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The Spirit Of Liberalism (1)

edited

Not long after the establishment of the Lord's church there were problems with false doctrine. The Judaizers were probably the first. They believed Christians needed to obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). Near the end of the first century there was Gnosticism. These taught that Christ was a spiritual being that was separate from Jesus, and that Christ did not actually come in the flesh. Also they taught that they had special, secret understandings of the scriptures that the unenlightened could not understand. Ever since then, there have been heresies, false doctrines, and problems in Christ's church. Today is no different.

The fact is we all have different backgrounds and experiences. It is an undeniable fact that we are not all on the same page in our knowledge and understanding of God's word. What can we do about such differences? How do we handle them? Do we even bother?

Not only is it appropriate to address differences and questions that arise, but the New Testament writers spent much time and ink in writing about differences and heresies of their day. This shows that it is not only right to preach on these things, but a preacher is not fulfilling his biblical duty unless he does. Thus, while there are many today who would argue against preaching on these things, they are arguing against the apostles.

Liberalism Defined & Illustrated

The word "liberalism" has many meanings in English. We may think first of politics when we hear it, but that is not what we are discussing here. The basic meaning of the word liberal is free or loose, and it may be good or bad.

It is readily admitted that the word liberalism is not found in the Bible, but the concept definitely is. In 2 Thessalonians it is illustrated as "the mystery of lawlessness" (2:7) and a lack of the love for the Truth (2:10-12). In plain English, liberalism is simply a clear way to describe it. In terms of the Bible, in the sense we mean, the spirit of liberalism is defined as the attitude which engages in Bible study and doctrinal teaching in a loose, free manner, without proper regard to the seriousness and strictness necessary. It is a general

approach that allows looseness and room for variance in biblical doctrine, resulting in sin and disobedience to God.

Romans 12:8, 2 Corinthians 8:2 and James 1:5 show that not all liberal attitudes in biblical matters are wrong. For example, when it comes to giving to the poor, we are commanded to be liberal, meaning loose and free with our possessions. But when we speak of the "liberal" approach to Bible study and to biblical doctrine – it is very wrong.

Consider this example of liberalism in handling the Bible: "A King of Judah once took the initiative to call the Jewish people to observe the Passover. After the collapse of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and in connection with the cleansing of the temple at Jerusalem, King Hezekiah called people from both Judah and Israel to keep the Passover together as brothers in the Holy City. Although many turned a deaf ear to his invitation, thousands began moving toward Jerusalem. The Passover lambs were killed and the celebration began. Some from the northern areas arrived too late, however, to perform the purification rituals that required several days for completion. So, although 'a multitude of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed' (2 Chron.30:18a). Or, as the New International Version renders the last words of this verse, 'they ate the Passover contrary to what was written.' Would the rekindling of faith in Hezekiah's attempt at reformation be stopped in its tracks by their impurity and unauthorized eating of the sacred meal? Would God destroy those who had violated the Passover rules? This is how the dramatic story ends: 'But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'The good LORD pardon all who set their hearts to seek God, the LORD the God of their ancestors, even though not in accordance with the sanctuary's rules of cleanness.' The LORD heard Hezekiah, and healed the people' (2 Chron.30:18b-20). The violation of the purification laws in Hezekiah's day was not a matter of cavalier disobedience. The people were not defying God but seeking him. Precisely because the good king knew the difference between rebellion and the failure of those who 'set their hearts to seek God,' he had the generosity of spirit to pray for them to be accepted in their deficiency. And because God ultimately judges on the basis of a seeker's heart rather than his or her performance, he showed mercy, forgave their shortcomings, and healed them. Could we lower some of the Satan-inspired and human-erected walls that divide Christians from one another? Perhaps live by a broader definition of fellowship within the family of God than some of us have experienced to date? Might we learn that we have misrepresented one another at times and exhibited a shoddy form of religious prejudice toward people different from ourselves? Would it be worth it to abandon sectarian rivalry in order to "be in agreement" for presenting the gospel to the world? Would it make our witness even stronger "that there be no divisions" among us in declaring that Jesus is the hope of our world? Maybe renounce our litmus-test doctrines for

the sake of lifting up Christ? Could we ever learn to be gracious enough to pray - and ask to have prayed for us! - the prayer of Good King Hezekiah for those we see as flawed in certain interpretations and practices?" (Rubel Shelley, Faith Matters, <http://faithmatters.faithsite.com>)

Note the following characteristics of the spirit of liberalism: (1) Only one scripture is referred to, out of context, and the rest is Shelley's own thoughts. Instead of actually reading a biblical text, and showing verse by verse what it means, only two sentences are read, without reference to the context, and this is the only scripture reference in the entire article. Compare this with biblical sermons, such as Peter's in Acts 2:14-40, which included copious amounts of scriptures. There is nothing wrong, in itself, with a sermon based on a single scripture, but when this is typical of any preacher's sermons it is not right.

