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Overcoming the Great Delusion

*An urgent call to consider again
the character of our times.*

'This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.' (II Timothy 3:1).

'And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.' (Luke 21:34-36).

SNIPPETS FROM A PREFATORIAL ADDRESS BY
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WE ARE LIVING in the end of the last days. This can be indisputably corroborated by passages such as II Timothy 3:1 and Luke 21:34-36. The apostle had spoken on the imminence of the perilous times.

Our Lord had said that such times shall come like a snare upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. The day, He had further reiterated, will come upon us unawares. What our Lord meant was that when the foreboding evil would finally descend, many in the churches would fail to take cognizance of it.

If we would examine the respective contexts of these prophecies carefully we find that both the apostle and our blessed Lord were particularly speaking of the woeful things that shall come upon the churches rather than the world at large. They were not so much speaking of the world: for it is inevitable that the world by itself should become worse and worse in the process of time. It can never be otherwise. Plain common sense avers that sin will increase and abound more and more as time fleets by. But when the future of the church is portrayed in an ominous way, it surely sends chill down the spine. The church is the salt of the world. It is the only hope for this world. The health, security and sanity of this world depend solely on the church. Hence the rhetoric poser of our Lord, 'But if the salt has lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?' (Matthew 5:13b). Yet the warning to us is that there will be a great delusion in the churches today. The Antichrist, endued and empowered by Satan himself, will work so mightily that many will be duped by his 'all deceivableness of unrighteousness' in the churches (II Thessalonians 2:10). The culminating effect of such a process is twofold. On one hand, many will reject the truth and thereby forfeit their salvation (II Thessalonians 2:10b). On the other hand, they all will embrace falsehood and receive damnation (II Thessalonians 2:10-12). We must realise that the events envisaged here are directly related to the outcome of true Gospel preaching. It is alluded that there shall be rarely any real Gospel preaching. But even when there is, the spirit of the times will militate against any success of the Gospel work. The blunt truth is that in spite of the indefatigable efforts of some faithful preachers, conversions will be lamentably scarce.

Only those of the very minority, who cleave on to the whole truth of the Gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ sincerely and seriously, would admit and confess the great hypocrisies that are so rife in Christendom today. The

deluge of evil has inundated the churches today. There is gross evil not only in the pews today but also in the pulpits. In fact the greatness of the evil in the churches can be attributed to and blamed upon those who stand behind the pulpits. The tragedy is that this is where the evil emanates from. It is from the pulpits that evil is promoted and encouraged. The whole and unalloyed truth of the Scriptures is shunned. Preachers are afraid to evoke the offence of the cross. The pre-eminent intent of all true Gospel preaching is to bring men to evangelical repentance. However today, this is the last thing the preachers have in their minds. Instead they lull the congregation into the security of an easy believism philosophy. This kind of faith, which is nothing but a figment of man's imagination and a concoction of the preacher's deceit, is confused for justifying faith. Hence the vulgarities and vanities described in the texts mentioned at the outset. The description vividly unfolds the character of men who pretend to have faith in Christ Jesus. Behold what our Lord said about vain professors in the last days: their hearts are 'overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life'. The apostle profiled church-goers in this manner: 'For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof' (II Timothy 3:2-5). As it was with our primeval parents at the inception of time, so also men are still hiding their sins behind aprons of fig leaves instead of repenting. And they do so by patronising churches where pastors are inclined to pander to their impenitent desires. Today those who identify themselves as Christians prefer preachers to flatter them with smooth sayings rather than to expose their natural depravity and absolute impotency to obviate themselves from their helplessness.

Anybody who denies such a situation prevailing in the churches today is denying the very words of our Lord and the inspired words of the apostle. Their denial of this prevailing scenario in the churches is a very exposure of their own wicked ignorance and blindness. And besides, to deny that there is the existence of the great delusion in the churches is a fatal mistake.

Thus on our part we ought to be anxiously careful, downright honest and deeply probing before we arrive at a conclusion as to where we are standing with respect to the grace

of God. Since illusion, deception and confusion characterise the times that we live in, it should not be grievous for us to be extremely wary of our perception. Indeed it is a safe and right thing for us to be strict and cautious in the spiritual diagnosis of our souls and our disposition before God.

ARE WE ACTUALLY REGENERATED?

Conversion is hard to come by when apostasy is on the ascent. It was said of Samson: 'And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him' (Judges 16:20b). If the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit is distraughtful enough, then tragedy is compounded when we are not able to discern the situation rightly. We may suffer from such an analogous situation. Wherein there is a dearth of the supply of the blessed Eternal Spirit, true divine works are few and far apart. Yet does not Samson's woeful predicament ring the same cords when the boastings of many churches seem to trumpet as though they are in the midst of revival seasons? How many evangelical church members presume themselves as saints? How many of those who sit in the pews today will attain unto the congregation of the righteous in heaven above (Psalms 1:5)? If one can be bold enough to be entirely honest, he will confess that almost everyone is 'playing' church.

