

(Christian History) 17. Christianity in a More Modern World

by David Guzik

David Guzik explores the philosophical and historical shifts in Christianity from 1650 to the present, highlighting the challenges posed by modernity and secularism.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Isaiah 1:1, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 14:13-21, John 5:19, John 14:27, Acts 2:43

Topics: "Miracles", "Postmodernism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of miracles and the supernatural in relation to the feeding of the 5,000. He criticizes the anti-supernaturalist perspective of Bible commentator William Barkley, who explains away miracles as acts of sharing. The speaker emphasizes the importance of connecting with eternity rather than trying to conform to cultural beliefs. Additionally, the speaker briefly mentions the idea of postmodernism and its impact on historical interpretation.

Transcript

Our next lecture will be on the modern missionary movement. This lecture is going to be more on the intellectual and philosophical developments and changes in the modern world leading up to the 20th century. I really debated whether or not we should talk about the modern missionary movement first or this subject first.

At the end of it all, I don't really know that it matters all that much. But here, we want to approach this subject here of the idea of Christianity in a more modern world. And basically, we're taking the idea of it being from the year about 1650 to the present.

Of course, as with all the dates that we've laid down in sort of blocking off different periods of time, the dates are somewhat approximate. They're not really exact. But what I'm taking this from is basically, if you wanted to get really technical, I'd say 1648, the end of the Thirty Years' War, and point more to the time when those fundamental religious war questions were settled in the Western world, in Europe.

But sort of even more fundamentally, a lot of people were soured on the idea of religion and faith, not only from the terror of the Thirty Years' War, but also just from the return to classicism and the emphasis of humanism coming out of the Renaissance. So basically, we're going to talk about several post-Reformation philosophical challenges to Christianity, beginning with the Enlightenment. The

Enlightenment movement was seen primarily, or particularly, in a very clear-cut form in 18th century Germany.

Karl Barth described it as a system founded on the presupposition of faith in the omnipotence of human ability. In other words, what the Enlightenment stressed was that man can figure it out. There are no real mysteries in the world.

Man can conquer them. Man can conquer nature, man can conquer theology, man can conquer technology. It was a great confidence in human ability.

It was defined perhaps best, or at least to begin with, by Immanuel Kant in his book Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Only. This is what he wrote in the book. He said, Enlightenment represents man's emergence from a self-inflicted state of minority.

He means it in the sense of childhood. So mankind has inflicted upon themselves this idea of childhood. The Enlightenment is an escape from that.

He says, a minor is one who is incapable of making use of his understanding without guidance from somebody else. Have the courage to make use of your own understanding is therefore the watchword of the Enlightenment. Again, based on this fundamental trust in human reason, in the human ability to analyze and figure things out, the Enlightenment rejected both supernatural revelation, right? Because no longer is it good enough to just say, well, you know, how come that mountain is up there? You can't just say, well, God made it.

No, and the Enlightenment says, no, by human reason, we can figure it out why. We can figure out the geological forces that led to all this, and we can analyze this. No longer do we just have to say, well, God did it and figure it out that way.

No, the Enlightenment rejected both supernatural revelation and man's sinfulness. It did not necessarily reject God, but the idea that there was God who was an all-wise creator who had put into man a natural religion, and this natural religion taught both morality and immorality. Now, from the rise of Christianity all the way through the post-Reformation era, the basic questions remain the same, and I want you to think about that.

From the time of the apostles to the time of what some people call modernity--let's just chart it up at the end of the Thirty Years' War, about 1650--from that period of time, and of course I'm being very approximate, but just let's say again, from that period of time, mankind basically asked the same questions. The questions were, how can man be right with God? How can I get to heaven? How can I draw closer to God? Now, there was disagreement about the answers, right? People disagreed on the answers, but there was fundamental agreement regarding the questions. Beginning in the 1700s, basic challenges emerged which changed the very questions people were asking about God and Christianity.

You know, in the medieval mind they were concerned with the question, how can I be right with God? But in the Enlightenment, the shift moved, removing God from the center and putting more man in the center. You see, since the Enlightenment and the rise of modern thinking, people don't ask, how can I be right with God? The more typical question people ask is, how can I be happy? How can I be a better person? How can I find fulfillment in life? Now, it's very interesting to me that when Christians live to ask and to answer these kind of questions, they find themselves in a losing battle. But part of our job as Christian sort

of messengers to the world is not only to answer the questions that the world has, but to give to them questions that they weren't thinking about.

But many Christians order their own Christian life that way. Many Christians give themselves to be followers of Jesus Christ simply for the reason that they believe, He will make me happy. He will fulfill my life.

I want to have a happy life and Jesus is the best way, so therefore I'll do it. Do you see, you're still asking those fundamentally man-centered, Enlightenment, reason-based questions instead of saying, well, how can I be right with God and how can I glorify Him? C.S. Lewis said this, he said, I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew that a bottle of wine could do that.

