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The Loss and Recovery of Truth

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When the Apostle Paul preached the good news concerning Christ and His Church, at Ephesus, his ministry continued in Asia for the space of two years (Acts 19:10). We read that the Word of God grew mightily and prevailed, and that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus." And yet, at the close of his ministry, and of his life, he writes his last Epistle to Timothy, when he says "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (II Timothy 1:15): "This thou knowest that all they that be in Asia have turned away from me."

We are told, on every hand, today, that we must go back to the first three centuries to find the purity of faith and worship of the primitive church! But it is clear from this comparison of Acts 19:10 and II Timothy 1:15, that we cannot go back to the first century. No, not even to the apostle's own lifetime!

This turning away could not have been merely personal; but must have included his teaching also. For in chapter 2, verse 18, he speaks of those "who concerning the truth have erred." In chapter 3, verse 8, he speaks of those who "resist the truth." In chapter 4, verse 4, he speaks of those who "turn away their ears from the truth" and are "turned unto fables."

It was Pauline truth and teaching from which all had "turned away." It was this turning away from the truth as taught by the Holy Spirit through Paul, especially as contained in the Epistle to the Ephesians, that led necessarily:

1. To the loss of the teaching concerning the Mystery; that truth concerning the one Body of Christ. The effect of this was at once to put everything wrong ecclesiastically, and to make room for all the various and different "Bodies," so-called, with all the consequent divisions and schisms of the church. Instead of recognizing "the One Body" which God had made, men set about making their own "Bodies" and Sects! and with this ecclesiastical confusion came the loss of the truth as to the Christian's perfect standing in Christ as having died and risen in Him.
2. Next, after this, went the truth of the Lord's promised return from heaven; and of resurrection, as the one great and blessed hope of the church. Other hopes, or rather fears, came in their place, and "death and judgment" took the place of those lost hopes. Having lost the truth of what God had made Christ to be unto us, and the joy as to our standing thus given, in looking for that blessed hope, preparation for death and judgment was the necessary result, and therefore:
3. The next thing to go was the truth as to what God had made us to be in Christ; and "justification by faith" and by grace was lost. The way was now open for the full tide of error to come in: and it came in, like a flood, with all the corruption and superstition which ended in centuries which have the significant description "the dark ages."

Everyone is familiar with the term, and with the fact. But what were the dark ages? How did they come? They were not brought on suddenly by some untoward event. There must have been some cause, something that made them possible. The corruption was historical. The Eastern churches today are in similar darkness. And the Western churches, where the Reformation has not removed it, are in the same darkness.

The Reformation itself, what was it, but the beginning of a recovery of these great truths? The remarkable fact is that the recovery of these truths has taken place in the inverse order to that in which they were lost.

Justification by grace through faith was the first great truth recovered at the Reformation. This was the truth over which that great battle was fought and won, though the victory was far from complete. For not until the nineteenth century had well begun did the Lord's return from heaven begin to become again the blessed hope of His church. In later years the subject has become more and more precious to increasing numbers. But this great and "blessed hope" is not yet really learned, because it ought to be the natural outcome of truth received and held, instead of being treated as an

independent subject artificially produced. It must come from the heart into the life, and not be merely held and retained in the head, if it is to be productive of the blessed results seen in the Thessalonian church. It must be learned experimentally as a vital and essential part of our standing as Christians, and not be studied as if it were an extra subject, in order to produce Thessalonian fruit. Hence, it is that we more often see prophecy taken up as a study, rather than as the result of waiting for God's Son from heaven.

The last of the three truths to be recovered is the truth taught in Ephesians; and it is only in our own day that we see any real sense of the loss, with any real effort to recover it.

The truth of the Mystery, as it was the first to go, so, it seems, is the last to be recovered.

It is with the hope of doing something to recover this truth that these papers have been written on the Church Epistles. May the Lord use them to bring back vital truths to their proper place, that their power may be felt in the hearts and seen in the lives of an increasing number of the members of the Body of Christ.

The cause of all the confusion around is that thousands of those who profess to be Christians know little or nothing of these Church Epistles. There is no other profession which they could enter without being able to pass a satisfactory examination in the text books set forth for that purpose. There is no position in life that anyone could apply for without being asked how much one knew of its duties and responsibilities. But the Christian "profession" is treated in quite a different manner, and as quite a different matter. Anyone may undertake that, and all the while be totally ignorant of these Church Epistles: — "The Creed, the Lord's prayer, and the Ten Commandments" are considered as sufficient for Christian position and profession. Hence the almost total neglect of these Epistles. The four Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount are taken as the essence of Christianity, instead of the Epistles specially addressed to Churches. Hence the great ignorance of Christians as to all that God has made Christ to be unto His People, and all that He has made them to be in Him. Not knowing their standing in Christ, and their completeness and perfection in Him, they are easily led into error concerning their state and their walk. Many, who know they are justified by grace, yet seek to be sanctified by works.

Nothing but full knowledge of what is revealed for our instruction in the Epistles will effectually deliver us from all the new doctrines and schools of thought which find an entrance into our midst.

May the great Head of the Body the Church, own this effort, and use it and bless it to the deliverance of many from all the variable winds of doctrine, and build them up in their most holy faith.

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