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## WHAT IS A LIBERAL?

By Herbert W. Armstrong

GOD SAYS to His Church, through the apostle Paul, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

This passage continues saying the church at Corinth, precisely like today's Church of God, was following various and differing *men* with differing doctrines. They, like many today, were *forgetting* that the HEAD of the Church is Jesus Christ that Christ is ALIVE today! That *HE* really is leading us!

Satan has been striking at God's Church and Work from within and from without! And as in the Ephesian church, where Paul said "...of your own selves shall men arrive, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

What happened in those churches in the first century has happened to us today. Those guilty of causing division are fighting God and shall be judged by Him!

My son, Garner Ted, fell under the influence of certain liberals, with whom he surrounded himself. He had had some liberal leanings prior to that. There were those around him bent on changing the doctrines of God's Church, watering down God's TRUTH.

I am learning now that my son was swayed under this liberal and secular-oriented influence. Because of his position of executive vice president, and because he assumed authority

beyond that delegated to him, those who were sound in the doctrines Christ had put into God's Church, who had been taught directly by me in earlier days of the college, were demoted, shanghaied away from headquarters.

Gradually, subtly, systematically, while I was in other parts of the world carrying Christ's Gospel message, doctrines were being watered down, the college was being made secular. God and Christ were being cast out and a *conspiracy* was in progress to get rid of Christ's chosen apostle, unless he accommodated the conspirators by dying.

Church teachings were being changed. The most resultful booklet of all, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*, was attacked, greatly deleted and later put out of circulation — the same with a number of other basic and important booklets written by Christ's apostle.

This group of liberals assumed the authority of setting Church doctrine. The one who primarily wrote the Systematic Theology Project later wrote, "My only goal in coordinating the project was to bring doctrinal consistency, stability and unity to the ministry" — that is, unity in watered-down doctrines that older loyal ministers did not and *never would accept!* That was not unity it was *DIVISION!*

### But What Do We Mean — 'LIBERAL'?

Let's understand what defines a liberal and God's Word about it.

What is the basic *difference* between Old Testament teaching and

that of the New Testament? The same BASIC SPIRITUAL LAW was given to both Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. But there was still a great difference. Notice how the apostle Paul defined this difference.

"[God] Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (II Corinthians 3:6).

It's the same basic SPIRITUAL law. But without the Holy Spirit, the people of Old Testament Israel could keep the law of God only by the strict *letter* of the law not by the SPIRIT or its obvious *intent* or *principle* involved.

Years ago God showed me, by an incident, what He means by the *spirit* of the law. My elder daughter, Beverly, was in school, possibly the seventh or eighth grade or high school — I don't remember the year. She was an avid and a rapid reader. One day her teacher sent me a note, saying Beverly was injuring her eyes and her progress in schoolwork by excessive reading. She had been bringing books of fiction — love stories — from the school library. She would read a whole book in two or three evenings at home. I spoke with my daughter and told her she must stop bringing the fiction books from the school library and stop her excessive reading — because her teacher had sent me a note saying it was interfering with her schoolwork.

The very next evening I noticed Beverly reading a book, and she was almost halfway through it.

"Is that another fiction book?" I asked.

"Yes, Daddy," she replied.

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“Didn’t I tell you to stop reading these fiction books?”

“Yes, Daddy, but you said to stop bringing the books from the school library, and I obeyed you. I didn’t bring the book from the school library, I borrowed it from Helen.”

She obeyed the strict letter of the law, but certainly not the spirit or obvious intent.

Jesus gave some examples of the spirit of the law, He said: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill...But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...” (Matthew 5:21-22).

Speaking of the Old Testament observance of the law, Jesus said: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

## The SPIRIT Of The Law

The spiritual law of God is a general principle, which, in its spirit, covers EVERY act. God intends for us today to apply the principle to every act. It is summed up in Ecclesiastes 12:13: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

The law of God is a way or LIFE. It is all-encompassing, in PRINCIPLE — that is, according to its spirit. It is an *attitude*.

It may be summed up in ONE word: LOVE. That one word is a *principle* of life. It is the way of OUTFLOWING love toward God and man. It is the way of GIVE, instead of GET.

It is then magnified into the two great laws — love toward GOD and love toward neighbor. In turn this is magnified into 10 general principles — the first four of the Ten Commandments express the principle of love toward God, the last six the principle of love toward man.

We are commanded to love God *more* than self — with all our hearts. We are told to love neighbor as, or equal to, ourselves.

## A Principle — Not Every Specific Detail

In the Bible *God does not write down every specific detail of the PRINCIPLE or SPIRIT of His Law!* He expects us, with His Holy Spirit, to *apply* the principle to every circumstance, act or question.

The whole duty of man is keeping God’s law IN THE SPIRIT — far more than the specific detailed letter. It is the *ATTITUDE* or the *principle* of the law. The law does not list every detail included in the duty of man.

