

Notes on Biblical Exposition

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III. PLAIN SPEAKING IN A TIME OF PERIL

"Paul an Apostle, not from men nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia . . ." (Gal. 1:1, 2, in a literal translation).

"All the Brethren Who Are With Me"

IN the two previous numbers of CHRISTIANITY TODAY we have considered the significant addition which Paul makes in the opening of this Epistle to the bare name and title of the writer. He is an apostle, he insists, not through any merely human intermediation, as the Judaizing opponents contended, but by a direct commission from the Lord Jesus Christ.

But with himself Paul associates certain other persons. The letter comes, he says, not only from him, but from "all the brethren" who are with him when he writes. Such association of other persons with Paul occurs in the openings of a number of the Epistles. Thus I and II Thessalonians are sent in the name of Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus; I Corinthians, in the name of Paul and Sosthenes; II Corinthians, Philipians and Colossians, in the name of Paul and Timothy.

What is the meaning of this association of other persons with Paul in the openings of these letters? What part did these persons have in the letters that follow?

The true answer to that question is readily determined when we find a mean between two extremes.

Paul Alone the Author

It is perfectly clear, on the one hand, that these persons did not have any actual share in the composition of the Epistles. That view is excluded by the whole character of the Epistles. It would be difficult to imagine any writings that present more clearly than these the marks of one very distinctive mind. Whatever else may be thought of them, it is perfectly clear that they are not composite productions. Moreover, the first person singular is used in the Epistles in the freest possible way. Thus in Galatians, immediately after the opening, Paul says, "I marvel that ye are so soon removing . . ."; and he proceeds to write throughout the Epistle in the same thoroughly individual and personal manner. It is evident, therefore, that whatever this association of other persons with Paul in the openings of the Epistles may mean, it does not mean that these persons shared in the actual composition; these persons clearly were not joint authors with Paul.

On the other hand, an opposite extreme should also be avoided. It will hardly do to say that this association of other persons with Paul in the openings is only a polite way of indicating that these persons send greetings to the churches that are addressed; for the Pauline way of sending such greetings is to put them at the end. At the end of I Corinthians, for example, it is said: "Aquila and Priscilla, with the church that is in their house, salute you much in the Lord" (I Cor. 16:19); yet I Corinthians is one of the Epistles where another person—in this case, Sosthenes—is associated with Paul in the opening. Evidently the two things, the sending of greetings at the end and the association with Paul in the opening, cannot be exactly the same in meaning.

Others Agree with Paul

If, then, the association of these persons with Paul in the openings does not mean so much as that they have shared in the actual composition of the Epistles, and on the other hand means more than that they merely send greeting, what does it mean? Evidently it means something in between these two extremes. No doubt it means that these persons are acquainted, in at least a general way, with the contents of the Epistles, and unite with Paul in hoping for a favorable and obedient reception of them on the part of the churches to which they are addressed.

So here Paul no doubt means to say to the Galatians: "All the brethren who are with me join in what I am saying to you; will you, then, agree with me any less than they?"

By the words, "all the brethren who are with me," Paul hardly means to designate the whole church in whatever city he may have been residing in when he wrote the Epistle; for, as has well been observed, in Phil. 4:21 "the brethren who are with me" are distinguished from "all the saints" (verse 22), by which latter phrase Paul means to designate all the Christians in the city, Rome, in which the Epistle was written. Evidently the phrase, "the brethren who are with me," designated some smaller group, more intimately associated with Paul than were the members generally of that church at Rome. So here in Galatians Paul associates with himself in the Epistle not all the Christians in the city where he was residing, but some smaller and more intimate group of persons who could really be cognizant of what the Epistle contains.

No Time for Pleasant Words

So far we have dealt with only one of the three parts into which the opening of the Epistle is divided. We have dealt only with the part that is in the nominative case, the part that designates the writer of the letter and his associates. The next part is the part in the dative case, the part which designates the persons to whom the letter is addressed. This part is very brief; it consists simply of the words, "to the churches of Galatia."

We have already seen that the nominative part of this opening is very peculiar as compared with the other Epistles of Paul; it contains a long addition directed against the attack which the Judaizers had made against the independent apostolic authority of the writer. But the dative part of the opening is no less peculiar than is the nominative part.

