

## THE TRUE CHURCH OF GOD

The expression "Church of God" does not refer to denominational names or lines. From the days of Christ, until the present, there has been a true church. Its members have often been scattered as far as human eye could discern, but on the record books of heaven they have been recognized as a single company. (SDP 222.2).

The characteristic which marks the true church is adherence to the commandments of the God of heaven. Wherever a people has been true to these, God has honored them with his presence. Moreover, to each denomination which has arisen, there have been offered the same opportunities which were offered to the four succeeding nations as they arose; that is, the privilege of walking in all the light, and by that very act becoming an everlasting company.

As truth was rejected by the nations and they fell, so truth has been rejected by one denomination after another, and they have fallen, another people taking the vacant place. This succession will be kept up until a remnant people who will keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will be made up. They will enter the eternal city to reign with Christ. It is this struggle which was revealed to Daniel in the latter part of his last vision. The history of Rome becomes the history of religious controversy, and the struggle between truth and error is greater than ever before. (SDP 222.3).

The history of the church, as given to John, contains more details than the words of Gabriel to Daniel. To his followers of the first century, God says, "Thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works." Of the church in the second and third centuries, he says, "I know thy works, and tribulations, and poverty (but thou art rich). . . . Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulations."

## AN OPEN CONFLICT

Christianity and paganism were in open conflict for three centuries following the birth of Christ, and at times the serpent reared his head to smite the truth to the ground. Some of the followers of Christ were persecuted, and others grew cold and indifferent. But there was a power in the gospel which the pagans could not withstand. As its followers increased, their influence was felt even in political circles. (SDP 223.1).

The close of the third century of the Christian era found the government of Rome greatly weakened. The evils of the empire, its oppression and cruelty, made it almost impossible for the emperors to control affairs. Authority was in the hands of the army, which seated and unseated rulers at will. Barbarian hordes pressed the empire on all sides, and the downfall of Rome was imminent. Some radical change was necessary to prevent complete disruption, and Diocletian, the reigning emperor, conceived the idea of partitioning the territory.

Consequently he associated with himself a man by the name of Maximian, giving him the title of Augustus. Each of the two emperors then chose an assistant, called a Cæsar, whose duty it was to guard the frontiers. According to the plan of Diocletian, the Cæsars should become emperors on the death of the Augusti, and then other Cæsars would be appointed. For a while the four who stood at the head of the Roman empire worked together in harmony, but through a variety of complications war broke out. (SDP 224.1).

Constantine was a Cæsar in the western division of the empire, and marching toward the East, he subdued, one by one, all rivals in the government. It was about the year 312, when, confronted by bitter foes, whose strength he recognized, this rising light assumed a policy never before followed. There were many Christians scattered throughout the empire who refused to fight under the banner of paganism. With these Constantine made a league. The story of his conversion is variously told, and perhaps the details are unimportant. The fact remains that he acknowledged the God of the Christians, proclaimed himself a follower of Christ, and immediately Christians from all over the empire flocked into his army, devout followers of the general who now fought in the name of Christianity. (SDP 224.3).

### References

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# The mystery of Iniquity

## Part 1

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The strength of paganism had been tested. Truth, eternal truth, had dwelt in the person of the Man of Nazareth. With the death of Christ, Satan lost hope. Looking forward to his crucifixion, Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out."

### SATAN BARRED FROM HEAVEN

Satan, after his fall, had met from time to time with the representatives of other worlds. Some in that assembly, not comprehending the hideous nature of sin, had felt to question God's wisdom in expelling Satan from the heavenly courts, but when Christ's life was over, and they had seen the taunting of the enemy and his final act of murder, "the accuser of the brethren" was forever cast from the council of worlds. "And when the dragon saw that he was cast to the earth," he knew that his time was short, and with renewed energy he sought to overthrow the truth of God, and crush those who adhered to it. The remaining portion of the eleventh chapter of Daniel clearly reveals the truth of these statements. (SDP 218.1).

### THE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

After the ascension of Christ, his disciples spread the gospel throughout Judea and all Palestine, and many who heard the word spoken with power on the day of Pentecost went into their own countries to proclaim the truth as it was in Christ. In less than thirty years the world was warned. But the Jews were exclusive, and the disciples had not yet lost the idea that Christ was the Saviour of the Hebrew race, not the healer of all mankind. Persecution in Jerusalem scattered the believers, and then they went everywhere preaching the salvation of God.

