

What Liberalism Has Done To The Church

Intro: Today we often preach and hear sermons concerning liberalism. We define what liberalism is, we describe liberalism. There are many sermons dealing with the doctrines and implications of liberalism, etc., etc. These sermons are needed and necessary in trying to turn the tide of liberalism today. However, we also need to realize what liberalism does to the church. When we see the consequences of liberalism, it might help us in turning that huge tide that is rolling over so many today.

I. PERVERTS THE WORD OF GOD.

A. There is a growing disrespect for the Bible.

1. “The idea of adhering to the Written Word is noble, but it is fraught with as many problems as there are people viewing the Word.” (James Woodroof, *The Church In Transition*, p. 36.)
2. “Plugging into any part of the scriptures, except the Gospels, expecting there to find power, is like plugging an electric motor into a reflection of a power outlet.” (Woodroof, *The Church In Transition*, p. 34).

B. This is the basis for the “New Hermeneutic” movement among us today.

1. We have misunderstood the Bible all through the past.
2. We must reinterpret the Bible to appeal to the world.
 - a. It does not consist of any law.
 - b. It is only a love letter from God.

C. There is, thus, a rejection of any pattern within God’s Word.

1. “We reject a rigid ‘pattern theology’” (Rubel Shelly & Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church*, p. 31).
2. “It [Scripture] certainly does not present an absolute blueprint for building a church.” (Shelly; Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church*, p. 34).
3. However, the Scriptures teach:
 - a. Heb. 8:5 “⁵ Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.”
 - b. Rom. 6:17 “¹⁷ But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”
 - c. 2 Tim. 1:13 “¹³ Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

D. This causes men not to study God’s Word.

1. 2 Tim. 2:15 “¹⁵ Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
2. 1 Pet. 2:2 “² As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:”
3. This results in man not knowing God’s Word and thus not knowing God
 - a. John 17:3 “³ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”
 - b. 2 Pet. 3:18 “¹⁸ But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.”

4. The result is an ignorance of the Scriptures; Hos. 4:6 “⁶ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”
5. This also happens to those who are faithful.
 - a. We become hesitant to study and examine something for fear that someone else will misunderstand and we will be labeled as being liberal.
 - b. We need to be careful about labelling; Gal. 5:15 “¹⁵ But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

II. CAUSES MEN NOT TO PREACH GOD’S WORD.

A. There is no longer a bold presentation of the truth.

1. Acts 4:29, 31 “²⁹ And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, ³⁰ By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”
2. Acts 9:27, 29 “²⁷ But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. ²⁹ And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.”
3. Eph. 6:20 “²⁰ For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”
4. There is no longer a definitive proclamation of truth as opposed from error, right from wrong, the church as opposed to denominationalism, etc.
5. While we should not intentionally try to offend anyone, there should not be an intentional avoidance of offending someone.

B. Sermons, instead of being filled with the Bible, are filled with short stories and moral platitudes.

1. Isa. 30:9-10 “⁹ That this *is* a rebellious people, lying children, children *that* will not hear the law of the LORD: ¹⁰ Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:”
2. Jer. 6:14 “¹⁴ They have healed also the hurt *of the daughter* of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace.”
3. 2 Tim. 4:2-4 “² Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴ And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

III. PERVERTS THE LORD’S CHURCH.

A. Denominationalizes the church.

1. Makes the church just another denomination.
 - a. The Lord’s church is not and never has been a denomination; and it is opposed to any and all denominations.

