

MODERN GALATIANISM

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President McClain, members of the Board, faculty, honored graduates, students, and friends of Grace Theological Seminary and Grace College. Commencement is quite properly an occasion when we think of deserved congratulations for past accomplishments and the challenge of the future which faces you graduates. Five or six years from now it will be most interesting to observe what your classmates have done. Some will be completely forgotten, and should you meet such an one on the street or in a church you will find yourself groping for the name. Some, even in that short time, will be rocketed into places of leadership. Many will surprise you--one way or another. That quiet student who sat next to you may be greatly used of God, and that fellow or girl to whom you never gave a first, let alone a second, glance might even be your husband or wife. Yes, in five or six years a lot can happen.

It was so in Galatia 2000 years ago. Without championing or even considering the North and South Galatian views, we may rightly surmise that five or six years had elapsed between Paul's previous visit to those churches and the writing of the Galatian letter. Could it be that those trouble-free congregations had so quickly and so thoroughly been infected by the contagious teachings of the Judaizers? Indeed they had, and the error which we call Galatianism had not only poisoned those churches in that day, but by its very existence has exposed the church in every generation to the same plague. And it is to this disease in its modern forms that I wish to direct your attention tonight. Modern Galatianism--what is it? what are its symptoms? and how can it be prevented or cured?

If there is one thing that I insist of my students, it is that they define terms. We are very lazy and hazy about this in Christian circles today. Lest I be guilty of addressing you on Galatianism without ever defining it, may I propose a definition at the very start. Galatianism is any action of the flesh which hinders spiritual progress (5:7). "Ye did run well"--that's progress. "Who did hinder you"--that's a reference to the Judaizers with their appeal to the flesh. "That ye should obey not the truth"--that's the terrible outcome. Anything that stems from the flesh and hinders spiritual progress is a form of Galatianism. "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" What is the flesh? It is not some entity within--some coarse, rough, hairy, ugly brute of a man who lives inside you and who is always fighting with that new nature represented by that tall, handsome, and, of course, blonde man. The flesh is the capacity to be self-controlled, to be uncontrolled by the Holy Spirit, and it encompasses all that has been made old by the presence of the new nature. The manifestations of the flesh conceived in this sense are not necessarily in filthy evil ways, but often in approved but evil ways. This was true in the case of the Galatians. They were not guilty of grossly immoral sins; rather, other fleshly sins had hindered their spiritual progress.

What were these sins? In other words, what are the symptoms of Galatianism? I suggest three. The first is a false intellectualism. In the Judaizers' case it was an attempt to compromise the

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gospel with Judaism. On this Paul pronounced a curse because it affected the heart of the gospel, and in its ramifications it appealed to the mind of the flesh. A similar false intellectualism has invaded evangelical circles today. A fleshly mind can impede spiritual progress more quickly than anything. Total depravity extends from the neck up as well as down. I am not placing any premium on ignorance. If ignorance is preferred then I have been and am now wasting much of my life. But intellectualism is not necessarily wisdom. It is one thing to have knowledge; it is quite another to be wise.

This fleshly, puffed-up attitude toward knowledge has three characteristics in our day. The first is: find some "good" in neo-orthodoxy and quote it. This will prove that you are a scholar, and of course this is not a difficult criterion to meet. For instance, listen to this quotation from Emil Brunner. "Herein is the essence of true salvation that God reconciles to Himself and makes atonement for you who are separated from Him by sin. It is just that which was effected through Jesus Christ and His atoning death. Through Him and in Him has God broken down the barrier raised by our guilt, and has once linked us to Himself in peace and reconciliation, so that if we believe on Him the Atoner we are no longer estranged from God but at one with Him. That my friends, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because that atoning event took place in Him and through Him alone--and not through Rama, Krishna, Buddha, or Mohammed--therefore He is the Saviour and His name the only name whereby we must be saved."¹

That sounds pretty good, doesn't it? And doesn't my use of this prove me to be a great scholar? Far from it, for if I cannot relate this quotation to the whole Barthian system and point out how this isolated statement fails to present accurately the whole of Barthian soteriology, then I am hardly a scholar. The true scholar is the one who knows the facts, and who can weigh critically and use accurately the meaning of those facts. This is more than knowledge, although that is included; it is also the right use of knowledge.

The second characteristic of false intellectualism is this: make your explanations elaborate and complicated. I do not mean to imply that people should not be made to think. It is often good to have to use a dictionary when you read a book. Nor do I mean that everyone will understand everything you say or write. But I do mean that a scholar is one who can express himself plainly; for he who can explain something most simply is the one who knows it most thoroughly. Our Lord was the supreme example of this; and while it is true that all did not understand His sayings, they were nevertheless spoken plainly. "A sower went forth to sow." "I am the door." "I am the vine." "I am the resurrection." "In my Father's house are many mansions." "Love your enemies." Present-day scholarship often stands in sharp contrast to this simplicity. Strive, dear graduates, to be able to explain the Scriptures so that the Juniors and Intermediates can understand. Then the adults will be able to follow too.

