

LIBERALISM AND NEO-ORTHODOXY

CHURCH HISTORY CLASS

BOOK THREE- CHAPTER SIX

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Isa 28:9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are* weaned from the milk, *and* drawn from the breasts.

Isa 28:10 For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little:

Isa 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

Isa 28:12 To whom he said, This *is* the rest *wherewith* ye may cause the weary to rest; and this *is* the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

Isa 28:13 But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

1. In chapters 1-5 we have traced the most significant development within Christianity in the twentieth century, as measured both by theological restoration and by numerical growth. In the early part of the century, however, the Pentecostals were a very small segment of Protestantism that sprouted from Holiness groups that in turn had separated from Methodism.
2. In this lesson we will look at the developments within mainline Protestantism. The Most important development within mainline Protestantism was *Liberalism*, also known as Modernism, and the reactions to it.
3. Liberalism was a continuation of a trend that began in earlier centuries and became quite strong in the nineteenth century, but to a great extent it captured the mainline Protestant denominations in the twentieth century.
4. **liberalism** ['lɪbərə,lɪzəm 'lɪbrə-]

- a. (Government, Politics & Diplomacy) liberal opinions, practices, or politics
 - b. (Christianity / Protestantism) a movement in modern Protestantism that rejects biblical authority.
5. In essence, Liberalism questioned the truthfulness of the Bible and undermined its authority. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had seen the emergence of a post Christian mindset as the Western world emphasized scientific methods, rationalism, and experimental knowledge. Many theologians and philosophers began to apply these methods to traditional religion, eliminating the supernatural elements and retaining what they deemed to be rational and humanly comprehensible.
 6. In a way, we can regard both Liberalism and Holiness Pentecostalism as reactions to formal Protestant orthodoxy, even though they are at opposite ends of the spectrum. By the seventeenth century, Protestantism had settled into rival theological camps, each with its own well-defined confession of faith and each of whom labeled the others as heretics.
 7. The Protestant's seemed to focus on doctrinal identity more than on personal faith and spiritual experience. By the eighteenth century, the Pietists in continental Europe and the Methodists in England were seeking to refocus attention on a personal relationship with God and the lifestyle of holiness. The Holiness movement of the nineteenth century (which arose from Methodism) and the Pentecostal movement of the twentieth century perpetuated that emphasis.

LIBERALISM

1. Whereas the Pietists, Methodists, Holiness movement, and the Pentecostals all sought a more fervent personal relationship with God on the basis of scriptural teachings, Liberalism sought a more personal theology by questioning scriptural teachings. Liberal theologians in the nineteenth century began to view the Bible as a book that contained divine principles. To them, it was inspired much like other great writings of philosophy, poetry, and literature. In other words the human element predominated in the writing of the Scripture.
2. Instead of seeing Scripture as infallible, they saw it as full of errors. Instead of being the direct revelation of God to humanity, it was a reflection of human

thinking about God. It was not the authoritative Word of God; it simply described human efforts to understand ultimate reality.

3. Liberal theologians began to deny, one by one, the supernatural elements of Scripture, including the miracles, the deity of Jesus, the virgin birth (conception) of Jesus, and the second coming of Jesus. They regarded these beliefs as mystical or prescientific elaborations that arose from the superstitious nature of the people who wrote the Bible.
4. These theologians thus sought to remove the miraculous from Christianity and yet perpetuate what they considered to be its spiritual and moral essence.
5. Other theologians and reformed pastors in Germany were the starting point for Liberalism; One of these men was a man by the name of Albrecht Ritschl, a German professor and son of a Lutheran bishop. By the early twentieth century, Liberalism was in the process of taking over seminaries, universities, and mainline denominations.
6. In general, Liberalism denied that humans have a sinful nature, instead holding that they are basically good, therefore, it denied the need for salvation in the traditional Christian sense of atonement, redemption, justification and regeneration. Instead of proclaiming personal deliverance from the penalty of sin, it reinterpreted salvation in terms of improving individuals and bettering society. Heaven and hell became states of being or states of mind rather than literal place.
7. Some of the more prominent theologians of the Liberalism movement were Adof von Harnack (1851-1930) and Walter Rausbenbusch of the U.S. was the most prominent proponents of the social gospel, which stressed the importance of social action. Of course, conservative Christian's groups, including the Methodists and Holiness people had long engaged in practical works such as establishing orphanages, feeding the poor, rehabilitating alcoholics and so on. But Walter's social gospel went beyond these kinds of actions, however, and offered a redefinition of Christianity. He said that the goal of Christianity is not, the spiritual salvation of individual souls from sin and hell, but the transformation of society on earth. Christians are not to look for physical return of Christ to earth, or the eternal reign of Christ for a thousand years, or eternal life in a place called heaven. Rather, the gospel calls them to establish the kingdom of God in this world – the kingdom of justice – through social and

political means. The church's priority should be to work for justice, freedom, and a better society.

