

## Essay on the Spirit of Liberal Protestantism

By Dan Jensen (2024)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. They can be found on my website.)

Before I say anything, it is important for me to first define how I am using the term *spirit* in this essay. I do not mean it in the sense of demonic spirit. Please don't get me wrong. I absolutely believe that all false religion has its genesis in Satan. And I certainly believe that he uses his evil servants to do his work of spreading all of the false religions. But, when I talk about a general *spirit* here, I am talking more about the general vibe or essence of this false religion. Like as if we are talking about the *spirit* of the Kansas City Chiefs, as just one example. I am of course not saying that the Holy Spirit is the driving force behind this organization, or that Satan is either. This is not to say that there are no saved people within the organization. There certainly are. But, that is not the same thing as saying that the Spirit is the primary driving force behind what the organization is trying to accomplish. None of that is to deny the sovereignty of the Spirit over all things. But, there is a sharp difference between what the Spirit indirectly allows and what He is directly promoting. Further, it would hardly be correct to say that Satan or a demon is the primary driving force behind the organization. Satan certainly influences this organization as he highly influences all secular organizations, but that is still not the same thing as saying that he is the primary pulse of the institution.

When we talk about the spirit of the Chiefs, we are talking about what the organization is, its history, and how it currently operates. At the present, to my great dismay as a Niners fan, it is a winning organization. That is a core part of the spirit of the organization at this time. But, that does not mean that there is any literal spirit, such as the winning angel, that is behind the success of the team.

With all of that made clear, Satan is the primary driving force behind Liberal Protestantism, no question about it. Again though, this is not what I am focusing upon in this essay. The point of this essay is to make clear that most people do not fully understand the spirit of this religion. And by *spirit*, again, I mean it more in the sense of how I talked about in regard to the Chiefs football team.

With all of that laid out, most people, if they have heard of the label at all, think of Liberal Protestantism as referring to the female Episcopalian “pastor” who wears LGBT robes. That is undoubtedly part of the overall Liberal Protestant movement. And it is certainly in keeping with the overall spirit of the movement. However, it does not encompass the spirit of this wicked religion. The spirit of this religion also includes just as much the rural white dyed-in-the-wool Trumper who insists that he is a “Christian,” and is adamant that we need to return our nation to its former “Christian” glory, but who says that he does not need to believe in all that the Bible teaches.

Now, if such a person insists that he does believe in all that the Bible teaches, he just struggles to follow all of it, this person is in all likelihood a “Christian” Fundamentalist. However, if he says that he has great respect for the Bible, and even believes in many doctrines that are most associated with the most conservative wings of the Conservative Evangelical church and “Christian” Fundamentalism, such as pre-trib eschatology, but that he does not believe that all of the Bible is the actual word of God, he is a Liberal Protestant. It matters little if this man would be mortified to be called a *liberal* anything. It would matter little if he yelled at us about all of the ways that he is a passionate conservative politically. Theologically speaking, he is a Liberal Protestant, whether he likes this or wants to see this or not. And those who fit this mold are far, far more common than most people realize.

It also refers to the young lady who insists that she is a “Christian,” and a very conservative one at that, because she hates abortion, but still believes that women should have the right to choose on that front. She says that she would never choose to have an abortion herself. She says that she would never advocate for abortions. But,

she says, she does not believe that it is the right of the government to control this issue. She may even attend a megachurch that on paper is very orthodox and Conservative Evangelical. Now, if this young woman insists that she believes in the inerrancy of Scripture, then she is heretical but cannot be considered Liberal Protestant. However, as is usually the case with those like this young woman, if she says that she has a very high view of the Bible, but cannot bring herself to believe that all of it is the word of God, she is by definition a Liberal Protestant. And people in this vein are rampant in our country. Many of them do indeed attend otherwise godly megachurches because these churches do not practice church discipline in any rigorous fashion.

Before plowing forward, I do want to make one more distinction about this hypothetical young woman that represents countless people in this country today. And that is that I am not talking about someone who is just confused. There are many today, especially in megachurches, who hold to Liberal Protestant theology and would accept correction if it was given to them. The problem is that these megachurches often never give this correction because of weak preaching and teaching, and in most cases the leadership of these churches does not even know the names of most of those who regularly attend. I am talking about a young woman who holds to what I described with conviction. Now, she may indeed be very confused on many other theological matters. But, on this particular point, she has received correction (not from her church), she has rejected it, and still chooses to attend this church that disagrees with her because she likes the people. Or she may have family ties to the church. Or the church may remind her of the church she was raised in.

Everything I have said in this essay is why I put the percentage of the American population that is truly Liberal Protestant at about 30%. This is in spite of the fact that most studies do not give numbers that high because most of the mainline denominations are shrinking, and shrinking fast. But, these studies do not understand the theological issues at play here at all. Formal churchgoing Liberal Protestantism is absolutely on the decline, no question about it. But, the spirit of Liberal Protestantism is not only alive and well in our nation, it is growing rapidly. Orthodox theology is not in

vogue right now in our culture. And I hate to break it to many folks, but that is just as true in politically conservative circles as it is in liberal ones. You can read more about my 30% number for Liberal Protestants in the United States in my essay on “Evangelical” stats. It can be found on my website.

The reason all of this is so important is because so many people fancy themselves as not being liberal theologically simply because they despise much of the theology of a Rachel Held Evans every bit as much as I do. They think that this makes them a true follower of Christ despite the fact that they would be more liberal than me on what they would see as the very small point of inerrancy. They are deluding themselves. They are rejecting the authority of the word of God. And that rejection always spills over into other areas. For the Trumper, it allows him to believe he does not need to attend church. For the young woman, it allows her to believe that she can be pro-choice in spite of the fact that she thinks she is pro-life.