

MARKS

OF THE

GREAT APOSTASY.

RELIGIOUS CONFUSION.

There are scores of Christian churches. They look with critical, often unfriendly eyes upon one another. They do not agree on doctrine or methods of worship. They have been founded by men. Tumult, strife and confusion reign among the religions of the world. These contending religions of the world can not all be right. The Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches "One Lord, one faith, one baptism;" and to-day there are many faiths, many baptisms and many conceptions of the Lord.

THE APOSTASY.

Jesus and the apostles taught the Gospel in its pure simplicity. Soon afterwards, however, the Christian church departed from the true doctrine of the Lord, and became corrupt in many ways.

Persecution, waged by both the Jews and the Gentiles, was in part the cause of the great apostasy; but possibly prosperity, and the adoption of Christianity as a state form of worship, doing away with the need for personal sacrifice, were even more productive of a general abandonment of the religious doctrine taught by Jesus and the apostles.

In a general way, there are seven points in which the apostasy of the early Christian church is marked.

MARK ONE: THE GODHEAD.

In the first place, the doctrine of the Godhead became greatly changed soon after the apostolic age. It had been taught that man was made in the image of God; that, therefore, God was a person of body and parts. Jesus, the one perfect man to take upon Him flesh, was in the express image of God the Father. There soon grew in the church, however, diverse opinions of the nature of God. He became an inconceivable immateriality with boundless power. The result in modern doctrine is a kind of divine nonentity, everywhere present yet nowhere to be found—

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an impossible being with neither shape nor dimension, with neither parts nor passions, but who, nevertheless, abides in an undefined place called Heaven, and loves the children of the earth. Moreover, the doctrine of the unity, or the trinity, of the Godhead also became perverted in the early church. It had been taught that there were three beings in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; separate and distinct in person, but one—that is united—in purpose and action. After the passing of the apostles it was taught that these three were only one:—“the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet they are not three Gods but one God.”

MARK TWO : DIVINE AUTHORITY.

In the second place, the necessity of divine authority became wholly ignored. The men of old understood that they might not assume of their own accord to officiate in the things of God. Jesus stated the doctrine tersely when He said to His apostles, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you.” In later times, however, it became popular for men to elect the office of priest or minister. At the present time men choose the calling of preacher as they do that of lawyer or doctor. They seek positions that confer upon the holders worldly recognition and riches.

MARK THREE : ORGANIZATION.

In the third place, the organization and government of the primitive church became corrupted. In the Church of Christ there had been apostles, prophets, evangelists, seventies, elders, bishops, priests, teachers, and deacons. These officers were maintained as long as the apostles lived; there are many references to them during the first century of the Christian era. Soon thereafter, however, many of these officers were dropped as unnecessary. To-day, there is not a denomination descended from the old Catholic church that maintains in its organization all the officers provided by the great Master; nor does the Catholic church itself do so. And with the church organization corrupted, it follows that the church government must be incomplete and inadequate.

MARK FOUR : ORDINANCES.

In the fourth place, it was not very long after the passing of the apostles, before the outward ordinances of the church became changed to suit the convenience of men. Baptism had been administered by immersion, as the word indicates. The custom arose, however, merely to sprinkle the applicant for baptism;

or, at most, to pour a little water on him. Furthermore, while the ordinance was meant only for adults, or for young people that had reached years of accountability, it was applied, after the time of Christ, to babes, who could neither know nor confess Him. The sacrament of the Lord's supper, too, was burdened with ceremony, and changed materially. The ordinance of administration to the sick was dismissed as useless. In fact, there remains in the churches to-day hardly an ordinance that has not been changed to suit the whims of men.

MARK FIVE : RITUAL.

In the fifth place, the church ritual became perverted under the administration of those who professed to follow after Jesus and His apostles. Nothing could be simpler or purer than the church service instituted by the Saviour. After the third century, the simplicity was gone forever. To gain the good will and favour of the pagans, many of their customs and ceremonies were adopted by the Christian church. So far was this done that the Christian worship of to-day is sometimes more nearly akin to the pagan worship of old, than it is to the simple worship of the Church of Christ.

MARK SIX : SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

In the sixth place, the spiritual gifts—so common in the days of the apostles—became wholly lost to the later Christian church. Prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, and other marvelous gifts, are enumerated by the Apostle Paul. He makes clear the fact that these gifts will be manifest whenever the authorized church operates. Unfortunately, belief in the spiritual gifts is rare in the modern Christian church.

MARK SEVEN : FALSE DOCTRINE.

Finally, the body of church doctrine became corrupted in the third, and fourth, and fifth centuries. To consider all the changes in church doctrine would require more space than can be allowed in this brief summary. Suffice it to say that besides the changes in doctrine already named, there was departure from the truth in many essential ways ; as, for example, the introduction of the doctrine that infants if unsprinkled would be eternally damned ; that condemnation for sin meant eternal condemnation, without hope or relief, worlds without end ; that there may be two standards of morality in this life, and so forth. In short, though it may appear to be a bold and very general statement, it seems to be true that only a few doctrines concerning the salvation of man, from the time of his advent into this world

to the time of the great judgment, remain to-day as they were taught by Jesus.

RESULTS OF APOSTASY.

From these seven points, then—the corruption of the doctrine of God and the Godhead : the rejection of the doctrine of Divine Authority ; the distortion of the doctrine of church organization and church government ; the changing of the outward ordinances ; the perversion of the simple church ritual ; the loss of spiritual gifts ; and the corruption of the body of church doctrines—from these seven points, it is indisputably evident that the great apostasy from the primitive Christian church is an accomplished fact. Although there followed in the middle ages a period of reformation—or revolution—yet there was effected no return to the primitive faith. There came no new revelation, and therefore there could come no authorized church. The churches of the Protestants were merely broken off from the mother Catholic church, which they themselves believed to be apostate. Each new religious teacher as he arose placed his own personal interpretation upon the word of God. Thus there came to be many creeds ; and since these creeds differed materially in essential points, contention and strife became inevitably common among the sects.

Although for the purpose of a revival meeting, the ministers of the Protestant churches might unite for a time in a general effort to waken the people to spiritual life, yet there lay beneath the surface feelings of antagonism and bitterness the one toward the other. The seven marks of the apostasy make them alien to Christ.

THE RESTORATION.

In such a religious condition was the religious world in the beginning of the nineteenth century when the Lord by a series of unequalled revelations authorized the re-establishment of the Church of Christ in its purity and completeness. The Prophet Joseph Smith was the divinely chosen instrument in this great work. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then organized, has had a most remarkable history, worthy of careful investigation. Its claim to the possession of divine truth has been amply justified by its accomplishments.

We invite you to examine into its claims and doctrine.

OSBORNE J. P. WIDTSOE,
Centennial Series No. 13.

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