Reduced to its simplest overall denominator, the whole law is the one word, LOVE.

How does God’s Church receive its doctrines, beliefs and teachings? Direct from God, through the channels of Jesus Christ as Head of the Church, and from Him through the *apostles!* NEVER by any others! NEVER by a group of ministers appointing themselves as a Doctrinal Committee! So it was in the first century.

How did the Worldwide Church of God receive its doctrines, beliefs and teachings? EXCLUSIVELY

THROUGH CHRIST’S APOSTLE! True, I have practiced the biblical principle that “in multitude of counsel there is safety.” On many occasions some top-level ministers have contributed certain input that has helped me in setting doctrine. BUT

EVERY DOCTRINE, BELIEF AND TEACHING IN THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD HAS COME FROM CHRIST *THROUGH HIS CHOSEN APOSTLE!*

Now, for example, we have a teaching that smoking is a sin. How did the Church receive that belief? Let me tell you. Fifty-two years ago, at the time of my conversion and baptism, I had to decide that question. I had been smoking — believe it or not! But only lightly about three cigarettes a day. But I had to decide whether it was right or wrong.

Now Adam and Eve took TO THEMSELVES the knowledge of right and wrong. Only God can give us that knowledge. I knew that. I had to decide at the time, for myself, but I knew I must look to Christ, the Word of God, for the answer. Of course I knew the Bible contained no teaching *specifically* on smoking tobacco. But I had learned the truth of II Corinthians 3:3 that sin is violation of the *principle* or intended *meaning* of the law.

So I asked myself: “Why do I smoke? To love or honor God?” Answer, No! “To express love, or outgoing concern, for the welfare of other people?” Again, No! I knew that some found second-hand tobacco smoke objectionable. “For my own good — health or otherwise” Again, No!

For although I did not know, or anybody else 52 years ago, that smoking was a cause of lung cancer, I did know the function of the lungs is filtering out impurities from the blood and expelling the impurities through the breath. And I knew that inhaling smoke only clogged up the lungs with added impurities and interfered with their normal functioning. On every count I found smoking was CONTRARY to the PRINCIPLE of God’s LAW! Therefore I knew it was

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a sin, and I stopped smoking and have not smoked for 52 years. Jesus Christ through me put into God's Church the teaching that smoking is wrong — mild or not, nevertheless, it is SIN!

Now if I had decided that as some of our ministers wanted to decide doctrine, I would have said, "The Bible does not contain a specific LAW against smoking." That is the way of the LIBERAL — who wants to water down the truth of God and go as far into this world which means as far in Satan's way — as possible and still get into God's Kingdom.

The liberal is one who has a DIFFERENT APPROACH to questions of human conduct than God, or those who have been CONQUERED by God and are being led by God's Holy Spirit.

## What Is God's Attitude?

What is God's Attitude? Does God really *want* to sin, but, because He has power of resistance, He uses willpower and does not ALLOW Himself to sin? Can you realize that sin is absolutely ABHORRENT to God? GOD DOES NOT WANT TO SIN! He has no such desire! He HATES sin! He is not tempted to sin!

God loves and *desires* righteousness and holiness. That's what He loves, desires and does!

Listen, my children in *the* living Christ! Do you really WANT to smoke - *want* to have birthday parties *want* to go along with this world in its ways? Is *that* what you *really* want to do? Do you have to use self-resistance, self-discipline and willpower to prevent going along in this world's ways?

If so, you have not yet been really conquered by the all-loving God. *If* so, you do not yet have the mind of Christ or His attitude or approach to problems or questions! If so, you'd

better begin *TREMBLING* at the Word of God!

Or, do you really *hunger and thirst* for God's righteousness and holiness? You can't have both attitudes! You have one or the other! Which is it?

Are you like Mrs. Emma Smith, one of the new converts in 1933 who formed the parent church of the Worldwide Church of God? She came to me one day saying her father had died and his will left her some money.

"How much of this do I *have to* tithe?" she asked. "I don't want to tithe any more than I *have to* to still get in God's Kingdom."

## The Doctrine Of Balaam

She was, in principle and attitude, like Balaam, mentioned as an evil man in Jude 11 and Revelation 2:14, The story about Balaam is found in Numbers 22. Balaam was a liberal — only perhaps more so. The Israelites under Moses had finally encamped on the east side of the Jordan River in the vicinity of Moab and Ammon, They were just across the river from Jericho.

Balak, king of the Moabites, was afraid, for the Israelites greatly outnumbered Moab. So he sent messengers to the sorcerer Balaam, a pater or pagan leader, apparently with bribe money, asking Balaam to remain overnight. He prayed to God, for he knew he could not do this evil unless God allowed.