If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity. That's what C.S. Lewis said and it's true. Now, this fundamental shift, this fundamental change from sort of a God-centered philosophy to a man-centered philosophy, this is what's important for us to understand, is it wasn't all bad.

So much of modern education and thinking and technological advance and science and all the rest of it is really rooted in this basis of saying, mankind getting a new flush of enthusiasm to say, we can figure it out. We can research these things. We don't have to look at a disease in a person and just say, oh, the devil did it.

No, now the scientist says, I want to figure out how it happens. And you know what a scientist does? He figures out a cure. But along the way, something can get lost.

Something can get lost with the idea is that sometimes there is no better explanation than that the devil did it. And so actually, we don't want to be those who completely reject the ideas of the Enlightenment, but neither can we completely embrace them. One historian I listened to, he called the Enlightenment the endarklement.

You got to admit here, though, that the Enlightenment, just naming it that, is a loaded term. Everybody was in darkness before, and now we bring to the world light. Well, that's certainly a biased way of speaking, isn't it? And in some ways, it did bring light to the world, but in other ways, it only brought darkness.

Because in spite of the many contributions that the Enlightenment made to culture, to science, and to industry, it was crass naturalism, essentially denying God and essentially denying his saving revelation. One way to analyze the Enlightenment is to say that it was a way for man to gain the whole world and lose his soul. Well, sort of an outgrowth of Enlightenment thinking was the rising confidence in what we might call science, but not just science, but scientism.

You see, when I say scientism, I'm referring to the emerging, not only of the scientific method, but the idea that the intelligent person is skeptical about everything, and that the person should believe nothing except what can be proved in a laboratory. That's scientism. I won't believe it unless it can be proved in a laboratory.

I am going to be skeptical about everything. At its root, scientism denies God. I mean, look, you can't explain things away with God, and you certainly can't prove God's existence in a laboratory.

You can certainly prove him with philosophy. You can certainly prove him with theology. And of course, you can also prove him with the appeal to natural revelation and to specific revelation, the Word of God.

But you see, this rising confidence in scientism, as I call it, was a real outgrowth of this Enlightenment sort of thinking. Now, this thinking started to be applied to Christianity as well, and it developed into a phenomenon that's known as form criticism. Form criticism is an analysis method of literature that seeks to take a piece, usually of ancient literature, and look for patterns, look for structure within that ancient piece of literature, to maybe give some clues as to how the literature came together, who authored it, and all the rest.

Well, this idea of form criticism, this literary study, was used by German theologians to advance the idea that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, came from several different sources that each began as oral traditions, and they were eventually written down and then drawn together by a later editor. This is commonly called the J-E-D-P theory, or the documentary hypothesis. The idea is that J represents the Jehovah source, E represents the Elohim source, D represents the Deuteronomic source, and P represents the priestly source.

And the idea here was, as these people examined the Old Testament, specifically the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, they said, well look, sometimes they use the word Jehovah to refer to God, and sometimes they use the word Elohim to refer to God. That's probably the work of two different authors that was mixed together. And then some things really seem to emphasize priestly customs and traditions and ceremonies.

That must come from another source. And then there's another source, the Deuteronomic source, that of course would be responsible for most of Deuteronomy. Now, you get this idea.

The idea here is that we can figure out the human formation of the Word of God, and therefore it's just a collection of human legends. It no longer has to be regarded as indeed the Word of God. And so this sort of thing was extremely persuasive to many, many--it was widely taught.

Listen, I'm no expert, but as far as I know, it still is widely taught in many colleges and seminaries, as this is the way that the Pentateuch came together. Actually, there's tremendous, tremendous scholarly difficulties with this theory that I won't go into at the present time. I obviously don't believe it.

I obviously believe that Moses, perhaps drawing on some previous written records--I think the Book of Genesis gives us some reason to believe that Moses drew on previously established written records. But drawing on both written records and his own personal eyewitness experience, Moses wrote the first five books of the Pentateuch, inspired by God. But you see, this sort of thing really helped people to have the idea that there was a natural explanation for the development of the Bible, and that it was not a supernatural book.

Now, another factor in the rise of scientism was the emergence of technology and the evaporating sense of dependence upon God. I mean, listen, as mankind becomes more technologically advanced and more able to influence and to control his environment, he becomes less and less sensitive to his own dependence on God. Now, I'm not saying he becomes less dependent on God, but I'm saying he becomes less and less aware of his dependence upon God.

Who is more likely to be a man of prayer, a fisherman in a sailboat or a fisherman in a motorboat? You know, the fisherman in the sailboat, he has to pray that God will send the wind so that he can go out and do the fishing that he needs to do. The fisherman in the motorboat, listen, all he needs to do is, you know, pull the cord and he motors to wherever he wants. Rises in modern technology made man feel less dependent upon God.

And you have to say, this is a challenge for many people today. I don't know how many of you know the writer, the Bible commentator, William Barclay. William Barclay has a collection of commentaries throughout the New Testament.

It's called the Daily Study Bible. And overall, I would regard it as a pretty good set of commentaries. He has especially really wonderful insight into some of the nuances of Greek words.