8. **Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)**, a German theologian and philosopher, became famous as a missionary doctor in Africa. He published *The Quest of the Historical Jesus (1906)*. In it, he tried to strip away the myths about Jesus and discover who He really was as a man. He concluded that Jesus mistakenly believed the end of the world was at hand in His day and thus He proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand. In order to fulfill His predictions, Jesus unsuccessfully tried to provoke the end of the world. He believed He would hasten the end of all things, and in His death would be the climactic moment. In Schweitzer's view, Jesus miscalculated and was killed too soon to implement His plans. In essence, He failed in His mission. Early Christianity was thus an attempt to reinterpret the failure of Jesus and turn it into a spiritual success.
9. In the view of conservatives then and now, Liberalism actually tried to cut the heart out of Christianity. It undermines or destroyed essential biblical doctrines such as the deity of Jesus Christ, the Atonement, and Justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and the new birth. Nevertheless, to a greater or lesser extent, its ideas became predominant in mainstream European and American Protestantism.
10. Liberalism provoked a sharp counterattack from people who accepted the Bible as the infallible, inerrant (Containing no errors) Word of God, including its miracles. This response became known as Fundamentalism, which we will discuss later.

KARL BARTH AND NEO-ORTHODOXY

ne·o·or·tho·dox·y (nĕ'ō-ôr'thə-dŏk'sĕ)

A Protestant movement that arose during World War I and is closely associated with Karl Barth, who was a reformed pastor in Switzerland and the foremost theologian in the first half of the twentieth century. He opposed liberalism and advocates certain theological, especially Calvinist doctrines of the Reformation.

1. Neo-Orthodoxy developed in 1920s through 1940s as a response to Liberalism. It defended historic Christian doctrines against Liberalism, yet it did not return completely to earlier beliefs such as the infallibility of Scripture in all things.
2. Neo-Orthodox theologians realized that the Liberal agenda was bankrupt, yet they still tried to take into rationalism of modern society. They sought to blend biblical supernaturalism and modern rationalism so as to affirm the essential doctrines of Scripture in a modern context. Ancient doctrines were rephrased and reinterpreted.
3. Barth emphasized the “otherness” of God and the “strange new world” of the Bible. In other words, God is so different from us that we could never learn about Him simply by human reason. Rationalism is insufficient to establish religion. Rather, we must learn about God by revelation, and God’s Word in His revelation to us. Thus, the basis of Christianity is revelation, not reason.
4. In contrast to Liberalism, Barth emphasized the sinfulness of humanity. Because of their sinfulness, humans must have God’s illumination to understand truth, and they must have the grace of God as work in their lives.
5. Barth proclaimed the sovereignty of God. God is in control of the world. We cannot remake God in our image, for God is who He is.
6. Barth drew considerably from Luther and John Calvin, especially the latter.
7. On the doctrine of God, Barth did not like the traditional terminology of “*three persons*,” because it made too great of a distinction in the Godhead. He was willing to speak of three eternal “*mode of being*,” “*the triune God*,” and “the Trinity” however. His doctrine of God bears similarities to Oneness thought – so much so that some critics have called him a modalist. For Barth there is only one revelation of God – In Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God Himself in flesh, and His atoning sacrifice is the work of God Himself.
8. God is the One whose name and cause are borne by Jesus Christ... Who and What is the God who is to be known at the point upon which Holy Scripture concentrates our attention and thoughts? From first to last the Bible directs us to the name of Jesus Christ... Under this name God Himself became a man... There is no greater depth in God’s being and work than that revealed in these happenings and under this name. For in these happenings and under this

name He has revealed Himself... When the bearer of this name becomes the object of our attention and thoughts, when they are directed to Jesus Christ, then we see God, and our thoughts are fixed on Him.

9. **Barth attributed great significance to water baptism.** He said that it relates us to “the one divine act of salvation and revelation.” Believers are baptized into the following expectations: (1) The coming to pass of the kingdom and rule of God in their lives, (2) their baptism and endowment with the Holy Spirit, (3) the execution of God’s judgment on them too, (4) the receiving of remission of sins, (5) their membership of the new people of God of the last time, and (6) their existence in the unity Jews and Gentiles in common judgment and blessing.
10. Despite his Reformed heritage, Barth **opposed the baptism of infants** since they could not have the personal encounter with God that baptism represents.
11. **He identified the inward work of salvation** as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is related to, but distinct from, water baptism.
12. **Barth explained that the wording of Matthew 28:19** actually points to Jesus Christ and His saving work. For him, the three titles do not refer to three names but to the one name of God. They signify God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ in light of the past (salvation history, the plan of God through the ages), the present (Christ’s act of atonement as applied to the believer), and the future (the ongoing work of God in the individual and in the world).
13. **Matthew 28:19**... is an extension of the Christological formulae of Acts and Paul... The apostles are to baptize them, not into three names, but into one name expounded in three different ways... In the mention of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is to be regarded as an enumeration, it is the enumeration of the dimensions of the one name of God,