

## THE "CHRISTIANS" OF ANTIOCH.

– APRIL 18. – ACTS 11:19-26. –

"Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."  
– Acts 11:18.

ANTIOCH was one of the chief cities of the world at this time: it ranked with Rome and Corinth. It was the capital of the province of Syria. The gospel reached it as the result of the persecution which arose about the time of Stephen's martyrdom, in which Saul of Tarsus was one of the leaders. Some of those who had received the gospel at Jerusalem when "scattered everywhere," got as far away as Antioch, about 300 miles from Jerusalem. They did not put their lights under a bushel, but endeavored to "show forth the praises [virtues, glories] of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvelous light." They met with hearing ears and believing hearts, under the divine leading and blessing. They no doubt thus eventually realized that their persecutions were part of the "all things working together for good to them who love God;" and those of right mind surely rejoiced that by any means they were permitted to be co-workers together with God, and to be used of him in his glorious work. These laborers were not apostles, nor even notable ones amongst the Lord's disciples, so that it was not considered necessary by the writer even to mention their names; nevertheless [R2134 : page 107] we can be sure that however obscure amongst men, they were reckoned by the Lord as his jewels whom he will shortly gather, and who, numbered amongst those who turn many to righteousness, will shine as the stars for ever and ever. The testimony to their efficient work is, – "A great number believed and turned unto the Lord."

It is worthy of notice that believing is one thing and turning to the Lord is another thing. We fear that this distinction is too often forgotten, and that too many are satisfied merely to get their friends to believe some of the good things of the gospel of our Lord Jesus, and

do not press the matter on to the only legitimate and proper conclusion – a complete turning away from sin and the world; a thorough turning of every sentiment, hope, ambition and desire "unto the Lord," and into harmony with his divine plan. Let us remember the statement, "devils also believe;" and let us not rest satisfied with efforts merely to convince the head without convicting and regenerating the heart.

Many speak of the Church at Antioch as "the first Gentile Church" and of "Gentile Christians" and "Jewish Christians." All this is a mistake: there is not and never was a "Gentile Church," nor a "Gentile Christian." We might just as well speak of a "heathen Church" or a "heathen Christian," for such is the meaning of these expressions. There was a Jewish Church under Moses, but there was never a Jewish Christian Church, and there never will be. The way may have been smoother for a Jew to pass out of the partial light of the Law Covenant into the new light of the Gospel Covenant, than for the Gentile to pass from the outer darkness of heathenism into the full light of the gospel; but, nevertheless, there was a positive transfer in both cases. Christianity is not a blending of the gospel with Judaism, nor is it a blending of the gospel with heathenism. Our Lord declared that he would not put a patch upon the Jewish system and call *it* Christianity, nor put the new wine of the gospel into the old wine skins of Judaism; but that, on the [R2134 : page 108] contrary, he established a totally new thing; and that those who would enter his Kingdom must first be begotten again, and ultimately be born again before they could share it. – John 3:3-8.

While we would contend earnestly for the truths and facts of the gospel, we do not wish to be hypercritical as to words and names. If, therefore, any have used the terms "Jewish Christians" and "Gentile Christians" merely through mistake of language, and have had the apostolic thought in mind, namely, that there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, male nor female, but ye are all *one* [a new one – a new Church] in Christ Jesus," we have no desire to quarrel with such, nor to be captious; and yet we do respectfully urge upon all such

the unwisdom of using terms which of themselves, and without particular private explanation, are misleading.

The gospel was preached at Antioch at first, properly, to the Jews only; yet, when the due time for it to go to the Gentiles arrived, the Lord's providence opened up the way and showed his servants that Cornelius was not an exceptional case, but that the gospel was to be preached in all the world for a witness, for the purpose of gathering his little flock from all kindreds, nations and tongues who should have an ear to hear it and to whom he would send it.