The third characteristic of false intellectualism is this: be constantly rethinking everything. Again I do not want to be misunderstood. It is good to stretch your mental muscles. It is sometimes profitable to re-examine even some of those things which these faithful teachers have taught you. But always to be in a state of mental flux and to be rethinking not peripheral things but basics leads to self-deceit and self-aggrandizement, if not heresy. Listen to the testimony of one evangelical: "In the year 1898 a minister contributed (to a certain journal) a series of papers. I was a young man of only 23, and therefore, of course, was very well informed: so I pointed out some matters in which the minister was in error....With (certain) views (of eschatology) and with those alone, my mind had been nurtured and saturated from infancy; hence the shock I received from the minister's state-

ments. But I very soon saw that he was right....This was the commencement of an honest and independent testing of all I held....That same year and the next year were momentous in my spiritual development and education. The Father of mercies, in love and wisdom, moved His child into a higher class and set more advanced lessons. I shall mention only one matter. I discovered at once the immeasurable superiority of the RV over the AV."² And so on. How history repeats itself! Be thankful you can enter into the labors of other men. It is no commendation to be ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Preach with conviction, not confusion.

These are the characteristics of false intellectualism, and this is the first example of modern Galatianism.

The second symptom of modern Galatianism is self-promotion. This was at the heart of Judaizing. Those men desired to make a fair show in the flesh. They gloried in the flesh, and in promoting themselves through their converts they avoided persecution and obviated the need for any self-sacrifice. This kind of self-promotion finds its counterpart today in those Christians and Christian workers who seek to climb the social or ecclesiastical ladder.

Of course the Christian is to assume social responsibilities, but nowhere do the Scriptures teach that we should grasp after social standing. Our Lord went about doing good, and the servant is not greater than his Master. Good works and culture are desirable in their proper places. However, too often Christians try to make an impact on the society in which they live either for culture's sake itself, or in order to promote their own social standing in the community, or to keep from being a social outcast. We hold no brief for boorishness, and there is no excuse for ill-mannered Christians, but whatever culture or position is given us should be used not to promote self but to promote the message of the saving grace of Christ. You who are going into secular professions, beware that Satan does not sidetrack you in this way.

In the ecclesiastical realm, Christian politics is frequently a big thing. Spiritual payola is not uncommon. Now, it is my observation that this politicking is not limited to denominational circles but is often found in interdenominational and independent groups as well. I am not suggesting that you graduates cultivate an independent cockiness, but I am reminding you to seek the leading of the Lord and not the luxury of position. Like Philip and the eunuch, like Paul and Ananias, like Peter and Cornelius, you and those to whom you should minister should be brought together by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Your job is to be faithful to Him in your present responsibility.

The third characteristic of the Galatian error was a warped emphasis on certain doctrines. Granted, the doctrines were important, but it is always risky to major on a distinctive. That which is good may become evil spoken of, and in the process your flesh will convince you that this is your calling and that you alone are God's prophet of truth in this 20th century. In reality you will be little more than a 20th century Galatian whose flesh has hindered your own spiritual progress.

You will not misunderstand me if I mention some distinctives on which you might be tempted to major in the years of your ministries. These are doctrines which, unlike the original Galatian error, are Biblical and necessary, but concerning which it is easy to lose proper perspective. Independence, denominationalism, Calvinism, separatism, dispensationalism, ecumenism, premillennialism, and a very popular one today, love everybodyism. Shun not to declare the whole counsel of God, but let not your good be evil spoken of.

These are the characteristics of modern Galatianism--false intellectualism, self-promotion, and warped emphasis. If anyone could have promoted his knowledge, his position, or his distinctive doctrines, Paul could have. He was thoroughly trained in the secular and sacred, he was an apostle, and one who was independently chosen, and he certainly knew all the in's and out's of Christian theology; but in one sweeping statement he puts all these in their proper places in comparison with the real purpose of his ministry. This statement of his is at once the preventive and cure for any kind of Galatianism. And, incidentally, even at this late point, it is my text. Listen to it carefully. "But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). Do you know what it is to glory? To glory is to show off. Last winter in Philadelphia our basketball team was playing an overtime period to determine the winner of a tied game. As a matter of fact it was a second overtime, and we were ahead by two points with less than a minute to play. Our boys had the ball, and, on orders from the coach, were stalling. Suddenly, to everyone's amazement, one of our fellows shot--and missed. After the game I asked the coach what on earth had possessed that fellow to shoot just then. He replied that he was a "glory hound" wanting to show off in front of his girl who was sitting in the stands at that end of the court. (By the way, we won the game anyway.) To glory is to show off. To glory in the cross of Christ is to show off the death of Christ. How do you do this? In two ways. First, by your open, aggressive, and Spirit-led witness. The world lost in sin needs men and women in all walks of life to show off the death of Christ, not their knowledge, not their positions, and not their emphases. The second way you can glory in the cross is by exhibiting the fruits of your co-crucifixion with Christ spoken of in this verse. In other words, a godly life shows off the cross. Dead to the world and alive to God--this is holy living. For all of its advances, wisdom and culture, the world more than ever needs a Saviour. Men need to hear the message of the cross of Jesus Christ through your active witness and they need to see it through your holy life. The verse literally reads, "As for me, be it not to glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." As for me, Paul says, this is my purpose in life. As for me. And as for you?

DOCUMENTATION

1. Emil Brunner, The Great Invitation and Other Sermons (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), p. 110.
2. G. H. Lang, The Revelation of Jesus Christ (London: The Paternoster Press, 1948), p. 12.