

GLEANINGS — February 7, A.D. 2016
Institutional Backsliding, Part One

The English language has a fine old family of words. One venerable member is liberality. The word is synonymous with generosity and big-heartedness. It should bring to our minds those character traits which are the opposite of "stinginess", mean spiritedness, and pettiness.

Another word sharing the august etymology of liberality is liberate - to set free. To attain the state of liberty is the passion of all who feel oppressed in body, mind, or spirit. Those who fight for the liberation of others are the heroes of the human race.

Thus when we hear or read these fine old words our minds should fill up with images of cheerful and lavish givers, the wonderful state of freedom, noble tolerance, and humble open-mindedness.

There's another term hanging on this linguistic family tree, which some count as fruitful indeed: liberal. Meanwhile, those who count themselves as liberals do so (or at least, the progenitors of liberal ideology did so) because they see their position as exemplifying the noble values of liberality. Despite the gainsaying of their conservative antagonists, they believe that their views exalt true human liberty. So is this to be an article on politics?

To be sure, a distinctly Biblical philosophy of the role of the state and government emerges in a believer as his overall Biblical worldview grows in strength and purity. However, our immediate purpose here is not to discuss liberal vs. conservative politics. Our purpose is to expose THEOLOGICAL liberalism. It needs to be exposed because that type of liberalism is not worthy of its noble family name; in fact it belongs on the list of aberrant cults and heresies which only mock true Christianity.

Sacrificial liberality is the very heart of the God of the Bible, for "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). God's plan of salvation anticipates a consummation of eternal freedom, "...because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). Theological liberalism, however, is not a giver and a liberator, but a destroyer and an oppressor.

Like eels and most slimy things, theological liberalism is hard to get a handle on; it is not easy to define. Sometimes called modernism or neo-orthodoxy, it is characterized by a denial of the Biblical, essential, historic doctrines of Christianity. It comes in like a deteriorating disease. First the doctrines are challenged and abandoned. In the wake of that wasting pestilence, truly Christian spirituality and ethics slowly erode as well. It robs a church or denomination of the precious Gospel, and causes it to retain only its outward form, its tradition. Here is an example.

In fulfillment of ancient prophecies (*the foretelling of a future event being in itself miraculous*) and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary without the conjugal involvement of any man. Mary remained a virgin until Jesus was born (cf. Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23-25).

Although the Bible clearly proclaims this historical reality, unbelief scoffs at such an idea, and insists that Christ must have been conceived in the ordinary way. In the name of tolerance, open-mindedness, charity (those noble virtues of that fine old verbal family) Christians gullibly accommodate the unbelief. Believing that the essence of the faith will remain intact even without the virgin birth, seminaries and pastoral search committees permit preachers and teachers to proclaim a non-virgin birth of Christ.

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