

Why "Liberal" and "Conservative" Churches of Christ?

During the past three decades many have asked this question. Some sincere brethren who have been caught up in one stream or another never fully understood, and many who were too young before have now grown to adulthood wondering why. It is therefore a good question worthy of repeated investigation. Labels of "liberal" and "institutional" versus "anti" and "conservative" have been used by some as a prejudicial tool to halt further investigation. Labels used as prejudicial clubs are to be condemned; yet the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are proper when used as adjectives to describe a difference in attitude toward Bible authority, and consequently, a difference in practices. As the years go by, the attitude underlying the division becomes more apparent. We are not separated because one group believes in benevolence and the other does not, nor because of jealousy and envy. We have divided over a basic attitude toward the Bible. A liberal attitude justifies any activity that seems to be a "good work" under the concept, "We do a lot of things for which we have no Bible authority." A conservative attitude makes a plea to have Bible authority (either generic or specific) for all we do - therefore refraining from involving the church in activities alien to that of the church in the New Testament. Briefly, the walls of innovations which have divided us are built in three areas:

WHO? Who is to do the work of the church? The church? Or a human institution? The church has a God-given work to do, and the Lord made the church sufficient to do its own work. Within the framework of elders and deacons, a local church is the only organization necessary to fulfill its mission of evangelism, edification, and benevolence (Eph. 3:10-11; 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3:15). However, a wedge was driven when some began to reason that the church may build and maintain a separate institution - a different WHO to do the work of the church. This separate institution is human in origin and control. It is not a church nor governed by the church - yet it receives financial maintenance from the church. Human institutions so arranged (such as benevolent homes, hospitals, colleges or missionary societies) may be doing a good work. But when they become leeches on the church, they deny its independence and all-sufficiency and make a "fund-raising house" of God's church.

HOW? How is the work of the church to be overseen? On a local basis with separate, autonomous congregations? Or may several local churches work as a unit through a sponsoring eldership? The organization of the New Testament church was local in nature, with elders limited to oversight of the work of the flock among them (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). We are divided by those who promote "brotherhood works" through a plan of inter-congregational effort with centralized oversight - an unscriptural HOW.

WHAT? What is the mission of the church? Spiritual, or also social? It is in this area that the loose attitude toward the Scriptures is becoming more apparent. Though wholesome activities are needed for all, the Lord died for a higher and holier mission than food, fun, and frolic. Let the church be free to spend its energy and resources in spiritual purposes (1 Pet. 2:5; Rom. 14:17) and let the home be busy in providing social needs (1 Cor. 11:22,34).

- by Robert Harkrider

How the Ads Should Read

If the places that sell whiskey would tell the truth in their advertising, the ads would read something like this: "Wanted -- 100 new customers as most of our old ones have dropped out. 10 committed suicide; 20 are in jail; 15 are in the poor house; 1 was executed for murder; 3 are in the mental hospital; and the rest are broke."

"We must have new customers -- young, fresh and strong for they will not live to stay with us long. Come to see us. We have brands that will cause you to disgrace your family, paralyze your mind, warp your body, and lose your friends."

- by L.O. Sanderson

God's Will About Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Marriage is God's arrangement. From the beginning, He joined one man and one woman in a lifelong covenant (Genesis 2:24). Jesus reaffirmed this truth when He said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). Marriage is not to be treated lightly, changed at will, or ended for selfish reasons.

Divorce is never presented as God's desire. Jesus said it is evidence of man's hardness of heart (Matthew 19:8). God hates the treachery and unfaithfulness that typically leads to broken marriages (Malachi 2:14-16).

Jesus gave one exception for divorce with the right to remarry: fornication. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matthew 19:9; see also Matthew 5:32). Fornication (illicit sexual contact) violates the marriage covenant so seriously that the innocent mate may put away the guilty party and be free to marry again. However, the put-away fornicator may not remarry.

Remarriage is not authorized by God when divorce occurs for other reasons. This is true even if fornication occurs after the divorce has taken place. To enter another union (while still being bound by God to a living mate) is adultery (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3). Civil law may recognize the unlawful marriages, but God's law does not.

These truths may be unpopular in a permissive age, but God's word has not changed. We honor Him when we honor marriage, remain faithful to our vows, and submit to His authority in every relationship.

- by Greg Gwin