

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 18, Liberal Theology in America Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 18, Liberal Theology in America, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Roger Green's lecture introduces **classical Protestant liberalism** as a movement seeking to preserve Christianity in America amidst modern challenges like Darwinism and secularization. This theological approach employed **three main strategies: deifying the historical process**, suggesting God reveals himself through history and humanity; **stressing the ethical**, emphasizing moral living over doctrine with Jesus as the prime example; and **the centrality of religious feeling**, prioritizing personal emotional connection with God over dogma, influenced by theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. These strategies aimed to make Christianity relevant and intellectually viable in a changing American landscape.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 18 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → American Christianity).



**Greenk_AmXy_Sessi
on18.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Green, Session 18, Liberal Theology in America

Study Guide: Liberal Theology in America

Introduction:

This study guide is designed to help you review the key concepts discussed in Dr. Roger Green's lecture on Liberal Theology in America. It covers the historical context, the motivations behind liberal theology, and its three primary strategies for "saving Christianity" in the face of modernity.

Key Concepts:

- **Classical Protestant Liberalism:** The specific form of liberal theology that emerged in American Christianity during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- **Modern World Onslaught:** The intellectual and social challenges faced by Christianity due to advancements in science (like Darwinism), historical criticism, increasing urbanization, secularization, and a general sense of societal progress.
- **Three Strategies for Saving Christianity:** The core of classical Protestant liberalism's response to the perceived threats to Christianity:
- **Deifying the Historical Process:** The belief that God reveals himself primarily through history and incarnates himself in humanity (not solely in Jesus Christ). The Bible is viewed as a historical document revealing God's work over time, emphasizing principles for personal morality and social ethics, and seeing progress as part of God's unfolding plan.
- **Stressing the Ethical:** The emphasis on living a good, moral life as the central aspect of Christianity ("Life, not doctrine"). Jesus is presented as the prime ethical example, focusing on love over judgment, and Christian education is seen as crucial for ethical training.
- **The Centrality of Religious Feeling:** Rooted in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, this strategy downplays dogma, doctrine, and literal biblical interpretation, emphasizing personal religious experience and emotional connection with God as the essence of faith. This approach seeks to reconcile religion with science and other secular fields by placing God's primary work in the realm of individual feeling.

Key Figures:

- **Dr. Roger Green:** The lecturer providing the analysis of Liberal Theology in America.
- **Friedrich Schleiermacher:** German theologian considered the "father of liberal theology," who emphasized religious feeling and ministered to the "cultural despisers of religion."
- **Henry Ward Beecher:** A preacher sometimes associated with the liberal tradition who occasionally stressed the individualism of the gospel and a "health and wealth" aspect.
- **Phillips Brooks:** Another preacher associated with the liberal tradition who emphasized ethics but remained grounded in core Christian doctrines.
- **Washington Gladden:** A founder of the Social Gospel movement, emphasizing the social ethical implications of Christianity.
- **Walter Rauschenbusch:** Another key figure in the Social Gospel movement, who, despite liberal tendencies in his social emphasis, was theologically grounded and even considered evangelical by some.

Historical Context:

- **Post-Civil War America (1865-1918):** A period characterized by progressive thought, economic prosperity for some, significant social changes (urbanization, immigration), and increasing secularization.
- **Impact of Darwinism:** The rise of evolutionary theory challenged traditional understandings of creation and biblical authority.
- **World War I (began 1914):** A major event that challenged the liberal belief in the continuous progress of humanity.
- **Reaction to Liberalism:** The emergence of fundamentalism and evangelicalism as responses to perceived negative consequences of liberal theology.

Quiz: Liberal Theology in America

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What was the primary concern of classical Protestant liberalism in America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries?

2. Explain the core idea behind the liberal theological strategy of "deifying the historical process."
3. According to this perspective, how should the Bible be primarily interpreted? What is its main purpose?
4. What was the central tenet of the strategy focused on "stressing the ethical" in Christian life? Who served as the primary example?
5. Why did Christian education, particularly the Sunday school movement, become important for those stressing the ethical?
6. Who is Friedrich Schleiermacher, and what is his significance in the context of liberal theology?
7. What aspect of faith did Schleiermacher and those following his lead emphasize as central to religious experience? What did they downplay?
8. How did the liberal emphasis on religious feeling attempt to reconcile religion with fields like science and education?
9. Name two prominent figures associated with a more individualistic ethical emphasis within the liberal tradition.
10. Name two figures associated with the Social Gospel movement and the social ethical emphasis within liberal theology.

