**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**GALATIANS-002**. **THE EVIL EYE AND THE CHARM by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eye Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"*

*Galatians 3:1*

The Revised Version gives a shorter, and probably correct, form of this vehement question. It omits the two clauses that ye should not obey the truth and among you. The omission increases the sharpness of the thrust of the interrogation, whilst it loses nothing of the meaning.

Now, a very striking metaphor runs through the whole of this question, which may easily be lost sight of by ordinary readers. You know the old superstition as to the Evil Eye, almost universal at the date of this letter and even now in the East, and lingering still amongst ourselves. Certain persons were supposed to have the power, by a look, to work mischief, and by fixing the gaze of their victims, to suck the very life out of them. So Paul asks who the malign sorcerer is who has thus fascinated the fickle Galatians, and is draining their Christian life out of their eyes.

Very appropriately, therefore, if there is this reference, which the word translated bewitched carries with it, he goes on to speak about Jesus Christ as having been displayed before their eyes. They had seen Him. How did they come to be able to turn away to look at anything else?

But there is another observation to be made by way of introduction, and that is as to the full force of the expression evidently set forth. The word employed, as commentators tell us, is that which is used for the display of official proclamations, or public notices, in some conspicuous place, as the Forum or the market, that the citizens might read. So, keeping up the metaphor, the word might be rendered, as has been suggested by some eminent scholars, placarded--Before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been placarded. The expression has acquired somewhat ignoble associations from modern advertising, but that is no reason why we should lose sight of its force. So, then, Paul says, In my preaching, Christ was conspicuously set forth. It is like some inexplicable enchantment that, having seen Him, you should turn away to gaze on others. It is insanity which evokes wonder, as well as sin which deserves rebuke; and the fiery question of my text conveys both.

**I. Keeping to the metaphor, I note first the placard which Paul had displayed.**

Jesus Christ crucified has been conspicuously set forth before you, he says to these Galatians. Now, he is referring, of course, to his own work of preaching the Gospel to them at the beginning. And the vivid metaphor suggests very strikingly two things. We see in it the Apostle's notion of what He had to do. His had been a very humble office, simply to hang up a proclamation. The one virtue of a proclamation is that it should be brief and plain. It must be authoritative, it must be urgent, it must be writ large, it must be easily intelligible. And he that makes it public has nothing to do except to fasten it up, and make sure that it is legible. If I might venture into modern phraseology, what Paul means is that he was neither more nor less than a bill-sticker, that he went out with the placards and fastened them up.

Ah! if we ministers universally acted up to the implications of this metaphor, do you not think the pulpit would be more frequently a centre of power than it is to-day? And if, instead of presenting our own ingenuities and speculations, we were to realise the fact that we have to hide ourselves behind the broad sheet that we fasten up, there would be a new breath over many a moribund church, and we should hear less of the often warrantable sarcasms about the inefficiency of the modern pulpit.

But I turn from Paul's conception of the office to his statement of his theme. Jesus was displayed amongst you. If I might vary the metaphor a little, the placard that Paul fastened up was like those that modern advertising ingenuity displays upon all our walls. It was a picture-placard, and on it was portrayed one sole figure--Jesus, the Person. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is Christianity; and wherever there is a pulpit or a book which deals rather with doctrines than with Him who is the Fountain and Quarry of all doctrine, there is divergence from the primitive form of the Gospel.

I know, of course, that doctrines--which are only formal and orderly statements of principles involved in the facts--must flow from the proclamation of the person, Christ. I am not such a fool as to run amuck against theology, as some people in this day do. But what I wish to insist upon is that the first form of Christianity is not a theory, but a history, and that the revelation of God is the biography of a man. We must begin with the person, Christ, and preach Him. Would that all our preachers and all professing Christians, in their own personal religious life, had grasped this--that, since Christianity is not first a philosophy but a history, and its centre not an ordered sequence of doctrines but a living person, the act that makes a man possessor of Christianity is not the intellectual process of assimilating certain truths, and accepting them, but the moral process of clinging, with trust and love, to the person, Jesus.

