

## REFORMATION COSTING SACRIFICE.

– ACTS 19:11-20. – MARCH 8. –

**"The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."**

EPHESUS was in many respects the scene of the Apostle Paul's most successful work. He spent about three years there altogether, accompanied by Timothy, Erastus, Titus and, possibly, others. The influence of his work, either directly or indirectly, extended to other cities round about. It is supposed that it was during this stay at Ephesus that congregations were started in the nearby places, mentioned in Revelation as "the seven churches of Asia" (Minor). Our last lesson showed the Apostle beginning his work at Ephesus in the synagogue. He continued to present the truth until opposition to it became quite marked, and certain of the Jewish adherents began to speak evil of the teachings and of the believers. Then the Apostle and those who believed, unwilling to continue a condition of strife, discontinued their attendance at the synagogue, and began a separate meeting, apparently in a rented public hall, called "The School of Tyrannus," because, according to the custom of that time, it was used by him for this purpose in the forenoons.

The Apostle probably labored at his trade during the forenoon, and daily, during the afternoon, preached the message to such as had hearing ears, not only in the public hall, but also by visiting those whom he had reason to expect would be amenable to the gospel. We are supposing a continuance of his usual manner of life, described in his first letter to the Thessalonians (2:9), "Ye remember our labor and toil, working day and night." The Apostle did not belong to a paid ministry. He had a message to deliver, which he appreciated so highly that he was glad of an opportunity to spend his life in its promulgation – using for other purposes only so much of time and energy as were necessary to procure life's necessities, – waiting for the great reward

which the Lord has promised to all faithful servants of his cause. The Lord's ambassadors today can take no better pattern than his, if seeking with him divine favor now, and glory, honor and immortality by and by.

Satan's arts, employed in all parts of the world from the earliest dawn of history, have been in the nature of wonder-workings, magic, etc. The Scriptures call our attention particularly to the magicians of Egypt, to the soothsayers of Babylon, and in this lesson show us that the same practises, the same **[R3158 : page 72]** wily arts of the Adversary, were general throughout the Roman Empire, and especially in the wealthy city of Ephesus. The Lord performed through the Apostle Paul, while at Ephesus, many marvelous healings of the sick, and other miracles, as well as the casting out of the evil spirits referred to in vss. 11 and 12, – doubtless as an offset to the blinding influence of witchcraft, magic, black art, etc. We may reason that the manifestation of divine power here was necessary to the establishment of the Church, and to the general influence of the gospel in that region – as an offset to the blinding influences of Satan's agents and power. The Ephesians were evidently so bound by these arts of the Adversary that an exhibition of him as the real father of them was almost indispensable. Besides, the miracles wrought by Paul served as an endorsement of him as an apostle; an endorsement of his message of Jesus, the Redeemer; of a resurrection as a means of rescue from death, the wages of sin; of a Millennial Kingdom as the means, or channel through which that rescue would come; and of the calling out of the Church as the body of Christ, to constitute that Kingdom, when, in due time, complete and glorified.

Perceiving the Apostle's power to be greater than **[R3158 : page 73]** their own, certain of the magicians essayed to use the name of Jesus as a charm or magic word, just as they were in the habit of using other magic words in their incantations. The effort of some of these, sons of one of the principal priests, resulted disastrously to them, and beneficially to many others. Addressing the one possessed of an evil

spirit, they demanded that the evil spirit leave the vexed one, "in the name of Jesus whom Paul preacheth," as distinguished from others of the same name, for the name was at that time a common one. The demon not only did not obey the command, but using the possessed one, and exercising through him demoniacal strength, the seven men were wounded and put to flight, losing, at least, their outer garments.

