

1-2019

Question 11 - What are the positions of Liberalism and Agnosticism in regards to the Bible?

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Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "Question 11 - What are the positions of Liberalism and Agnosticism in regards to the Bible?" (2019). *101 Most Asked Questions*. 39.
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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

11. What are the positions of Liberalism and Agnosticism in regards to the Bible?

A. Liberalism

Probably the most famous liberal of the twentieth century was the late Harry Emerson Fosdick. He has written the following words which typify the liberal attitude:

“When one moves back to the Scriptures with a mind accustomed to work in modern ways he finds himself in a strange world . . . Knowing modern astronomy he turns to the Bible to find the sun and moon standing still or the shadow retreating on a sundial. Knowing modern biology he hears that when Elisha had been so long dead that only his bones were left, another dead body, thrown into the cave where he was buried, touched his skeleton and sprang to life again, or that after our Lord’s resurrection many of the saints long deceased arose and appeared in Jerusalem. Knowing modern physics he turns to the Bible to read that light was created three days before the sun and that an axe-head floated when Elisha threw a stick into the water. Knowing modern medicine he finds in the scripture many familiar ailments, epilepsy, deafness, dumbness, blindness, insanity, ascribed to the visitation of demons . . . We live in a new world. We have not kept the forms of thought and categories of explanation in astronomy, geology, biology, which the Bible contains. We have definitely and irrevocably gotten new ones.” (Ibid., p. 160)

But at the end of his life Fosdick may have seen the error of this false liberal approach to the Word of God. Note his evaluation:

“Today, however, looking back over forty years of ministry, I see an outstanding difference between then and now with regard to what is standard and who must do the adjusting. What man in his senses can now call our modern civilization standard? It is not Christ’s message that needs to be accommodated to this mad scene; it is this mad scene into which our civilization has collapsed that needs to be judged and saved by Christ’s message. This is the most significant change distinguishing the beginning of my ministry from now. Then we were trying to accommodate Christ to our scientific civilization; now we face the desperate need of accommodating our scientific civilization to Christ.” (Quoted in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 168)

B. Agnosticism

The word *agnosticism* literally means, “no knowledge.” To help in its definition, note the following contrasts:

1. An atheist says – “We know there is no God, or inspired Bible!”
2. A Christian says – “We know there is a God and an inspired Bible!”
3. An Agnostic says – “We can’t know anything about God or an inspired Bible!”

Dr. Bertrand Russell makes the following statement:

“An agnostic regards the Bible exactly as enlightened clerics regard it. He does not think it is divinely inspired; he thinks its early history legendary, and no more exactly true than that in Homer; he thinks its moral teaching sometimes good, but sometimes very bad. For example: Samuel ordered Saul, in a war, to kill not only every man, woman, and child of the enemy, but also all the sheep and cattle. Saul, however, let the sheep and cattle live, and for this we are told to condemn him. I have never been able to admire Elisha for cursing the children who laughed at him, or to believe (what the Bible asserts) that a benevolent Deity would send two she-bears to kill the children.” (*A Guide to the Religions of America*, Leo Rosten, ed., p. 152).

Russell was a radical socialist and a philanderer as well. He was involved in multiple marriages and divorces. The judge of one of the divorce courts granting a divorce to his wife said that he was a rogue who had committed adulteries of the type that no decent adulterer would even commit. He seduced virtually everybody who came across his path. Once he was invited to stay at the home of a physician friend for two nights. His second night there he spent seducing the man’s teenaged daughter. No wonder he didn’t want to be a Christian – it would have interfered with his sexual mores.