But, further, if any of you consult the original, you will see that the order of the sentence is such as to throw a great weight of emphasis on that last word crucified. It is not merely a person that is portrayed on the placard, but it is that person upon the Cross. Ah! brethren, Paul himself puts his finger, in the words of my text, on what, in his conception, was the throbbing heart of all his message, the vital point from which all its power, and all the gleam of its benediction, poured out upon humanity--Christ crucified. If the placard is a picture of Christ in other attitudes and in other aspects, without the picture of Him crucified, it is an imperfect representation of the Gospel that Paul preached and that Christ was.

**II. Now, think, secondly, of the fascinators that draw away the eyes.**

Paul's question is not one of ignorance, but it is a rhetorical way of rebuking, and of expressing wonder. He knew, and the Galatians knew, well enough who it was that had bewitched them. The whole letter is a polemic worked in fire, and not in frost, as some argumentation is, against a very well-marked class of teachers--viz. those emissaries of Judaism who had crept into the Church, and took it as their special function to dog Paul's steps amongst the heathen communities that he had gathered together through faith in Christ, and used every means to upset his work.

I cannot but pause for a moment upon this original reference of my text, because it is very relevant to the present condition of things amongst us. These men whom Paul is fighting as if he were in a sawpit with them, in this letter, what was their teaching? This: they did not deny that Jesus was the Christ; they did not deny that faith knit a man to Him, but what they said was that the observance of the external rites of Judaism was necessary in order to entrance into the Church and to salvation. They did not in their own estimation detract from Christ, but they added to Him. And Paul says that to add is to detract, to say that anything is necessary except faith in Jesus Christ's finished work is to deny that that finished work, and faith in it, are the means of salvation; and the whole evangelical system crumbles into nothingness if once you admit that.

Now, is there anybody to-day who is saying the same things, with variations consequent upon change of external conditions? Are there no people within the limits of the Christian Church who are reiterating the old Jewish notion that external ceremonies--baptism and the Lord's Supper--are necessary to salvation and to connection with the Christian Church? And is it not true now, as it was then, that though they do not avowedly detract, they so represent these external rites as to detract, from the sole necessity of faith in the perfected work of Jesus Christ? The centre is shifted from personal union with a personal Saviour by a personal faith to participation in external ordinances. And I venture to think that the lava stream which, in this Epistle to the Galatians, Paul pours on the Judaisers of his day needs but a little deflection to pour its hot current over, and to consume, the sacramentarian theories of this day. O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you? Is it not like some malignant sorcery, that after the Evangelical revival of the last century and the earlier part of this, there should spring up again this old, old error, and darken the simplicity of the Gospel teaching, that Christ's work, apprehended by faith, without anything else, is the means, and the only means, of salvation?

But I need not spend time upon that original application. Let us rather come more closely to our own individual lives and their weaknesses. It is a strange thing, so strange that if one did not know it by one's own self, one would be scarcely disposed to believe it possible, that a man who has tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and has known Jesus Christ as Saviour and Friend, should decline from Him, and turn to anything besides. And yet, strange and sad, and like some enchantment as it is, it is the experience at times and in a measure, of us all; and, alas! it is the experience, in a very tragical degree, of many who have walked for a little while behind the Master, and then have turned away and walked no more with Him. We may well wonder; but the root of the mischief is in no baleful glitter of a sorcerer's eye without us, but it is in the weakness of our own wills and the waywardness of our own hearts, and the wandering of our own affections. We often court the coming of the evil influence, and are willing to be fascinated and to turn our backs upon Jesus. Mysterious it is, for why should men cast away diamonds for paste? Mysterious it is, for we do not usually drop the substance to get the shadow. Mysterious it is, for a man does not ordinarily empty his pockets of gold in order to fill them with gravel. Mysterious it is, for a thirsty man will not usually turn away from the full, bubbling, living fountain, to see if he can find any drops still remaining, green with scum, stagnant and odorous, at the bottom of some broken cistern. But all these follies are sanity as compared with the folly of which we are guilty, times without number, when, having known the sweetness of Jesus Christ, we turn away to the fascinations of the world. Custom, the familiarity that we have with Him, the attrition of daily cares--like the minute grains of sand that are cemented on to paper, and make a piece of sandpaper that is strong enough to file an inscription off iron--the seductions of worldly delights, the pressure of our daily cares--all these are as a ring of sorcerers that stand round about us, before whom we are as powerless as a bird in the presence of a serpent, and they bewitch us and draw us away.