And then in addition to that, some great insight into ancient history and how it connects with biblical writings and biblical history. Nevertheless, there's something that's absolutely infuriating about William Barclay. It's that basically he's an anti supernaturalist.

And what I mean by that is he doesn't believe in miracles. He believes that it completely discredits Christians to believe in the supernatural, right? I mean, what are we, a bunch of headhunters, you know, dancing around a pot or something, worshiping some idol? The idea that miracles exist, that the supernatural is out there, it's just nonsense. And therefore, William Barclay in his commentaries has a very maddening habit.

Whenever he comes to a miracle in the Gospels or in the book of Acts, he explains it away. For example, here is the feeding of the 5,000, right? There's Jesus miraculously dividing the loaves of the fishes and feeding the multitude. William Barclay says, oh, indeed, that was a miracle.

But actually what it was, was it was a miracle of sharing. Because if that one little boy went out and shared his lunch, he brought his little lunch to Jesus and said, I'm willing to share it with the whole group. Then actually what happened was everybody in that group of thousands of people who had actually brought their own food but didn't want to bring it out and eat it, because then they would have to give it to their neighbor.

When they saw the example of that little boy, they opened up and shared the food that they had actually brought. And it was indeed a miracle, but it would be best to understand it as a miracle of sharing. You see sort of that anti-supernaturalist bias.

It says, now, you can't blame the Bible for this, because the Bible was written in this supernaturalist age, right? The Bible was written at a time when everybody thought like that, but we've advanced beyond that. We know that you can't believe things unless you can prove them in a laboratory. You can't believe things unless it's been proven by the scientific method.

We should be skeptical about everything, and so we're not going to take these stories of miracles of the Gospels to be true. So all of this moved along and contributed as well to an increasing rise of secularism. Now, what is secularism? Secularism is a term invented to indicate a way of life which leaves out the consideration of God, of heaven, of revelation, and of hell, but rather it bases morality on what will benefit the public good.

The term and the thinking associated with secularism increasingly became associated with atheism, and it became associated with the idea that religion should not be taught in public schools. Secularism is really the idea that society doesn't need God or religion. Secularism doesn't necessarily say that there is no God.

It just says that God should be ignored by society. That's basically the idea, and this was manifested, of course, in the 20th century in communism. You could say it's also manifested in Western materialism, and communism and Western materialism became the dominant ideas in the 20th century.

Now, actually, again, we approach these things, and I don't think that the word secular is necessarily bad. Now, of course, any believing Christian should be opposed to secularism. We're not opposed to science.

We are opposed to scientism. We're not opposed to the concept of the secular. We are opposed to secularism, and I would say there's an appropriate place for the secular, and in my personal opinion, you may disagree with me with this, and there's probably many good and godly and smarter-than-me people who do disagree with me, but I believe that it's been a benefit to the Western world to have a secular government, to have government, as it has been practiced in the United States, that favors no one particular religion, right? The government is not Islamist.

The government is not Jewish. The government is not Christian after any one particular denomination or sect, but just in a general sense, the government lets religion do whatever it wants, and the government says, we will be religiously neutral. I think the ideal combination for society, sort of getting off on a little trail here, but I think the ideal combination for society is to have a secular government and a very religious people.

I think when you have that combination, which really has been the great history of the United States, that has been one of the remarkable things about the United States and its history, noted by foreign observers for a long time before, that it is basically a secular government. Now, secular doesn't necessarily mean hostile to God, doesn't mean anti-God. In this sense, it just means it shouldn't be carrying the banner of any particular denomination or religion.

But to have a secular government, but a thoroughly religious people, that has basically been the pattern for the United States throughout its history. Well, so again, we look at some of these trends, we look at some of these developments, because if you want to say, if you want to go 180 degrees from secular government, what do you have? Well, you have the church-state combinations that dominated in the medieval world. And of course, that was a very dangerous combination, just ask the Anabaptist movement.

So, another trend in this whole stream is the rise of modernism and theological liberalism. Now, used more loosely, modernism has been used as sort of a derogatory term to characterize the varieties of philosophy and theology after Immanuel Kant. These are the things that have become so popular in Protestant churches during the last century, during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century especially.

These ideas of modernism have sort of completely adopted an attitude of higher criticism towards the scripture and towards the very idea of revelation as providing men with the knowledge of God. Therefore, modernism and theological liberalism, it no longer embraces the historic Christian faith. It no longer embraces creation and the fall and the gracious redemption that God has brought to us through Jesus

Christ.

Now, in its place, successive attempts have been made to reconstruct the Christian faith largely along ethical lines. I don't know if I can explain to you this way. It's generally the attitude that we shouldn't look at Jesus so much as being the one who died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

No, instead, Jesus is the great moral example. Theological liberalism looks at the idea of a substitutionary atonement by Jesus for us on the cross. They look at that and they think of it like a primitive aboriginal ritual, right? What is this? Is this some divine form of child sacrifice, you know, as might be practiced by some obscure tribe in the depths of Africa? This blood religion is so unsophisticated, it belongs to the primitive world, not to the modern world.

