

# WHAT IS CHRISTIAN LIBERALISM?

Josiah Meyer

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## WHAT IS LIBERALISM? (Part A, my story)

### The Casket

*Josiah Meyer, 2008*

Gentle voices,

Kindest hands

Have raised a casket

Raised by man

Between these walls

And roof and lid

Ten thousand young

They've safely hid

Until we rise

Anemic few

To seek the light

To blossom through!

We are "Emergent,"

Scared to be

We are not perfect,

But we are free

Men who've been there

Men who fight

Men with scars,

Who know what's 'right'

Hid from troubles

Hid from strife

Hid from poisons

Safe from life

Climb through rubble,

Climb through loss

Climb for faith

And Climb for cause

### Some Difficult Questions:

1) What is Truth, actually...?

*(without absolute truth, might makes right)*

2) How do I know what God wants, without the Bible?

3) How do I raise children without the church?

4) Is Jesus really *Lord* of my life?

## WHAT IS LIBERALISM? (PART B: Definitions)

### Definition 1: “**Liberalism is Christianity, studied from the outside looking in**”

- This is the same way that we would study Islam, Sikhism
- It is an approach that denies miracles
- This is the approach of *most* people currently studying Christianity, in the religious studies of secular universities
- *(By the way, studying Christianity at a secular university is probably the worst thing you can do for your faith!!)*
- What are some of the implications of this?
  - The Bible was written by people, not God
  - None of the miracles happened
  - (So then how did the stories about miracles arise?)
    - Perhaps they were stories told by the religious community, developed over time, were borrowed from other religions, etc....
- THE GOOD SIDE of secular, liberal studies:
  - It provides *objective* information about Christianity
  - It can be used in Apologetics, to prove Christianity
- THE BAD SIDE of secular, liberal studies
  - It denies miracles
  - It is (very often!) used to discredit true Christianity
- SHOULD WE BE WORRIED?
  - *When you understand that they deny miracles as a starting point, then 80% of the problems disappear*
  - *A useful phrase is “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”*
  - *There are some serious issues which remain, which is why we need Christian scholars in the field*

DEFINITION 2: “Liberalism is a form of Christianity that denies miracles”

- “*seriously?! There are Christians that deny miracles?!*”
- “*yes, whole seminaries, whole denominations of them!*”
- According to J. Gresham Machen, in *Christianity and Liberalism*, this is the main difference between Liberalism
- What would change if there were no miracles in Christianity?

Revelation:

- The Bible isn't really God's word: it's just people speaking about what they think God is like
- The miracles didn't happen (therefore, much of it is false)
- The Bible does not transmit propositional information
- Christianity is about, “the feeling of absolute dependence” (Schleiermacher) and right behaviour

God:

- We don't really know much about Him
- We can learn about Him from other religions as well
- Let's assume He is a “kind Father in the sky”

Jesus

- Not born of a virgin (therefore, not God!)
- Didn't rise from the dead (therefore, can't save!)
- He was a *moral teacher* and that is all

## Salvation:

- Jesus was not killed for our sins: that's barbaric!
- Jesus was a good example for us to follow
- Salvation is basically through good works
- People from all religions (or no religion) can be saved, because good works is available to everyone
- Missions is a waste of time

## Heaven & Hell

- We have no Bible to tell us about them
- Maybe they are spiritual realities
- Pretty much everyone probably goes to "the good place"

## Ethics

- Being kind, humble, and good is the most important
- Sexual ethics are out!

DEFINITION 3: Liberalism is the belief that, "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations (actions) of a Christ without a cross." - H. Richard Niebuhr

## HOW DO WE COMBAT LIBERALISM?

...the *people* or the *ideas*...? (Eph. 6:12)

The “Liberal” and “Fundamentalist” debates

### 1) Sneaky Liberals

- A. Changing definitions
- B. Pretending to be evangelical, when they aren't
- C. Seizing power in churches and schools
- D. Pressing conservatives out, keeping the building

### 2) Heresy-hunting Fundamentalists

#### A. Making lists

- i.* The inspiration and infallibility of Scriptures
- ii.* The Virgin Birth
- iii.* The Miracles of Jesus
- iv.* Salvation through Christ's atoning death
- v.* Jesus' literal, bodily resurrection

#### B. Critique of Fundamentalism

- i.* Lists can get longer and longer
  - i.* KJV, baptismal modes, end-times, long hair, dancing, etc., etc.
- ii.* Can create an atmosphere of suspicion & fear
- iii.* Can take the emphasis off of the Gospel
- iv.* Doesn't help with evangelism
  - i.* Outsiders repulsed by fighting
  - ii.* The poor in spirit don't hear the Gospel
- v.* Rather, we need to focus on the Gospel**

## MY STORY (continued...)

1. What is the Fear of the Lord?
  - a. It is the beginning of wisdom (Psalms 111:10)
  - b. God is dangerous (Mat. 10:28)
2. What is Wrath?
  - a. It is God's anger, poured out on humanity, because of their sin (Romans 1:18)
  - b. It is the most important danger to the human race
  - c. It is not God's heart to destroy: rather,  
**the love of God shelters us from the wrath of God**
    - i. Exod. 19:21, Ezek. 18:23, 33:11, 2 Pet. 3:9
3. What is Hell?
  - a. It is a place of conscious, eternal torment (Mat. 18:6-9, Mark 9:42-48, 2 Thess. 1:5-10, Rev. 14:9-11, 20:10, 14-15)
  - b. *The most important thing in the world is helping people to avoid going there!!*
4. What is Grace?
  - a. All other religions are man's attempt to reach up
  - b. Christianity is God reaching down to us
  - c. God really *loves* us (John 3:16-18)
5. What is Missions?
  - a. Because there is only one way (Acts 4:12)...
  - b. We need to *go* to tell people (Rom. 10:14-15)

## Other Resources...

J. Gresham Machen, *Liberalism and Christianity*, 1923

- This is a classic book, which is easy to read and well written

Josiah Meyer, *Modernity and the Roots of Classical Liberalism* (research paper/blog post)

<https://nolongerbechildren.com/2010/07/07/modernity-and-the-roots-of-classical-liberalism/>

Josiah Meyer, *J. Gresham Machen: The man who wrote Christianity and Liberalism* (research paper/blog post)

<https://nolongerbechildren.com/2010/06/15/the-man-who-wrote-liberalism-and-christianity-rough-draft/>

Josiah Meyer, *What is Liberalism?* (podcast series)

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/PodcastNoLongerBeChildren>