This matter becoming widely known, was a convincing argument to those who had long had confidence in such wonder-workers, and proved to them that the Apostle's teachings were correct – that the black arts were of Satan, while the Apostle's miracles were of divine power. The resulting increase of interest in the truth shows us clearly that the people were previously duped and unable to discern the true message of God from the spurious teachings of Satan. This reminds us of the Apostle's words, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:4.) We may safely conclude that the same general principle prevails throughout the whole heathen world today, and to a considerable extent, also, amongst Christian people – that the alienation of many, and their opposition to God and his message through the truth are probably to be accredited more to ignorance than to evil preferences. How blessed is the assurance that ere long the Lord's power shall be exercised not only a little, as in the case under consideration at Ephesus, but universally, to the complete binding of Satan that he may deceive the nations no more until the thousand years of Christ's reign have accomplished their designed work of opening all the blind eyes, and permitting all who will to come back into full fellowship with God. – Rev. 20:2,3.

The statement of vs. 18 is capable of two constructions: we might consider it as referring to those who practised magic, and understand it to signify that they confessed certain deceptions connected with their practises, and showed their deeds, – how certain tricks had been performed; or, (and we think preferably) the words may be understood

to mean that many believers confessed the truth, and publicly showed it in the reform of their conduct. The latter view is supported by the statement of vs. 19, which seemingly refers to the whole number of believers, declaring that "not a few of them that practised curious arts brought their books together, and burned them in the sight of all." – R.V.

Satan's method of enslaving mankind seems to have been, from the first, largely through superstition. Gross superstition and darkness still dominate the great mass of mankind, and even where the blessed light of the gospel lamp has gone, reproving the darkness, and setting forth the true way of life and blessing, the Adversary has been enabled to follow, and more or less to attach superstitious rites and ceremonies, to the gross delusion of many known as civilized. We cannot doubt that the Adversary is connected with many performances done in the name of Christian religion and with many of the miracles wrought by "holy nails," "bones," etc., etc., and is generally effective in holding the deluded ones back from the study of the Lord's Word, and an understanding of the great plan of salvation therein so clearly set forth.

The readiness of the Adversary to use now any and every means available to hinder the light of truth, or to turn aside those who have already discerned it, is very manifest. Almost without exception, all the various persons and systems performing the "many wonderful works" (Matt. 7:22) of today, directly or indirectly antagonize the truth; – the ransom itself, the substitution of the life of our Redeemer for the life of the world, is generally ignored, if not totally denied by them. We are inclined to think that much of the mind-healing and hypnotism, coming rapidly into popularity, are merely adaptations of our old enemy to the new conditions of our day.

We have every reason to believe that the Adversary would be willing to use the black arts today, as in times past, in proportion as conditions would be favorable; and incantation, by repeating certain seemingly meaningless words, is still practised by some; also the

making of peculiar stews and broths, which are supposed to have magical powers, affecting love, hatred, etc., and the wearing of charms, the making of the sign of the cross in the presence of danger, etc., to protect from evil.

Such mispractices and misbeliefs assuredly have the effect of holding their victims in the bonds of superstition, hindering them from the proper exercise of the true faith in the almighty power of God, by filling their minds with errors and superstitions. Even brethren who have received present truth are not exempt from the Adversary's besetments along this line. A number have written us regarding their deliverance from the snares of spiritism, and one came very nearly being entangled in the black art. He wrote us in substance, thus: –

"Dear Brother Russell: – You will rejoice with me, I am sure, that our heavenly Father has been pleased to give **[R3158 : page 74]** me a special and remarkable gift of healing in connection with one disease – every case that I have treated since I received the gift has resulted in a cure. It requires but a few moments in each case, the repeating of a few words. I make no charge for the service, as I am glad of the privilege of doing good in any manner to my fellow-creatures."

We responded to this, that we were glad to know of the Lord using any of his people in any manner; nevertheless, we felt curious to know what were the words used in this simple and effectual operation, and, hence, inquired for the formula. The reply came that the formula of words, etc., necessary to the performance of the cure could not be communicated from one man to another, but only from a woman to a man, and from a man to a woman – a peculiar restriction, to say the least, to apply to anything good. Upon giving the name of a lady to whom the formula could be sent, we received it, and found that it was simply magic, – the using of a few meaningless words in connection with a piece of string.