The point is, Balaam wanted the rewards of divination, which the messengers from Moab had brought. He wanted to go as far in the GET way of life, even for doing evil, as he could. But he knew his curse against Israel would be ineffective unless he had God's permission.

God said to Balaam, "...Thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed" (Numbers 22:12).

There is much more to the story, but the point I want to show here is the ATTITUDE of wanting to go as far in the way of evil as possible.

In Jude 11, God says, "Woe unto them! for they...ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward..." And in Revelation to the church at Pergamos, Jesus said, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam..." (Revelation 2:14).

Christ is now purging out of His Church those that "hold the doctrine of Balaam!" Balaam was a liberal.

The liberal is going also in the way of Satan.

## Satan's Evil Attitude

"...there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Eternal, and Satan came also among them..." The Eternal asked Satan if he had considered God's servant Job, "...that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man..." (Job 1:6-8).

Satan argued that Job served God in SELF-interest, for God had given him all his material wealth. But if God would allow Satan to take all his possessions from him, Satan said Job would curse God.

The Eternal answered, "...Behold, all that he hath is in thy power: only upon himself put not forth thine hand" (verse 12).

Satan destroyed all Job's wealth and even his sons and daughters. But Satan caused other humans to do his evil. Yet Job maintained his own righteousness and refused to curse God.

Satan tried again. Satan argued that a man would give all he had for his own life. But he contended that if God would allow him to do evil to Job's person, Job would curse God. God allowed this, but said, "save his life."

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Did you ever have a boil? I did — just once, many, many years ago. I shall never forget it. The pain was nearly unbearable. And that was only *one* boil. Job was covered with boils from head to foot! But still he did not curse God. In the end God spoke to Job. Job's one great sin was one Satan could not ascertain. It was SELF-righteousness. When God spoke, opening Job's eyes to his self-righteousness, Job repented deeply, and God restored to him two-fold for all He had allowed Satan to destroy.

The point I want to make here is, Satan CANNOT go farther than God allows — but Satan *wanted* to inflict as much evil and destruction and harm as possible.

It is Satan's ATTITUDE that is his prime evil. He does not hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, He harbors only the deep-rooted desire to do EVIL — TO GO CONTRARY TO GOD'S LAW OF LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. He wanted to go *as far as he could* in the evil way contrary to GOD'S WAY. That was in his heart.

## The Liberal Attitude

The liberal among us today wants to GET! He wants to get into God's Kingdom, but he *wants to* go along with this world's ways as far as God will allow and still let him make it into the Kingdom!

The liberal has deceived himself! I do not believe the liberal realizes his

own attitude. He really wants to get into the Kingdom of God — he wants to RECEIVE the eternal rewards of happiness, joy and eternal life in security. But he still would like to hang on to some of this world's ways.

He doesn't want to tithe, unless he can see beyond any of his arguments there is a specific LAW *compelling* him to tithe. He wants to be free to vote, at least in local elections.

The argument was made to me that our Church people actually outnumbered others living in Big Sandy, Texas, but (what a big word "but" is) you see, if they did not vote, the minority would vote to incorporate the Ambassador College campus into the town of Big Sandy, and we'd have to pay big taxes. It never seemed to occur to the liberal mind that Christ will solve our problems, and we do not have to go contrary to His Attitude!

Like Mrs. Emma Smith, who was too new as a child in Christ and had not grown sufficiently as yet in His grace and knowledge — like Balaam — like Satan — the liberal wants to see how close he can come to the precipice without falling and losing his eternal life. Like Mother Eve, they use HUMAN REASON to justify straying partly away from the SPIRIT of God's Law. They want to keep the law in the strict letter, *but not in the spirit!*

In his heart, the liberal would like to "go along" at least part way with this world.

## What Is The Mind Of Christ?

But God says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

What is the mind of Christ? What is His attitude — His approach to viewing and deciding all activities? Does He, as I asked before, really WANT TO sin, to think and act contrary to His law, but because of His super power, restrain Himself? We know He has never sinned. But *why?* Is He sinless because He has such supernatural power to restrain Himself?

A THOUSAND TIMES, *NO!* The living Christ has never sinned because He does not *want so* sin! What is HIS MIND, that should be also in us? It is a mind that HATES sin, that loves righteousness. It's a matter of ATTITUDE! The liberal is not hungering and thirsting after righteousness! He wants to ease off a little on God's law. He wants to do only as much as he *has to*, to receive the reward of eternal life. He has not yet *fully* gotten rid of the GET attitude, and come into the GIVE attitude.

It is Satan who deceives and puts into many human minds the *desire* to go as far into this world as he thinks God will allow and into its ways of VANITY and INTELLECTUALISM (carnal, secular) — vanity of mind.

Having the ATTITUDE of the "SPIRIT OF THE LAW" is the attitude of the mind of Christ!