Answer Key: Liberal Theology in America Quiz

1. The primary concern of classical Protestant liberalism was the perceived jeopardy of Christianity in America due to the intellectual and social challenges of the modern world. They sought to make Christianity a viable and healthy intellectual religion.
2. "Deifying the historical process" involved the belief that God reveals himself primarily through the unfolding of history and incarnates himself in humanity as a whole, rather than solely through Jesus Christ. Understanding this historical process was seen as key to understanding God and being a good Christian.
3. According to this view, the Bible should be read primarily as a historical document that unveils God's work in history. Its main purpose was to reveal the principles and the unfolding narrative of God's interaction with humanity over time.

4. The central tenet of "stressing the ethical" was that Christianity is fundamentally about living a good, moral, and loving life ("Life, not doctrine"). Jesus Christ was considered the ultimate example of this ethical way of living in his relationship with God.
5. Christian education, especially Sunday school, became important for those stressing the ethical because they believed that people needed to be taught and trained in moral values and ethical living. They saw education as crucial for instilling these principles.
6. Friedrich Schleiermacher was a German theologian considered the "father of liberal theology." He is significant because he emphasized religious feeling and experience as the core of faith in response to the perceived obsolescence of traditional Christianity.
7. Schleiermacher and his followers emphasized personal religious feeling, emotion, and attachment to God as central to religious experience. They downplayed the importance of dogma, doctrine, theology, and the literal interpretation of the Bible.
8. The liberal emphasis on religious feeling attempted to reconcile religion with science and education by asserting that God's primary work in the religious realm is within the individual's heart and personal experience. This separated the domain of faith from the domains of empirical and rational inquiry.
9. Two prominent figures associated with a more individualistic ethical emphasis within the liberal tradition were Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks.
10. Two figures associated with the Social Gospel movement and the social ethical emphasis within liberal theology were Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch.

Essay Format Questions: Liberal Theology in America

1. Analyze the historical context in America (1865-1918) that contributed to the rise of classical Protestant liberalism. What specific societal changes and intellectual developments posed challenges to traditional Christianity?
2. Critically evaluate the liberal theological strategy of "deifying the historical process" as a means of "saving Christianity." What were its key assumptions, and what potential theological challenges or criticisms might arise from this perspective?

3. Compare and contrast the liberal theological strategies of "stressing the ethical" and "the centrality of religious feeling." How did each approach redefine the essence of Christian faith and practice?
4. Discuss the legacy and impact of classical Protestant liberalism in American Christianity. How did it influence subsequent theological movements and the broader religious landscape of the 20th and 21st centuries?
5. Consider the reasons why figures like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, despite their connection to liberal tendencies, are sometimes viewed as theologically grounded or even "evangelical" in certain aspects. How does their emphasis on the social gospel fit within the broader spectrum of liberal thought?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Classical Protestant Liberalism:** A theological movement within Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that sought to reconcile Christian faith with modern thought and culture.
- **Deify:** To make something into a god or treat it as divine.
- **Dogma:** A firmly held belief or doctrine, often considered authoritative within a religious or ideological system.
- **Doctrine:** A set of beliefs or principles held and taught by a church, political party, or other group.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts.
- **Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. In the context of liberal theology, it was sometimes broadened to include God's presence in humanity in general.
- **Secularization:** The process by which religious thinking, practice, and institutions lose social significance.
- **Social Gospel:** A Protestant intellectual movement that applied Christian ethics to social problems, advocating for issues like poverty, inequality, and injustice.
- **Theology:** The study of the nature of God and religious belief.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 18, Liberal Theology in America

Study Guide: Liberal Theology in America

Introduction:

This study guide is designed to help you review the key concepts discussed in Dr. Roger Green's lecture on Liberal Theology in America. It covers the historical context, the motivations behind liberal theology, and its three primary strategies for "saving Christianity" in the face of modernity.

