

GLEANINGS — February 14, A.D. 2016
Institutional Backsliding, Part Two

When something like the denial of the virgin birth of Jesus (discussed in Part One) occurs, theological liberalism has crept in. The acceptance of one such a watered down position makes the next one even more acceptable. Subsequent attacks on the incarnation and deity of Jesus Christ eventually establish an emaciated Christology (doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ). Jesus is perceived as only a man and a noble example, instead of the Redeemer Who is both fully God, fully Divine, as well as being fully human (and Who is also an example for His disciples). Thus a major characteristic of theological liberalism is its dangerous "slippery slope".

The term slippery slope originated with England's late nineteenth century "prince of preachers", Charles Haddon Spurgeon. The image is almost self explanatory. Once you've finally worked up the courage to start down that water slide at your favorite summer theme park, no natural force is going to bring you back up to the top platform. A skier contemplating her jump may decide to abort it before her descent begins, but once she begins, turning around and skiing back to the top is essentially impossible.

Apply the concept to spiritual life in the kingdom of God, and theology. Writing under Holy Spirit inspiration, the apostle Paul wrote as following in his zeal for the Corinthians: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Like the first inch or two down a slippery slope, stealthy and deceitful theological liberalism creeps into faithful realms within Christ's vast kingdom, and begins to woo believers to a more worldly, humanly manageable, pseudo-Christianity which is nothing more than moralism with Christian wrapping. Like the diabolical work of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who led ancient Israel into idolatry, theological liberalism is spiritually seductive.

Adding insult to injury, theological liberalism goes on to the treachery of sanitizing the apostasy it has engendered. It provides a justification and rationale for the slippery slope descent of a previously faithful Christian church or denomination. The mid 19th century provides a classic example. Imitating Dickens we might call it "A Tale of Two Charlies".

The less well known Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) and his fellow Englishman Charles Darwin (1809-1882) both advanced what in their day were radical ideas. Lyell assumed uniformitarianism - the idea that the same geological forces observable today are responsible for all the earth's features (stratified sedimentary rocks, the Grand Canyon, etc.). This fatal assumption led him to conclude that the earth was far older than a Biblical worldview will allow.

Darwin, self consciously dependent on Lyell's ideas, advanced the theory which today bears his name and also despises the clear teaching of Scripture. We can think of these two men as the fathers of twin errors of pseudo science: that the earth is untold millions of years old, and that all life on earth arose by evolution. The unbelieving masses, as if intuitively seeing in this doctrine an escape from accountability to the Creator God of the Bible, drank in the twin errors like water. The "scientific" establishment of today regards the twin errors as twin pillars and bulwarks of truth.

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