

Daniel Morrison
SESSION 2 | Authority for the Christian

I. INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY J. GRESHAM MACHEN

- a. “History maketh a young man to be old, without either wrinkles or grey hairs; privileging him with the experience of age, without either the infirmities or inconveniences thereof.” -Thomas Fuller

- b. To help us stand amidst the shocks of life:
 - i. Light may seem at times to be an impertinent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion which rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or shrinks from ‘controversial matters,’ will never stand amid the shocks of life. - Machen, Christianity and Liberalism

II. THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

- a. At its core, theological liberalism is an attempt to adapt Christianity to the sensibilities and naturalistic tendencies growing more and more prevalent in modern culture.

- i. “But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one: the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism – that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God in connection with the origin of Christianity.”

- b. For theological liberals, the Bible is inspiring but not inspired; a record of religious experience but not a divine revelation of God.

- c. Example: According to theological liberalism, the virgin birth is simply a manner of speaking, in first century terms, about a great person. It is not a miracle.

- d. Theological liberalism is marked by a low view of God and a high view of man. Liberalism totally de-emphasized the saving acts of God in Christ and focused almost exclusively on ethics and responding to social issues.

III. MACHEN’S RESPONSE TO CHRISTIAN LIBERALISM

- a. Machen on the Authority of the Scriptures
 - i. Man does not discover God but God reveals himself to man.

 - ii. “Full or plenary inspiration of holy scripture...is not a popular doctrine...yet it is a very blessed doctrine all the same, and if a man finds his life upon it he can be very joyous and quite undismayed in all the sorrows and all the battles that may come upon him in this world.”

- iii. Machen's commitment to the authority of Scripture led him to embrace Reformed or Calvinistic theology as the perfect manifestation of Christianity. This, in turn, enabled him to stand strong amidst great opposition.

 - iv. "Calvinism is not a specific variety of theistic thought, religious experience, [or] evangelical faith; but just the perfect manifestation of these things. The difference between it and other forms of theism, religion, [and] evangelicalism is difference not of kind but of degree. . . . it does not take its position then by the side of other types of things; it takes its place over all else that claims to be these things, as embodying all that they ought to be."
- b. Christianity is fundamentally a witness to the historic and supernatural saving acts of God.
- i. "Here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity - liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with the triumphant indicative; liberalism appeals to man's will, while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God."
- c. Only the historic Gospel can lead to right Christian living
- i. Liberalism seeks to change lives by pure exhortation to moral exertion – but as with Stoicism and Cynicism in the ancient world, Machen notes, it doesn't work.

- ii. “The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by exhortation, but by the narration of an event. It is no wonder that such a method seemed strange. Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? That is what Paul called “the foolishness of the message.” It seemed foolish to the ancient world, and it seems foolish to liberal preachers today. But the strange thing is that it works. The effects of it appear even in this world. Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an event succeeds; the lives of men are transformed by a piece of news.”

IV. CONCLUSION

- a. “For us Jesus does not merely place His fingers in the ears and say, ‘Be Opened’; for us He does not merely say, ‘Arise and walk.’ For us He has done a greater thing – for us He died. Our dreadful guilt, and the condemnation of God’s law – it was wiped out by an act of grace. That is the message which brings Jesus near to us, and makes Him not merely the savior of the men in Galilee long ago, but he Savior of you and me.”