

LEGALISM, LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM # 2

Int.

1. Aim: To show what liberalism really is and that it is an extreme we must avoid.
2. Deut. 5:32 **"Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."**
 - a. Do as the Lord hath commanded - Moses speaking to people of Israel
 - b. Do not turn to the right or the left - either extreme is wrong !
3. Turning to the right is legalism - binding or making laws that God did not make.
4. Our lesson today is about turning to the left - liberalism - an attitude that goes beyond the commands of God in the Bible or ignores them. Conservatism is one who holds to the truth and avoids extremes either to the left or the right.
5. Matt. 16:13-19 - v. 19 **"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."**
 - a. Peter was given the responsibility of opening the doors of faith to:
 - i. Jews = Acts 2 - Pentecost
 - ii. Gentiles = Acts 10 - Cornelius
 - b. Keys - authority to open and close - same keys for both Jews & Gentiles - they remain the same today
 - c. Whatsoever thou shalt bind / loose
 - i. Bind = forbid it - prohibit it
 - ii. Loose = allow it - permit
 - d. Peter would be guided in all these things by the Holy Spirit

- e. He would lay down the conditions on which men would be admitted into the kingdom
6. To bind where God has not bound is legalism - to loose where God has not loosed is liberalism. The legalists restricts truth and the liberal abandons the truth. The conservative maintains truth. Today we will talk about Liberalism.

Discussion

I. COMPARISON OF THE EXTREMES OF LEGALISM AND LIBERALISM

- A. Whereas legalists restrain where God has loosed, liberals loose where God has bound.
- B. Where legalists present a picture of God that overdoes the Bible's teachings on His justice or severity, liberals distort God's love and goodness by picturing these attributes in isolation from His more sober characteristics.
- C. Legalists make God look mean; liberals make God look indulgent.
- D. Human nature being much more bent toward indulgence than on restraint, liberalism is a considerably more popular "ism" than legalism.
- E. But what causes some people to become liberal in their thinking? It is because....

II. LIBERALISM DEFINES THINGS IN A SPECIAL WAY

- A. Liberalism believes in God, but not in the God of the Bible.
- B. Liberalism believes in Christ, but not in the Christ of the Bible.
- C. Liberalism believes in inspiration, but not the inspiration the Bible claims for itself.
 - 1. Liberalism's basic error is its low view of the inspiration and authority of the inspired scriptures
 - 2. Liberalism denies the plenary inspiration of the bible.
 - 3. Liberalism denies the miraculous elements in the scriptures

- D. A liberal can make the statement: "I believe that the Bible contains the word of God."
1. This may sound like he has respect for the Bible, but in reality, he does not!
 2. There is a great difference in saying that the bible contains the word of God and in saying that the Bible is the word of God.
 3. The apostles were told that they would be given "how" and "what" they were to speak - Matt. 10:19 - that is verbal inspiration
 4. Paul wrote in Gal. 1:11-12 **"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught [it], but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."**
 5. In I Cor. 2:9-16 Paul is making these same kind of statements: v. 16 **"For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."**
- E. Liberalism is that philosophy that seeks to escape the restrictions of the Bible by releasing men from it's guidelines. The Bible is not the final authority for liberals.

III. THE LIBERAL AGENDA

- A. A change in the emphasis on baptism for the remission of sins.
1. It is claimed that this emphasis does too much to separate us from other religious groups.
 2. Baptism is for Believers [not babies] is by immersion [not sprinkling/pouring] and is for the remission of sin [not because we have been saved]

3. Some in the church are denying these things.
 - a. In his widely circulated book, *Free To Speak*, Cecil Hook alleges that God “accepts the individual, as he is, where he is, when that person resolves to follow the Savior to a nobler life and commits himself to that life of faith and obedience”(emp. WJ).⁷
 - b. Elsewhere the same writer has argued that we ought not to be dogmatic toward those who substitute sprinkling or pouring as expressions of “baptism”
 - c. In a book by F. LaGard Smith he suggests that if he were forced to choose, he would conclude that a “commitment of faith to Christ” would be “more important” than the “wedding ceremony of baptism.”¹⁰ What is the purpose of a statement of that nature? Are “commitment of faith” and “baptism” mutually exclusive matters?

