

The Camel's Nose

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James 1:17-27

Alexander Campbell once told of a camel that wanted only to have his nose sticking through the tent door — just his nose, no more — just wanted to get a better smell of the strange odors that emanated from inside the tent. “Please just tolerate my intrusion.” However, that did not satisfy the camel. Eventually he managed to worm all of his hairy self, humps and all, inside the tent, and if the people inside didn’t like it, they can get out. He was there to stay.

Alexander Campbell said this camel has many names in religion — anything not authorized in the New Testament scriptures that initially only wants to be considered — just be tolerant and have an open mind; then eventually says to truth, “What are you doing here?”

During the restoration movement, Alexander Campbell held that the camel had to be warded off and not be allowed to have his nose in the church. He held that Biblical truth had to be authoritative and man’s opinions are to have no place in religion.

The camel's nose in religion.

In the history of the church there have been many camels that initially just wanted its nose through the tent door.

Missionary Society and other societies, clubs and organizations, instrumental music, individual cups, Sunday school classes, hired preachers, women teachers, open fellowship (calling on just about anyone to take an active part of church services regardless of their religious status (unbaptized, unrepentant sinners (example given: a person baptized, but later espouses non-biblical teaching), etc.)).

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 is like the camel that just wants its nose in the tent door.

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.*”

God’s righteousness, not our own.

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.*” 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.

This is what caused all the religious division of which Campbell spoke.

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.”*

The Jews had God’s word, but they did not live it with the Spirit.

The camel’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. Just the nose through the flap.

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.”

I once read in a church publication by the digressive churches of Christ that gave an account of one congregation that had a problem where one person gained a foothold in their congregation and tried to subvert their young secretly.

This person had eventually been put in the position of teaching their teenage class group. One student of this class had told his parents that this person was teaching the class that baptism was not necessary for salvation. The parents took this information to one of the elders, who originally was skeptical that this person was teaching this. He, however, agreed to check on it.

The next Sunday, shortly after the students separated to their separate classes, the elder entered the teenage classroom to see the teacher quickly scrambling to set aside his teaching material. The teacher told the class, “Today, let’s study something different.” The elder asked to see the material the teacher had just put aside and found the information the parents had provided him earlier was true. The elder told the teacher that he would not be allowed to teach this class again.

They want to be tolerated (or as in this case, are deceptive); then they want to subvert; then they want to take over.

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.*”

Conclusion.

The Bible is given to us for revealing.

The human mind is given us for thinking and obeying.

We need to use these things properly to tighten up the tent flap and to not allow the nose of the camel to get in.

We don’t use the heart as if it were the head. The word of God is to have full authority in our religious matters. Our mind is not the same as God’s. His thinking is a lot higher than ours.

Isa. 55:9, “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*”

If we allow the nose of the camel in our tent, we’re sure to have a camel attack.

