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PERSECUTION'S GOOD RESULTS

– **FEBRUARY 27. – ACTS 5:12 – 6:7. –**

METHODS USED OF GOD – DIVINE APPROVAL OF THE GOSPEL – OPPOSITION BY THE SADDUCEES AND THE CHIEF PRIESTS – MULTITUDES BELIEVED IN JERUSALEM – CHURCH COMMUNISM BEGAN TO FAIL – SEVEN DEACONS APPOINTED.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." – Galatians 6:2.

THE manifestation of love and sympathy amongst the early Christians had a salutary effect in backing up the teachings of the Apostles. The principle is as true today as it was then. The living of the Christ life is necessary to a proper endorsement of the Gospel Message. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." (Romans 8:9.) The worldly are apt to read the Gospel influence in the lives of professors before they give particular heed to the Message.

Alas, that we can see so many evidences of the fulfilment of the Apostle Paul's words respecting our day! He declares that at this time many would have a form of godliness without its power, and be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." (2 Timothy 3:5.) The difficulty [R5851 : page 46] seems to be that sectarianism has lost the essence of the Gospel Message which Jesus and the Apostles taught. That serious loss has had various substitutes favored by the great Adversary; but they are not the Gospel, and do not have the proper power upon the hearts and lives of those who even desire to do right. The Gospel Message which Jesus and the Apostles taught was expressed in our Lord's prayer: "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, even as it is done in Heaven." (Matthew 6:10.) The Apostles exhorted the people to prepare for the Kingdom of God's dear Son and to accept the invitation to become members of the Bride class.

The parables of Jesus, His sermons, and the teachings of the Apostles abound with the thought that Messiah's Kingdom will be the great panacea for all the ills of the world; and that the Church, if found faithful, will share her Master's glory, honor and immortality. It was because St. Paul had this glorious hope before him, he declares, that he was willing to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ and to count all his afflictions and sufferings for Christ, his sacrifice, but light afflictions. Because of these hopes, because of this deep-seated faith, he counted all earthly prospects as valueless in comparison, and willingly sacrificed his fame, his family position and his Roman citizenship, and endured stripes, imprisonments, buffetings and derision. – Philippians 3:7-11; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 11:23-28.

ERROR'S BITTER FRUITAGE

The principle has not changed. The Gospel has not changed. Merely the true Message has been lost sight of. The theory came in that Christ's Kingdom was established in 800 A.D.; that the Popes were representatives, or Vicegerents – reigning instead of Christ; that the Cardinals were the Little Flock class in special glory and honor; and that Bishops, Archbishops and priests were also associated in the glory of the exalted Church.

We are not doubting the sincerity of those who promulgated these theories; but surely we now see that a great mistake was made. The nations of Europe were told that they were God's earthly kingdoms, responsible to the Papal system as the spiritual kingdom; and that thus in relationship with God, they had Divine appointment to rule the people. Under these unscriptural teachings the world has been for eleven centuries. What the Catholics started, the Protestants have continued.

When Great Britain rebelled against the Papacy, and King Henry VIII. declared his kingdom to be another spiritual empire, put the Bishops into the House of Lords, and made himself and his

successors the representatives of Christ on earth in great power, it was a part of the same blunder that the Catholics had previously made. When, later, Luther and his followers attached themselves to the German princes, and favored and authorized them, and in turn were sanctioned by them, the German kingdoms were thus constituted kingdoms of God. And so with the other nations of Europe, great and small.

Claiming to be God's Kingdom, these kingdoms of the world have therefore been hindering the people from hearing the Gospel Message of the Second Coming of Christ to establish the true Kingdom of God, to put down sin, to scatter the ignorance and darkness of the world, and to help mankind out of evil back to the image and likeness of God. The Bible declares these deceptions to be from Satan – "doctrines of demons" – 1 Timothy 4:1.

Now we are seeing some of the bitter fruitage of such false teachings. Millions have been gathered into sects and parties unauthorized by the Bible, while only the few have been properly joined to Christ Himself as His members. This great mass of people, deceived into thinking that they are true Christians, are today at war – fighting like demons. The great intelligence which came to the world through God's Message, illuminating the minds of men more and more, has been turned to one side. Instead of blessing the world, this intelligence has been cursing the world with inventions for human destruction, such as the heathen were not intelligent enough to invent, and perhaps not heartless enough to use. Alas, what a picture!