We wrote the brother at once, that we believed the cures he had been performing were not of the Lord, but of the evil One, and advised

that he discontinue them. He responded, thanking us, and assuring us that it had never occurred to him that a work of healing could be accomplished by any other than divine power, but that in the light of our suggestions he saw to the contrary, and would use it no more. However, the fame of his cures already performed brought him many applications from others in the same distress, who were indignant when he refused to go to their relief for either love or money; and upon his explaining that he believed the power he had used was of Satan they declared that they did not care, so long as the relief could be had. To what lengths the Adversary may carry his delusions in this day and by up-to-date methods, we cannot surely know; but our expectation certainly is that his delusions will be numerous, and of the kind that would "deceive, if it were possible, the very elect," as our Lord foretold.

The sincerity of some of the converts at Ephesus was manifested by the public burning of the books in which were recorded the various magic words, and receipts, by which incantations could be made, affecting and counteracting various of the ills of life. All books at that time were precious, as they were made of skins instead of paper, and pen-printed instead of printed by type; but these books were specially high-priced because each possessor of a copy was interested in restricting the information and, hence, unwilling to permit the copying of his book. Viewed from this standpoint, the number of books would not necessarily be very great to amount to the considerable figure specified – 50,000 pieces of silver – about \$8,500, a piece of silver representing about 17 cents of our money. But, if we remember that each piece of silver represented a day's wages, it might be considered equivalent to at least \$1, in our day, and thus the total value of the books would be \$50,000.

This considerable sum was freely sacrificed to the Lord and to the truth; – not that the Lord accepts as sacrifices any evil thing, such as those books were, but **[R3159 : page 74]** that the destruction of the books, representing a considerable value, represented also a

sacrificing condition of heart. The books had a commercial value, and could have been sent to some other city and sold for a large sum, but this would have been spreading the evil which they were recognized as representing, and we note with pleasure that they who gave up the books were unwilling to sell them, and thus risk injuring others, nor did the Apostle suggest that the books might be sold and the money turned into useful channels in the service of the gospel. The Lord's people are never to do evil that good may follow. We are reminded of a liquor dealer, who pursued a different course; – concluding that his business was dishonoring to the Lord's cause and injurious to his fellowmen, he determined to abandon it; but instead of destroying the liquor by emptying it into the sewers, he sold it. We may be sure that he failed to get the great blessing which evidently came upon the more proper disposal of the evil things, narrated in this lesson.

The Lord is not poor; all the gold and silver are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. It is not necessary, therefore, to his cause that we shall put into it anything that in any sense or degree represents evil. In our opinion those who burned the books on "black art" were not only more blessed themselves, but they more honored the Lord and more advanced his cause, by such heroic treatment, than if they had sold the books and put the money into the treasury of the Lord. Everything throughout the Scriptures seems to teach that the Lord specially loves and appreciates those who are thorough-going, not only in their zeal for righteousness and truth, but also in their opposition to that which is unrighteous and erroneous.

We believe that the same principle applies to the sale of books which inculcate Satan's lies, and we recommend that if the Lord's people have books of this kind, black with false doctrines, misrepresenting the divine character and plan, they would do far better to burn them, to put them where they will not endanger others, than to sell them and to give the proceeds to the Lord's work.

With such a spirit prevailing amongst the believers – such a willingness to give up things contrary to the Lord, and that at a cost to

themselves, involving, **[R3159 : page 75]** no doubt, a change of occupation, we cannot wonder at the statement of the last verse of the lesson, that "so the word of the Lord Jesus grew mightily and prevailed" over the evil influences opposing it. So it will surely be with the Lord's people today; where the proper zeal for the Lord and for righteousness are in the hearts of his people, the effect will be telling upon all with whom they come in contact.

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