

## **Theology** = “*the way we think about God*”

do we embrace or reject these thoughts / practices?

### Liberal

### Conservative

|   |     |  |
|---|-----|--|
| Universalist Unitarian  | vs. | Westboro Baptist church                    |
| find your own path to God   |     | only our club, our way                     |
| inclusive, welcoming  |     | exclusive, elitist                         |
| all religions are good  |     | Christianity is the only way to heaven     |
| many books are inspired   |     | the Bible alone is infallible and inspired |
| dress casual  |     | wear sunday best suit, tie, dress          |
| many modern english translations are acceptable                           |     | King James only                            |
| modern concert rock music in church                                       |     | traditional hymns, choirs                  |
| pro choice  |     | pro life                                   |
| same sex marriage   |     | traditional family values                  |
| women are called gifted leaders, speakers                                 |     | ordain only men                            |
| priesthood of the believer  |     | clergy / laity separation                  |
| democracy run church, voting  |     | republic, appointed representatives        |
| mob rule  |     | dictator                                   |
| casual sporadic attendance - required to be there when the doors are open |     |  |

I know a lot of Christians, and they're split pretty evenly between conservative and liberal.

I like the conservative Christians, mainly because they're so clear about what they believe. They know what the [Bible](#) says; they know who they are; they know what they're doing in life; boom--- they're solid. The whole "backbone of America" thing is no joke; the strongest trees, after all, have the deepest roots. Not a lot of wafflers in the conservative camp. Plus, they're super dedicated. Conservative Christians don't wonder if they're in the mood; they *go* to church. They go to Bible study. They show up for the church functions. They actually *do* stuff. Conservative Christians also tend to be, in practice, extremely loving. Liberal Christians think conservative Christians are harshly judgmental, and sort of fundamentally (ha, ha) hardhearted. They think that if, in the middle of the night, a clearly gay guy showed up at the home of a Christian conservative in need of help, he'd summarily get a door slammed in his face. But he wouldn't. All the conservative Christians I've ever known are serious about putting God's love into practice. The fact that they're so sure of what they believe makes them *more* open to new thoughts, ideas, and experiences. If you're sure of who you are, you're a lot more open to discovering who others are. When things get rough, it's good to know a conservative.

On the other hand, conservative Christians can be *too* sure they're right about everything. It's too easy, when you're a conservative, to boil down what you believe into a really simple set of assertions, and to then never again question or allow those assertions to evolve (har, har). Then it just becomes about rules; then it's too easy to make everything about who is and isn't on the right side of right. When it comes to something as complex as God and history, it's too easy for "keeping it simple" to become "keeping it stupid"---which too easily becomes "keeping it mean-

spirited." Conservatives have a troubling propensity for closing their minds.

I like liberal Christians because they're so generous with their love and respect. They're *seriously* focused on God's love, and they're not afraid to insist that anything that hinders that love must be suspect. They love Jesus; Jesus preached love; they're all about loving as Jesus did, period. Also, I like the way liberal Christians are so thoughtful. They listen. They reflect. They refine. They search. They question. They study. They understand that part of their *job* as Christians is to actively try to access the mind and heart of God, and they're disinclined to let anything interfere with that goal. They're not afraid to get inspired. They live with the confidence that God will never fault them for loving too much. On the other hand, liberal Christians can waffle like IHOP on a Sunday morning. They too often fall prey to thinking that the emotions of their loving feelings is really *all* they need to guide them, with the result that they never feel a need to be clear on what they *actually* believe at all. Maybe Jesus was mainly a social activist. Maybe the cross is a metaphor. Maybe Jesus walking on water was an optical illusion. And so on, until they may as well be astrologers. Yet for all their comfortable ambiguity, liberal Christians can also be altogether too smug, too sure, too condescending toward those who take the Gospel as gospel. They tend to think they're smarter than they are. In the main, the problem with liberal Christians is that they can stay so busy remaining lofty and above it all that their rubber never hits the road. Many of them are better with compassion as a theory than a practice.