

DOCTRINE and DIVISION

Paul's burden in Galatians is to present the truth of the Cross to correct the two complimentary errors into which these believers had fallen, namely

1. Doctrinal error—to rely on the works of the law in place of the death of Christ, *and*
2. Sectarian error—to compel observance by circumcision.

It is important to note that the apostle's object is to *correct* these errors, not to judge those affected as unfit for fellowship, which he specifically condemns in ch. 2. 11/14. In fact, he sees the second error as the more serious, and it is the determined and wilful efforts of those who would enforce their views which he likens to the influence of leaven.

The reason for this distinction is plain. Doctrinal error may be held through ignorance, false teaching, immaturity or prejudice, even by those who are truly the Lord's. But whether right or wrong, the subject of this dissension availed nothing, "but faith which worketh in love" (ch. 5, 6), and the Holy Spirit is free to reveal the truth only when our "hearts are rooted and grounded in love" (see Eph. 3. 17/19). We have been called to love and liberty, but when these are denied the will of man becomes a controlling force in place of that of the Spirit of God—the liberty becomes "an occasion to the flesh" (ch. 5. 13) which works like leaven to full sectarian sin. *This* is what Paul condemns.

On the other hand, he deals with the doctrinal error firmly but most graciously. The false teacher—he that troubleth you—shall bear his own judgment (ch. 5. 10), but Paul has confidence through the Lord in the saints generally. Nevertheless, if any are overtaken in a fault a spiritual man should restore such, who will also humbly consider himself (ch. 6. 1/10). Christ Himself has shown us how we are to bear the burdens of the weak, infirm and defective ones. Indeed His final appeal to a man who had been restored himself was to feed His sheep, and thus the Great Shepherd would have us to learn from Him and act humbly in tender care during His absence. This gracious spirit would preserve the flock in a crisis, rather than scatter them. Let us heed the solemn indictment of the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34.

Therefore, there is an essential difference between the leaven of 1 Cor. 5. 6 and Gal. 5. 9, though both represent the

working of the fleshy mind and will. When its gross and immoral features appear the holiness of God's house immediately requires us to "purge out the old leaven", and those responsible are specifically to be put away as wicked persons.

In Galatians, however, Paul does not call for such discipline or purging out of leaven because some trace of it is found in the sinful nature of us all. But it must be judged, condemned, and treated as God has treated it, for "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh."

It may be said that the doctrine pressed was one of fundamental importance, and so it was if it called into question the necessity for the death of Christ. But very few, if any, issues on fundamental doctrine have been disputed by brethren during the last hundred years. The importance of the deity of Christ, His true humanity and His atoning work have been fully accepted by all contestants, though definitions thereof have caused untold strife.

It is these variations from the simple words of scripture which have much confused and troubled the saints, and as they have been forced to accept one or other interpretation (often in an unscriptural formula) so the greater error of sectarianism has developed.

The doctrine of defilement from contact with misguided and ill-taught believers which has been built upon Gal. 5. 9, is not taught in scripture. (2 John 7/11, does not refer to true believers.) It is the divisive course of action intended to stop the spread of leaven which has in fact defiled the church by the deep-seated rivalry and prejudice of each resultant party. The enemy has indeed used this so-called principle to sow discord and scatter the flock as Paul later foretells in Acts 20. 28/30.

Let those who talk so readily of compromising the truth reflect that by "provoking one another" and "sowing to the flesh", our ill-conceived actions have themselves compromised the truth until our so-called fellowships have become a dishonour to Christ and a mockery to men.

Rather let us see to it that we are not beguiled into further recriminations of the past with its critical analyses of the glorious truths of the Person and Manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are accepted by all concerned, and which should never have been made the subject of dissension and world-wide division.

Extract from a letter by Mr. J. N. Darby

on

THE PERSON OF CHRIST

To enter upon subtle questions as to the person of Jesus tends to wither and trouble the soul, to destroy the spirit of worship and affection, and to substitute thorny enquiries, as if the spirit of man could solve the manner in which the humanity and divinity of Jesus were united to each other. In this sense it is said, "No one knoweth the Son but the Father." It is needless to say that I have no such pretension. The humanity of Jesus cannot be compared. It was true and real humanity, body, soul, flesh, and blood, such as mine, as far as human nature is concerned. . . .

Our precious Saviour was quite as really man as I, as regards the simple and abstract idea of humanity, but without sin, born miraculously by divine power; and, moreover, He was God manifest in flesh.

I recommend you with all my heart to avoid discussing and defining the person of our blessed Saviour. You will lose the savour of Christ in your thoughts, and you will only find in their room the barrenness of man's spirit in the things of God and in the affections which pertain to them. It is a labyrinth for man because he labours there at his own charge. It is as if one dissected the body of his friend, instead of nourishing himself with his affections and character.

I may add, that I am so profoundly convinced of man's incapacity in this respect, that it is outside the teaching of the Spirit to wish to define how the divinity and the humanity are united in Jesus, that I am quite ready to suppose that, with every desire to avoid error, I may have fallen into it, and in falling into it, said something false in what I have written to you. That He is really man, Son of man, dependent on God as such, and without sin in this state of dependence, really God in His unspeakable perfection—to this I hold, I hope, more than to my life. To define is what I do not pretend. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father." If I find something which enfeebles one or other of these truths, or which dishonours what they have for object, I should oppose it, God calling me to it, with all my might.

May God give you to believe all that the word teaches with regard to Jesus! It is our peace and our nourishment to understand all that the Spirit gives us to understand, and not to seek to define what God does not call us to define; but to worship on the one hand, to feed on the other, and to live in every way, according to the grace of the Holy Ghost.

Col. Wtgs. X, pp 286/291.

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