

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

LIBERAL CONGREGATIONS

By Gary Colley

What is a “liberal” congregation? What are the identifying marks? Can one worship acceptably with such a congregation? Knowing that many are presently disturbed by and are wrestling with this question, we trust that our answer will be of help to all.

In Second Timothy 4:1-4, Paul gives the definition of those who are liberal in doctrine and practice. His charge to Timothy *“before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom”* was to *“preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 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; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”*

MAN’S WAYS, NOT GOD’S WAYS

- They refuse to endure (continue or abide in) sound (healthy, solid) doctrine (Truth).
- These follow their own lusts (desires) instead of the sound doctrine or teaching of Christ and the apostles.
- They find a plentiful amount of teachers who are willing to teach what they think, and they follow them as if the majority was to decide what is right and what is wrong.
- When the Word is preached in purity, their ears refuse and reject it.
- Finally, they willingly exchange the true religion of Jesus Christ for the fables of men.

“Liberal,” then, is a term, whether applied to individuals or congregations, which describes a complete lack of respect for the Word of God—if and when it interferes with human thinking and philosophy.

The Lord’s Word is not the final authority to the liberal mind. They place their own way above the Lord’s authority and practice the same. These are blind, evidently, to Jehovah’s words spoken by Isaiah: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isa. 55:8-9).

Jesus says, *“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world”* (Matt. 28:20).

Peter writes, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Pet. 4:11).

Paul encourages, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ... And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Col. 3:16-17).

WHAT ARE THEY SEEKING?

These promote and force fundamental changes in teaching and practice which are unauthorized by the Lord (Matt. 28:18-20). Rather than worshiping in spirit and Truth, rather than letting *“all things be done decently and in order”* (1 Cor. 14:30), and rather than doing the Lord’s work with soberness, they want a pep-rally, handclapping, foot-stomping form of *“worship,”* as they seek emotional entertainment, wherein those leading the services become “stars,” and these, by their *“fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”* (Rom. 16:18).

SOME IDENTIFYING MARKS

The convicting evidence will be found in what you see and hear, just as it was with Samuel and Saul. When Saul claimed to have done the commandments of the Lord in utterly destroying the Amalekites, Samuel said upon his return, ***“What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear”*** (1 Sam. 15:1-14)? In the same manner, these are convicted today.

- First, you will probably see the New International Version or some other of the modern perversions quite prominent to view.
- You may hear “special music” from choirs, or solos and quartets.
- You may hear doctrines such as Grace Only, even Faith Only, and that it is not necessary for one to know the scriptural reason for being baptized if a man thinks he is obeying God.
- You will miss hearing the plan of salvation at the close of the sermon, but you may hear something to the effect that “the church of Christ is a big, sick, denomination” or the downplaying of the importance of the Lord’s church, and how it needs to be changed.
- You may hear it said that instrumental music is optional in worship, or that “meaningful worship” must be changed to the emotional, Pentecostal type of swaying, singing, and swinging while waving the hands.
- Or you may observe that two acts of worship are being attempted to be performed together “to make it more meaningful.”
- It is possible now that you may see women in leading roles even when men are present.
- You may hear that the Holy Spirit so powerfully works directly and apart from the Word among them “that even the elders cannot control their actions.”
- It is likely that the emphasis will be more on social activities than on doctrinal teaching, in which God, by the Scriptures, thoroughly furnishes the man of God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17)!

CAN WE PARTAKE?

A faithful Christian, who wants to remain faithful, after making every attempt to change the unscriptural situations, needs for his or her own sake as well as that of their precious family members, to separate themselves and go to a faithful congregation! They are under scriptural obligation to ***“mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them”*** (Rom. 16:17).

I would ask that you read these passages and make up your own judgment about whether a faithful Christian can partake of, or be a part in any way, of these errors.

Ephesians 5:11, ***“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”***

Galatians 1:8-9, ***“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”***

2 Corinthians 6:14-18, ***“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”***

2 John 9-11, ***“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. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds. ■***

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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