

## **From the Pastor's Desk (1989 - 1993)**

### **Liberalism**

Liberalism, also known as modernism, is extremely difficult to define. In today's language, liberalism describes someone whose theological views differ from the conservative position or anyone being "liberal" if they seem to be on his/her "left". In our denomination the label liberal is used for those who have gone along with recent changes either in worship, lifestyle or traditional doctrinal stance. We should avoid, however, such loose use of the term.

Historically "liberalism" refers to a major shift in theological thinking which flourished in Western Europe and North America from the mid -19th to the early 20th century. Primarily found in Protestantism, it also had its adherents in Roman Catholicism. Its leading thinkers tried to reconstruct the faith in the light of modern knowledge. They believed that certain developments in science and philosophy simply could not be ignored. The focus was on morals rather than on doctrine. They were more concerned about good works than about confessions. They no longer accepted the Bible as their sole authority for faith and practice. They followed the Higher Criticism movement, which came into being during the 19th century. They questioned the authorship and dating of much Biblical literature. They saw the Bible as the work of writers who were limited by their times; it is neither a revelation from God nor inerrant in all that it teaches. Liberals welcomed the latest findings in science. They accepted the Darwinian theory of evolution as fact. They taught that God had slowly built the universe through the evolutionary process. Even their view of God became radically different from the one revealed in Scripture. They no longer spoke of the Holy God and His wrath. They preached the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Sin is not breaking God's law. It is primarily selfishness. Jesus Christ is not the virgin born Son of the Most High God, but a powerful moral image whose example we must follow. Salvation comes through education and moral persuasion. Man doesn't need conversion, a radical change in life; he needs inspiration, a vision of what he can become.

Liberalism had a disastrous effect. It robbed the church of its authority. The certainty of the Gospel message was undermined. Liberal preachers emptied churches. H. Richard Niebuhr wrote the now classic and devastating critique of liberalism: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

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