

SEPARATION FROM ROME

Once again I've decided to read through the book titled *The Great Controversy*. If you have never, or if it's been awhile since you've read it, I would encourage you to do so. The devil tried to kill its author while writing it because it exposes his deceptions like no other book other than the Bible can do, and Ellen White said she wished to see this book circulated more than any of her other writings. I've read it several times before, but the truth it contains hit me this time as never before, and I hope and pray it will do the same for you this morning.

Just recently I read the chapter titled "**Luther's Separation From Rome,**" and as I was reading I noticed parallel experience after parallel experience in the way present truth was revealed to Luther and the hard choices he had to make in his day, and the way present truth is being revealed and fulfilled to us today and the hard choices we have to make.

Thinking about this chapter, personally I could just as well title it "**Jack's separation From Rome,**" and you could put your name in there as well if you have separated from an apostate church. And make no mistake, if your church is in apostasy, that is, if it has abandoned any of the main teachings and principles it was founded upon, providing it was founded upon the Bible, then it has apostatized, and if it has done this, then it has become incorporated into the gigantic system know in the Bible as "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."

The Spirit of Prophecy is too clear on this point to make a mistake. In *The Great Controversy*, **page 381** it says, "The term 'Babylon' is derived from 'Babel,' and signifies confusion. It is employed in Scripture to designate the various forms of false or apostate religion."

If you have only thought about separating from Rome, but have not yet done so, or if you are in doubt or perplexed about separating from a church that you see has strayed from the straight and narrow path, it would be well for you to read the chapter titled "**Luther's Separation From Rome,**" because it's all about what Luther went through, and how that relates to us today, because Satan's tactics have not changed, and God's requirements are the same today as they have always been. The Bible principle is, if you associate with the corrupt, you will become corrupt. Several stories in God's word bear this out, but let me simplify it by reading you a one liner from the *Review and Herald, January 2, 1900*.

"God and Christ and the heavenly host would have man know that if he unites with the corrupt, he will become corrupt."

Now, this doesn't mean witnessing to the corrupt or worldly person when you have opportunity, but it means "uniting" with the corrupt. For instance, if the church you have united with has corrupt doctrines, your thinking will become corrupted by them. If your friends have corrupt morals, you will begin thinking like them. And so, it's very important who you hang around with, or fellowship with, or allow your children to hang around with.

Over a number of years Martin Luther went through a process in his thinking from being a loyal subject of the church of Rome, to being one who denounced his church as Babylon and the pope as antichrist, and you have to admit that that was quite a transformation, and probably not too much unlike what many of us have had to go through.

During this process Luther had many doubts and struggles in his mind about whether or not he was doing the right thing in denouncing his church, but finally he was freed from all confusion and doubt as he saw that the teachings of his church and the word of God, which he came to trust fully, were at odds with one another. And if the same scenario is taking place today within the professed remnant church, wouldn't the same action as Martin Luther took be required today?

Notice what the wise man said in **Ecclesiastes 1:9-11**, it's very apropos to the topic today. *"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after."*

You remember the old saying, "The one who doesn't know history is doomed to repeat it"? Well, that's a true statement, and it's especially true as we consider the kind of struggle and final separation from the principles of Rome the Protestant reformers went through as they compared the word of God with what their church was teaching and what the leaders of their church were allowing and promoting.

Just as Martin Luther and those that came before and after him had to do, so we today, unfortunately, must go through the same experience if we would be faithful to the truth and be approved of God as they were.

Not long after becoming a priest, Luther was called to be a professor at the University of Wittenberg, and there he had the opportunity to study the Scriptures more deeply and to lecture and preach from the pulpit about the wonderful things he was learning, and as he did, the people listened eagerly to what he had to say. And so his popularity increased, but up to now he had never visited Rome, the headquarters of the work.

