

## **Liberal**

Liberal has become somewhat of a political dirty word of late. In numerous recent elections, those branded as liberals have not fared well. Bigger government, more social programs, and increased legal protection for criminals and minorities are not in vogue at the moment.

Liberal is also an oft-used term in the church. I consider some Christians liberal. Some whom I think of as liberal warn against others whom they consider liberal, the "ultra-liberals." Is this just a bunch of name-calling? (Liberals identify themselves as "mainstream" or "progressive" and call me "anti.") What do we mean when we speak of liberal or conservative churches?

### **On the Surface**

You do not have to be Solomon to discern the differences among churches of Christ. A quick glance reveals a variety of practices.

- \* Some contribute to institutions such as homes for orphans or widows, schools, hospitals, missionary societies, etc. Others care for their own needy and support preachers directly (Acts 6:1-6; Phil. 4:15).

- \* Some participate in arrangements where one church takes on a project way beyond its means, then begs other churches to pay for it. Oversight of the project is the business of the elders of the "sponsoring church." Others work within their means, being careful that their elders limit themselves to the flock among them (2 Pet. 5:2).

- \* Some build facilities called "family life centers" or "fellowship halls." These house recreational and social activities including dinners, athletic events, shows and entertainment, exercise and weight loss classes, etc. Others limit their facilities to auditoriums and classrooms for worship and Bible study, leaving social activities in the realm of the home (1 Cor. 11:22, 33).

- \* Some sponsor special events around popular holidays: Easter egg hunts, fall festivals at Halloween, Christmas plays, etc. Others limit their observance of days to the first day of the week when they gather to eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).

- \* Some use carnal appeals to attract people to services, especially with bus ministries directed toward children. They provide special outings for different categories of people such as camps, retreats, skating parties, and jaunts to amusement parks for the young, and sight-seeing trips for the seniors. Others rely on the power of the gospel to draw sinners (Rom. 1:16).

- \* Some have an extensive staff of specialized ministers: education minister, youth minister, singles minister, seniors minister, hospital minister, prison minister, music minister, pulpit minister, etc. Others are served only by evangelists, elders, and deacons (Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1).

- \* Some take up collections on a variety of occasions, insist on pledges from their members, and engage in a host of different fund-raising activities from sales to rentals to investments. Others are financed only by the freewill offerings of their members on the Lord's day (1 Cor. 16:2).

- \* Some use instrumental music in worship. Others are content to sing and make melody in their hearts (Eph. 5:19).

- \* Some teach that divorce for most any cause is acceptable, and maintain fellowship with brethren who are so divorced and remarried. Others teach that adultery is the only scriptural basis for putting away one's mate and remarrying (Mt. 19:9).

- \* Some use women as preachers and worship leaders. Others do not (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

- \* Some openly fellowship people in denominational churches. In fact, a few are beginning to accept denominational status for themselves. Others refuse to fellowship those who do not abide in Christ's teaching (2 Jn. 9-11).

It is difficult to say precisely what a liberal church is since not all are equally liberal. Some do everything I have described at the beginning of these paragraphs. Others go along with only a few of these things. Others are doubtless doing things that I am unaware of.

### **The Underlying Problem**

Despite the difficulty in precise descriptions, liberal is an appropriate term to designate these brethren because it accurately describes their approach to the authority of God's word.

Bible authority is established in one of three ways: 1) by direct statements or commands; 2) by approved examples, which illustrate what was commanded; 3) by necessary inferences, conclusions necessitated by the facts.

A few liberal brethren still recognize these principles and attempt to justify their practices thereby. However, these constitute an increasing minority. More and more liberals are denying that the Bible was intended to be a pattern to be followed for all time.

They deny the force of examples and inferences, saying the only authority is in commands. (What about the command to follow examples, as in Philippians 3:17 and 4:9?) Some commands are dismissed, too, as belonging only to the less advanced society in which the gospel was introduced. Silence is viewed as permissive - a thing is right unless the Bible says not to do it despite the Bible's warnings against going beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). Make no mistake: attitude toward authority is at the root of the differences in practice.

Liberalism is snowballing. Thirty or forty years ago brethren would not have dreamed of things that are commonplace today. And it shows no signs of slowing down. Those who want only a little liberalism are in an awkward position: they do not like what is happening but they cannot preach against it without condemning themselves.

### **Conclusion**

"Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified . . ." (1 Pet. 4:11).

*- by Frank Himmel*

---

### ***"Take Care Of ME!"***

It doesn't take long for the parents of newborn babies to realize that those "little bundles of joy" also happen to be the most selfish and demanding creatures imaginable! They want to be fed on demand. They expect to be diapered promptly. They want to sleep without interruptions, and they require immediate attention as soon as they awaken. All of this would be very disturbing in an older person, but we know this is completely natural conduct for newborns.

We anticipate that in time the newborn will begin to lose some of that self-centeredness. They will start to realize that the needs and desires of others must be taken into consideration. We call this process "maturing". Often this "growing up" process demands appropriate action on the part of parents. Frequently this required action is in the form of discipline - the kind that is administered to the seat of the pants! The child has finally "matured" when he is able to think of others before self, when he is no longer the absolutely self-centered being he was at birth.

Spiritually speaking, we were "born again" when we were baptized into Christ (1 Pet. 1:23). At that point we were all "babes" (1 Pet. 2:2). As "babes" we were typically very self-centered. Our own needs, wants, whims, and desires were foremost in our thinking. But God expects us to mature (Heb. 5:12-14). As we "grow up" we should begin to lose our selfish way of thinking and demonstrate the signs of our spiritual maturity. Paul said it this way: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. . ." (Phil. 2:4,5). If this never happens, there is something seriously wrong.

Christian, are you still selfish and self-centered? Are you still primarily concerned about what others are doing - or not doing - for you? Have you not matured spiritually? Do you need to "grow up"? Think!

*- by Greg Gwin*