"The Weaknesses of Liberal Theology"

For the last few years we have heard a great deal of talk about liberal theology. Ever since the dawn of the century this system of theology has been gaining great recognition. This theology grew out of an attempt to wed theology to the dominant thought pattern of the day, which is science. It insists that the real theologian must be as open-minded, as unbiased, and as disinterested as the scientist. Therefore, he can never speak in terms of the absolute. Moreover, liberal theology insists that truth is not a one-act drama that appeared once and for all on the Biblical stage, but it is a drama of many acts continually appearing as the curtain of history continues to open. The liberal believes that the light of God is forever shining through history as the blossom shines through the bud. Therefore, there can be no set theology. Liberal theology can never be static. It must forever adjust itself to the changing conditions of history.

Personally I think this is the best, or at least the most logical system of theology in existence. But at the same time I must admit that there are certain weaknesses found in liberal theology which are well worth our attention. In this paper I will only discuss one of the weaknesses found in liberal theology; others will be discussed next week.

One of the great weaknesses of liberal theology is that it too often loses itself in "higher criticism." In other words, the liberal theologian, in many instances,

1. King's reference to 1948 suggests he wrote this paper for Great Theologians, his only theology course that calendar year. For more on Davis's role in the development of King's theology, see Introduction, in Papers 1:49-50.
3. In his course notes, King recorded that theology was partly determined by "the [pressures?] conditions of the environment in which the theologian lives. These pressures cause them to seek the nature of God." His notes continue: "Is our day propitious for great theologians. If ever the stage was set for great theological thinking, it is today. There are two major forces which must be present in society. New form and way of thinking. Crisis if a great theology is to come" (King, Class notes I, Great Theologians, 30 November 1948–16 February 1949).
4. Davis added a comma after the word "logical."
5. "Higher criticism," a type of biblical analysis that examined the historic accuracy of biblical texts, emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Davis added another "o" to the word "to."