17; Romans 5:3,4).
- B. A spiritual kingdom exists in a physical world. (John 17:6; 17:14-16; Romans 13:1; Ephesians 4:28; II Timothy 3:12; Ephesians 1:3; Matthew 5:16).

#### II. What Should Draw People to Christ?

- A. How do we understand the Lord’s example of benevolence? Why did Jesus practice benevolence?
  1. Compassion (Mark 8:1-3; John 6:1,2, 15; 51-54; Matthew 19:16-22).
  2. To confirm personal belief. (John 4:46-48, 54).
- B. The Social Gospel approach. Today we have churches using benevolence as a “carrot at the end of the stick” trying to draw people by it.
  1. This kind of thinking leads to twisted priorities. In some churches that practice this, ladies view it as part of their “Christian duty” to forsake the assembly so they can be back in the “church kitchen” preparing food for the dinner after services.
  2. N. B. Hardeman is quoted as having said - “The less religion a person has the more fried chicken it takes to keep him interested in church.” Whatever enticement we use to draw people is exactly what it is going to take to keep them.
  3. What drew early believers to Christ? (Acts 2:41; I Thessalonians 2:13,14; I Cor. 9:19-23).
- C. Is it the duty of the Church to help the poor and needy of the world?
  1. Although the New Testament church was responsible to assist needy Christians (see Acts 11:27-30; I Timothy 5:16) there is no example of the church collectively providing benevolence to non-Christians.
  2. As individuals it is the responsibility of Christians to help those around us as we have the means and opportunity (Galatians 6:10).

#### III. The New Testament Church and Common Meals.

- A. Did they eat as a church? (I Corinthians 11:20-22, 33,34).
  1. The Lord’s supper is a memorial, not a meal for hunger.
  2. Eating together is not a work of the church.

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- B. What about the “Love Feasts” of Jude 12? - “In the pl., *agapai*, love feasts, public banquets of a frugal kind instituted by the early Christian church and connected with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The provisions were contributed by the more wealthy individuals and were made common to all Christians, whether rich or poor, who chose to partake. Portions were also sent to the sick and absent members. These love feasts were intended as an exhibition of that mutual love which is required by the Christian faith, but **as they became subject to abuses, they were discontinued.**” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, by Spiros Zodiatas, p. 66, 1992., emphasis mine)
- C. Doesn't The Word “Fellowship” Refer To Social Interaction?
1. “Fellowship” refers to joint-participation (I John 1:1-4).
  2. The context determines in what they are jointly participating.
  3. The New Testament focuses on joint-participation in the gospel (Philippians 1:5).

**Conclusion.** Man is a spiritual creature dwelling within a physical body. The focus of the gospel and the primary responsibility of the church is to address man's spiritual needs. There are responsibilities that the church has to assist Christians in need, but it is not the work of the church to attempt to feed, cloth and provide medical treatment to the world. While Christians as individuals should do all that they can when they see others in need, this is an individual responsibility — not the work of the church. In the same way while Christians are encouraged to spend time with one another outside of the assembly, it is not the work of the church to provide the opportunities for this interaction. Neither is it the role of the church to provide social incentives as a “lure” to motivate non-believers to obedience to the gospel. The word of the truth of the Gospel is God's means of drawing people to Himself.