

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MEN BEWITCHED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?”—Galatians iii. 1.

WITH very great enthusiasm the Galatians received the gospel when Paul preached it to them. They seem to have been a very warm-hearted but fickle people, and Paul found to his great grief that, while he was away from them, certain false teachers came in and turned them aside from the gospel which he had delivered to them. He spake out very plainly about the matter. In this verse he uses very strong terms, while he says to them—“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?” I do not know that any such witchery has fallen upon any of you, but I do know that, being men, we are all subject to like dangers, and I know also that there is a witchery in the very air at this time, so that many are to be found throughout the churches of this land to whom these words might be justly spoken.

We can only hope to escape this evil which Paul so severely condemns by the use of right cautionary means. It is only, in fact, as the Holy Ghost shall keep us that we shall be preserved from the fascinations of error, and kept true to the grand old gospel of the blessed God. At this time I shall very briefly speak, in the first place, upon *the subtle danger* which is hinted at here; “Who hath bewitched you?” Secondly, at more length I shall speak upon *the blessed preservative*: there is no way of being kept from this witchery like having Christ Jesus set forth among us, evidently crucified. And, thirdly, a few words, in closing, upon *the supreme folly* of any who, having tried this divine preservative, nevertheless do become bewitched by error.

I. First, then, let us think of *THE SUBTLE DANGER* which is ever around us.

It was hard work to preach the gospel at first among the heathen. Men had to lay down their lives to do it. They had to propound new things which the heathen mind did not readily receive. But, by the power of the Spirit of God, converts were made, and churches were formed. And now came another difficulty. Even those that were converted, or appeared to be so, became suddenly, as it were, bewitched

with error of one kind or another, just as in families children are suddenly taken ill with certain complaints which seem incidental to childhood. If parents had never heard of such things before, they would be astonished. They would suppose that they must lose their children when such unaccountable diseases suddenly appeared in them, and yet they survive. In the family of Christ certain epidemics break out at times. We cannot tell why they should come just then; and at first, perhaps, we are puzzled and perplexed to think that such diseases should come at all; but they do come; and hence it is well to be on our guard against them. Paul calls it being bewitched, because these people fell into strange error, error which had no argument to back it, error surprising and startling. He seems to say, "I cannot make it out. I cannot understand how you should be thus misled." In Paul's day the error was generally that of Judaism. They wanted to go back to circumcision, and to the old sacrifices of the law. Paul was indignant enough about this. "I testify," said he, "to everyone of you, that if he be circumcized he is a debtor to keep the whole law, and he has fallen from grace. If you go back to the old beggarly elements of Judaism, you are leaving Christ, and rejecting Christ, and imperilling your souls." He declares that he could not understand how they should wish to do it. He calls it witchery, for in his day it was believed that men could cast an evil eye upon one another, and thus work evil upon their fellow men. It seemed to Paul to be something like that—as if the devil himself were in it, and came and turned men away from Christ Jesus, to go back to trusting in the law and its obsolete ceremonies.

It was not long before Paul found another kind of error in the church. There came in among the humbler believers certain men of education, who thought themselves highly intelligent—men who knew something about Socrates and Plato; and they said, "These doctrines are too plain. The poor people understand them, and they come into the church; but no doubt they have a deeper meaning, intended only for the initiated." So they began to spiritualize everything, and, in the process, they spirited away the very gospel itself. Paul could not endure it. He said that though he or an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel than that which he had preached it would be a cursed deed. Whether it were Judaism, or Gnosticism, he smote it heavily, and said to those who fell into it, "Who hath bewitched you?"

You who read church history know that in after ages the church fell into Arianism. There were great disputes about the deity of Christ, and the air for a long time was full of that deadly plague. When that battle was over, and such men as Athanasius had settled the question of our Redeemer's Godhead, then came up all the superstitions of Rome—that awful midnight, black with murky clouds, which covered the church for ages. Indeed, if we look back on history, it seems like a witchcraft, that men who had the gospel preached among them in all its glorious simplicity, should after all submit their minds to such debasing falsehoods as those of old Rome, and prostrate themselves before images of of wood and stone after a heathenish manner, even as their pagan forefathers had done.