- b. Liberalism would make the church just one among many.
 - (1) “The church has never existed” we are not the “true church an arrogant claim.” “The church has never existed except in the Father’s mind.” (Rubel Shelly: Sermon at Missouri Church in West Memphis, Ark.).
 - (2) “We have no interest in building a first-century church” (Shelly; Harris, *The Second Incarnation*, p. 37).
 - (3) “But assume for just a moment the crazy concept that there may be some folks out in the world who, honest to goodness, love Jesus with all their heart, who would want to give him anything they have in their hands, but for whatever reason they are not fellowshipping in a building that says, ‘Church Of Christ’ on it. Now, can you say with me, ‘that we may be one?’ ... Jesus asks that we would throw a calf rope around all of those who just believe in him, and pray, and work, for the unity of all believers.” (Jeff Walling: sermon at 1990 Tulsa Soul Winning Workshop on a lesson on the Lord’s prayer for unity in John 17).
2. Makes us loose our distinctiveness.
 - a. Distinctiveness is the power of Christianity and the church.
 - b. We are to be different from others, not like them.
 - (1) Mat. 5:47 ⁴⁷ “And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others?* do not even the publicans so?”
 - (2) Mat. 5:20 ²⁰ “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”
 - (3) Rom. 12:1-2 ¹ “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”
 - (4) 1 Pet. 2:9 ⁹ “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”
 - c. Loss of distinctiveness is loss of power.
 - (1) The power of the church is not where is it like other religions, but where is it unlike them.
 - (2) It is in its distinctiveness that it asserts its real influence.
 - d. Liberalism would make us loose our distinctiveness to be one among the many.
- B. Perverts the worship of the church.**
 1. “The tired, uninspiring event called worship in our churches must give way to an exhilarating experience of God that simultaneously exhibits and nurtures life in the worshippers.” (Shelly; Harris, *The Second Incarnation*, p. 13). Notice what is meant.
 2. Women taking a leadership role in the worship.
 - a. “But what about a dramatic presentation by 15 men and women that communicates the will of God.” (Shelly; Harris, *The Second Incarnation*, p. 9).
 - b. “You want to talk about the issue of the 90’s. There are Bible majors at Abilene Christian and Lubbock Christian who are female. They don’t know what they are going to do yet with their Bible major. But they are female. ... In one youth group

represented by somebody sitting in this section there is a woman, a teenager in that youth group, that wants to be able to preach in some fashion to men and women when she gets older. You want to kick her out? ... the bottom line is that in the 1990's diversity is the only game in town, folks. ... Recently, the Herald Of Truth had a conference on family. Nine hundred people came to the Dallas area. One of the sessions, in which all the participants, nine hundred men and women came, the speaker was a woman with a Ph.D. And though she had a topic related to family, let me tell you what she did, *she preached*. And she was dynamite!" (Randy Mayeux speaking at the 21st Annual Youth Minister's Seminar, sponsored by Lubbock Christian University Oct. 16-19, 1989).

3. A change in the music of the church.
 - a. Congregations are using and being taught how to bring choirs in the worship service.
 - (1) The bulletin for Woodmont Hills church were Rubel Shelly preaches speaks of how their "chorus continues to grow and to improve, and you continue to express appreciation for the contribution they make to our worship atmosphere. Some of us admitted to feeling a bit uncomfortable the first time or two the group sang in our assembly." (July 19, 1989).
 - (2) "My subject here is to talk about, primarily about, the use of choruses in the worship the worship itself. Minter Lane congregation at Abilene does use them has for about 2 years now.... We're changing Minter Lane congregation is not alone in using choruses in the worship service. There are others that are doing this around here. In Houston there are two or three that are using a chorus in the worship service. On the West Coast there are about four or five congregations that are doing this. It is a very slow moving thing. The people in the Eastern part of the United States are slower to change. I'm very sad to say, because they seem to be a bit more conservative." (Jack Boyd of ACU Music Department, Nov. 6, 1988).
 - b. The change is seen in the group Acappella and Echo and other groups that make their voices sound like instruments of music.
 - c. There has been the acceptance of instrumental music in worship.
 - (1) "My commitment is to God's word and doing things as effectively and Biblically as I can. For that reason I don't go around the country preaching against instrumental music" (Jeff Walling sermon at Ozark Christian College, Joplin, Mo., 1987).
 - (2) "Only a carefully refined 'quarry-exegesis,' having nothing to do with the heart and essence of the Gospel, can argue for a cappella music only, while insisting that instrumental music is in fact sinful. True exegesis will not support our long-held tradition. The outcome of our ingenious 'mining' creates a host of problems for us. Among them the worst and most obvious include: needless division in the body of Jesus Christ ... an unfortunate squelching of gifted people in the church, who find no outlet for their God-given abilities to minister ... an unbearable pseudo-spirituality before other Christians who do not employ our 'pick and shovel' methods of

interpretation.” (Larry James in the monthly newsletter for Richardson East Church Of Christ, Oct. 25, 1989 articles entitled *Tradition or Truth?*)