In the modern world, we've progressed beyond that. And therefore, the theological liberal would first of all say, well, look, whether or not Jesus really died on the cross isn't important. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't.

But think about what it means, what the picture of it is. There he is, the supreme example of self-sacrifice. That's what you should take from the cross.

And really, nothing more in that sense. So this idea of transforming Jesus from actually being a savior who saves us by his work on the cross, bloody as it is, to being someone who actually is only a moral example for the world is a huge change in theological liberalism. And you got to say, in some respects, you know, this tendency is still with us.

There are two errors we can make along these lines. The one error is to say that Jesus is not a moral example. He is.

And the Bible presents him to us that way. The Bible does present to us Jesus as the idea of someone that we should follow in our life's conduct and that we should follow his moral example. So the one error is to say, well, Jesus isn't a moral example.

But the other error is to say that that's all Jesus is. And you know, sometimes well-meaning people emphasize that. One recent phenomenon of it, and I don't mean to be overly critical of it because I think it only deserves criticism if it's understood in the wrong way, would be that whole movement, what would Jesus do? Right? Now, the whole idea of what would Jesus do, what does that say? That says, make Jesus your moral example.

That's what you're supposed to do. Make Jesus your moral example. Now, that's okay, as long as it's understood properly that it is not the moral example of Jesus that saves us.

You could endeavor to live your life after the moral example of Jesus and still go to hell because you believe that you want to pay for your own sins by your own good works or your own efforts. You see the difference between the two? Now, as a result of this, modernism and theological liberalism were largely positive about human nature and human potential, right? I mean, because if basically the whole goal of Christianity is to improve the moral and ethical standing of man, you're basically going to have a positive attitude towards that. And in the late 19th century, the rise of theological liberalism brought forth generation after generation of Christian pastors, leaders, and theologians who denied many of the fundamentals of biblical Christianity.

Listen, theological liberalism, modernism, it was a broad movement, right? And at its root, it really believed that Christianity had to reevaluate all of its doctrines in light of modern science, modern philosophy, and modern thinking. It rejected the idea that a doctrine was true just because the Bible taught it. It said it also has to be proved true by reason and experience.

They believed that the Bible was not an inspired message from a real God, but that it was the work of men who were inspired in the way you might say Shakespeare was inspired, but certainly they weren't inspired by God. The Bible was not inspired to them. It was not supernatural to them.

The importance of the Bible and its message was not in its literal and historical truth, but rather in its changing spiritual message. You know, in this period, we must say that Germany took the lead in theological liberalism, and German philosophers and theologians had a profound impact on British and American Christians. Men like Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the Tübingen School of Theology, and Adolf Harnack all had a tremendous influence.

Let's begin taking a look at some of those. First of all, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher wrote in the year 1799 a famous work titled Religion, Speeches to its Cultured Despisers.

Most people regard this as sort of being the debut of liberal theology, because basically this is what he said. He said that the essence of religion is not doctrine, it's not theology, but it's feeling. True religion, I'm quoting him here, true religion is sense and taste for the infinite, right? The infinite is out there, the unknowable beyond, the sense that you have for that, the taste that you have for that, that's what religion is.

Sometimes Schleiermacher and his theology is regarded as a theological expression of romanticism. You see, he intended it to be an apology for Christianity in a post-enlightenment world. You see, his idea is, I don't know if I can explain it to you this way.

In Schleiermacher's context, most cultured and educated people believed that religion was absolutely irrelevant. The Enlightenment had already dominated the thinking of many people, and they felt there was no more need for God, religion was irrelevant. Now, Schleiermacher thought that what he would do is, without going against kind of these fundamental Enlightenment principles, he would say, no, you still need religion, because you still need a sense and taste for the infinite, therefore your life without religion is incomplete.

You see, he didn't just say that religion was more than knowledge and action, but he said that it was distinct from knowledge and action. He said ideas and principles are foreign to religion. If ideas and principles are to be anything, they must belong to a knowledge which is a different department of life from religion.

And so basically, Schleiermacher's attitude was that Christianity, and all of religion for that matter, is a feeling of complete dependence upon God and really not much more. Schleiermacher wanted to defend Christianity against the threat of the Enlightenment, but he did it with the thinking of the Enlightenment. And so he defended Christianity by appealing to man-based feelings for God and spirituality, not on biblical revelation or historical events.

You see, Schleiermacher could say, be a Christian, believe in God, and you would say, well why, because it's true? And he goes, no, it's not true, we can't know if it's true, right? It's supernatural knowledge, it can't

be proved in a library, in a laboratory, or anything like that. You say, no, no, no, you should believe in God because it will do you good to believe in God. It will be good for your inner man to believe in God.

And so he was an important founder in this movement of theological liberalism. Now again, I want you to just notice something. I believe, to the best of my ability, please, you can tell by the way I'm talking about him that I'm no expert on Schleiermacher.