At this present time it is a marvel to some of us how the churches have been bewitched again. When I was a boy I recollect hearing Mr. Jay

say, "Puseyism is a lie!" I remember the words coming just like that from his reverend lips, and everybody, or nearly everybody, thought with him. It was a wonderful event if a high church or ritualistic place was set up. Everybody was astonished at it; and if you said, "This is the church of England, and this is according to her prayer-book," everybody said you were uncharitable, and that it was not so. They pitied our fears, and said that a dozen men were going towards Rome, and that was all. Look ye now, sirs: these things are openly done. Our parish churches are commonly turned into mass houses, and the Church of England is slightly to be distinguished in many parishes from the church of Rome, and yet nobody is astonished; and, if we make a remark about it, we are set down as bigoted. Who hath bewitched this Protestant land? With Smithfield scarcely yet swept of the ashes of her martyrs, they set up the crucifix again! What would Oliver Cromwell say if he and his Ironsides could come back again to see what they are making of this land? I wot some strong things he would say; and, as I cannot speak such vigorous words as he would have uttered, I leave the subject with words borrowed from Paul, which well suit the case, "O foolish Englishmen, who hath bewitched you, that ye should thus turn aside?"

Nor is this all. You see this witchery in another way among our dissenting churches. At a time not yet forgotten Unitarianism and Socinianism gradually crept into Nonconforming congregations, and the pulpits lost their testimony for Christ; the meeting-houses were deserted, and true religion seemed dying out of the land. Then came Whitefield and Wesley, and all their troop of Methodists, and the blessed flame that was almost quenched burned up again, and we, of this generation, have said one to another, "That experiment will never be repeated: the Nonconformist churches will never go in that direction again: they know better. They see the ill-effect of this modern teaching, and they will stick to the grand old gospel now." So I dreamed; but I dream in that way no longer, for scarcely do I look anywhere but I find the gospel of Christ diluted, the milk of the word adulterated, and the grand gospel, as Luther and Calvin would have thundered it out, seldom enough to be heard. O foolish Nonconformists, who hath bewitched you that ye should not obey the truth, but should seek after this novelty and the other—this refinement and the other, and let your God and Saviour go? As for us, if we stand alone, God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the peril.

II. Our second head is THE ONLY PRESERVATIVE. The apostle says that the Galatians had had Christ set forth before their eyes crucified among them.

Well then, if you want to be kept right and sound in the faith, the first thing is to get the right subject fixed in the centre of your hearts—Jesus Christ crucified. Paul says that he preached *that*. He set Jesus forth. Whatever else he might not have made clear, he did set forth the person and work of Jesus Christ. Beloved, settle this in your soul, that your sole hope and the main subject of your meditation shall always be Jesus Christ. Whatever I do not know, O my Lord, help me

to know thee. Whatever I do not believe, enable me to believe thee, and to trust thee, and to take thy every word as the very truth of God. Beloved, away with the religion that has little of Christ in it. Christ must be Alpha and Omega, first and last. The religion that is made up of our doings and our feelings and our willings is a falsehood. Our religion must have Christ for the foundation, Christ as the cornerstone, Christ as the topstone; and if we are not based and bottomed, grounded and settled upon him, our religion is vain. Paul wonders that any to whom Christ has been the chief thing should ever have been bewitched; and I trow that if Christ be really such to your souls, you will not turn aside through error, but Christ crucified will hold you fast.

