
CHAPTER 2: DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES OF THE B-P MOVEMENT

Thus far, we have discussed the history of the B-P Movement in Singapore. Through the various controversies throughout the history of the B-P Movement, the Lord had raised up faithful men who defended His Word amid compromise. In this section, we want to understand the doctrines that these faithful men held to, and how they came to the conclusions that they did, which resulted in their unwavering stand on the truth.

AGAINST LIBERALISM AND MODERNISM

First, we want to consider the controversy that arose within the PCUSA – liberalism and modernism. We shall investigate what liberalism and modernism is, followed by an explanation of the danger of liberalism and modernism, and finally, we shall consider the Five Fundamentals of the Christian Faith that were drawn up in response to liberalism and modernism.

DEFINITION OF LIBERALISM AND MODERNISM

Liberalism and Modernism is a school of thought that arose within Christianity during the 20th Century. This school of thought was influenced by Naturalism and Rationalism. Naturalism is the philosophy that believes only things that are natural (as opposed to supernatural), while Rationalism operates on the principle that reason is the ultimate determinant of truth. Liberalism is seeking to be liberated from the coercion of external controls and a consequent concern with inner motivation. They sought to be liberated from authority.²⁵ Modernism is a subset of Liberalism, which sought to marry religion and “science”. They claim that religion can only be useful with regard to matters of the heart and cannot be scientifically accurate. As such, they reinterpret and even deny the veracity of Scripture.²⁶ They taught that Scriptures have error, and that the miracles in the Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ were not real since they could not be explained by science or reason.

²⁵ “Theological Liberalism | Religion, Beliefs & History,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/theological-liberalism>.

²⁶ “Text of The Auburn Affirmation (1923),” *PCA Historical Centre*, <https://www.pcahistory.org/documents/auburntext.html>.

This was what Machen contended with in his time. Note Machen's comment on Liberalism and Modernism in his book *Christianity and Liberalism*,

"In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism." Both names are unsatisfactory; the latter, in particular, is question-begging. The movement designated as "liberalism" is regarded as "liberal" only by its friends; to its opponents it seems to involve a narrow ignoring of many relevant facts. And indeed the movement is so various in its manifestations that one may almost despair of finding any common name which will apply to all its forms. But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism (*sic*)--that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity. The word "naturalism" is here used in a sense somewhat different from its philosophical meaning. In this non-philosophical sense it describes with fair accuracy the real root of what is called, by what may turn out to be a degradation of an originally noble word, "liberal" religion."²⁷

Machen explains that Liberalism is no Christianity at all. Though it uses Christian terms, it is devoid of any saving power. It is rooted in the denial of God's greatness and power.

DANGER OF LIBERALISM AND MODERNISM

Some may argue that Liberalism is but a variation of Christianity since they still teach Jesus and should therefore not be castigated as heretical. While it may be true that they still teach about Jesus, the Jesus that they teach is not the Jesus of the Bible but another Jesus. This means that the gospel that they believe and preach is also another gospel. Liberalism, therefore, is nothing more than unbelief masquerading as Christianity.

UNBELIEF

The Bible makes it clear that there will be false teachers in the last days that will teach another Jesus.

1 John 2:18-19, 22-23 "*Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for*

²⁷ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Monergism, n.d.), <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/machen/Christianity%20and%20Liberalism%20-%20J.%20Gresham%20Machen.pdf>.

if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us... Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."

1 John 4:1-3 "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

Galatians 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."

These antichrists deny that Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah was the Anointed One promised by God in the Old Testament. The Old Testament reveals who the coming Messiah was. For these antichrists to say that Jesus was not the Messiah and to say that He did not come in the flesh was to deny His very nature and work. When one tempers with the nature of Christ, he is an antichrist, a false prophet, and has no salvation. To be a Liberalist is to be an unbeliever. To be a Liberalist is to be accursed by God.

UNRULY

Furthermore, Liberalism is rank rebellion against God. To deny the words of God is to deny Him. God has given mankind His Word, and for the liberalists to say that God's Word cannot be trusted because it contains miracles that cannot be explained naturally and rationally is to elevate man above God. To take a Liberal position is to take a prideful position, calling God a liar, which is exactly what Satan did.

But the Bible makes it clear in Romans 3:4a,

"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar;"

If anyone is to be in error, it is us and not God. God is perfect, and His Word that He has given to us is perfect. To reject the truthfulness of God's Word is to reject God all together.

In fact, the Bible goes one step further to say that those who reject the true biblical Jesus is calling God a liar. 1 John 5:10 states,

“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”

To deny the witness and records of His Son that God has given to us in His Word is to deny the Son Himself and call God a liar.

UNFORGOTTEN

There remains great judgment for such individuals who deny God’s Word and the Lord Jesus Christ. God will not forget their works and will judge them in due time. Revelation 21:7-8 makes this clear,

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

The Liberalists who do not believe in God’s Word (unbelieving), who deny the nature of Christ (abominable), who use reason and nature to critique God’s Word (idolators), and preach another gospel promising to save when it cannot (liars), will all be judged by God for eternity in the lake of fire.

DEFENSE AGAINST LIBERALISM AND MODERNISM

Knowing this truth about Liberalism and Modernism, the Five Fundamentals of the Christian Faith were drawn up specifically in response to their errors. We shall examine each of these five fundamentals in relation to Scripture and the gospel.

INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

The first fundamental reads, “It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them from error.” This statement affirms that the Holy Scriptures is free from error. While human agencies were used, the Holy Spirit superintended the writing work such as to keep them from error.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

Scripture is God-breathed, in other words, what we have in the Bible are not man’s words but God’s very words.

2 Peter 1:21 *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”*

The Holy Ghost was the one who guided and oversaw the writing of Scriptures.

Psalm 12:6 *“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”*

Psalms 119:160 *“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”*

Proverbs 30:5 *“Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.”*

John 17:17 *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”*

God’s Word is pure and incapable of error.

To say that God’s Word is capable of error is to undermine the entire gospel. It is to say that the Scriptures are not trustworthy. If the Bible cannot be trusted in the “smaller things” like names and places, how can it be trusted in the “larger things” like that of salvation? Furthermore, to say that the Word of God is capable of error is to say that God is capable of error. The attack on God’s Word is an attack on the very nature and character of God.

VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

The second fundamental reads, “It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.” This is clearly taught in the Scriptures.

Matthew 1:23 *“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”*

This is a vital doctrine because it concerns the two natures of Christ. Jesus has two natures – human and divine. Jesus had to be perfectly sinless in order to be the perfect unblemished sacrifice for sin. He also had to be fully man in order to be our representative. If Jesus had become a man through ordinary means, He would have had Original Sin – the sin of Adam. How then can Jesus be our representative and yet at the same time without sin? The answer is found in the virgin birth.

This is a key doctrine that touches the very heart of the gospel because it concerns the nature of Christ. To have a wrong understanding of the nature of Christ is to believe in a different Jesus and a different gospel.

SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

The third fundamental reads, “It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that Christ offered Himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and to reconcile us to God.” This statement states that the reason why the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross was to be a sacrifice. The Liberalists taught that when Jesus died on the cross, it was merely a noble act that we ought to emulate, and they denied the atoning aspect of Christ’s death. The Bible is clear that when Christ died on the cross, it was to be a sacrificial lamb slain in place of us.

Hebrews 9:13-14, 28 *“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?... So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”*

Romans 3:24-25 *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;”*

2 Corinthians 5:21 *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”*

When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, He died as the sacrifice for our sin. He bore the sin that we have committed. We deserved to die because of our sins, but Christ was offered to bear our sins and the wrath of God for our sins. The word ‘*propitiation*’ means an appeasement for wrath. God is displeased with us because of our sins. When Christ died for us, He appeased the wrath of God with His sacrifice. There is no doubt in Scripture that the punishment that we deserved for our sins, Christ took it upon Himself when He died on the cross. In turn, He gave us His righteousness that we may be able to stand before God perfect.

BODILY RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The fourth fundamental states, “It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and of our standards concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, that on the third day He rose again from the dead with the same body with which He suffered, with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father, making intercession.” This statement affirms the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again with the same body. This is not a denial of the truth that Jesus received the glorified body at His resurrection, but an affirmation that His resurrection was bodily and actual. Because the Liberalists were Naturalists, they did not believe that a person could be raised from the dead supernaturally. Hence, they would reject the central Christian doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ, and instead say that He rose spiritually in the hearts of men. This does violence to the gospel, for the resurrection of Christ is a keystone gospel doctrine. The Bible makes it very clear that the Lord Jesus rose again from the dead bodily.

Matthew 28:5-7 *“And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.”*

He also appeared visibly to His disciples as Paul recounts in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8,

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

Apart from the eyewitness accounts, the Bible is also explicit in describing the theological importance of the resurrection of Christ for our salvation. In fact, in his day Paul was contending with people who denied the resurrection of the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, Paul employs *reductio ad absurdum*, taking such a view to its logical conclusion, showing how holding to such a view is a denial of the gospel all together.

“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

First and foremost, Christ Himself taught that He would rise again from the dead. Furthermore, if there be no resurrection, then Christ could not have risen from the dead, which means that Christ is still dead, and our faith is useless, and we are still condemned in our sins. In other words, we have no salvation if our Saviour is dead! Therefore, to deny the resurrection of Christ is to deny the gospel.

MIRACLES OF CHRIST

The fifth fundamental states, “It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God as the supreme standard of our faith that our Lord Jesus Christ showed His power and love by working mighty miracles. This working was not contrary to nature, but superior to it.” This statement affirms the truth of the miracles of Christ, in contrast to the Liberal position that says the miracles of Christ are mere legends and myths, since they cannot be scientifically explained. This fundamental point is rooted in the first fundamental of the inerrancy of Scripture, for the miracles of Christ are recorded for us in Scripture.²⁸ The Bible itself affirms the veracity of the miracles of Christ. John 20:30 states,

*“And many other signs **truly** did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.”* (emphasis mine).

²⁸ For example, see Mark 1:34 “And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.”

Furthermore, these works which Jesus did cannot be explained by nature because they were by nature supernatural. That which is supernatural, by definition, cannot be explained by the natural. These miracles were recorded for us in Scripture for a purpose, as John explains in John 20:31,

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

The reason why the miracles of Christ were recorded for us in Scripture was so that we would believe in who Jesus is. It is to reveal to us the nature of Christ that we may believe in Him for salvation. The miracles of Christ reveal to us that He was divine. This was what Jesus testified in John 10:37-38,

“If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.”

Jesus performed miracles so that man would know that He and the Father are one, i.e., that He is God. When one denies the miracles of Christ, he is not only denying the veracity of Scripture, but he is also denying the deity of Christ. If Jesus were not truly God, He could not have been that perfect sacrifice for our sins. Hence, to deny the miracles of Christ is to deny the gospel.