B. A change in the public worship of the church.

1. Some are now calling for the use of instrumental music in the public worship and for special music in the assembly such as choirs, solos, and other alternatives to congregational singing.
2. Some argue that instrumental music in the worship is a matter of opinion.
3. Some are already using instruments.
4. How long before some congregations have robed choirs, choir directors, and musical performances as a part of the worship?

C. A change in the role of women in the public assembly.

1. It is being alleged by some that women, notwithstanding the teaching of Paul in I Timothy 2:11-12, should be full partners in leading and directing public worship.
2. Robert Randolph of Brookline, Massachusetts, and Lynn Mitchell, one of the elders at Bering Drive in Houston, have stated that they "have no problem with women serving as elders today."⁵
3. There are some churches that allow women to preach, lead singing, lead in prayer, and take part in all the public acts of worship.

D. A change to allow fellowship with others

1. There is a desire among liberal thinkers to engage in fellowship and joint activity with denominational bodies.
2. An effort to justify this view is made on the basis of a misapprehension of Romans 14.
3. Keep in mind in Romans 14 that Paul is discussing matters of indifference, e.g., the eating of meat (vs. 2, 15), not matters of faith and doctrine.
4. Fellowship is being extended to all religious groups, no matter what they teach.

E. A change in the distinctive plea of churches of Christ.

1. There are those who wish to abandon the restoration plea, i.e., the effort to restore New Testament practice in the present day.
2. They view the church as simply "another denomination" and thus wish for us to take our place in the religious world as "one among many."

- F. A change in our understanding of salvation by grace.
1. More and more it is being said that grace covers all our differences so that doctrine now matters little.
 2. Some contend that we cannot really know whether we have the truth; therefore, in the final analysis we do not know who is right and who is wrong.
 3. Yet, in the first century, the apostles preached with certainty (I Cor. 14:37), and those who heard them were persuaded to give up long-cherished beliefs and to obey the gospel (Acts 6:7).
- G. Many others such as:
1. Divorce and Remarriage
 2. Lord's Supper on week nights
 3. Tongue speaking
 4. Deny virgin birth

IV. WE COULD HAVE NEVER IMAGINED THESE THINGS...

- A. Who would have imagined that a well known gospel preacher would use his radio program to offer salvation to his listening audience by asking them to pray a sinner's prayer with him? But it has happened.
- B. Who would have imagined that a university professor at a Christian college would travel the country preaching that there is no wrong in having women elders? But it has happened.
- C. Who would have imagined that a gospel preacher could speak at a university congregation saying that there are faithful Christians in all the denominations, and calling us to acknowledge and accept this to be true? But it has happened.

- D. Who would have imagined that a church of Christ would have women deacons and women preachers? But it has happened.
- E. Who would have imagined that the church of Christ would participate in, and fellowship with denominational bodies in joint worship services? But it has happened.
- F. Who would have imagined that "gospel" preachers would be preaching a doctrine of salvation by "grace alone?" But it has happened.
- G. Who would have imagined that gospel preachers would argue in defense of instrumental music in worship? But it has happened.
- H. Who would have imagined that gospel preachers would deny that the Bible provides a pattern for the life of the church every century? But it has happened.
- I. Who would have imagined that congregations, and elderships who have the responsibility of shepherding the flock of God would invite, welcome, defend, and clamor for men who hold and teach such positions as mentioned above? But it has happened.

Conclusion

1. Liberalism
 - a. Goes to the left
 - b. Allows where God does not
 - c. Does not accept inspiration
 - d. Other extreme of legalism
2. Legalism is
 - a. Going to the right
 - b. Making laws where God has not made a law

- c. Just as wrong to make a law as it is to break a law
 - d. We are not law makers
3. Liberalism fails to recognize the difference between matters of faith and matters of option [judgment or opinion].
- a. Matters of faith are matters that are essential to our salvation.
 - b. In olden days the pioneers said: "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love."
 - c. But liberals treat matters of faith as matters of option.
4. Jesus said, "**And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free**" (John 8:32).
- a. Truth is important. Truth is understandable (Eph. 5:17), and it is attainable (I Tim. 2:3-4).
 - b. But men may err concerning the truth (II Tim. 2:17-18), and one may err from the truth (James 5:19-20).
5. We must not go to the right or the left but follow the truth
6. Joshua 23:6
7. In the next lesson we will study conservatism.