Key Concepts:

- **Classical Protestant Liberalism:** The specific form of liberal theology that emerged in American Christianity during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- **Modern World Onslaught:** The intellectual and social challenges faced by Christianity due to advancements in science (like Darwinism), historical criticism, increasing urbanization, secularization, and a general sense of societal progress.
- **Three Strategies for Saving Christianity:** The core of classical Protestant liberalism's response to the perceived threats to Christianity:
- **Deifying the Historical Process:** The belief that God reveals himself primarily through history and incarnates himself in humanity (not solely in Jesus Christ). The Bible is viewed as a historical document revealing God's work over time, emphasizing principles for personal morality and social ethics, and seeing progress as part of God's unfolding plan.
- **Stressing the Ethical:** The emphasis on living a good, moral life as the central aspect of Christianity ("Life, not doctrine"). Jesus is presented as the prime ethical example, focusing on love over judgment, and Christian education is seen as crucial for ethical training.
- **The Centrality of Religious Feeling:** Rooted in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, this strategy downplays dogma, doctrine, and literal biblical interpretation, emphasizing personal religious experience and emotional connection with God as the essence of faith. This approach seeks to reconcile religion with science and other secular fields by placing God's primary work in the realm of individual feeling.

Key Figures:

- **Dr. Roger Green:** The lecturer providing the analysis of Liberal Theology in America.
- **Friedrich Schleiermacher:** German theologian considered the "father of liberal theology," who emphasized religious feeling and ministered to the "cultural despisers of religion."
- **Henry Ward Beecher:** A preacher sometimes associated with the liberal tradition who occasionally stressed the individualism of the gospel and a "health and wealth" aspect.
- **Phillips Brooks:** Another preacher associated with the liberal tradition who emphasized ethics but remained grounded in core Christian doctrines.
- **Washington Gladden:** A founder of the Social Gospel movement, emphasizing the social ethical implications of Christianity.
- **Walter Rauschenbusch:** Another key figure in the Social Gospel movement, who, despite liberal tendencies in his social emphasis, was theologically grounded and even considered evangelical by some.

Historical Context:

- **Post-Civil War America (1865-1918):** A period characterized by progressive thought, economic prosperity for some, significant social changes (urbanization, immigration), and increasing secularization.
- **Impact of Darwinism:** The rise of evolutionary theory challenged traditional understandings of creation and biblical authority.
- **World War I (began 1914):** A major event that challenged the liberal belief in the continuous progress of humanity.
- **Reaction to Liberalism:** The emergence of fundamentalism and evangelicalism as responses to perceived negative consequences of liberal theology.

Quiz: Liberal Theology in America

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What was the primary concern of classical Protestant liberalism in America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries?

2. Explain the core idea behind the liberal theological strategy of "deifying the historical process."
3. According to this perspective, how should the Bible be primarily interpreted? What is its main purpose?
4. What was the central tenet of the strategy focused on "stressing the ethical" in Christian life? Who served as the primary example?
5. Why did Christian education, particularly the Sunday school movement, become important for those stressing the ethical?
6. Who is Friedrich Schleiermacher, and what is his significance in the context of liberal theology?
7. What aspect of faith did Schleiermacher and those following his lead emphasize as central to religious experience? What did they downplay?
8. How did the liberal emphasis on religious feeling attempt to reconcile religion with fields like science and education?
9. Name two prominent figures associated with a more individualistic ethical emphasis within the liberal tradition.
10. Name two figures associated with the Social Gospel movement and the social ethical emphasis within liberal theology.

Answer Key: Liberal Theology in America Quiz

1. The primary concern of classical Protestant liberalism was the perceived jeopardy of Christianity in America due to the intellectual and social challenges of the modern world. They sought to make Christianity a viable and healthy intellectual religion.
2. "Deifying the historical process" involved the belief that God reveals himself primarily through the unfolding of history and incarnates himself in humanity as a whole, rather than solely through Jesus Christ. Understanding this historical process was seen as key to understanding God and being a good Christian.
3. According to this view, the Bible should be read primarily as a historical document that unveils God's work in history. Its main purpose was to reveal the principles and the unfolding narrative of God's interaction with humanity over time.

