

The Greatest Heresy of Our Time

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I have lately in several articles pointed out the dangers of Christian political involvement, and have specifically mentioned Christian Conservatism (sometimes spelled Conservatism) as one of the most dangerous turns Christianity has ever taken. I'm not sure, however, that I've really made clear why I believe that Christian Conservatism, partnered with the legalist leach that invariably hangs onto it, is now the greatest heresy of our time. In this article, I want to give you some background about the great apostasy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Liberal Christianity, and show how this has now been largely superseded in the twenty-first century by Christian Conservatism. You might be surprised to learn that Liberal Christianity and Christian Conservatism share a major tenet. I want to make clear the vast difference between Christian Conservatism and Conservative Christianity and establish why Christian Conservatism is so insidious and dangerous to the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

The Previous Incumbent

Until the rise of Christian Conservatism as a power, the chief vandal of Christian doctrine was Liberal Christianity (sometimes called Theological Modernism). Liberal Christianity began in the eighteenth century and is characterized by replacing the Bible as the source and standard of dogma with the methodologies of Enlightenment science. Instead of seeing the Bible as the supreme and final authority in all areas where it speaks (such as being God's revelation of all that is necessary to know about Him, His plan of salvation, the covenants, faith, and so forth), Liberal Christians looked to Enlightenment science, even to the point of using it to interpret and determine the validity and truthfulness of the Bible.

By the nineteenth century, Liberal Christians were teaching that whatever truths we might gain from the Bible we find by interpreting it much as we might a novel. Read *Jane Eyre* and you might come away with a better understanding of conscience and passion. Read the Gospels, and you might learn lessons about compassion for the poor and self sacrifice. On the other hand, Liberal Christians taught, the Bible's propositions (such as, "He who believes in me has eternal life," "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die," "Your [God's] word

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is truth," "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free") are not to be taken at face value. They must not be used as the basis for dogma. Thus, Liberal Christianity is described as non-propositional.

Liberal Christianity was tolerated, tried on for size by more conservative scholars, and some of its ideas eventually began trickling into sermons and Sunday schools everywhere. Then an outcry was finally raised when some of its prominent champions openly rejected the authority of Scripture and denied the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Christ. By then, great damage to doctrine had already been done, Liberalism was a pandemic in the seminaries, the infection was scattered throughout the churches, and the fight to root out Liberalism merely resulted in cleaving the major denominations into many fragments.

An interesting attribute of Liberal Christianity is that it is difficult to separate it from political Liberalism. A major movement within Liberal Christianity was the Social Gospel. This was the idea that the primary mission of Christianity is to cure the world's social ills now. Liberals were typically postmillennial (believing that Jesus will return after the church has established the kingdom of God on earth), and the application of the Social Gospel was their way of building the kingdom of God on earth. Proponents of the Social Gospel worked for economic equality and some were associated with promoting Socialism and even Marxism. In particular, an offshoot of Liberal Christianity, known as Liberation Theology, espoused praxis (practice or process) over doctrine and became heavily politicized in promoting Socialism and Marxism, especially in Latin America.

Liberal Christianity, of course, lives on, and it continues to spread its spores into more conservative churches. We must be ever diligent to guard against its Scripture-defaming teachings that dilute the authority of God's Word. At least this heresy has been recognized and identified, however, so that we can maintain our efforts to quarantine it. Much more dangerous is the heresy that is not recognized for what it is so that it successfully masquerades as Bible-believing, Conservative Christianity.

Christian Conservatism, the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

The Christians who have successfully staved off the attack of Liberal Christianity generally call themselves conservative. More than any other characteristic, Conservative Christianity is distinguished by believing the Bible is alone and in its entirety the written Word of God,

that all Scripture was given by the inspiration of God, that all Scripture is infallible and inerrant in the original writings (autographs), and that the final authority in all disputes concerning the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself.

Unlike Liberal Christianity, which can often be accurately switched with the political term Christian Liberalism, the Conservative Christianity in the previous paragraph and Christian Conservatism are horses of very different colors. Notice that in Conservative Christianity, Christianity is the noun and Conservative is merely the adjective indicating that the adherents hold a conservative view toward Scripture. In Christian Conservatism, Conservatism is the noun and Christian is merely the adjective, telling us that the adherents are political/economic conservatives who also profess Christianity (but see below for what the "Christianity" in this political movement really means).

I have lately seen several popular articles and even some scholarly articles in which the authors confused Christian Conservatism with Conservative Christianity. This is very concerning. Conservative Christianity is wrongly becoming associated in the minds of the general public with Christian Conservatism, and this association is a contaminating one. What is even more disturbing is that even Christians are confusing the two. Do not make this mistake. Conservative Christianity is Christianity that takes a conservative view of Scripture and doctrine. It believes in the authority of Scripture and the teachings of Scripture, such as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Christ.

Christian Conservatism, however, merely describes a political movement. It is also called the Christian Right, and it refers to political and economic conservatives who also profess Christianity. There is no established set of Christian dogma that Christian Conservatives must agree to, and, in fact, some are even members of religious sects that are outside the bounds of Christian orthodoxy—Mormonism, for example. What they hold in common are their strong social and/or economic conservatism that, labeling themselves as Christians, they attempt to underpin with what they claim are Christian or biblical values.

