



In Name Only: Understanding Liberal Christianity

Joe and Heidi Gerber

Goals

- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Differences
- ▶ Why this matters?

Definitions

- ▶ We need to be very careful with labels.
- ▶ Liberal Theology is a systematic approach and movement.
- ▶ It's not just a term we use to label someone with whom we disagree.
- ▶ A few examples.

Differences

- ▶ Bible
- ▶ God
- ▶ Jesus
- ▶ Miracles
- ▶ Salvation
- ▶ Morality - especially sexual ethics

Bible

- ▶ Liberal Christians don't view the Bible as inspired or authoritative.
- ▶ This is due to an anti-supernaturalism, a misunderstanding of interpretations, and embracing critical biblical scholarship.
- ▶ There are good reasons for us to hold that the Bible is indeed inspired and authoritative.

A few important themes to note

- ▶ Liberal Christians are more consistent in what they DON'T believe than in what they do believe.
- ▶ They use familiar Christian terms that may sound similar, but they have a different meaning.
- ▶ Contemporary knowledge and understanding is their final source of authority.

God

- ▶ God is present in creation but is not sovereign ruler or moral governor.
- ▶ Two big differences: Creator/creation distinction and the role of natural laws
- ▶ They certainly do not believe in the Trinity in any way we would.

Jesus

- ▶ They might use terms like “Jesus was divine” and/or “Jesus fully revealed God” but they mean something very different.
- ▶ They would not say that Jesus was ontologically God.
- ▶ The incarnation is a symbol.
- ▶ Jesus is different from us only as a matter of degrees not as a different kind.

Miracles

- ▶ Liberal Theology is strongly biased towards naturalism. They embrace a sort of deism.
- ▶ They reduce miracles to natural events with causes that are not yet understood...
- ▶ or they are a symbol.
- ▶ Dismissing supernatural events is like the first domino in a theological chain.

Salvation

- ▶ Remember: They use familiar Christian terms that may sound similar, but they have a different meaning.
- ▶ “...a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

-Richard Niebuhr

- ▶ Universal salvation

Morality - especially sexual ethics

- ▶ Because they embrace modern knowledge and understanding as authoritative, their morality flows with the spirit of the age.
- ▶ This approach to morality makes it attractive to those who struggle to resist the spirit of the age, making it a frequent “gateway” to deconstruction.

Why does this matter?

- ▶ Yes, it's true that Liberal Christian churches are dying.
- ▶ But that's more a reason TO talk about it than not talk about it. These beliefs lead to destruction.
- ▶ The thinking is often found under the surface of deconstruction stories.
- ▶ It confuses people because they call themselves Christians and use Christian terms.

One final thought

- ▶ If Liberal Christian ideas lead to destruction, what is the solution to avoid the danger?
- ▶ Is it to forbid change?
- ▶ No. Because not only might that be quenching the Spirit, it means better alignment with God's Word is off the table.
- ▶ The solution is to redouble a commitment to the authority of God's Word, rightly understanding it, and then submitting to it.
- ▶ This is what our Statement of Faith calls us to.

The following statements of faith are the words of men attempting to capture simply the most basic of beliefs that arise from this fundamental grounding, and in their reading, we point all back to Jesus to find the way, the truth, and the life.

What we believe

1. There is one eternal God, the Creator of all things, who exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



2. The Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God and serves as the true and timeless basis for the doctrine of the church. It reveals God's love, character, and will.



- The Bible is the written revelation of God through his apostles and prophets (2 Peter 1:20–21). It consists of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament received by the church. (Luke 24:27, 45)
- The Bible is infallible and inerrant in revealing who God is, what he has done, how we might be saved, and what our responsibility is to God (John 10:35; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:14–17). Copies, translations, and interpretations of Scripture are true to the extent they faithfully represent God's intention in what was originally written. (Matt. 22:29; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:15)
- Because God has all authority, his written Word is the supreme authority for the doctrine and practice of the church (Matt. 5:17-19; Mark 7:1-23). God has faithfully worked through the church to preserve the Bible and preach its message throughout the ages. (Luke 16:17; 1 Thess. 2:13)

3. Mankind was created in God's image but became separated from God by sin. All who reach an age of accountability are responsible for their sinful deeds.



4. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, and willingly died on the cross. His atoning blood was



of converted men and women (known as brothers and sisters), with Christ as Head. We contend for the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Word.



2. We disciple and care for one another as a closely-knit, committed body of believers. We encourage and apply the full range of biblical discipline—from Spirit-led self-correction to church discipline—for the purpose of helping the soul struggling with sin and for the preservation of the church.



3. Brothers and sisters are equipped and encouraged to fulfill their biblical roles in the church to further the gospel to all people. Brothers who are sound in faith, doctrine, and example are chosen from the congregation to serve as elders and ministers.



- We believe membership and full participation in the local church and in our international brotherhood is important for encouragement, accountability, and connection. (Eph. 4)
- Our ministers and teachers are committed to diligently study and rightly preach and teach the full counsel of God's Word. (2 Tim. 2:15, 4:2)
- We respect God-ordained church leaders and uphold them in prayer. We interact with church leaders in mutual humility and transparency and embrace biblically based, Spirit-led decisions. (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17)
- As a church, we strive to encourage and equip each other for spiritual growth through diligent study of the Word, prayer, and counseling together. (Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24-25)

4. As believers, we honor the work of salvation through holy sacraments such as baptism and Holy Communion. As a church body, we adhere to biblically based practices that encourage