4. The central tenet of "stressing the ethical" was that Christianity is fundamentally about living a good, moral, and loving life ("Life, not doctrine"). Jesus Christ was considered the ultimate example of this ethical way of living in his relationship with God.
5. Christian education, especially Sunday school, became important for those stressing the ethical because they believed that people needed to be taught and trained in moral values and ethical living. They saw education as crucial for instilling these principles.
6. Friedrich Schleiermacher was a German theologian considered the "father of liberal theology." He is significant because he emphasized religious feeling and experience as the core of faith in response to the perceived obsolescence of traditional Christianity.
7. Schleiermacher and his followers emphasized personal religious feeling, emotion, and attachment to God as central to religious experience. They downplayed the importance of dogma, doctrine, theology, and the literal interpretation of the Bible.
8. The liberal emphasis on religious feeling attempted to reconcile religion with science and education by asserting that God's primary work in the religious realm is within the individual's heart and personal experience. This separated the domain of faith from the domains of empirical and rational inquiry.
9. Two prominent figures associated with a more individualistic ethical emphasis within the liberal tradition were Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks.
10. Two figures associated with the Social Gospel movement and the social ethical emphasis within liberal theology were Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch.

Essay Format Questions: Liberal Theology in America

1. Analyze the historical context in America (1865-1918) that contributed to the rise of classical Protestant liberalism. What specific societal changes and intellectual developments posed challenges to traditional Christianity?
2. Critically evaluate the liberal theological strategy of "deifying the historical process" as a means of "saving Christianity." What were its key assumptions, and what potential theological challenges or criticisms might arise from this perspective?

3. Compare and contrast the liberal theological strategies of "stressing the ethical" and "the centrality of religious feeling." How did each approach redefine the essence of Christian faith and practice?
4. Discuss the legacy and impact of classical Protestant liberalism in American Christianity. How did it influence subsequent theological movements and the broader religious landscape of the 20th and 21st centuries?
5. Consider the reasons why figures like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, despite their connection to liberal tendencies, are sometimes viewed as theologically grounded or even "evangelical" in certain aspects. How does their emphasis on the social gospel fit within the broader spectrum of liberal thought?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Classical Protestant Liberalism:** A theological movement within Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that sought to reconcile Christian faith with modern thought and culture.
- **Deify:** To make something into a god or treat it as divine.
- **Dogma:** A firmly held belief or doctrine, often considered authoritative within a religious or ideological system.
- **Doctrine:** A set of beliefs or principles held and taught by a church, political party, or other group.
- **Ethical:** Relating to moral principles or the branch of knowledge dealing with these.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts.
- **Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. In the context of liberal theology, it was sometimes broadened to include God's presence in humanity in general.
- **Secularization:** The process by which religious thinking, practice, and institutions lose social significance.
- **Social Gospel:** A Protestant intellectual movement that applied Christian ethics to social problems, advocating for issues like poverty, inequality, and injustice.

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 18, Liberal Theology in America, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Classical Protestant Liberalism in America

1. What were the primary historical and cultural factors in America between the Civil War and World War I that led to the rise of classical Protestant liberalism?

The period between the end of the Civil War (1865) and the beginning of World War I (1918) in America was characterized by a sense of progress and prosperity for some, coupled with significant social and intellectual changes. The rapid growth of cities due to mass migration, increasing secularization, and the emergence of new intellectual ideas, most notably Darwinism, challenged traditional Christian beliefs and practices. Americans held a confident outlook on the future, yet these societal shifts created anxieties among some Christians who feared that Christianity was losing its relevance and intellectual viability in this modernizing world.

2. According to classical Protestant liberalism, what was the perceived threat to Christianity in America, and what was their overarching goal?

Classical Protestant liberals believed that Christianity in America was in jeopardy due to the intellectual challenges posed by the modern world. They saw the authority of the Bible and the church being questioned. Their overarching goal was to "save Christianity" and make it a viable, healthy, and intellectually respectable religion in America amidst these challenges. They aimed to redeem Christianity and ensure its continued relevance in a progressive and increasingly secular society.