But at the same time, I think it's important for us to understand that it seems that his intentions were good, right? I want to defend Christianity against the Enlightenment, but when he used the thinking and the language of the Enlightenment to do it, he basically fell into their trap. And this is a problem that's been repeated constantly throughout church history. Another notable person we want to look at is a man named Adolf von Harnack.

Von Harnack was the son of a Lutheran scholar and a university professor. He taught at Leipzig, at Gießen, and at Marburg, and at Berlin. His last appointment was challenged by church leaders because he doubted the traditional authorship of several New Testament books.

In the year 1899, he taught a series of lectures titled, *What is Christianity?* And in these lectures, he very plainly spelled out his beliefs. He said that Jesus was a man who had rest and peace for his soul and was able to give life and strength to others by his inspiring example. The gospel he preached was not about himself, but about his father.

His gospel is about the kingdom of God, the fatherhood of God, the infinite value of the human soul, the higher righteousness, and the command to love. Now, here's something you need to know about Adolf von Harnack, is even though those ideas, that sort of reductionism of Christianity, making it just a moral creed that follows Jesus's ethical example, one of the things that made that belief so dangerous in a man like Adolf von Harnack is he was brilliant. He was really an accomplished scholar.

And it was very, very difficult for Christians in these days, because all the best schools, all the best seminaries and universities thought in this theologically liberal way, yet nevertheless, if you were a Christian and said, well, I want to get a really good education, in those days at least, you had to submit yourself to this theological, well, error. Von Harnack introduced the idea that historically, the truth of the Christianity is different from what you see in the New Testament. In other words, did Jesus rise from the dead? And they would say, well, no, it's impossible to say historically that Jesus rose from the dead.

This would be what somebody like von Harnack or other theological liberal would say. But they would say, that's not important. It's not important whether or not Jesus rose from the dead historically.

What's important is, is he risen in your heart? Now, as more Orthodox and Bible-believing Christians, we would say, well, the question of whether or not the risen Jesus lives in your heart indeed is important, but it's only relevant if he actually rose from the dead. And so that's the aspect we would emphasize. He made this distinction between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the Gospels.

In other words, he tried to make the case that the Jesus of the Gospels was not the real Jesus of history. It would be as if there was a noble man who lived his life and did some good deeds and taught some good truths, and some people wrote some things about him. And over the years, as people wrote more and more about him, they kept adding legends.

They kept adding fanciful stories upon it. You know how fanciful stories go about the world today, these urban legends that go about. They're not true, but they get passed on as if they were true.

Well, that's basically what Adolf von Harnack and the other theological liberals thought, was that the Bible is not true or accurate historically, but they would say it doesn't really matter. Now, liberalism grew and influenced society and the church all up until the present day. It offered a stream of Christianity, which I would say is not really Christianity at all.

Now, there was somebody who came along to counter these ideas, another brilliant scholar who was a conservative man himself, J. Gresham Machen. His book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, exposed this decades ago. He made a very clear distinction.

I just want you to think about the title of that book, *Christianity and Liberalism*. Do you see what he's doing? He's saying that the two of them are not the same thing, right? There's a distinction. One's one thing, the other is the other thing.

This is what he said in the preface to his book. He said, the purpose of this book is not to decide the religious issue of the present day, but merely to present the issue as sharply and as clearly as possible in order that the reader may be aided in deciding it for himself. In the sphere of religion in particular, the present time is a time of conflict.

The great redemptive religion, which has always been known as Christianity, is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only all the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. The modern non-redemptive religion is called modernism or liberalism. The outstanding feature of the recent history is an enormous widening of human knowledge, which has gone hand in hand with such perfecting of the instrument of investigation that hardly any limits can be assigned in the future in the progress of the material realm.

He says all these advances have helped us a great deal materially, but not spiritually. And J. Gresham Machen, his book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, was a brilliant defense. Now, modern liberalism, theologically, has actually had very little popular influence.

When you talk to most people, most people who would call themselves Christians, they do not hold fundamentally theologically liberal ideas. I mean, look, the main line churches that essentially bought into theological liberalism, they're empty. That doesn't strike accord with people because there's nothing there.

There's no substance. Preaching Jesus as a moral example can't impact people's lives the way that preaching the true gospel can. And so theological liberalism has had little impact on popular culture, but it continues to have significant influence in academia and especially significant influence in the media.

Theological ideas have been emphasized from this. Basic ideas that would be emphasized by theological liberalism would be the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, social action and social justice, a denial of the deity of Jesus Christ, a denial of the Trinity, a denial of the inerrant scriptures, a denial of the fall of man, a denial of the wrath of God, a denial of salvation only through the atoning blood of the cross. You can see what kind of attitude that they had over and over again.

