

Liberalism: Are We Drawing Closer to God?

By Ben Bailey

In the church a serious wind of change is taking place (Eph. 4:14). This movement is so powerful that it is blowing down many of the “old paths” the Lord’s church has held to (Jer. 6:16, Prov. 22:18). Those who advocate doctrinal change will say that this movement is caused by an acceptance of culture and a desire to have a deeper relationship with God, but I say that rebellion, emotionalism, and Biblical ignorance are the causes of this change.

The liberal movement in the church has tried to bring us in synch with our culture in several ways. First, as a direct result of the women’s liberation movement, change agents are advocating an extended role for women. For example, a person can now go into a congregation of the Lord’s people and find women serving at the Lord’s Supper, preaching, praying, or even leading song service. Next, we have tried to be culturally oriented by being more accepting of denominations. Change agents say that we need to be more relaxed in our views on who is, or who is not our brother. Today, many church of Christ preachers are exchanging pulpits with Baptists, Methodists, and

Lutherans as if they are no different than us. A final way in which liberals have tried to make the church cultural is by making additions and changes in our worship. For instance, the church used to believe that acapella music was the only way to worship God in song (Eph 5:19, Col. 3:16). But now some are bringing instruments into worship as an acceptable alternative. We used to be convicted that singing unto the Lord vocally with our mind engaged was proper, but now we are being told that hand clapping is just as acceptable to the Lord as vocal singing in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24). Also, alterations to fit culture are being made to the Lord’s supper. For example, some churches of Christ are only serving the Lord’s supper once a month or once a quarter. When we view these major changes in the church, we should automatically ask, “Are we really drawing closer to God?” or has the Lord removed some churches from their place of exaltation because of unauthorized change (Rev 2:5)?

I am convinced that one of the major causes of change in the church is a rebellious spirit. Due to some major transformations and impacts by culture and society a rebellious generation is rising up and leading the church away from the doctrines we have held to for years. Many factors in society caused a rebellion against authority. For example, in the 1960’s

drugs, long hair, antiwar protests, and acceptance of eastern religions was simply a rebellion against authority. Another factor that caused this rebellious generation was a lack of discipline. When Dr. Spock published his ideas on discipline, many people began to rethink their method of discipline which led to children rebelling against authority. Instead of spanking their children, people began to ground, give time outs, or simply reward unacceptable behavior so they would not squash their children’s spirits. While this seemed like a good approach to some, the voice of experience shows us that it was not the right way (Prov. 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15,17, Heb. 12:7). Children who are not disciplined at a young age grow up to be adults who reject the authority of the Bible. To God, “...Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft” (I Sam 15:23). God does not want people to rebel against His will but to obey it (Lk 6:46, Matt 7:21). King Saul serves as the perfect example of how rebellion leads to change in worship. In I Samuel 15, God told Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekite nation, including every animal, man, woman, and child. For the most part King Saul did utterly destroy the Amalekite nation, except for the King and the best of the animals, which he planned to give as a sacrifice to God. However, the Lord saw his action as a

form of rebellion, and it made Him regret that He made Saul king, and He eventually tore the kingdom from Saul. Surely, none of us would doubt that Saul’s motives were good. He simply wanted to change God’s command a little so that he could make a more pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. But, God did not want Saul changing what he commanded, even if Saul thought he could improve his worship to God. God said to Saul, “Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams” (I Sam 15:22). In the eyes of God, rebellion is sinful and results in spiritual death (James 4:17; Lev 10:1).

Another major cause for the change epidemic that is plaguing the church is emotionalism. We live in an age where our emotions often overrule truth (Jn 4:24). Change agents equate emotions and feelings with spirituality. Many worship assemblies have turned into an entertainment circus, instead of a place where man and God could be brought together through reverent, worship.

“For example, Lynn Anderson cites a Sunday morning assembly in which a ‘communion trio’ sang to the congregation and thereby ‘helped us express emotions for

which the congregation knew no song. The congregation sat profoundly moved and with uplifted faces as tears flowed”¹ (Miller, pg. 52).

Notice how Anderson equates an unauthorized act of worship (a communion trio), crying and emotions with spirituality. The Bible clearly teaches that emotions should not guide our worship. Christians are commanded to “prove all things” (I Thes 5:21). God says to man, “Come let us reason together” (Isa 1:18). The Bible commands man to combine reason, logic, truth and emotions in our worship (Jn. 4:24). The truth of God’s word should govern our worship, and then our emotions should be engaged. The Apostle Paul is a perfect example of how our emotions should not be our guide in life. In Acts 23:1 Paul claimed that he had lived all his life in good conscience before God. Basically, Paul is affirming that everything that he did in life (including killing Christians) he felt was right in God’s sight. But, Paul’s feelings about the church and Christianity were not a proper guide. Jesus said truth, not emotion alone, is what saves a person (Jn. 8:31-32).

A final cause for change in the church is biblical ignorance. In the

past 20-30 years, a growing ignorance of the Bible has erupted among our children. This has led to biblically uneducated adults who are now leading the church. In the past Christians were known for their biblical knowledge. People used to think of members of the church as walking Bibles. For instance, in a small town court, when the judge was informed that there was no Bible present to swear the defendant in, instead of adjourning court, the judge asked a member of the church of Christ to come forward and allow the defendant to put his hand on the Christians head since he knew the Bible so well. But today, most Christians do not know the Bible well enough. God said in Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge.” Many today, are like the first century Christians in Rome who had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2-3). To counteract this biblical ignorance that is pervading the church we must study to show ourselves approved unto God, workers who do not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15). Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, said, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer” (Prov 15:28). God has a pattern for worship, and He expects us to “hold fast the pattern of sounds words” (2 Tim. 1:13).

The words of the Proverb writer are concise and to the point; “Do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly” (Prov 24:21). Truly, those who are bringing in unauthorized change are walking down the broad and wide path that leads to destruction (Matt 7:13-14). May God help us to not give in to the push for change in the church. “Whatever you do in word of deed do all in the name of (by the authority of, Acts 4:7) our Lord Jesus Christ” (Col 3:17).

¹ David Miller, **Piloting The Strait** (Pulaski, TN., Sain Publications, 1996) pg. 52.

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Emotionalism!

Relaxing the Scriptures!

Human Pride!

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