3. What is meant by the classical liberal Protestant strategy of "deifying the historical process" as a way to save Christianity?

"Deifying the historical process" refers to the strategy of understanding God's revelation and work primarily through the unfolding of history. Proponents of this view taught that God reveals himself not primarily through specific doctrines or theological interpretations of the Bible, but through the historical narrative itself and the perceived progress of humanity. They believed that by understanding this historical process, Christians could grasp what it meant to be a good Christian in the modern world. While they acknowledged Jesus, they emphasized his profound connection with God and understanding of the historical process, advocating for his imitation rather than his deity. They also reinterpreted concepts like the "Kingdom of God" as the continuous unveiling of God's will within historical progress.

4. How did the classical liberal approach to the Bible differ from more traditional interpretations, particularly in the context of "deifying the historical process"?

Classical liberals viewed the Bible not as a primarily theological or doctrinal work, but as a historical document that unfolds God's actions and revelation within history. They cautioned against theological and doctrinal interpretations, emphasizing instead the reading of the Bible as a record of God's engagement with humanity over time. They placed significant importance on religious experience as the dominant way to witness God's activity in the historical process, seeing it not in terms of sin and redemption, but as a connection with the divine similar to Jesus' connection. They also sought to extract timeless ethical principles from the biblical narrative, such as love, applicable to personal morality and social ethics, while often downplaying or reinterpreting miraculous or supernatural elements.

5. What does the strategy of "stressing the ethical" entail in the context of classical Protestant liberalism, and who served as the primary example?

"Stressing the ethical" focused on the idea that the essence of Christianity lay in living a good, moral, and ethical life rather than adhering strictly to doctrines. The key phrase associated with this strategy was "life, not doctrine." Jesus Christ was held up as the ultimate example of this ethical life, particularly his emphasis on love over judgment. This approach led to a significant emphasis on Christian education, including the Sunday school movement, as a means of training individuals in ethical living and moral values.

6. How did figures like Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks differ from those who advocated for a "social gospel" like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch within the broader context of stressing the ethical?

While both groups operated within the liberal tendency of "stressing the ethical," they focused on different aspects. Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks tended to emphasize personal ethics and at times, individualistic interpretations of the gospel, occasionally bordering on a "health and wealth" emphasis. In contrast, Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch were key figures in the "social gospel" movement. They also were theologically grounded but stressed the social implications of Christian ethics, focusing on issues of social justice and the application of Christian principles to societal problems. Thus, the emphasis on the ethical could manifest either in a focus on individual moral conduct or on broader social reform.

7. What is the significance of Friedrich Schleiermacher in understanding the classical liberal strategy of emphasizing "the centrality of religious feeling"?

Friedrich Schleiermacher is considered a foundational figure, sometimes called the "father of liberal theology," who heavily influenced the emphasis on the "centrality of religious feeling." Facing a cultural context in Germany where Christianity was seen as outdated, Schleiermacher sought to make it relevant by focusing on the individual's subjective religious experience, emotions, and personal attachment to God. He and his followers downplayed the importance of dogma, doctrine, theology, and literal interpretations of the Bible, viewing religion as primarily a matter of the heart. This perspective aimed to reconcile faith with modern thought, allowing for the flourishing of science, education, and other cultural pursuits in separate realms from personal religious experience. Jesus, in this framework, became the ultimate model of someone constantly and profoundly dependent on God, embodying deep religious feeling.

8. How did the classical liberal emphasis on religious feeling seek to reconcile religion with other aspects of modern life, such as science and education?

By positioning religion primarily within the realm of personal feeling and individual experience, classical liberals sought to create a separation between faith and other domains of modern life, particularly science and education. They argued that the religious realm, focused on the heart and individual connection with God, operated independently of the empirical and rational inquiries of science and the intellectual pursuits of education. This allowed them to assert the continued relevance of religion without necessitating conflict or contradiction with scientific advancements or academic knowledge. They believed that God worked in both the external world (studied by science) and the internal world of human experience (the focus of religion), thus removing the need for contestation between these spheres.