The progress of the interested at Antioch was a refreshment to the central company of believers at Jerusalem, and forthwith appreciating the fact that they would need instruction in the truth, and that the Lord would be pleased to continue to use human instrumentalities to this end, they at once dispatched Barnabas on a missionary tour. Barnabas, as a good, faithful servant of the Lord, was greatly rejoiced when he found the condition of matters at Antioch, yet, apparently, he found a condition of things to meet which he himself lacked certain qualifications. Of a loving and kind disposition, his visit no doubt was very helpful to them, but he apparently discerned that they needed instruction as well as exhortation, and immediately he thought of Paul, the wonderful Christian logician, and of how ably he could present the gospel in its various features to those Grecians of a philosophical turn of mind. Accordingly he sought him and found him and brought him with him to Antioch. The results showed the wisdom of the course, and no doubt it was entirely ordered by the Lord. A year's stay in Antioch under the able teachings of Paul and under the loving ministries and exhortations of Barnabas resulted most favorably: not only was the church of believers well developed, but the multitudes who assembled received considerable instruction also, and thus the knowledge of the gospel was greatly spread abroad.

Some have surmised that the name "Christian," first attached to the Lord's people at Antioch, was applied in ridicule. But it seems to

us that the evidences all point to the contrary, and indicate that this was the name which the believers adopted for themselves, by which they would be known to outsiders. Had the name been a disreputable one we might have supposed it to be applied in ridicule; but since the basis of the name Christian is the word Christ, and since the word Christ signifies Messiah or the Anointed (of God), it must have been accepted as a most honorable name, or who would think that a divine anointing could signify anything dishonorable in the eyes of any man, Jew or Gentile.

This adopted name "Christian" indicates the healthy condition of the Church, and testifies to the sound instruction which they had received from Paul and Barnabas. When later another company of Christians began to split up into factions, some calling themselves followers of Peter, some followers of Paul, some followers of Apollos, the Apostle reproved them for this, assuring them that it was an evidence that their views in general on the subject were fleshly, carnal, worldly and not spiritual. He told them that it was an evidence that as yet they were "babes" in spiritual things, and pointed out to them that neither Peter, nor Paul, nor Apollos, had died for them, and that at very most they were only servants of the Lord Jesus, who had redeemed them and who had sent them the blessing of the truth, using such instrumentalities as seemed to him good. (1 Cor. 3:3-23.) What evidences we have all around us that the carnal or worldly mind prevails very largely to-day, – that very many who have named the name of Christ are merely "babes" in spiritual comprehension. The evidences of these conditions may be found in the fact that one says, "I am of Wesley," another, "I am of Calvin," another, "I am of Peter," and that in general the believers of the Lord Jesus are split up into parties and factions – Lutherans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, etc.

Moreover, it is not true, as some claim, that these names are merely forms and that they signify nothing. They do signify much: they imply that those who brand themselves with these names

acknowledge various the rules of various parties and factions, and that they are all more or less in bondage to human systems and traditions of men, and have failed to a large extent to realize the individual "liberty wherewith Christ makes free" all those who have come to him, and who are united to him only. Nor do we with many advocate the removal of these dividing fences of human creeds merely to construct of them a "union" fence, doubly strong, around the whole company of believers in Christ. On the contrary, we deny the propriety of any human fences, and hold that each individual Christian is to be united and bounden only to the Lord and to his instructions, and not to others, few or many. All the truly consecrated and truly united to the Lord will find themselves in fellowship with all others similarly united to him, and the bondage between these various members (the bonds of love and of common submission to the one Head and to all of his arrangements) will be the only bondage necessary to the complete operation of this body of Christ, according to the directions of his Word.

Let us each make it our highest ambition and aim to be Christians in the fullest sense of that word. To truly be a *Christian* implies a union with Christ; it implies a submission to him as our Head, it implies a share with him in the anointing of the priesthood for the work of sacrifice and of self-denial in this present time; it implies also an association with him in the anointing of kings and joint-heirs in the coming Kingdom. Let us take and let us keep this holy name, and it alone; and let us make sure that we do not take this holy name in vain.

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