At first sight, that may seem to be rather a surprising assertion. "To the churches of Galatia," Paul says. What could be simpler than that? What is there so peculiar about it? We answer that there is nothing peculiar about it, and that that is just exactly what is so peculiar about it! In almost every one of the other Epistles of Paul, there is something peculiar about the way in which those to whom the Epistle is addressed are designated in the opening; Paul uses words which designate in some way the high Christian state in which the readers find themselves. So in Rom. 1:7 the readers are called "beloved of God, called to be saints"; in I Corinthians the church is called "the church of God which is at Corinth," and the members of the church are called "saints"; and similar words of recognition of the Christian state of the addressees are found in other Epistles of Paul. But here the Epistle is addressed, in the briefest and most formal kind of way, simply "to the churches of Galatia."

This brevity and formality in the designation of the recipients of the Epistle, this complete absence of words recognizing their Christian state or their progress in the Christian life, is without doubt significant. These Galatians were on the point of turning away from the gospel of Christ, and Paul has no intention whatever of commending them. It is true, he does address them, later in the Epistle, as "brethren"; and "brethren," in Paul's writings, means, "fellow-Christians." He does not, therefore, give them up. Though they are in danger of falling away, there is yet a possibility—if we may speak after the manner of men—

of saving them. But certainly it was no time for pleasant words. He calls them, therefore, simply "the churches of Galatia"; he does not call them "saints"; he does not go out of his way to call them a part of the Church of God. Whether they were truly to be designated by these high terms remained to be seen; they could not rightly be so designated unless they should reject the error of the Judaizers and should stand fast in the freedom with which Christ had set them free.

What Would Paul Say Now?

How would Paul designate our churches of the present day? Would he fall in with the customary practice of saying that all is well? Would he sign the reports of the various Moderatorial commissions in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., which have as their function the crying of "Peace, peace, when there is no peace"? Would he go out of his way to commend as a true church of Jesus Christ an ecclesiastical body that includes among its ministers the thirteen hundred "Auburn Affirmationists" who have signed a formal document derogatory to the very vitals of the Christian faith? Would he commend an organization that has placed those men in positions of the highest ecclesiastical authority and is plainly dominated by the point of view that they represent, an organization that has recently removed from office the old Board of Directors of Princeton Seminary for no other cause but that with too great honesty and fearlessness it maintained the Confession of Faith of the Church? Would he speak with any essentially greater commendation of many other Reformed or Presbyterian Churches in this country? Would he commend the Presbyterian Church in the U. S., which is drifting away from the Bible and from the historic Faith almost without knowing it? Would he commend the United Presbyterian Church, with its recent adoption of a feeble, compromising "Confessional Statement," to supplement, and really to supplant, its great historic Westminster Confession which was founded squarely upon the word of God? Would he commend any of these churches that are toying with a plan of union which would substitute the power of committees and boards for a true, free unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and which, in its tentative form already announced, would do away with any effective creed-subscription on the part of the ministry and would give free course to indifferentism and unbelief? Would he commend churches so complacent toward those advocates of indifferentist church-union who, ever since the proposal of the "Plan of Organic Union" of 1920, have been engaged in undermining, undermining, undermining, where their office would have required them to be engaged in edification on the basis of God's holy Word?

We are convinced that he would utter no such commendation at all, but that he would

speak the same earnest word of warning that he spoke in the presence of the Judaizers of old. And in these sad days, when Christian language so often conceals a profoundly unchristian mind and heart, would to God that we had, in all our churches, less of empty pious words, less of a foolish optimism, and more of the fearless honesty of Paul.

The Churches of Galatia

Where were these "churches of Galatia", to which this Epistle was addressed? There are two views about this question. According to one view, called "the North Galatian theory", the churches were in the north central part of Asia Minor, in Galatia proper, the country of the "Celts"—the word "Galatians" is the Greek word for "Celts"—which was occupied by people of Celtic race after a back-migration into Asia Minor in the third century before Christ. According to the other view, "the South Galatian theory", the churches addressed in the Epistle were not in Galatia proper, but were the well-known churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, which were in those parts of Phrygia and Lycaonia that had united, or left united, with Galatia proper in 25 B. C. to form the large Roman province of "Galatia."

Upon this "Galatian question", the question as to which of these two views regarding the destination of the Epistle is correct, depends to some extent the question of the date of the Epistle. Apparently Paul had visited "the churches of Galatia" twice before he wrote the letter; for he says in Gal. 4:13, according to the most natural interpretation of his words: "Ye know that on account of a weakness of the flesh I preached the gospel to you *the former time*."