Ministers keep exhorting those in the pews to render sacrifices in making offerings, so that their religious organisations may continue to thrive; but these whose pockets are plundered are also duped to think that they are on their way to heaven when as yet they are bereft of Christ in their souls. Yea, there are many many who boast about their knowledge of the Bible and the doctrines thereof but who are strangers and aliens to the warm assurances and tender pulsation of true religion. How many are there today who find it at home when we talk about the ineffable effervescence and celestial throbs of the presence and communion with the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ? How many can confidently speak about the actual experience when the Sovereign God did mercifully forgive all their sins? How many have really tasted the power of the atoning blood of Christ? The true answer to these incisive inquiries can send reverberations of terror in many a heart.

ARE WE CERTIFIED THAT THE MINISTRY IN THE PULPITS WHERE WE ATTEND TO IS FAITHFUL TO AND APPROVED OF GOD?

Almost everywhere, the pulpit is the place where the net of deception is cast. The modern prophets of Baal are wielding a success that put to shame those that had served Jezebel

in the days of Elijah. The apostle was referring to the pulpit when he said 'But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived' (II Timothy 3:13). Our Lord emphasised the urgency of this concern when He warned us 'Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves' (Matthew 7:15). The trouble with identifying the authenticity of preachers is that many false ones come to us in the evangelical garb. They insist that the impressive string of credentials from reputed Bible seminaries are clear proofs of their high calling to the ministry. Verily, I tell you, it cannot be further from the truth especially in these days. How then can we know that preachers are sent of God? In any case, why is it important to know whether preachers are sent or not? As to the latter, the most ordinary way in which God has instituted to plant faith into others is through authentic preaching (Romans 10:17). Hence if there be no preachers, how can there be true faith in the hearts of men? There are those who have tried to convince me that they have faith though they have been nurtured and cultured in the ambience where Arminianism, Dispensationalism, Reconstructionism and Charismatism are espoused. Should we not be more charitable, to concede authenticity to those who espouse these errors, yet who still preach Christ? But I say, which Christ? Do not the cults preach Christ? Do not Papacy preach Christ? Why then the distinction when we deal with Dispensationalism, a heresy conceived and bred by the Antichrist? In any case who am I to decide or affirm what authenticity is. Authenticity is stamped from heaven above: you and I are but to discern it. We do not give it, for the mere reason that we have absolutely no authority to do so. If a minister is sent from God above, he would bear the marks of divine calling (I Timothy 1:11-14; I Thessalonians 2:1-12; Galatians 6:12,17; II Timothy 3:10-12; II Corinthians 2:14-4:7). As the apostle reasoned, 'And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they hear, except they be sent?' And I ask, who sends them? The immortal God or mortal man? The holy God or the erring church? The Sovereign God or man-made Bible colleges? And my answer is, 'A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven' (John 3:27).

What then are the marks of true preaching? First, it is to be faithful to the whole counsel of God. Second, it must be attended and accompanied by the power and life of the Spirit. No man can understand the Word of God without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. It is extremely disas-

trous to confuse mere intellectual apprehension for spiritual enlightenment in the matter of receiving the Holy Scriptures. 'For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.' (I Corinthians 4:20). There is a kind of preaching that will cause the faith of men to stand precariously on the wisdom of men and there is a kind of preaching that erect the faith of men safely upon the power of God (I Corinthians 2:1-5). Many say that this is a hard matter to discern. They think because it is something subjective and experimental it is difficult to gauge. But I say, this is not an ambiguous and vague matter. It can be safely discerned. It must be discerned correctly, and indeed discerned clearly, definitely and beyond all dispute. A Christ-endorsed ministry is a savour of life unto life for those who believe and a savour of death unto death unto those who disbelieve. Third, it must produce spiritual fruit. By the fruit we will know the tree. This is what our Lord Himself emphasised so that we may not be wrong here (Matthew 7:15-20). Behold their own lives: do they exhibit their worthiness for this high calling? Behold the lives and ways of those that come under the ambit of their ministry. Are they living epistles? Are they spiritual in their outlook and demeanour? Do they walk by faith? Does eternal things seem more real to them than temporal and earthly things? Do they have a voracious and insatiable appetite for the Word of God?

All true ministers are a sweet savour of Christ unto God (II Corinthians 2:14-16). The evidence of their ministry is in the lives of their congregation (II Corinthians 3:1-3). Of true heaven-sent ministers, we say, 'how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!' (Romans 10:15). As for false preachers, the Holy Scriptures condemns them for 'they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be made manifest unto all men' (II Timothy 3:9).

Wherefore let every man be very honest and conscientious here. For if we make a mistake in this matter concerning the authenticity of the ministry we give attendance to, alas, we ourselves will suffer for eternity. ❧



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