Moving on now to some of more of the responses to the rise of theological liberalism, I listed one of them there, this great man Jake Gratiem Metcham, but there were some other ones, and the three ones that we want to highlight are basically fundamentalism, neo-orthodoxy, and evangelicalism. Each one of these can

be seen as responses to the rise of theological liberalism. The fundamentals were actually a series of 12 small books published from 1910 to 1915, containing articles and essays designed to defend the fundamental Christian truth.

Three million copies of the books were sent free to every theological student and every Christian worker for whom they could get an address. The project was funded by a man named Lyman Stewart, who was a wealthy California oilman. So at this guy's expense, he sent out these books to every pastor and every theological student that they possibly could in the United States.

And so here's a few examples of the subjects of the fundamentals. They talked about the history of higher criticism, the Mosaic author of the Pentateuch, the fallacies of higher criticism, the Bible in modern criticism, Christ in criticism, One Isaiah. A popular theory among theological liberals is that there are actually two authors for the book of Isaiah, or some people say even three.

Next, the testimony of the monuments to the truth of the scriptures, the recent testimony of archaeology to the scriptures, science, and the Christian faith. Now, the term fundamentalism came from these series of books that was basically titled The Fundamentals. But fundamentalism came to be used loosely for all theological conservatism, as opposed to theological liberalism.

Because fundamentalism came to be associated with legalism, it came to be associated with anti-intellectualism, and it also came to be associated with a self-imposed cultural isolation. The term came to be avoided. There's not many people today who go around calling themselves fundamentalists, although there definitely are, and I don't think it's a term to be ashamed of, but it has sort of been criticized a lot.

Therefore, a lot of people would instead call themselves evangelicals. The evangelical movement began in the 20th century. It was used to describe an international movement which was committed to the historical Protestant understanding of the gospel.

It distinguished itself from Protestant theological liberals, from Roman Catholics, and then also groups regarded as cults and sects, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. Some denominations were mostly evangelical, but many of them had an evangelical group and a liberal or a modernist group. For example, this would be the story of--and I'll just take one example--the Methodist Church.

The Methodist Church in the 1700s, man, these guys were radical preachers of the gospel and just wholehearted, you know, furthering the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it was that way even up until the 20th century. But sometime in the first few decades of the 20th century, the influence of theological liberalism really started making itself known among the Methodists, and there developed two basic camps within the Methodist Church.

There developed sort of the liberal camp and the evangelical camp. But you see, as it went on, there were more and more struggles for control of these denominations between a liberal group and an evangelical group. Now, another aspect of this would be the rise of what's known as neo-orthodoxy.

The strength of modernism began to decline with the aftermath of the First World War, and Karl Barth and the rise of biblical theology movement with its more constructive idea to the biblical text was a factor then. Neo-orthodox was essentially a reaction--neo-orthodoxy was essentially a reaction to the excesses of liberalism. It didn't want to leave some of the basic ideas of liberalism, but it felt that it had gone too far.

Neo-orthodoxy wanted to keep the fundamental truths of the Protestant faith, but it felt that those truths needed to be restated and re-explained in light of the modern world. Therefore, it really stressed a renewed emphasis on Jesus Christ and faith in him, but without really referring to the foundations of what the Bible says about Jesus. The idea is that the important Jesus is not the Jesus of the Bible, but the Jesus that we actually experience.

Another idea of neo-orthodoxy is that the Bible is not the Word of God. Instead, it contains the Word of God. They would say that the true Word of God is revealed by the Spirit as the Bible is preached and as Jesus is present.

Of course, the great leader of neo-orthodoxy was a man named Karl Barth. He was a Swiss theologian who studied in Switzerland and in Germany under some of the great theological minds of his day who, needless to say, were all theological liberals. He wrote his important commentary on the Book of Romans in 1919 at the end of the First World War when he was the pastor of a church in a small Swiss town, again, right in the middle of the crisis and the despair of the First World War.

And so he broke with liberal theology. He saw the devastation of the First World War and he said that the tenants of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, these ideas are just too shallow to explain the world's and man's crisis. So Barth subsequently taught at the universities of Göttingen, Münster, and Bonn until he was forced out of Germany when the Nazis came to power and he returned to Switzerland where he stayed in his native Basel where he taught until his retirement all the way into 1962.

Barth is an example of a man who was basically a sold-out liberal who realized the emptiness of it all and wanted the true gospel but he didn't want to become a fundamentalist. In other words, he knew that the answers were not in theological liberalism and he looked at the fundamentalists and he said, it looks like they have the answers but I don't want to be like them. So he tried to sort of walk this strange middle ground.

So his classic commentary on Romans stressed conservative ideas about God but without the same proofs and supports of traditional Christianity. He took God, sin, and salvation seriously and he was conservative enough that a Roman Catholic theologian described Barth's work as a bomb falling on a happy playground of theologians. You know, there are the liberal theologians just all happy in their self-indulgent kind of man-centered beliefs.

Barth dropped a bomb on them with his commentary on the book of Romans. Yet it was also liberal enough to frustrate conservatives. For example, Barth thought that the resurrection of Jesus was true but that the literal historical resurrection of Jesus was unprovable and ultimately not as important as the message of his resurrection.

