

The Love of God and Social Justice – by Ken Olson

(Wednesday, January 29 at 11:05 AM)

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

This verse from Matthew gives us the true gospel of Christ. It is a spiritual gospel of salvation from sin and hell. These are the “good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people” which the angel announced to the shepherds on the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Paul gave the same Gospel in I Timothy 1:11-15. He says that he was given the “glorious gospel” and then tells us what that gospel is in verse 15: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

God promises us a spiritual salvation if we pray as Jesus pointed out the publican praying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” The gospel is not one of physical salvation. Many preachers today change the spiritual gospel into a physical gospel.

1. The gospel is not that Christians will be prosperous. Many times Christians will be prosperous but that is never promised to all Christians. Jesus and the apostles gave us examples of a life of poverty on this earth. Jesus said that he had nowhere to lay his head and the apostles spoke of having none of silver and gold. Jesus said that the poor would always be with us and having just food and raiment we can be content. Sometimes it is God`s will for a Christian to be poor. We see Lazarus in Luke 16 as poor as could be imagined but he was one of God`s own and went to heaven.
2. The gospel is not that Christians will be freed from oppression and have social justice. Many times Christians will be freed from oppression but that is never promised to all Christians at all times. God has a purpose he is fulfilling

when Christians have affliction and persecution. Some Christians suffer martyrdom according to the will of God. The church in Smyrna in the book of Revelation was told that they would suffer and have tribulation. God did not tell them he would deliver them from tribulation but He would be with them through their sufferings.

3. The gospel is not that Christians will be healed of all disease. If that were true there would be no death. Many Christians are healed and we seek to be healed but that does not mean that we always will be healed. Paul had his “thorn in the flesh” and it is clear from the word “flesh” that it was a sickness of some sort. God made it clear that he would not be healed but would have the grace of God in his sickness. It is not just the devil that wants us sick but God himself wants us sick at times. The gospel is not that God will take all problems away from us but He will give us grace to endure problems.

The tendency today is to replace the spiritual with the physical, to replace heavenly things with the earthly “here and now.” A missionary preaches the spiritual gospel of salvation and his main job should be dealing with spiritual things as he teaches all nations whatsoever God has commanded. Many times today the effective missionary is seen as someone who does social work, bettering people`s lives from day to day. It needs to be put in perspective how short our life is here on earth.

As the focus moves from a spiritual gospel to a physical gospel, pastors are no longer seen as having a special calling but being just like the bricklayer next door. It is said that the bricklayer can be doing God`s will in his bricklaying, which is true, but that does not put it on the same level as spiritual work. Where in the Bible is a special call given to be a bricklayer or any other physical occupation? The special calls of the Bible are when someone is called from the physical bricklaying to do spiritual work. The apostles were called from their physical fishing to do spiritual fishing.

There may be applications of the gospel and spiritual teachings to physical things on this earth. However, the “good tidings of great joy” announced by the angels is a spiritual gospel of salvation from our sin and hell that is for eternity.