(2) The **actual meaning** of the passage is that people of God were **admitting their sin** & repenting of it. Clearly God accepts people when they humble themselves and repent of their disobedience. In contrast to this, the article assigns a **new meaning** to this passage. This new meaning includes ideas, such as: God does not care about our actions, but our heart; God will tolerate false doctrine and unscriptural practices today as long as we feel honest and sincere; we have no right to demand that the scriptures be followed carefully and correctly; if we do demand proper following of the scriptures we will heartlessly and wantonly cause unnecessary division. This is obviously **not** the inspired meaning of the passage.

(3) Shelley's opposition (those who insist on doctrinal purity, godly living and a biblical standard of fellowship) are caricatured and made to look like villains. Note the following words and phrases used to describe us: Satan-inspired; human-erected; misrepresented one another; shoddy form of religious prejudice; sectarian rivalry; litmus-test doctrines; could we ever learn to be gracious enough. Now, if someone wants to make a logical, scriptural argument that someone is any one of these things, or that a doctrinal position is any number of these things, that is fine. But to **merely assert** these things without any logical argument or proof is mere name-calling.

(4) The spirit of liberalism often claims to be non-judgmental and tolerant. This spirit also claims to be against the supposed intolerance of those who think like us (who uphold careful observance of God's word). But, just look at the names we have been called in point 3. Are these "tolerant, open-minded, non-judgmental" types of things to call people?

(5) The arguments made are not logical and not consistent with the New Testament. The basic meaning of this article is that God judges our heart and not our actions; thus we can ignore all doctrinal differences and accept everyone in fellowship, and the scriptures do not matter so much as long as we have the right heart. But these points violate several clear scriptures, among them:

2 Timothy 3:16-17; Matthew 16:27; Matthew 23:23; James 2:24.

(6) The article ends in what seems more like an emotional tirade than a reasoned, logical argument from the scriptures.

In the future, Lord willing, we will examine other examples of the spirit of liberalism. This is not an attempt to "ruin" anyone or "bad mouth" anyone. It is an earnest examination of real examples of how people, members of "the church of Christ", are drifting away from God's word. It happened in the first century and it happens today. We cannot completely prevent it from happening (1 Cor. 11:19), but we can learn to see it coming and learn how to handle it as God wants us to handle it (Eph. 5:7-11)

PEOPLE TO REMEMBER & PRAY FOR

Marilyn Poteet-Langford, Johanna Fletcher, Othena Kinnard, Jo Miller, Wesley Geer (Life Care 316), **Mag Bumbalough** (Back in room 519, slightly improved), **Thelma Cunningham, Mary Cox, Monie Petty** (breathing difficulties), **Dave Poteet** (NHC in Sparta), **Dorris Williams, Robert & Betty England, Ed Williams** (heart blockages), **Joe Smith, Lydia Poe, Mike Tenpenny, Thelma Klein, DeLeesa Price** (expecting) and **Alisa Fletcher** (expecting), **Kenley Streeval, Larry Bumbalough, Jake Hale, Joshua & Misty Poteet**. Also, **Reba Jones** (Dorris Williams' niece), **Jackie Tindle** (cancer, relative of the Sims), **Marci Miller** (Alisa Fletcher's mother), **Ocia Bell Jones** (Doris William's mother), **Ruth Williams** (Betty England's niece), **Pauline Hickey, Kitty Mahan** (Kathy Tenpenny's mother), **Dwayne Williams** (Dorris William's son), **Paul Grissom, Carl Williams** (Ed's brother), **Teddy Sims**.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Home Bible Study** - Sat. May 12, 26
- **Door To Door** - Every Tuesday @ 6pm.
- **Business Meeting** - Sun. April 29.
- **Ladies Class** - 2nd & Last Sunday Each Month.
- **GM** - Raymond Castillo, Oct.14-19, 2007.
- **GM** - Brian Yeager, April 13-18, 2008.
- **GM** - Lanny Smith, Oct.12-17, 2008.

We Invite You To All Our Services!

Sunday Bible Study	9 am
Sunday Morning Worship	10 am
Sunday Evening Worship	6 pm
Wednesday Bible Study	7 pm

<http://frontiernet.net/~nscoc>
nscoc@frontiernet.net