

Notes on Biblical Exposition

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VI. THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGER

"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you contrary to the gospel which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, now also again I say: 'If anyone is preaching to you contrary to what ye received, let him be accursed.' Now am I persuading men—or God? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should be no servant of Christ. For I make known to you, brethren, as to the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not according to man" (Gal. 1:8-11, in a literal translation.)

An Inviolable Gospel

IN the verse which we dealt with last month, Paul has stated with the utmost clearness the occasion for the writing of the Epistle: the Galatians are turning away from the gospel of Christ to another teaching. That other teaching purports to be a gospel, but in reality it is no gospel at all. It is a perversion of the one true gospel. The Judaizing teachers who are leading the Galatians astray are laying violent hands upon a gospel which does not belong to them but belongs only to Christ.

But in denying to the Judaizers the right to change the gospel, the Apostle is not denying to them anything that he is attempting to reserve for himself. "Even we who preached the gospel to you," he says, "have no right to change it; it is not our property any more than it is any other man's property; we were the instruments of preaching it to you, but it belongs exclusively to Christ." Indeed, Paul continues, even the angels in heaven have no power over this gospel; it is fixed and sure once for all. "But even if we," says the Apostle, "or an angel from heaven should preach to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed."

The Meaning of "Anathema"

The word *anathema*, here translated "accursed," is an interesting word. The

derivation of it is very simple: *ana* means "up"; *the* is a root meaning "to place" or "to put"; *-ma* is a noun ending with a passive significance. Hence an *anathema* is "a thing that is placed up." The word came to refer especially to what is "placed up" in a temple as a votive offering to a god. So the word is used in Lk. 20:5: "And when certain men said concerning the Temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and offerings . . ." The spelling is a little different in this passage, a long *e* standing for a short *e* in the *the* of *anathema*; but essentially it is the same word.

How then can a word that means "votive offering" possibly come to have the bad sense, "accursed"? The answer to that question seems fairly clear. The fundamental idea, when a thing is called an *anathema*, is that the thing has been taken from ordinary use and has been handed over to God. If it is a good thing, it has been handed over to Him for His use; if it is a bad thing, it has been handed over to Him for destruction: but in either case men have no more to say about it; it is taken out of ordinary relationships and is "devoted" to God.

So here Paul says—if the original sense of the word is to be regarded as still in view—that the punishment of the man who attempts to lay violent hands upon the gospel of Christ should be in God's hands: that man should be regarded as beyond men's power to help; he should be regarded as having fallen into that state about which the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The Intolerance of Paul

Upon what sort of error does the Apostle pronounce this tremendous condemnation? It was not an error which the modern Church, according to its present tendency, would be inclined to take very seriously. The Judaizers agreed with

Paul about many things: they believed that Jesus was the Messiah; they seem to have had no quarrel with Paul's lofty view of Jesus' person; they believed in His resurrection from the dead. Moreover, they believed that a man must have faith in Christ if he is to be saved. They differed from the Apostle only in thinking that a man must also contribute something of his own if he is to be saved—namely the keeping of the law of God.

Paul also held that the Christian man must do what the law commands. The Apostle did differ from the Judaizers, it is true, with regard to the meaning of the law; he did hold that certain ceremonial requirements of the Old Testament, though entirely divine and authoritative, were intended by God only for the old dispensation and not for the new dispensation that had been ushered in by the redeeming work of Christ. But that difference is not really the main point in the Epistle to the Galatians. The central point at issue between Paul and the Judaizers concerned merely the logical—not even the temporal—order of three steps. Paul said: (1) "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; (2) at that moment you are saved; and (3) immediately you proceed to keep the law of God." The Judaizers said: (1) "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) keep the law of God the best you can; and then (3) you are saved."

To the men that dominate the life of the modern Church it would seem to be a subtle, hair-splitting distinction at the most. Surely, they would say, Paul ought to have made common cause with those Judaizers who had such a zeal for righteousness and furthermore exalted the Lord Jesus Christ so high!