C. Perverts the work of the church.

1. The work of the church is that of saving souls. This is accomplished in three areas.
 - a. Preaching to the lost.
 - b. Edifying the saved.
 - c. Benevolence.
2. Liberalism changes the work of the church to self-gratification.
 - a. Liberalism turns our mind inward to providing recreation, building gymnasiums, ski trips, trips to six flags, etc.
 - b. They have made the church nothing more than a social club.
 - (1) In this we deal with the social issue man faces.
 - (2) The appeal is to man's felt needs (“meeting the needs of man.”) Thus there are seminars on how to manage money, stress management, how to cope with worry, etc.
 - c. We no longer have the money for missionary work, and other work of the church.
3. Rubel Shelly is quoted as saying, “We are at a juncture in history where the church should listen to the un-church about what they're telling us about us.” (Newspaper article by Carrie Ferguson, *The Tennessean*, Sunday July 5, 1992 p. 3-B).

D. Perverts God's plan of salvation.

1. Some are teaching we are saved by grace only.
 - a. “It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation.” (Rubel Shelly, *Love Lines*, Oct. 31, 1990 Woodmont Hills church bulletin, p. 3).
 - b. “I have preached and believed, I believe deeply that the New Testament teaches that salvation is a free gift of God period. You are saved by grace alone.” (Randy Mayeux speaking at the 21st Annual Youth Minister's Seminar, sponsored by Lubbock Christian University Oct. 16-19, 1989).
 - c. “Are we saved 100% by the grace of God? Yes ... Our salvation is completely by grace. We contribute nothing to our salvation.” (Denny Boultinghouse, *Image* Article “100% Grace”, Dec. 1991).
2. Some are teaching we do not have to understand why we are being baptized (that it is for the remission of sins), only be baptized to obey God.
 - a. “Surely there are individuals in practically all the denominations known today who have learned of Jesus, looked to him in sincere faith, turned away from their conscious rebellions against his will, and embraced him as Savior through their immersion in his name.” (Rubel Shelly, *I Just Want To Be A Christian*, 1984, p. 126).
 - b. “It is my belief that the New Testament teaches when a penitent believer in the crucified and risen Savior is immersed in water to fulfill righteousness or obey God, the Lord forgives his past or alien sins (although he may not know that sins are remitted or that the Holy Spirit is given at the time).” (Jimmy Allen, *Rebaptism*, 1991, p. 39).

E. Promotes worldliness in the church.

1. This is a two pronged sword.
 - a. Worldliness brings liberalism to justify their worldliness.
 - b. Liberalism then justifies their worldliness, which promotes more worldliness.
 - c. Liberalism and worldliness feed off of each other.
2. The church is filled with worldliness today.
 - a. Immodesty.
 - b. Immorality (fornication, homosexuality)
 - c. Gambling.
 - d. Drinking.
 - e. Dancing.
 - f. Lying.

IV. CAUSES PRECIOUS SOULS TO BE LOST.**A. Ultimately this is the greatest problem with liberalism.****B. It carries one away from God's Word which will cause him to be lost.**

1. 2 John 9 ⁹ Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."
2. 2 The. 1:6-9 ⁶ Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; ⁷ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;"

C. Many will never hear God's saving Word.

1. Liberalism destroys the evangelistic nature of the church.
2. Without hearing God's Word, man cannot be saved.
 - a. John 8:32 ³² And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
 - b. Rom. 10:13-14 ¹³ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. ¹⁴ How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Conclusion: Liberalism rapes the church. The church is the beautiful bride of Christ. Liberalism destroys the pristine beauty of the church. We must do all we are capable of doing in putting a stop to liberalism.