In all the churches of all denominations, prayers are going up for and against each other. The clergy are bewildered. The laity are bewildered. True faith in the Bible is at a discount. Little but a form of godliness remains. However, God has not left Himself at any time without witnesses in the world. Today the faithful followers of Jesus are realizing what is wrong. They are awakening, are giving the Bible

a fresh study, and are getting blessings out of it. They are realizing that our difficulties have come from the creeds, which are really contradictory to the Bible, but which represent the strange notions of our deluded forefathers. Now is the time for the people of God who have not already put on the whole armor of God to do so; for the Bible seems to assure us that still more stringent conditions are before us. – Ephesians 6:12-18.

OPPOSITION INSPIRED BY SELFISHNESS

Our Study for today shows how the living of the true, simple life of faith, trust, obedience and love had its effect – how that many were added to the Church, including "a great multitude of priests." It shows us, too, how angered were the Sadducees and the official class at that time. They were grieved that the people were taught; for the teachings of the followers of Jesus were so contrary to what they had taught and what they had hoped for.

Not believing the Prophets, they had been using religion largely as a cloak – "a form of godliness." Their real hopes were along the line of Gentile hopes – of becoming more intimately associated with the Roman Empire and thus obtaining special favor. They feared lest the teaching of Messiah as the coming King of the world would reach the ears of the Roman rulers and bring upon the Jews ridicule and disfavor, and perhaps take from them some of the liberties which they were enjoying, and crush all their aspirations respecting the future. Their **[R5851 : page 47]** opposition to the Gospel was therefore entirely selfish.

They had the Apostles arrested and put into prison for preaching. But the Lord sent His angel and delivered His faithful servants; and they, with good courage, appeared again the next day in the Temple, preaching to the people as before. Again they were arrested, brought before the officials and commanded to preach no more in this Name. The point of the official resentment is noted in their words, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrines

[teachings], and are liable to bring this man's blood upon us." That is to say, It looks as though you might really convince the people of this city that we have committed a great crime in putting to death that fanatical leader of yours called Jesus.

But the more they sought to oppose the Message, the more God blessed it; the more the common people received the Truth; the more the Church of Christ multiplied.

GRADUAL TRIUMPH OF THE LIGHT

We see this same principle illustrated at the time of the Reformation, when God's time had come to bring back the Bible to the people after it had been turned aside for twelve hundred and sixty years. When the Bishops began to claim that they also were Apostles, and when, using this Apostolic authority, they gave the people the Nicene Creed in A.D. 325, an end was put to all Bible study; for the people were taught that that creed, and other creeds subsequently made, contained all that was proper to be believed, and that any further Bible study was quite unnecessary – indeed, dangerous, because by believing anything not in the creeds, they would be heretics and doomed to eternal torture.

When, under Divine guidance, Wyclif and Tyndale brought the New Testament to the attention of the people in the English language, it marked the start of return to an individual faith and a new beginning of Bible study. It has required the centuries since to help get us out of the gross darkness of those twelve hundred years during which we were without the Bible and were poisoned by the various creeds. No wonder that we still feel some of our poison! No wonder that it is still difficult for us to use our common sense in Bible study! Thank God for the light of the new Day beginning to dawn! Thank God that His true saints everywhere are awakening and, like Cardinal Newman, are praying,

"Lead, Kindly Light,

Amid the encircling gloom"!

But if God will hear our prayers and grant the guidance of this light to His faithful, the responsibility is upon us to step out from all the creeds and not support hypocrisy and error – as becomes those who walk in the path of the just, which "shineth more and more unto the perfect Day." – Proverbs 4:18.

COMMUNISM A FAILURE

Then came some of the difficulties of communism. Favoritism was claimed in the distribution of the necessities. Meeting this emergency, the Apostles realized that they could not undertake to manage a community along earthly lines. They concluded that they should, as the Master had directed, give themselves entirely to the Gospel work. They appointed seven Deacons to attend to the charities; but evidently these also by and by failed, and we hear no more of the early communism.

This experience, which the Lord permitted, served its purpose. It manifested the proper Christian spirit, but nevertheless taught us the impossibility of such a practise while ourselves and others are still limited by the imperfections of the flesh.