As a matter of fact the Apostle did nothing of the kind. What he actually said with respect to the Judaizers was: "Let them be anathema." He seemed to have none of the modern virtue of tolerance at this point.

Tolerance Right and Wrong

Yet on occasion the Apostle could display tolerance of the broadest possible kind. He displayed it, for example, when he was in prison in Rome, at the time when he wrote the Epistle to the Philippians. At that time, certain men had tried, apparently, to use the Apostle's imprisonment in order to seize the place of preëminence in the Church, which otherwise would have been his. They preached Christ, says Paul, "of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add a fiction to my bonds." It seems to have been about as mean a piece of business as could possibly be imagined. But Paul was very tolerant about it. "What then?" he said, "Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

What was the reason, on the one hand, for the broad tolerance in Rome and, on the other hand, for the vigorous anathemas in Galatia? Why was Paul tolerant in the one case and not in the other? The answer is perfectly plain. He was tolerant in Rome because the message that was being proclaimed by the rival preachers was true; their motives were wrong, but their message was right. And it was with the truth of the message that Paul was chiefly concerned. In Galatia, on the other hand, it was the message that was wrong. No doubt the motives of the Judaizers were by no means all that they should be; these men preached circumcision in order to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ and in order to obtain credit from their non-Christian Jewish countrymen (Gal. 6:12f.). But it was not such faults in their motives that afforded the primary ground for Paul's attack upon them. His opposition to them would have been exactly the same, as he says in our passage, if they had all been angels from heaven!

Tolerance and Intolerance in the Modern Church

The prime question for Paul in dealing with any message was not the personality of the messengers but the question whether the message was true. In the modern Church, on the other hand, it is exactly the other way around. Paul was intolerant about the content of the mes-

sage but tolerant about the personality of the messengers; the modern Church is tolerant about the message but intolerant about the personality of the messengers and about the methods by which the message is proclaimed.

Thus Paul was just as tolerant as the modern Church; only his tolerance appeared at an entirely different place. It is a mistake to say that the modern Church is really practising tolerance. On the contrary, there is nothing more intolerant than the ecclesiastical machinery that governs, for example, our Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. It seems at first sight to be tolerant in the doctrinal sphere, though even there its tolerance is apparent rather than real, being extended much more to Modernist opponents of the truth than to those who would proclaim in its fulness and in its solemn exclusiveness the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But even if the ecclesiastical machinery were really tolerant in the doctrinal sphere, its intolerance in the sphere of administration would still be apparent.

A Recent Example

The difference between the two kinds of tolerance can be made clear if we take as an example the contrast between the methods of the two parties in the recent debate regarding the reorganization of Princeton Theological Seminary.

In that conflict, the gentlemen representing the ecclesiastical machinery, who finally succeeded in bringing about the reorganization of the seminary, certainly displayed intolerance enough, even though the president of the Seminary who agreed with them, advocated an "inclusive" seminary.⁽¹⁾ They carried on the conflict, moreover, by the introduction of all sorts of personalities. Such personalities appeared at the beginning, and they also appeared not only throughout the conflict but also at the very end. An official bulletin issued by Princeton Theological Seminary in November, 1929, soon after the reorganization, actually speaks (without any specific citations whatever) of "insinuations," "slanders," "false statements," "defamers," a "disingenuous" attitude on

the part of the opponents.⁽²⁾ It seems almost unbelievable that an official organ of an educational institution should use such language as that; yet such language certainly was used.

We, on the other hand, opposing the reorganization, and opposing the present government of Princeton Seminary, have avoided such personalities. We are strongly opposed to the policy of these gentlemen who brought about the destruction of the old Princeton; but we are not interested in carrying on a guerilla warfare against their character or in analyzing their motives. Their character and their motives are for God to judge; all that we feel obliged to say is that their policy is hostile to the spread of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our objection to them, like Paul's attitude to his opponents in Galatia, would be exactly the same if they were angels from heaven. Not the character of the messengers, but the truth and clearness of the message is our concern in this entire conflict. And in that attitude we have tried very humbly to follow the teaching and example of the Apostle Paul.

