

"THE LORD YOUR GOD PROVETH YOU."

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."
"There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold I have told you before." Matt. 24:11-24.

"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other gods which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Deut. 13:1-3.

When the disciples came to Jesus inquiring what should be the sign of his presence and of the end of the age, before answering their question [See art. "The Sign of His Presence" in our January issue.] he took occasion to give some important information as to events which should transpire before that time. Among others he foretells the rise of many false prophets and false Christs, and of their power to deceive. Then he adds, "Behold I have told you."

To be forewarned is to be forearmed, if we heed the warning. But forgetting the warning and instruction, the many, as Jesus foretold, are deceived by these pretenders, and because iniquity abounds, the love of many of God's children waxes cold. Standing where we do to-day, in "The Time of the End," and looking back, we are able to discern many false Christs and false prophets, and can see how Jesus' words have proved true, that many have been deceived thereby.

The word Christ means anointed, and is applicable not only to the anointed head, but also to the anointed body of Christ, all who as followers of Jesus have made a covenant with him by sacrifice: hence

those systems pretending to be the anointed body, and who are not really such, are false Christs. The various great religious systems each claim to be the anointed body, the church, the body of Christ, though each regards its founder as its head. Though these systems contain members of the true church whom they have blinded and enslaved, yet as systems they are false – false Christs and being deceitful ensnarers of the true they are really anti-Christ. [R767 : page 7]

The chief and greatest of these systems is the great "Mystery of Iniquity," the Church of Rome, whose head is the Pope. Its "lying wonders" have truly deceived many, and out of this system have sprung the various minor systems, each claiming to be the church, the body of Christ, and each acknowledging and following others than the true head of the true Church – Christ Jesus, though all assume his name.

Not only have these great false christs anti-christs arisen, flourished, and deceived many, but many individual false prophets, or false teachers have also arisen; and through the combined influence of all these, iniquity (erroneous faith and practice) abounds. The truth has been covered, and error has been advanced, accepted, and acted upon. In the significant language of the prophet (Isa. 59:14,15), "Truth is fallen in the streets, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey."

Since inquiring minds begin to weary of the confusing errors presented by the various and conflicting false christs and false prophets, it is becoming quite a popular method with all of these, to silence inquirers with the assurance that what they believe is really of little importance, that the all important thing is to live a virtuous life, and to give their influence and support to some one of the many false christs or false prophets, and to work in harmony with them and under their direction.

But let us consider for a moment what has been the effect of some of the false doctrines which have been advanced, and see if this idea, which has now become so common, is a correct one. Take for example

the dogma of inherent immortality. This idea was first advanced as a fundamental doctrine of Christianity by the apostate church of Rome, and has been held and guarded with special care by all denominations of so-called Protestants. From this as a root principle, have grown the dogmas of eternal torment, of purgatory, of death as a mere transition period, an instant of change with no cessation of life, for say they, man is immortal, and cannot die. If man *must* live forever somewhere, they argue that such everlasting existence must be in torment if not in bliss. In harmony with this idea, death cannot be regarded as an enemy, nor as the punishment of sin; nor can any blessing be seen in the scripture teaching of a resurrection. And further, if death be not regarded as the punishment of sin, the logical inference is, that the death of Christ as man's Redeemer or Substitute, availed nothing. This logical inference has not yet been drawn by the masses of those who compose these great systems, simply because of their drowsy lethargy; but for centuries the false idea of inherent immortality has been strengthening its roots, and shooting out and building up its branches, and soon the sure fruit will be a general denial of the redemption secured through Jesus' death. Already, prominent thinking ones in these various systems, reasoning, not from the Scriptures, but from the so-called orthodox standpoint, are boldly declaring their conclusions, and with no little effect upon others.

This is the logical effect so far as faith is concerned, of that one single item of error firmly rooted. This error and those which have grown out of it, have also deterred the church from pursuing the most important part of her work, viz.: the building up of each other in the truth as presented in the Scriptures, from which alone come the highest and purest incentives to a holy life and to untiring zeal in the divine service. Furthermore, by inculcating ideas of God which represent him as cruel and vindictive, encouragement has been given to those base qualities of man's depraved nature, and as a consequence, the most cruel persecutions and pitiless and revolting crimes that the world has ever witnessed, have been perpetrated in the name of Christianity, and by those claiming to be the followers of Christ.

Take another dogma which is held and guarded with the utmost jealousy by all these systems, viz.: the dogma of The Trinity, an idea so absurd that its very absurdity is taken as proof of its divine authority, though not a text of scripture can be quoted in its support, save a single spurious clause (1 John 5:7-8. Without the interpolated words it reads plainly as follows: – "For there are three that bear record, the spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one" testimony), introduced for this express purpose, now generally known and admitted to be an interpolation. This dogma teaches that God is three separate and distinct persons, equal in power and glory; that the Father is a person, the Son is a person, and the Holy Spirit is a person, yet all three are one person. In this confusion of ideas none can form a clear conception of God, and all their thoughts of him must be very mixed and cloudy. It tends also to mystify their comprehension of the sacrifice which Jesus made for our redemption; for, if the three persons are one person, then when one died all must have died, and the universe was left without God for three days, and mere chance must have raised him up from death if the true idea of death be accepted; or if death be considered but a period of transition from one nature to another, then this must have been the case with Jesus also, and consequently if he was of the divine nature before death, he must be a different nature now.