But Paul says not only that he had preached Christ to them, but that he had set him forth, by which I understand that he had taken pains to make all about Christ clear to them. He had preached his person as man and God. He had preached his work as the atoning sacrifice. He had preached him as risen and pleading before the throne of God. He had preached him as our substitute. He had made this the main doctrine—that, if we are saved, we are saved by the righteousness of Christ, and our sin is put away because Christ bore it in our stead and suffered the penalty due for it, that so the justice of God might be satisfied, and we might be saved. That is what he means by Christ crucified. He had gone into details on this point and set forth the glorious doctrines which cluster about the cross. Brethren, if you want to be kept from the modern witcheries, think much of Christ, and go into detail about him. Be familiar with his divine person. Be well acquainted with his relationships, and his offices: know what he is in the covenant of grace, what he is to the Father, what he is to you. Oh seek to know him! He yet surpasseth knowledge; but be students of Christ. Do not have a mere superficial knowledge of him, but seek to know Christ, and to be found in him. This will keep you free from error.

When the apostle says that he set Christ forth, he means, next, that he had done it with great plainness. The Greek word has to do with a programme or a proclamation; it is as good as to say, "I have set Christ before you as plainly as if I had printed a great bill and stuck it up before your eyes. I have put the letters down in capitals. As a king, when he makes a proclamation, puts it on the walls, and calls attention to it, so," says Paul, "I have set forth Christ before you. I have not talked of him in a mystical way, so that you did not know what I meant, but I have set him forth. I have said of him that he suffered in our stead, and was made a curse for us, as it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.'"

Paul set forth Jesus plainly. Now, you know the way in which Jesus Christ is preached by some. It was well described by old Dr. Duncan when he said, "They preach that the death of Christ in some way or other had some sort of connection, in some way or other, with the salvation of men." Yes, that is it—misty, cloudy, foggy—a bottle of smoke. We do not preach Christ in that way, but we just say this, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," and because he was oppressed and he was afflicted in the room and place and stead of the guilty, therefore does God most freely remit the sin of believers and bid

them go their way. Substitution—may we never stammer over that—Christ in the sinner's stead.

Beloved, if you will get a hold of that truth, and get it well worked into your soul, you will be more than a match for the ritualism or rationalism of the age. Give up that doctrine? The man who has once drunk it in and knows its sweetness cannot give it up; for he gets to feel that, having once believed it, it acts in him as a detector by which he discovers what is false doctrine, and it gives to him a taste which makes false doctrine loathsome to him, so that he cries, "Away with it." If anything contrary to this comes before him, he does not timidly say, "Everybody has a right to his opinion"; but he says, "Yes, they may have a right to their opinion, and so have I to mine; and my opinion is that any opinion which takes away from the glory of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice is a detestable opinion." Get the real atonement of Christ thoroughly into your soul, and you will not be bewitched.

Nor is this all. Paul says that Christ was set forth crucified visibly among them. Did you ever see Christ in this way? I do not ask whether you ever saw a vision. Who wishes for that? I do not ask whether your imagination was so worked upon that you thought you saw the Saviour. There would be no particular use in that, for thousands did actually see him on the cross, and they thrust out the tongue at him and perished in their sins. But let me tell you that it is one of the most strengthening things to our piety to get to feel by faith as though we did behold the Saviour. We do not expect to *see* him until he comes; yet when we have been alone in our chamber we have as much realized his presence without the use of our eyes as if we had literally seen him. He has been certainly sensibly crucified before us, for this is the point. He says that he had set forth Christ with such vividness—he had word painted so thoroughly well, he had spoken so plainly and so simply, that they seemed to say, "We see it: Christ in our stead, Christ bleeding for our sin." They seemed to see him as if he were before them in their midst. My dear friends, do not say, "Christ died on Calvary. That is thousands of miles off." I know that he did, but what matters it where he died as to locality? He loved you, and gave himself for you. Let him be to you as though he were crucified at Newington Butts, and as though his cross were in the middle of this tabernacle. "Oh, but he died nineteen hundred years ago." I know that he did, but the efficacy of his death is a thing of to-day. "He died unto sin once": and that once pours the splendour of its efficacy all down the ages, and the thing for you to do is to feel as if you saw him dying *now*, on the tree *now*—you standing immediately at the foot of the cross, and looking up, and seeing him looking down from off that cross and saying, "I did all this for thee." Cannot you ask the Lord to make it as vivid as that to you? I want, while I am looking upon this great throng, to forget you all, and to see Jesus standing here with the nail prints. Oh, if I could see him how humbly I would throw myself at his feet! With what love would I embrace him! With what reverence would I adore him! But, my Master, I am so sure of the fact that thou didst die in my stead, and that my sins were laid on thee, that even now I see thee discharging all my debts, and bearing all my curse. Though thou art gone to the

