

Modernism in the Church

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James 1:17-27

James 1:17-27, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”*

Modernism like a Trojan horse. A wooden horse concealing armed men by which the Greeks gained entrance into Troy.

Liberty — the cry of the modernist

Gal. 5:1, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”*

Liberty does not mean license to do anything one wants to do.

There is no conflict between liberty and law. Last phrase of “America the Beautiful” – “thy liberty in law.” Liberty is found in authority.

Authority guarantees freedom to live without fear of violence. Without certain restrictions and limitations there could be no freedom.

The psalmist, David, saw no conflict between liberty and law in Psalms 119:44-45, *“So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.”*

James 1:25, “*But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*”

Liberty does mean freedom, but from what?

From the bondage of the Old Law.

Rom. 8:2-3, “*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*”

From the bondage of our own sin.

- John 8:34, “*Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*”
- Rom. 6:16, “*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*”
- Rom. 6:18, “*Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.*”

The Apostle Paul saw no conflict with liberty and obedience.

Which liberty does Gal 5:1 apply?

Gal. 5:1, “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*”

Answer is in the next verse. Gal. 5:2, “*Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.*”

It was the Old Law ordinances.

Are we at liberty to do anything we want?

What does God say about things of the world being a liberty?

2 Pet. 2:19-20, “*While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*”

What should be our attitude concerning our liberty?

1 Pet. 2:13-16, “*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of*

God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.”

If our brother thinks something is a sin, we should abstain from it for his sake (unless that contradicts God’s law).

1 Cor. 8:13, *“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”*

The modernist cries “the spirit, not the letter of the law”

2 Cor. 3:6, *“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”*

The modernist says, “What a passage says is not as important as the spirit behind it.” This softens us up for error.

The only way we can know the spirit of a command is through the letter of the command. If the letter is false, or unimportant, there is no way to know what the spirit of the command is. If there is no letter, there is no authority. Each of us, then, is free to decide our own spirit.

If the letter kills, then does baptism kill? If the modernist is right, it would be wrong to obey the letter.

It would kill spiritual life to observe the Lord’s Supper, for the bread and fruit of the vine constitute the letter.

The passage of 2 Cor. 3:6 does not deal with the external and internal of a new covenant, but of the Old and the New Covenants.

2 Cor. 3:7-9, *“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.”*

The Apostle John says it well: John 4:24, *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”*

Modernism's start in a congregation

This is something to which we have to be constantly on alert. It is not easily detected until it has a stronghold.

Quote from R. C. Lenski, "In the beginning error is meek and asks only to be tolerated. It pleads for broadmindedness. However, once it is entrenched it becomes inflated, and accusingly asks truth: 'What are you doing here?'"

A false teacher may not seem influential at first; but if not checked, will influence others to where his modernist ideas have created a disaster in the church.

Many times a modernist will think of some philosophy, and then try to explain the Bible in light of it, rather than making the Bible the standard that guides our thinking.

Lenski says, "One problem when confronting modernists is there is a sentimental weakness among them where they find it difficult to oppose 'nice, amiable' people who propagate false teaching. There are hordes of likable, good teachers of false doctrine in the world today."

- 2 Tim. 4:3-4, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*"
- Gal. 1:6-9, "*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*"
- Rom. 16:17-18, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*"

Quote from J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Doctrinal deterioration in a group rarely starts with rejection of a basic doctrine but rather

with indifference as to the importance or significance of that doctrine. Compromise usually begins at the point of silence.”

2 Thess. 2:15, *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”*

