

Liberals and Conservatives

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The terms “liberal” and “conservative” have been used since the debate on institutionalism. We all know what these labels mean – *or do we?! Labels can be easily misused by applying them to a person or situation without warrant.*

Just what is a “liberal”? I believe we *intend* to use the word to describe someone who takes liberties with the Scriptures and acts without divine authority. However, in practical usage, the label can be misapplied.

For example, when a preacher makes a point which has not been previously thought of (or maybe merely forgotten over time), he is automatically labeled by some a “liberal.” To them, the issue is not the *substance* of what has been taught but simply the fact that it is *different*.

The same application is made to churches who do things which run counter to custom. “Did you hear that the so-and-so church did away with Sunday evening services? They’re *going liberal*.” Often, no attempt is made to determine if the practice in question has Bible authority or is expedient for that particular congregation. To some, if it’s *different*, it’s *liberal*. When we set ourselves up as the standard, then all who differ with us are going to be “liberals.”

Just what is a “conservative”? Again, we *intend* to use the word to describe those who act with Bible authority, who *speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent*. But again the label can be misused.

For example, a church may balk at doing what is entirely authorized, expedient and fruitful on the basis that some abuse may arise from it. This, they think, is being “conservative.” Granted, reckless decisions that invite trouble are foolish, but is there *any* good thing that cannot be potentially twisted into evil?

The term “liberal” has a favorable connotation: *Not limited to or by established, traditional, orthodox, or authoritarian attitudes, views, or dogmas; free from bigotry. b. Favoring proposals for reform, open to new ideas for progress, and tolerant of the ideas and behavior of others; broad-minded* (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, 1992). Those are all good qualities unless, taken to an extreme, they lead one to bypass Bible authority.

There is also a positive connotation to the word conservative: *Disposed to maintaining existing views, conditions, or institutions* (Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate, 1986). In matters specifically authorized by the Scriptures we must be conservative. But taken to an extreme, some can get so preoccupied with *conserving* the truth that they neglect to *use* it. This was the fault of the man who was afraid of responsibility and hid his master’s talent in the ground. The verdict: “*cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness*” (Mt 25:30).

Remember, “liberal” and “conservative” are not Biblical terms; they are merely accommodative and therefore subject to abuse.