glory, yet I vividly realize that thou wast here. This has become a fact to me.

Whenever you get into company where they are talking about the doctrines of grace, and sneering about them, and whenever you get into another class of company, where they say, "Away with your simple worship of God! You must have priests, and incense, and altars, and all": do not argue with them. Get alone, and ask to see Jesus Christ over again. See if there is anything of popish finery about him. See if there is anything of this philosophy, falsely so called, about him. You will determine as soon as you have seen him that you will call all things else vanity and lies, and bind his gospel to your heart. The cross is the school of orthodoxy. Endeavour to keep there. While I have been alone on the Continent I have, in my quiet moments, had realizations of my Master's presence, and then I have wished that I could borrow the wings of a dove, so that I might there and then stand up and talk to you. I have been very sick and full of pain, and depressed in spirit, and I have judged myself to be of all men most unworthy, and I judged truly. I stand to that judgment still. I felt myself only worthy to be shaken like dust from off the feet of my Lord, and cast into the bottomless pit for ever. Then it was that my Substitute was my hope, and in my lonely chamber at Mentone I clung to his dear skirts; I looked into his wounds; I trusted myself with him again, and I know that I am a saved man. I tell you there is no salvation in any other, but only in Jesus. You will not be led away to any other doctrine if you will return continually to this truth. Some men want a sound pummelling with affliction to get them to love Christ; and some old professors need a touch of poverty sometimes, or a little affliction, or a rack of rheumatism, and that would bring them to their bearings, and they would begin to cry out after realities, and get rid of whims and fancies. When it comes to close dealings between God and your soul, and death stares you in the face, nothing will do but a crucified Redeemer, and no confidence will do but a sinner's childlike reliance upon the finished work of him who suffered in our stead. I speak strongly, but I feel a thousand times more strongly than I can speak.

III. The last point is THE SUPREME FOLLY of those who would leave Jesus for anything else. Suppose that any man should once have trusted in Jesus Christ simply, and have realized the death of Christ, and have come into real contact with the dying, bleeding Master; and suppose that, after that, he should begin to put his confidence in priests and sacraments; or suppose that he should, after that, put on his lavender kid gloves and become a philosopher,—what would he be? Now, do not tell anybody, I pray you. Keep it to yourselves. The apostle Paul did not affect the manners of a gentleman, but he spoke very plainly indeed. Do not tell your learned neighbours that I said it, because I did not say it: it is Paul that said it: he says that a man who should do that would be—A FOOL. "Oh, foolish Galatians!" What are you at, Paul? They have been decorating their service; surely you cannot object to that. Don't you know, Paul, that the old Jewish priest used to wear a splendid breastplate wrought with jewels, and he had an ephod adorned with bells and pomegranates? Surely in the worship of God we ought to do things decorously and properly! And on this plea

these Galatians have decked themselves out exceedingly. "They are foolish Galatians!" he says. Very rude of him, mark you; very rude of him! I shall not attempt to excuse him, for I fully endorse his verdict.

But here is a gentleman who has been reading Plato, and after reading Plato he has been reading the words of Jesus Christ, and he says that they do not mean what the common people think they mean—that there is a very mysterious philosophical sense hidden within them. For instance, when Jesus Christ says, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment," it does not mean at all what the words say. It means that they shall ultimately be restored. Now, Paul, this gentleman is a philosopher; what do you say of him? He says, "He is foolish!" That is all he says, and all that he needs to say, for learned folly is folly at its height. "Oh, foolish Galatians! Who hath bewitched you?"