One man summarized the belief of Karl Barth by saying that this is what he believed. He said, and this is a caricature, it's not entirely accurate, but it gives you a feeling. Barth said, or Barth didn't say this, but people have characterized his belief this way.

There is no God and Jesus Christ is his son. You know, sort of something to the liberals but something to the conservatives too. Another historian put Barth's thinking this way.

He said, I'll agree with the smart liberals that Christianity cannot be proved and then I'll enjoy the gospel feast which the ignorant fundamentalists enjoy because they think the gospel can be proved. So that's

neo-orthodoxy in a much too short explanation. Then we come to evangelicalism.

You see, set against modern theological liberalism, evangelical Christianity is different. I really like the definition given by Martin Lloyd-Jones in his little book, *What is an Evangelical?* And he just lists off several points that would characterize an evangelical. He says an evangelical is entirely subservient to the Bible.

He's always watching. He distrusts reason and particularly reason in the form of philosophy. Now again, why would he do that? Because the Enlightenment put so much trust in reason, so much trust in man's ability to figure it out.

He has a particular view regarding the sacraments. He has a critical view of history and tradition. He's always ready to act on what he believes.

He's a man who always simplifies everything. He's always concerned about the doctrine of the church. He puts a tremendous emphasis on the new birth.

He pays great attention to the way that he lives. His interest is in revival. He always gives a primary place to preaching.

And he's always concerned about evangelism. You know, two things just to mention quickly about that, this always being concerned about evangelism and putting a tremendous emphasis on the new birth. Basically, you could describe an evangelical believer as someone who believes that people must be born again to enter the kingdom of God.

Now, you in this room, you might take that as, well, like, duh, of course you have to be born again to enter into the kingdom of God. But you need to understand that there are a lot of people in this world who call themselves Christians who do not believe that you have to be born again to be a Christian. They would say, I was born into my Christianity.

I was baptized as a baby, right? Or I believe the ethical and the moral precepts of Christianity. Jesus Christ is my great moral leader. You know, this is how they understand Christianity, not as something that looks them square in the eye and says, you must be born again.

At its root, you could say that that's a characteristic of evangelicalism. It believes that people must be born again, and therefore the gospel must be preached to people, right? That's why it's concerned with evangelism. And so this idea, I think Martin Lloyd-Jones gives a good, brief perspective on some of the ideas of evangelicalism.

Now, just in the last remaining few minutes of this lecture, I sort of want to transition from this very brief and inadequate survey of sort of theological trends since the Reformation and give a little bit of attention to 20th century Christianity. This is going to be very brief and not all that helpful, but I just want you to understand that as Christianity came into the 20th century, it came with tremendous optimism, and it had good reason to be optimistic. First of all, the 19th century, that is the 1800s, were a century of tremendous advance for the cause of Christianity.

But it was also a time of tremendous advance in the world politically, tremendous advance in the world socially, tremendous advance in the world technologically and scientifically. People had, especially Christians, had this feeling that, man, things are getting better and better, and mankind is just progressing

and progressing up on this upward thing. Isn't it wonderful? We're really going to do something in this new century, in the 20th century.

Towards the end of the 19th century, if you want to say about 1899, though I'm not trying to pick that as a specific date, Christians were optimistic. They felt, man, we're going to see God do a work in the year 1900 as the 20th century begins that we've never seen Him do before, and we're going to see the world continually to progress along its moral and ethical and social lines. They really believed that the 20th century would be called the Christian century.

Matter of fact, a magazine of that title was started, and it exists to this day. Again, it's mostly theologically liberalism in it, but it's called the Christian century, but that was sort of the idea with which it was founded. But listen, the harsh reality of World War I dealt a devastating blow to this optimistic dream.

In that war, the loss of life devastated Europe. Italy lost almost half a million men. Britain and the British Empire lost almost a million.

Austria-Hungary lost 1.2 million. France lost 1.4 million. Russia lost 1.7 million.

Germany lost 1.8 million men in the First World War. And it all seemed to be for nothing. That was the feeling, that it was just for nothing.

I mean, of course, people were happy that the war was over, but it didn't really seem to accomplish anything. This led to an incredible sense of pessimism in the world, especially in Europe. Especially so.

One might say that Americans are sort of naturally more optimistic than Europeans because they haven't lived through this crisis the same way that this crisis of World War I shook the foundations of European society. Let me put it to you this way. After World War I, no one believed in a Christian century.

Nobody. It was a time of disillusionment and feeling that the world was just useless. Now let me just tick off quickly following that basic sort of philosophical foundation for understanding the 20th century.

Just a few important movements of the 20th century, and I'm just basically going to list these. I don't have time to talk much about them. But first, I see some interesting trends in the 20th century in Western Christianity.

First, the rise of parachurch organizations. You have to admit that today in the modern world, we sort of take these parachurch organizations for granted. Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth with a Mission, Focus on the Family.