The Cost of Loyalty

There could scarcely be a better guide in controversy than the verse with which we have just dealt: "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you contrary to the gospel which we have preached to you, let him be anathema." That text excludes unworthy personalities in debate; but it also demands the most unswerving loyalty to the gospel of Christ, no matter what personalities may be opposed, and no matter what sacrifices loyalty may involve.

The sacrifices involved in loyalty will, in our Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., in all probability not be small. In the Permanent Judicial Commission just appointed by the General Assembly, four out of eight ministerial members are signers of the "Auburn Affirmation," which declares that a man may be a minister in the Presbyterian Church without believing in one single one of the following verities of the Faith: the full truthfulness of Scripture, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resur-

(1) See *Proceedings of the General Assembly's Special Committee on Princeton Theological Seminary* (on file in the office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly), p. 170.

(2) See *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, xxlii, No. 3, November, 1929, pp. 5-8.

rection, the miracles of our Lord. A leader of the Affirmation movement, Dr. Robert Hastings Nichols of Auburn, is among the four. It seems altogether probable, therefore, that the highest judicial body in the Church, which is charged with the all-important duty of interpreting the creed, is dominated by this point of view so derogatory to the very vitals of the Christian religion.

A consistent Christian man will hold that in any doctrinal issue it will be a disgrace to be acquitted by such a court and an honor to be condemned. But the honor of being condemned will of course involve worldly sacrifices and the revilings of the visible Church, at the same time that it involves the favor of God. Unless all signs of the times fail, Christian men in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. will soon be called upon to decide very definitely which they love more—the Lord Jesus Christ or the favor of men.

The Law or Grace

Certainly the point of difference between Paul and the Judaizers—to return to our passage in Galatians—was no trifling difference, no matter how trifling it may seem to the modern Church. It was the difference between a religion of merit and a religion of grace. The Judaizers' teaching required a man to earn at least part of his salvation by his own keeping of God's law. Paul saw clearly that to follow such teaching was to do despite to the cross of Christ. If we have to fill up even the slightest gap by our own works, then we are still lost in sin; for the awakened conscience sees clearly that our own works are insufficient to bridge even the smallest gap. We must trust Christ for nothing or for all; to trust Him only for part is the essence of unbelief. There are two ways of being saved, according to the Apostle Paul. One way is to keep the law of God perfectly. That way is closed because of sin. The other way is to accept the gift of salvation which Christ offers us freely by His cross. The two ways cannot both be followed—that is the burden of the Epistle to the Galatians. A man must choose as the way of salvation either the law or grace. In bidding men choose the latter way the Apostle was contending for the very heart of the Christian religion.

So important did the utterance which we have just discussed seem to the Apostle Paul that he repeats it, in slightly different form, in the next verse. "As we have said before," he says, "now also again I say: 'If anyone is preaching to you contrary to what ye received, let him be accursed.' The reference here is no doubt to a warning which had been given on the last visit by the Apostle to the Galatian churches. "I gave you the warning at that earlier time," he says, "and I am giving you exactly the same warning now."

Was Paul Inconsistent?

Then he continues, with reference to the uncompromising language which he has just used: "Now am I persuading men—or God? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should be no [true] servant of Christ." Apparently the Apostle had been accused of vacillation and time-serving. When he was among the Gentiles where circumcision was unpopular, it was said, he could preach freedom from the Mosaic law; but when he was among the Jews, where circumcision was popular, he could preach circumcision. Such a charge seems to be implied in Gal. 5:11, where Paul says: "And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?"