If the North Galatian theory is correct, the former of these two visits to the churches is to be put at Acts 16:6 (near the beginning of the second missionary journey) and the second of the visits to be put at Acts 18:23 (near the beginning of the third missionary journey), in both of which passages the phrase, "the Galatian country," is used. On the North Galatian theory, therefore, the Epistle could not have been written prior to the time of Acts 18:23, and in all probability it was written during the long stay of Paul at Ephesus which came just after that time.

If, on the other hand, the South Galatian theory is correct, the former of the two visits to the churches addressed in the Epistle took place on the first missionary journey, when Paul founded the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe; and the second visit—at least so our first impulse would be to say—took place at the beginning of the second missionary journey, when the Book of Acts distinctly says that Derbe and Lystra were visited and when it apparently intends us to understand that Paul went on also to Iconium and

Pisidian Antioch. On the South Galatian theory, therefore, the Epistle may have been written at any time after Paul's passage through South Galatia at the beginning of the second missionary journey.

Indeed, it is possible, on the South Galatian theory, to place the Epistle even earlier than that. On the first missionary journey, it will be remembered, Paul went first through Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe; and then he went back again over the same route. May not that return journey be regarded as the second of the two visits of Paul to the Galatian churches? If so, both of the visits may be placed in the first missionary journey, and the Epistle may have been written at any time after that journey was over.

In particular, the Epistle, on this view, may have been written *immediately* after that journey, or at Syrian Antioch during the period mentioned in Acts 14:26–15:2, a period prior to the "Apostolic Council" at which Paul met the Jerusalem Church in the manner described in Acts 15:3-29.

The Importance of "the Galatian Question"

This early dating of Galatians would have rather important consequences for our understanding of the history of the apostolic age. If the Epistle to the Galatians was actually written before the Apostolic Council, then of course it cannot contain an account of the Apostolic Council; and the meeting described in Gal. 2:1-10 between Paul and the pillars of the Jerusalem Church cannot be identical with the Apostolic Council of Acts 15:3-29, but must be identical with a previous visit of Paul to Jerusalem, the "famine visit" of Acts 11:30; 12:25, when Paul and Barnabas took up to Jerusalem the gifts of the Antioch Church.

Now a large part of modern negative criticism of the New Testament has been based upon the assumption that Acts 15:3-29 and Gal. 2:1-10 are two accounts of the same event. Since they are two accounts of the same event, it has been said, they can be checked up by comparison with each other; and if they are found to be contradictory, one account or the other is untrue. But in any case it is clear that the account given by Paul in Galatians is essentially true, since Paul was actually an eyewitness of the events and since the genuineness of the Epistle is not denied today by any serious critics, whatever their general attitude toward the New Testament may be. If, therefore, it is said, there is contradiction between Gal. 2:1-10 and Acts 15:3-29, the fault must lie on the side of Acts; and if Acts is thus discredited at this point, where we can check it up by comparison with a recognized authority, it is discredited elsewhere as well; and since the Third Gospel was written by the same man, that is discredited also, and the whole account which Luke-Acts gives of the life of

Christ and the beginnings of the Christian Church is shown to be untrustworthy.

This method of attack falls to the ground if Galatians was actually written before the Apostolic Council of Acts 15:3-29 took place; for in that case Gal. 2:1-10 is an account of an entirely different event from that which is narrated in Acts 15:3-29, and differences between the two accounts cannot possibly be regarded as contradictions. Thus the dating of Galatians before the Apostolic Council, which becomes possible on the South Galatian theory, constitutes one way, and a very effective way, of refuting what is perhaps the most serious modern attack upon the trustworthiness of the New Testament. This early dating of Galatians can no longer be regarded as a mere curiosity or baseless vagary of criticism; for it has received the support of several able modern scholars of widely differing views.

We do not, indeed, desire to create the impression that we adopt the early dating of Galatians. In particular, we do not desire to create the impression that we think it provides the only way of defending the trustworthiness of Luke-Acts. Even if Galatians was written after the Apostolic

Council, and even if Gal. 2:1-10 and Acts 15:3-29 do constitute, as the vast majority of scholars think they do, two accounts of the same event, still we hold most emphatically that there is no contradiction between them but that they present only those differences which are natural in two independent, but equally trustworthy, witnesses.

However, the early dating of Galatians, with identification of the event of Gal. 2:1-10 with the famine visit of Acts 11:30; 12:25, constitutes one possible, even though perhaps not probable, way of exhibiting the harmony between Acts and Galatians. It must be treated, therefore, at least with respect, and unquestionably it would serve to solve some of the problems. If there were no other way of defending the trustworthiness of Luke-Acts, then, because of the great weight of independent evidence to the effect that Luke-Acts is trustworthy, and that it was really written by a companion of Paul, we should regard as thoroughly scientific the adoption of this view.