Why do we think these people foolish? Because *we* should be foolish ourselves if we were to do the same. A good many years ago, when I was about fifteen or sixteen years of age, I wanted a Saviour, and I heard the gospel preached by a poor man, who said in the name of Jesus—"Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." It was very plain English, and I understood it, and obeyed it and found rest. I owe all my happiness since then to the same plain doctrine. Now, suppose that I were to say, "I have read a great many books, and there are a great many people willing to hear me. I really could not preach such a commonplace gospel as I did at the first. I must put it in a sophisticated way, so that none but the *élite* can understand me." I should be—what should I be? I should be a fool, writ large. I should be worse than that, I should be a traitor to my God; for if I was saved by a simple gospel, then I am bound to preach that same simple gospel till I die, so that others too may be saved by it. When I cease to preach salvation by faith in Jesus put me into a lunatic asylum, for you may be sure that my mind is gone.

There are hundreds of you who feel perfectly happy in Christ. You believe that all your sins are washed away, that you are justified by the righteousness of Christ, and accepted in the Beloved. Now, suppose that you give that up and say, "Instead of believing in Christ's dying once and making an atonement, I am going to believe in the perpetual sacrifice offered by a human being in the mass": you will be very foolish. Suppose that instead of trusting in Jesus Christ for perfect pardon and justification, so that you know that there is no condemnation to you because you are in Christ Jesus, you go back to works, and say, "I am going to work out my own salvation by my own good works": you will be foolish to the last degree, and you will soon discover the fact by the misery that will come over your spirit.

Look again. When you have lived nearest to Christ, and trusted most in him, have you not felt most desire after holiness? Now, tell me, if you have tried the modern views, what state of mind have you been in with regard to your daily walk? I will tell you. You could, with those modern views, frequent the theatre and the music hall, and feel quite easy; and you could do a sharp trick in business and feel comfortable; but you know that when you have seen Christ you cannot do anything of the kind. You are sanctified by his presence. You feel a strong desire after perfect purity. You feel a horror and a dread of sin.

You walk tenderly and cautiously, and you are bowed down by distress of mind at the thought of your imperfections. Judge then which must be the right doctrine. That which makes you most holy must certainly be true; and if you turn away from your Lord, whose very presence breathes sanctification, and communion with whom is sure to bring holiness, you will be a fool: and we shall have to say, "Oh, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?"

During the late meetings that we have had here, my dear brethren Fullerton and Smith have been preaching the gospel, the straight-out gospel of Jesus Christ, and at one meeting, held afterwards, there were scores of persons who rose up to tell of what that ministry had done for their souls by God the Holy Spirit. There were thieves reclaimed, drunkards reclaimed, harlots reclaimed, great sinners reclaimed. Well, now, suppose that, after all, some of you ladies and gentlemen should say, "We see what the gospel can do, but we are going to try something else," you will be fools. I am always ready to try a new machine: we will try the electric light one of these days instead of gas when we are sure of it; but suppose that it should all go out and leave us in the dark! I will wait till the invention has been tested. So it may happen with the new religious lights that men bring up, which are like dim rushlights compared with the blazing sun of gospel truth; we are not going to try anything new to the risk of our souls. We are going to keep to the old, old gospel until it is worn out. When it gets worn out, and will not save any more, and will not comfort any more, and will not draw us near to God any more, then will be the time for us to think of something fresh. But as that has not come to pass, I beg to say that I will drive another nail into my old colours and fasten them anew to the old mast. What I have preached among you these six-and-twenty years I will preach again; for I am determined to know nothing among men but Christ and him crucified; and may neither the preacher become a fool, nor any of his hearers become fools, by being bewitched, so that they forsake the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh that you all knew its power, and were all saved by it! God grant that you may be, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians ii. 21; and chapter iii.