And so one absurdity leads to another, and leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ as set forth in the Scriptures, the various false bodies of Christ have built themselves up into systems of great size and influence in the world. Their great claims and apparent success have deceived very many of God's children; repressed their zeal for the truth, left them in almost complete ignorance of the Gospel hopes, both for the world and for the little flock of overcomers, led them to worldly conformity, and prejudiced them against the truth and against all true truth seekers. And as the prophet said, the few remaining truth seekers become a prey – a prey to the hatred, opposition and persecution of the church nominal. Ah, yes, what we believe makes a very great difference. Our FAITH has a most potent influence in moulding both our character and our destiny; and every child of God should beware of

any system or person that seeks to guard its theory against thorough examination and criticism by underrating the importance of a correct faith.

True to Jesus' words, because iniquity (erroneous doctrine and consequent erroneous practice – worldliness, etc.) abounds, the love of many waxes cold. The Lord seems afar off, incomprehensible and almost unknown. How can they delight in his word who are ignorant of it? or how rejoice in his promises who do not comprehend them? or how strive for the offered prize who do not discern it?

The elect of God cannot be thus deceived; they have walked and are walking with God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, searching, believing and trusting his word, walking in its light and striving to fulfill the conditions for the attainment of its exceeding great and precious promises. This fixedness of purpose, and adherence to it, not only designates such to be the elect of God, but it shields them from the deceptions and snares of false christs and false prophets (teachers). Though many such have doubtless lived and died in those false systems, they overcame their influence through faith and loyalty to God. We should not forget that the separation of the wheat from the tares was not *commanded* until the "harvest." Matt. 13:30. It was the Lord's design to *let* wheat and tares grow together until the harvest; but in this harvest time it is his will that all such should come out and be separate when his truth makes manifest the true character of these systems.

But even after coming out of these anti-christ or false-christ systems, there are many false prophets who assume authority to direct the consecrated, who teach theories subversive of the truth and pervert the Scriptures to support them. Such false prophets always have been and always will be found, so long as Satan has power in his hands; that is, until he is bound.

And our Heavenly Father permits it so to be: why? To prove his people: "For the Lord your God doth prove you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." The

Lord would prove whether we have received the truth in the love of it and of its Author. It is very often the case that truth is received by some because of their love for those who bear it, and without personal searching to prove that it is from God. Such have not received the truth in the love of IT, and sooner or later some circumstances will unsettle them. If the prop falls into error such will surely fall with it; or if love for the prop grows **[R767 : page 8]** cold, the love for truth thus received grows cold with it. But love for our brethren in Christ, and special love for those who serve us most, will never overthrow the faith of those who receive the truth in the love of *it*.

Should controversy arise because the way of truth is evil spoken of even among those through whom the blessed Gospel has been received, and who have been greatly loved for their work's sake, it will only impel those who are wholly the Lord's, to a more diligent searching of the Scriptures, and thus more earnest inquiring of the Lord to make very plain the way.

Peter reminds us that there were false prophets in Israel, even as there should be false teachers among us; (2 Peter 2:1) and Moses declares that it was permitted to prove Israel. If faithful to God, no consideration of a personal character, should lead them to turn away from God's truth after these false teachers. When we remember that these things happened to Israel as types for our instruction, the words of Moses become very significant: – "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and **[R768 : page 8]** serve other gods...thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him, neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him. But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death and afterwards the hand of all the people." (Deut. 13:6-9.)

Thus the Lord proved Israel's determination to obey him at the sacrifice of any earthly friendship if need be. And in this Israel was a

type of both the world in the age to come, and also of the church in the present time. Temptations even from dearest friends to depart from the living God and serve idols, whether those idols be self-exaltation, or any other thing, must be resolutely met with a fixed purpose to follow the Lord wholly. Such suggestions may not be harbored nor consented to by those fully consecrated to God, even though they come in the most deceptive disguise, and by dearest friends. And not only so, but deceptive errors and influences must be put to death; they must be pelted to death by the stones of truth. Our weapons are not like those of fleshly Israel – not carnal but spiritual, and mighty in pulling down the strongholds of error. 2 Cor. 10:4.

Ever bearing in mind that the Lord your God doth prove you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and whether your love to him is paramount to every other love, however strong, we may meet the trials of severing friendships and dissolving earthly ties, with firm unflinching confidence in God, who will crown with everlasting joy, the faithful overcomer who has fought to the end the good fight of faith.