The possibility of this early dating of Galatians is open only on the basis of the South Galatian theory. That constitutes, we think, the chief interest of the much

debated "Galatian question" as to the destination of the Epistle.

We shall not endeavor to decide that question here, and indeed the decision is exceedingly difficult. Plausible arguments may be adduced on either side. The North Galatian theory has the advantage of placing the Epistle chronologically together with the Epistles of the third missionary journey—I and II Corinthians and Romans—with which it is very closely connected in thought and in style. Perhaps that theory may provisionally be adopted, though the South Galatian theory, with or without the dating before the Apostolic Council, must be kept in mind as a possibility which ultimately we might be led to adopt.

Fortunately the essential teaching of the Epistle is quite independent of the question where the churches to which it is addressed are to be found. Whether those churches were in North Galatia or in South Galatia, they were falling into a very modern, as well as a very ancient, error, and the Epistle which Paul wrote to them in the first century is eminently a tract for our twentieth-century times.

Books of Religious Significance

MORALS OF TOMORROW. By Ralph W. Sockman, Ph.D., LL.D. Harper & Brothers, publishers, New York and London. Price, \$2.50.

FREEDOM AND RESTRAINT. The James Sprunt Lectures, 1930, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va. By Robert F. Campbell, A.M., D.D., Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Asheville, N. C. Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, Chicago. Price, \$1.75.

FROM the well-written book of Dr. Sockman it appears anew that Liberalism has determined upon the destruction of historic Christianity and theism. The God of Dr. Sockman is an immanent principle within the universe instead of the Creator and Sustainer of it. The Christ of Dr. Sockman is an exceptionally wise man but not the Son of God. The Scriptures are for Dr. Sockman the precipitate of past experience but not the word of God. Accordingly God no longer judges men.

Now it will at once be said that on such views of God, Christ and the Scriptures, there is no longer any authority for moral law. And this is true. Moral chaos is the logical result if Christian theism is relinquished. It is pathetic to see the author grasp in vain for some sort of authority. What he finds is the "authority of the expert." As one calls upon the doctor so one may still call on God, on Christ and on Scripture till nature takes its course in us.

That is "moral authority for free minds." The "democratic temper of our time" can allow no other authority. Thus the church's business is to help men outgrow their "growing pains." And in doing this the church must make no mention of eternity. "When the children of the psychological era cry for the bread of happiness here and now, it will scarcely do to offer them the stone of a promised bliss hereafter" (p. 128). Such is said to have been the view of Christ himself.

Now against such a position it is useless to fight unless one uproots the foundations upon which it is built. Or rather, one must show that such a position has no foundations. Its foundations are the shoreless and bottomless waters of human experience. Whence has human experience come? The answer must be, "From the void." Whither is human experience going? The answer must be, "To the void." Upon what is human experience resting? The answer must be, "Upon the void." The whole of human experience then, is meaningless. And expert advice on moral questions too, is meaningless. Granted there were experts there would be no patients but corpses. Modernism is as the jackdaw pluming itself with feathers stolen from Christian theism.

In Dr. Campbell's book the question of authority comes to the foreground again. But if one expects to find in this book a good refutation of the position maintained by Sockman and Liberals in general, he will be

disappointed. Dr. Campbell halts between two opinions. We would expect to be shown that except man moves in the medium of implicit obedience to God, and therefore to Christ and the Scriptures, he is as a fish on dry land. We would expect to be shown that tyranny and chaos are the twin monsters that face us if we do not face God. We would expect to be shown that we are slaves to sin if not slaves to Christ. We would expect to be shown that we are slaves to the word of the spirit of man if we are not obedient to the Spirit of the Word of God.

Instead of all this we have what looks very much like "authority for free minds." We are once more told that the authority of the Bible is that of the expert and not that of a judge (p. 17). Now this way of putting the matter is misleading. It implies that orthodox theology has been accustomed to think of God as a sort of judge who merely administers law that exists beyond Himself. It is thus misconceived and then caricatured that Sockman presents the matter. It is thus that Campbell misconceives the matter. As though the words of Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" have not found their echo in every believer's heart! Yes, we believe God's authority is expert. God is the expert not an expert. Therefore too, He has the authority not of a judge but of "the Judge of all the earth." It is for this reason too, that both guilt and pollution are involved in sin. Dr.