At first sight, this charge might seem too preposterous ever to have been made even by the bitterest opponents. But closer examination reveals things in Paul's life which might conceivably have given color, though certainly not real justification, to the charge. One may think, for example, of the circumcision of Timothy, the half-Jew (Acts 16:3); or one may remember that Paul himself in his Epistles says that he "became all things to all men" (I Cor. 9:22), and particularly that he became to the Jews as a Jew, to those who were under the law as being himself under the law (I Cor. 9:20). Where no principle, but merely his own convenience, was involved, Paul could be the most concessive of men. Such concessiveness may well have been misunderstood, or wilfully misinterpreted, by the Judaizing opponents. So the Apostle has to defend himself against a charge from which he might at first sight have been thought to be immune.

"You say that I am a time-server," says

the Apostle; "you say that I change my attitude toward circumcision to suit the likes or dislikes of my hearers. Well, the language that I am using now hardly seems to justify such a charge. If any man preaches a different gospel, let him be accursed. I said that some time ago on my last visit. I am saying exactly the same thing now. Does *that* look like persuading or cajoling men? Does that look like vacillation? Surely not. Surely that language is uncompromising enough."

"No," says the Apostle, "if I am 'persuading' anyone, it is God. It is his favor, not men's, that I am seeking to win. Indeed, if I were still seeking men's favor, I should be no true servant of Christ; for the commission that Christ has given me excludes all man-pleasing. The gospel that Christ has entrusted to me is not according to man, and now that I have been entrusted with that gospel I must put all thought of men's favor aside. I must preach that gospel without fear or favor: it is not my gospel, but Christ's; and I have no power to change it to suit the fancies of men."

Various Interpretations

Such, we venture to think, is the most natural interpretation of a passage that has been much discussed. The commentators dispute, for example, over the meaning of the word "now" at the beginning of verse 10. Does it mean "now since I have become a Christian," or "now since the error has become so serious as to call forth an uncompromising stand"; or does it mean, as we have taken it, "now when I am using such uncompromising language as that which appears in the two preceding verses"?

So also there is dispute over the meaning of the Greek conjunction, usually translated "for," which appears at the beginning of that same verse 10. Does Paul mean (1): "I pronounce this severe judgment upon the Judaizers; for I am no man-pleaser"? Or does he mean (2): "This severe judgment of mine upon the Judaizers is correct; for I am speaking the truth as in the sight of God and am not swayed by my likes or dislikes"? Or, is the "for" best left untranslated in English, as we have left it untranslated, the

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But is the Church not losing by thus misplacing her emphasis? Her glory has always been the preaching and living of the Christ life; she needs no better advertisement than doing just that. In seeking to inculcate her teaching and the Christ life the Church may lose worldly goods, social prestige and Gothic cathedrals, but she will gain in moral authority, spiritual reality and heavenly power.

Money and worldly power have often threatened to strangle the Church and have again appeared with warnings aplenty. Many pastors have at some time been told to be careful about "so-and-so" because he was a good contributor. Those who contribute much wealth usually desire power and often when analyzed in proportion to the contribution of a poor widow, the wealthy gift isn't so much. But it has now and then happened that the Church has toned down her spiritual message to admit the jingle of gold. We condemn Israel for worshipping the golden calf, but I wonder if sometimes that sin does not beset us in greater measure than we imagine.

Power, wealth and social glory are sins assailing the Temple of Truth. I wonder if the time has not come for the Church to repent of these things, to draw its lines tighter about itself that it may tell the world it stands for something; that it is not seeking glory, or wealth, or power, but that it is seeking to bring the love of God into the hearts of men, and to bring peace and joy into life. Then I wonder if the Church should not re-define its requirements for membership and if it should not make an attempt to adhere to them. Church membership should mean something; it should mean the dedicating of a soul to the Christ, the serious attempt on the part of that soul to live a truly Christian life on week days as well as on Sunday.

Some time ago I was called to a home where a member of the family died. I did not know the family and upon inquiry after I got to the home I learned that the deceased had never made an attempt to live a Christian life, but had consistently opposed it. "But," they explained to me, "that isn't necessary for a Christian funeral. All we have to do is give the minister \$10 and he will say anything we desire." "I'm sorry," I replied, "but you have the wrong minister." And the sad part of such an incident is that I know pastors who would be glad to get \$10 like that, for the money found its way into a clerical pocketbook.