Groups like this. They're not churches, but they have a lot of influence and a lot of work in the Christian world. Well, these parachurch organizations are somewhat a phenomenon of the 20th century.

Another important trend in the 20th century, especially towards the end of the 20th century, is the declining importance of denominations. I find it fascinating that sociologically, people really don't care all that much about denominations anymore. There was a time when you identified yourself, yes, as a Christian, but maybe first and foremost, as a Methodist, as a Presbyterian, as a Baptist.

And if you were visiting in a town over a Sunday, your first question was, where's the Methodist church? Because I'm a Methodist. People don't think so much that way anymore. The denominational labels and categories just aren't as important to them.

Of course, there were also the very important movements of the Pentecostal and the charismatic resurgence in the 20th century. We're going to touch on that in a later lecture. But again, this was an extremely important phenomenon, so much so that if you notice that by far, by far, the most rapidly growing segment of Christianity all around the world is charismatic and Pentecostal.

This is especially true in Africa and in South America. You also have some of the great revivals and persecutions of the 20th century. We'll talk about the revivals in a later lecture, but it's important just to understand that the 20th century was also a century of tremendous persecution.

This is oftentimes overlooked by people. They don't understand that the 20th century, as is understood by some historians, I don't know if you can document this or not, but by the research of some historians, they say that more Christians have been martyred for their faith in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined. This is because many of the communist persecutions and slaughters wiped out Christian communities wholesale by the tens, if not the hundreds of thousands.

And then finally, one of the things that we think of having to do with the church at the 20th century is how the church more than ever, well, you know what? I almost take that back. I almost want to take back this point as soon as I'm about to say it. I have here in my notes written down the church and relevance and how the church is really working to be relevant and all that.

But you know what? It's always been that way. The church has almost always felt a responsibility to try to connect with the culture and be relevant to the culture. I mean, the examples against that are like the Amish, right? They're the ones who say, well, we don't care about the culture at all.

We're just going to do our own thing. Let the world go to hell. But most people don't think that way.

Most people say, no, no, we care about the culture. And so we want to connect to the culture. So we want to be relevant to the culture.

But what makes that different in the 20th century is that culture seems to change so rapidly that it's a significant challenge for the church. And really, in some ways, I don't know if it's a challenge that the church should embrace. You know, in my opinion, and again, I'm not speaking as a historian.

Obviously, I'm speaking more as a preacher right here. I believe that in many ways, it's a vain thing for the church to try to keep up with being cutting edge relevant in connection to the culture. I think that the best way to stay relevant is to be eternal.

Eternity is always relevant. But if Christians are always chasing around culture, then basically, they're always going to end up being behind it, right? They'll never be caught up to it. They'll always be five minutes ago, right? I mean, or worse, you know, five years ago.

And so this is just a characteristic oftentimes of how Christians try to connect with culture. I think that the biggest focus for us needs to be we need to be connected with eternity, because eternity is always relevant. Um, let me, I keep threatening to end this lecture, let me just go over one more point, just because it might be relevant to some of you thinking, and it's the whole idea of post modernism.

Many people, especially in this philosophical framework, when they look at history, they try to apply these different ideas having to do with modernism. And so this is how it's been defined by many people. First, they talk about the pre modern period, and that would be the Western world prior to the 17th century.

Okay, so the Western world, prior to this consolidation of, of Protestantism and Catholicism in Western Europe, basically the medieval world, the medieval world had an idea that we should have a just society based on revelation from a just God, right? God is just, he'll show us how to have a just society, we should do what God wants us to do. Then that developed into sort of the ideas that I've been talking to you about through this lecture, through the Enlightenment, through the trust in reason, through all of that, through theological liberalism, more into the modern world, beginning with Descartes, we didn't talk about Descartes, we just didn't have time. But the modern world more has the idea that we should use reason to build a just society, right? No longer do we believe in a revelation from God, but we're still interested in a just society.

So we will use human reason to build a just society. Then there's the third thing, postmodern, which most people date to being after the Second World War, you know, 1945 or so is when most people date the beginning of postmodernism. Postmodern, first presented by Friedrich Nietzsche, he says the idea there is denying that there is a universal standard for justice.

The postmodern person would say, just society, what do you mean? This person's just society, that person's just society, the other person's just society, how can you talk about a just society? What does the word even mean? Because nobody really agrees on it. You see, the idea is that society moves from medieval hierarchy to enlightenment democracy, to postmodern anarchy. Postmodernism basically says that the truth about reality is forever hidden from us, all we can do is tell stories.

Now, what would enlightenment thinking say about that? Enlightenment or modern thinking would not say the truth about reality can be discovered by God, excuse me, can be discovered by man. I confused two ideas there. Premodern thinking would say the truth about reality can be revealed to us by God.

Modern or enlightenment thinking would say the truth about reality can be discovered by man, but postmodernism says the truth about reality is forever hidden from us, all we can do is tell stories. But here's the problem, or not the problem, just the phenomenon. If real truth is not possible or even desired, I mean postmodern folks

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