When he finally got to go, you can probably imagine his excitement as he neared what he

thought was a holy city, with the notion that this was God's church and all the higher-ups in the hierarchy were very godly men that were directing a world-wide work for the salvation of souls, and being so thankful to be a part of it all; but it wasn't very long before his misplaced confidence and trust in his precious church were dashed to pieces as he witnessed the extravagance and iniquity and a disregard for the Bible that was everywhere prevalent.

It would be kind of like the anticipation of a loyal Seventh-Day Adventist visiting one of the larger institutions of the church for the first time thinking they were going to be extremely blessed and so thankful to be a part of it all, only to be terribly let down when they witnessed the worldliness, the immodesty, the flagrant disregard of Spirit of Prophecy counsel, and a generally liberal attitude toward sin everywhere they looked.

Or perhaps it would be like attending a General Conference Session for the first time thinking to hear some grand present truth message that would draw them closer to Jesus and the historic truths they've always believed, when all of a sudden a Catholic priest is invited by the General Conference president to come to the pulpit and address all the church delegates and tell them how much his church and theirs have in common. And no wonder, because the General Conference president had already consigned the writings of the prophet to the historical trash heaps.

Do you know what Martin Luther felt like after his visit to Rome? His following words explain it pretty well. He said, "If there is a hell, Rome is built over it: it is an abyss whence issues every kind of sin." (*The Great Controversy, page 125*)

And when you think it through, can any words better describe the condition of a church that has been given the most exalted truth ever given to a people to give to the world when they disregard that message themselves? "Oh Pastor Jones, now you've gone too far! The Seventh-Day Adventist Church could never become as bad as the Roman Catholic Church." And I would agree. It could never become as bad, but it could become worse!

Notice what it says in the *Review and Herald, August 1, 1893*, "Of those who boast of their light and yet fail to walk in it Christ says, 'But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum [Seventh-day Adventists, who have had great light], which art exalted unto heaven [in point of privilege], shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.'"

And put that together with this next statement from *Manuscript 12, page 319*: "The more and increased light God has given makes the receiver more responsible. . . When Jerusalem was divorced from God it was because of her sins. She fell from an exalted height that Tyre and Sidon had never reached. And when an angel falls he becomes a feind. The depth of our ruin (**speaking of the church**) is measured by the exalted light to which God has raised us in His great goodness and unspeakable mercy. Oh, what privileges are granted to us as a people! And if God spared not His people that He loved (**speaking of the Jews**), because they refused to

walk in the light, how can He spare the people (SDAs) whom He has blessed with the light of heaven in having opened to them the most exalted truth ever entrusted to mortal man to give to the world?"

You see, until Martin Luther came to a certain point in his church affiliated experience, he never had a thought that his study of the Bible would lead him away from what he believed was God's last day church. Notice what it says about Luther before he visited Rome in *The Great Controversy, page 124*:

"Luther was still a true son of the papal church and had no thought that he would ever be anything else."

I don't know about what your experience has been or what it is today, but I can say that there was a time in my life when I thought of myself as a true son of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and had no thought that I would ever be anything else. But like Luther, as my eyes were opened to many of the things going on within my church, and comparing that with the inspired information this church has been given, it was unavoidable that I would have to come to the same conclusion he did.

After visiting Rome, notice what it says in *The Great Controversy, page 125*:

"His eyes had been opened, and were never again to be closed to the delusions of the papacy. When he turned his face from Rome he had turned away also in heart, and from that time the separation grew wider, until he severed all connection with the papal church."

Just as it took a little time for Luther to sever all connection with his apostate church, so it took me some time, about 2 years before I could bring myself to fully admit that a total separation was absolutely necessary if I would be true to God and to His word. Perhaps your experience is a bit different, or maybe you are still wondering what you should do about your affiliation to your church, but I can tell you one thing, if you don't decide soon, your decision will be made for you, and in the end you will regret not having taken a decided stand for truth and righteousness, the cost be what it may.

Once Martin Luther turned away from Rome in his heart, he could no longer be fooled, and he no longer had doubts about who was in control of his once beloved church. And once he came to that conclusion, guess what happened next? *The Great Controversy, page 133*, "Luther received a summons to appear at Rome to answer to the charge of heresy."