According to *Conservapedia*, the Christian Right "is based on the belief that the morality of our nation [the United States] was eroding and that Christians had to be mobilized at the local level to pressure the political system to reverse the damage" ("Religious Right" accessed 13 April 2016) (http://www.conservapedia.com/Religious_right). That quote is very

telling because it is from an admittedly conservative sight and openly acknowledges that the one unifying theme of Christian Conservatism is morality. But as I have pointed out in several other articles, we commit a grave error when we confuse Christianity with morality (see, for example, "Christianity or Moralism, Can You Tell the Difference?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/moralism.htm>).

What I'm saying is that the word "Christian" in Christian Conservatism does not refer to true Christianity. It is merely a codename for morality. The movement should really be called Moral Conservatism, and, in fact, an early manifestation of it formed by Jerry Falwell was called the Moral Majority.

As I said recently (see "Christianity Is Not...") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/christianityisnot.htm>), the preaching of moralism is contrary to the preaching of the Gospel. Moralism is based on the law, the Gospel is based on grace. If the message of moralism were true, Christ would have died for nothing (Galatians 2:19-21). The preaching of moralism lays the burden of the law on people. This is a denial of the work of Christ, a denial of what He came to accomplish in the flesh (see "Are You Following the Doctrines of Antichrists?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/antichrist.htm>). Thus, moralism is a doctrine of antichrist. Since Christian Conservatism is a movement advocating moralism and law rather than grace, since it pushes for the enforcement of a code of "biblical morality," and since it does this under the banner of Christianity, Christian Conservatism is a heresy and a movement of antichrist.

At the beginning of this article, I said that Liberal Christianity and Christian Conservatism hold a major tenet in common. That tenet is the desire to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Whether their politics are liberal, socialist, or Marxist, or whether they are conservative, capitalist, or legalist/moralist, their ambitions are to take the reigns of earthly power and enforce their religious beliefs. Thus, whether they are approaching the problem from a liberal point of view or a conservative point of view, their goal is dominion. (Further reading: "Sorting Out the Two Kingdoms") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/twokingdoms.htm>) Indeed, many Christian Conservatives, just as Liberal Christians, are postmillennial. Those that are not seem to have put blinders on because even they are walking in step to a postmillennial agenda. One of the seventeenth century fathers of the separation of church and state, Roger Williams, wrote, "An enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity

and civility, and that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (*The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*). And as the apostle John wrote, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who don't confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the Antichrist" (2 John 7).

Christians seem to be attracted to Christian Conservatism because it bears the name Christian, because it sounds like Conservative Christianity and they think it is the same thing (thus, some mistakenly believe that to reject Christian Conservatism is to reject the authority of the Bible!), because it advocates dealing with sin in an emotionally and carnally satisfying way (vociferously laying the law on people, accusing them of sin, and then condemning them), because it promises to return society to more familiar moral standards, because it appears to have a biblical basis in its use of Old Testament law (and many Christians are too unfamiliar with the Bible to know that the laws of the Old Testament were given only to Israel and have now ended anyway), and because so many other Christians and churches endorse it that there is a peer pressure to go along.

Why It Is So Dangerous?

If someone handed you a banknote with Bill Gates' picture on it, you would know it was counterfeit and reject it. No currency has Bill Gates' picture on it. For a counterfeit to work, it must give the appearance of the real thing. Similarly, if a wolf openly walks into a flock of sheep, you will recognize it for what it is. To get amongst the flock, the wolf must disguise himself. Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Today, most Bible-believing Christians would know to quickly reject the teaching of someone who questions the authority of the Bible or the Virgin Birth. But many are not doing as well when someone comes along and promises to solve our problems with an emphasis on the Ten Commandments, a return to the traditional definition of marriage, the teaching of creationism in the schools, the insertion of "Christian values" into government, and the legislating of "biblical morality." Unfortunately, despite the fact that it says nothing of grace, trusting in Jesus, spiritual rebirth, or the work of the Holy Spirit, many Christians will be fooled into thinking Christian Conservatism is good Christianity. The heresy they will listen to and put their time and effort into will teach them to turn from grace to law, to look to morality rather than faith, to substitute quick and efficient condemnation for long-term

solutions involving charitable love, to follow politicians rather than Jesus Christ (Daniel 4:17 says that God sets the lowest of men to rule the earth's nations), to look to change the kingdoms of men with law rather than seek the kingdom of God.

Baptist preacher, John Leland (1754–1841), wrote, "The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever... Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another. The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence, whereas all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians," and, "Experience...has informed us that the fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did" (*The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland*, 1845).

Christian Conservatism, as we have seen recently on the news, is spreading beyond the bounds of the United States. It has the potential to deceive many nations, to lead astray large numbers who are seeking the truth, to entice even believers to leave the narrow and enter the broad way for a time, and to persecute those who hold to the truth. Christian Conservatism is the great apostasy and heresy of our time. Yet, few have recognized it as such. Jesus warned, "There will arise false christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones" (Matthew 24:24). Don't be fooled.

The response of Jesus Christ and His early followers to the moral problems in our society would be the same as their response to the moral problems in their day. They would call people to trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and to real inner change through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They would be neither Christian Conservative nor Christian Liberal. They would simply be biblical, conservative Christians adhering to the doctrines found in the Word of God and expressing love and good works to those around them.