If the Church means anything, if it stands for something, it should exercise enough disciplinary force to maintain those things Jesus committed to it. The Church always loses when it accommodates "its message to the prejudices and interests of the surrounding world." Strait is the gate and narrow is the way . . . What would Jesus find in His churches if He returned to earth?

Who Can Answer?

Editorial in "The Christian Register"

WE are amazed at the present state of confusion which admits into most approved Christian circles such utterly radical people as the brilliant Abba Hillel Silver and the learnedly ponderous Henry Nelson Wieman. The Rabbi's new book is humanism from beginning to end; he is a liberal whose creed would be accepted by our outmost left-wing brethren. Yet all the evangelical front-line men who get into the book-review pages praise to the point of hysteria the work of this utterly un-Christian prophet, and take him to their bosom much more closely than they do nine-tenths of the orthodox faithful.

We do not understand this uprush of emotion which is without any reason at all. The religious bookclub, we should add, endorses the Silver volume and thus it bears the modernist imprimatur. We are glad of it, for it helps along the liberating business; but still we wonder.

As for Professor Wieman, we are sure the evangelical brethren don't know what he is talking about, for he has changed from one position to another till to-day he is outside the Christian breastworks altogether. As Daniel Evans says of him, his God is in no sense a person; his concept is the thinnest kind of abstraction. Wieman is an "impersonal cosmologist." He does away with "mind and purpose in the universe," and God as a word is for him only a "squawk." Yet this impressive scholastic is so popular in orthodox seminaries and special conferences that he may almost be called a sensation.

These two examples of approval by the curious mind in prevailing religion ought to be a lesson to us, though just what it is we do not know.

The 143rd Assembly (Editorial)

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in America have voted to discontinue negotiations along this line. It looks as though the United Presbyterian Church would be the only church that is even willing to give further consideration to this matter. It would seem, therefore, as though the labored and long drawn-out effort to unite the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of the United States had virtually come to naught. As a Department of Church Cooperation the "Department of Church Cooperation and Union" may have considerable to its credit, but as a Department of Church Union it has as yet hardly justified its existence.

Attention is directed to what is said

about the new Judicial Commission on pages 9, 10 and 18.

One of the most significant actions taken by the Assembly was to authorize the General Council to discontinue the Presbyterian Magazine. There will be time enough to discuss the significance of that action, however, after the General Council has availed itself of the authority conferred upon it—if the contingency upon which the exercise of this authority is dependent should become a reality.

Broadly speaking it does not seem to us inaccurate to characterize the 143rd General Assembly as a "Yes and No" Assembly. One can readily find much to commend, but it is equally easy to find much to condemn. As a whole it, perhaps, affords more warrant for encouragement on the part of conservatives than did the Assemblies immediately preceding. That, however, is not saying a great deal.

Notes on Biblical Exposition

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meaning of it being, if it had to be analyzed, very similar to that which appears in (1).

Then what is the meaning of the word "still" in the clause, "If I were still pleasing men"? Does the word mean, "still after I have become a Christian," or "still after the error has attained such proportions as to call forth an uncompromising stand;" or does it mean, as we have taken it, "still after I have been entrusted with a gospel which by its very nature excludes man-pleasing in the messenger who proclaims it"? It must be said that this last interpretation seems to depend upon the correctness of those manuscripts that read "for" at the beginning of verse 11, as over against other manuscripts that read "but" or "and." We are inclined to hold rather strongly to our interpretation and to the reading that supports it.

Fortunately these questions about the meaning of the passage in detail do not seriously affect the general sense. Paul has been entrusted with a gospel that is not his own and that demands unswerving loyalty in the man who proclaims it. That gospel in its very nature is not "according to man"; it does not conform to any standard which man might set up.