

The Approaching Judgment of Christendom.

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It is a deeply solemn thing to realise that one belongs to a system which stands responsible before God for ages of failure and unfaithfulness, and upon which, in consequence, the judgment of God will soon descend. Yet how feebly is this soul-subduing thought entered into by the children of God in general! Many are so occupied with their own immediate surroundings, that the fact of their belonging to *the Church of God* — a corporation nearly nineteen centuries old as a witness for God — has little, if any, place in their minds. Others, alas! though truly born of God, have become so infected with the spirit of the times that positive expressions of Laodicean complacency are frequently to be found upon their lips.

Now God would have His own spiritually intelligent as to the true position of affairs at the present moment. We are not living in the first days of the Church of God, but the last; a fact which should, of itself, suggest the most serious considerations to the mind. What is the character of this Church of God, whose earthly history is drawing to its close? And what was its testimony and responsibility as set up by God at the beginning? It has often been pointed out that the Church has been introduced parenthetically into the ways of God. Israel's deep failure as God's responsible witness in the midst of idolatry, and, above all, their rejection of Messiah, has necessitated the complete setting aside of that nation for the present. Not until Christ appears in glory will Israel again truly have God's testimony committed to them. During the interval, while Christ sits at the right hand of the Majesty on High, the Holy Spirit is present on earth engaged in the formation of the Church of God. The very day of His descent from heaven (Acts 2) witnessed the inauguration of the new system — a spiritual one in contrast with Israel's national one. The saints on earth (at first merely a remnant from among the Jews) became at once the body of Christ and the house of God, though the doctrine of these was not unfolded until some years later. What freshness and power characterised the new testimony! What Divine love amongst the saints, what renunciation of the world, what zeal in the propagation of the truth, even in the face of fierce persecution!

The Church was responsible to maintain its testimony unimpaired until the end. In manifested unity and love, in separation from the world, and in bold confession of all the truth committed, should the Church have continued. Faith should have carried her triumphantly through all the vicissitudes of wilderness life, and over all the obstacles raised up by the enemy. It is vain to remark that everything that God has ever entrusted to man has failed in his hands, and that every dispensation has ended in Divine judgment. This, while true, in no way mitigates the failure of the Church, who, with more light from God, and greater privileges than were ever before possessed, has her own distinct place of responsibility, and must be held accountable accordingly. Her public position as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3: 15), necessarily involves judgment from God if the testimony is not faithfully maintained.

The failure Soon came. He who loved the Church with a peculiar affection, at an early date had to blame the Corinthians for being full, and reigning before the time (1 Cor. 4: 8); he had to deplore the defection, through lukewarmness and love of carnal ease, of all the assemblies in Asia (2 Tim. 1: 15); and he also found it necessary to instruct his beloved child in the faith as to the path of individual faithfulness when evil should become rampant (2 Tim. 2) Jude speaks of ungodly men having crept in unawares, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord

Jesus Christ (Jude 4); Peter warns of false teachers bringing in damnable heresies (2 Peter 2: 1, 2); and John of Antichrists, who had once companied with the Apostles themselves, but who had gone out, manifesting their true character (1 John 2: 18, 19). A little later, we find the Lord Himself complaining, in His messages to the churches, of the forsaking of first love (Rev. 2: 4), of the harbouring of men holding the doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes (Rev. 2: 14, 15), and other and even graver evils.

In view of all this (and how much more might be added!) how solemn is the Spirit's word in Romans 11: 22, "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God, on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." In this chapter the professing church is looked at as having taken Israel's place on earth as the possessor of privileges from God. If faithful, the result should be blessing; if unfaithful, the same cutting off that Israel has experienced should follow. Who will pretend that Christendom has continued in God's goodness? The Protestant points disapprovingly at the glaring errors and gross corruptions of Rome; and the Romanist, with good cause, directs his scorn at the divisions of Protestantism, and its relinquishment of what it once professed, the faith of the Bible. What room is there for boasting on the part of any?

What then is coming? Just what the Spirit says in Rom. 11: "Thou also shalt be cut off." Or, as the Lord Himself expressed it in Rev. 3: 16: "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth." Only ignorance would plead the Lord's promise in Matt. 16: 18: "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it" — as militating against this, the Lord there simply guarantees the durability of His own handiwork. His judgment of human responsibility is another matter altogether, and is plainly dealt with in other Scriptures. The professing church has failed as deeply as Israel, and shall be judged as truly. There is, however, this difference between Israel's rejection and the rejection of Christendom; that, whereas for the one there is to be a restoration in grace at the end, for the other the judgment is final and irrevocable. Solemn thought!

Does this in any way endanger individual salvation? By no means. The passage already quoted from Matt. 16 is sufficiently explicit as to this. God's judicial dealings with Israel did not touch the salvation of true children of faith; nor will the approaching judgment of Christendom affect in any way the eternal security of all who are "in Christ." Nothing can annul, or even weaken, the infinite grace of God in this respect. What comfort for the man of God while painfully exercised as to the evils around him!

What should be the practical outcome of what we have been considering? First, God would have His true hearted ones feel and confess the sins of the Church as their own. Daniel furnishes us with a fine example of this spirit. Though, personally, a holy man, he poured out his heart to God in touching confession concerning the sins of his people, justifying God in all His governmental dealings with them. He made no attempt to individualise himself, but kept before his soul that he belonged to God's people, and was, therefore, a part of that body which had so grievously failed. In like manner, let us remember that *we belong to the Church of God*, the most privileged witness that God has yet set up, and withal the most guilty. Such a thought keeps the soul humble and unpretentious.

Secondly, God would have each exercised soul walk wholly apart, in individual faithfulness, from the public evils that will presently bring down His righteous judgment. Let us beware of all the streams that will shortly pour their waters into the foul pool of the apostasy. While cultivating fellowship with all who conscientiously seek the glory of Christ, and while seeking the deliverance of all others as far as possible, may we be kept free from moral, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical corruption,

that we may walk in holiness before God with robes unspotted.