The sad fact has been verified over and over again on a large scale in the history of the Church. After every outburst of renewed life and elevated spirituality there is sure to come a period of reaction when torpor and formality again assert themselves. What followed the Reformation in Germany? A century of death. What followed Puritanism in England? An outburst of lust and godlessness.

So it has always been, and so it is with us individually, as we too well know. Ah, brethren! the seductions are omnipresent, and our poor eyes are very weak, and we turn away from the Lord to look on these misshapen monsters that are seeking by their gaze to draw us into destruction. I wonder how many professing Christians are in this audience who once saw Jesus Christ a great deal more clearly, and contemplated Him a great deal more fixedly, and turned their hearts to Him far more lovingly, than they do to-day? Some of the great mountain peaks of Africa are only seen for an hour or two in the morning, and then the clouds gather around them, and hide them for the rest of the day. It is like the experience of many professing Christians, who see Him in the morning of their Christian life far more vividly than they ever do after. Who hath bewitched you? The world; but the arch-sorcerer sits safe in our own hearts.

**III. Lastly, keeping to the metaphor, let me suggest, although my text does not touch upon it, the Amulet.**

One has seen fond mothers in Egypt and Palestine who hang on their babies necks charms, to shield them from the influence of the Evil Eye; and there is a charm that we may wear if we will, which will keep us safe. There is no fascination in the Evil Eye if you do not look at it.

The one object that the sorcerer has is to withdraw our gaze from Christ; it is not illogical to say that the way to defeat the object is to keep our gaze fixed on Christ. If you do not look at the baleful glitter of the Evil Eye it will exercise no power over you; and if you will steadfastly look at Him, then, and only then, you will not look at it. Like Ulysses in the legend, bandage the eyes and put wax in the ears, if you would neither be tempted by hearing the songs, nor by seeing the fair forms, of the sirens on their island. To look fixedly at Jesus Christ, and with the resolve never to turn away from Him, is the only safety against these tempting delights around us.

But, brethren, it is the crucified Christ, looking to whom, we are safe amidst all seductions and snares. I doubt whether a Christ who did not die for men has power enough over men's hearts and minds to draw them to Himself. The cords which bind us to Him are the assurance of His dying love which has conquered us. If only we will, day by day, and moment by moment, as we pass through the duties and distractions, the temptations and the trials, of this present life, by an act of will and thought turn ourselves to Him, then all the glamour of false attractiveness will disappear from the temptations around us, and we shall see that the sirens, for all their fair forms, end in loathly fishes tails and sit amidst dead men's bones.

Brethren, looking off unto Jesus is the secret of triumph over the fascinations of the world. And if we will habitually so look, then the sweetness that we shall experience will destroy all the seducing power of lesser and earthly sweetness, and the blessed light of the sun will dim and all but extinguish the deceitful gleams that tempt us into the swamps where we shall be drowned. Turn away, then, from these things; cleave to Jesus Christ; and though in ourselves we may be as weak as a humming-bird before a snake, or a rabbit before a tiger, He will give us strength, and the light of His face shining down upon us will fix our eyes and make us insensible to the fascinations of the sorcerers. So we shall not need to dread the question, Who hath bewitched you? but ourselves challenge the utmost might of the fascination with the triumphant question, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'

Help us, O Lord! we beseech Thee, to live near Thee. Turn away our eyes from beholding vanity, and enable us to set the Lord always before us that we be not moved.