Quietly, yet steadily, the life-giving current of the stream of Christianity penetrated to the remotest corners of the vast Roman Empire. All nationalities were for the first time in all history united in Him, for with him and his followers there was neither "Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ was all, and in all." (SDP 218.2).

As the truth spread, it was the growth of an empire; a spiritual kingdom within the confines of earth's strongest monarchy. It was with the whole church as with each individual within the church, a spiritual life, a new man, circled about by a human form. Well would it have been for the progress of truth if all oppression of the spiritual by the temporal had been only when the state opposed the church! Instead, the greatest, the only effectual drawback to the spread of the

truth has been caused in individual experience when the physical man has limited the development of the spiritual, the abiding spirit, the Christ in you, the hope of glory. (SDP 219.1).

The early church was zealous; their first love was strong, and the greatest difficulties were met and surmounted. Sometimes it meant an entire household, but oftener only one or two members of the home circle who stepped out of the darkness of paganism to stand against all attacks, for the truth of God. Mothers watched their children with the greatest care, for every custom and practice of the people from their waking moment to the time when they committed themselves to sleep, from birth to death, was associated with the worship of some god. (SDP 219.2).

### AN ETERNAL SPIRIT IN MORTAL CLAY

One peculiar thing about the new sect, as they were viewed by the pagan worshipers, was the absence of images and forms which the senses could comprehend. When Christians gathered for worship, there was no altar, no god, no incense. When the Christians prayed, there was no priesthood, no vain repetition of words, no offering, but a simple petition in the name of Christ. An invisible power seemed to have taken control of the new converts, a power which never quailed, and which no pagan votary could gainsay. The life which God had so long searched for among the Jews was found among the early Christians. (SDP 220.1).

The enemy of truth had sought by every means to blind the eyes of the Jews to the love of God; he had worked through every government for their destruction, and when their nation was at its lowest point, when spiritual vitality was almost exhausted, Christ came in person to revive their fainting hope. Then Satan used every device to deceive the Son of man. He tempted him in all points where human nature can be tempted; he sought to ensnare him with petty trials; he sought to induce him to accept high worldly honors; but he failed in all, and when he thought he had gained the victory by his crucifixion, he found it was only the physical form which could be thus bound, and that only for a time.

An eternal spirit dwelt in mortal clay, and the bands of death were broken by his resurrection. Now from the midst of that down trodden people, that despised race, from the very foot of the ignominious cross, God chose a people and sent them forth to conquer the world. "Such knowledge is too wonderful; it is high, I can not attain unto it." What wonder that the world awoke with a start, and that Satan sought new devices for the overthrow of truth. (SDP 220.2).

Outward pressure, though tried again and again, had proved unavailing in stamping out the truth. In the fiery furnace was seen the form of a fourth; from the lions' den came forth a prime minister; from Joseph's new sepulcher arose a conqueror. Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome had attempted the overthrow of truth, but there had been a constantly increasing grandeur in place of defeat. A new plan was devised by Satan. If paganism could be placed in the heart, while Christian principles were acknowledged outwardly, the overthrow would be certain; for destruction worketh from within, outward. It was a repetition of Balaam's plan. (SDP 221.1).

### THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

Paul, the great teacher of righteousness, as he visited from place to place among the saints, wrote thus to the Thessalonians: "The mystery of iniquity doth already work." "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." This is Paul's description of the mystery of iniquity, the fourth beast of the vision of Daniel seven. (SDP 221.2).

Then it was that into that church, noted for its purity, crept the life of paganism Sheltered in the folds of the Christian garb lay the serpent, the old dragon. As the birth of Christ, the incarnation of God, was a mystery, and is to-day a mystery which none can fathom, it was met by another mystery, a mystery of iniquity whose machinations are too strong for the human mind to understand. It will deceive if possible the very elect. Only he whose eye is lightened by truth, whose heart is the abiding place of the Son of God; in other words, only he who has within his own being the mystery of godliness, will stand against the mystery of iniquity. (SDP 221.3).

In Paul's day, that is, in the first century A. D., that power was at work. Hitherto the history as recorded in the book of Daniel dealt with earthly kingdoms, but from this time on history handles this "mystery of iniquity" which worked through the various governments. The distinction between the kingdoms of the north and the south remains as it was in the past, but we pass from governments as governments to a power which is swaying these governments. On one side in this controversy is the church of God; on the other side is the mystery of iniquity, which often lays hold of earthly governments for the purpose of destroying the church. (SDP 222.1).