I have known of many, who over the past 25 years have had an experience not unlike my own. When they finally, after a long struggle in their own mind about what they should do about their church membership, and being loath to make a clean break from the church they loved, were summoned to a church board meeting or a business meeting to answer for their faith before a very skeptical group of people that had no intention of listening to a plain "thus saith the Lord" with an open mind.

In *The Great Controversy*, page 132, notice the kind of thoughts and feelings Martin Luther went through in his own mind as he tried sorting things out.

“Luther trembled as he looked upon himself—one man opposed to the mightiest powers of earth. He sometimes doubted whether he had indeed been led of God to set himself against the authority of the church. ‘Who was I,’ he writes, ‘to oppose the majesty of the pope, before whom ... the kings of the earth and the whole world trembled? ... No one can know what my heart suffered during these first two years, and into what despondency, I may say into what despair, I was sunk.’”

Oh, I remember all too well these same thoughts going through my own mind as I was preparing to talk to my local pastor and elders about the things I saw going on in my church, locally and worldwide. But I knew that my decision to confront my church leaders and finally my separation from them was just, because I was leaning upon the truths of God’s word and the Spirit of Prophecy and not upon the arm of flesh.

I know of others who were pronounced apostates, and heretics, and disfellowshipped for no other reason than that they opposed church authority. It wasn’t because of the Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy proofs they gave as the reason for their concerns, but simply because they would not submit to church authority.

When Luther stood before the diet with the Scripture weapons on his side, it didn’t matter! He was told he must recant and retract what he had said and written, or else. “Show me my error from the Scriptures, he said, and I’ll be glad to retract everything I believe”; but of course they couldn’t do it. “I cannot submit for conscience sake”, he said, and thus began his experience as one who was anathematized and proclaimed worthy of death at the stake like others before him who had dared to question the authority of the church and its true position in the eyes of God.

Like I said, I know of many others who went through a long battle with church leaders before they were finally disfellowshipped for no other reason than they were not willing, for conscience’ sake, to submit to church authority. However, after a short struggle myself, I decided I wasn’t going to fight to try to retain my membership in a church that had formed an image to the beast, but asked instead that my membership be removed so I could be free in Christ to follow the dictates of my own conscience and not be corporately accountable for the sins and errors of others that refused to free themselves from falsehood.

By the way, do you know how a church forms an image to the beast and the consequences for being a member of a church like that? Well I’ll tell you, it’s very simple. A church forms an image to the Roman hierarchy by doing the same thing it did. What did it do? It formed an alliance, or a union with the civil power to persecute those that, for conscience’ sake, were not willing to go along with apostasy in order to be true to God and to His word.

Well, you say; the Seventh-Day Adventist Church hasn’t done that, nor would it ever do that.

Oh really? Then what did they do back in the 1990s when they took a small group to court and sued them simply because they felt it their duty to call themselves Seventh-Day Adventists? Did they not form a union with the state and use God's sacred tithe money to pay a Catholic lawyer to defend themselves? Did they not trademark the denominational name, and even the name of Ellen G. White in order to keep others that they couldn't bring under their authority from using them?

Come on Pastor Jones, aren't you getting a little nitpicky here? Well, let me read you something and let's see if you still feel the same way afterward.

Selected Messages, Book 3, page 299, "When troubles arise in the church we should **not** go for help to lawyers **not** of our faith. (**Especially Catholic lawyers as the denomination has done. And notice how many times the word "not" is used in this statement**) God does **not** desire us to open church difficulties before those who do **not** fear Him. He would **not** have us depend for help on those who do **not** obey His requirements. Those who trust in such counselors show that they have **not** faith in God. By their lack of faith the Lord is greatly dishonored, and their course works great injury to themselves. In appealing to unbelievers to settle difficulties in the church they are biting and devouring one another, to be 'consumed one of another' (Galatians 5:15).

"These men cast aside the counsel God has given, and do the very things He has bidden them **not** to do. They show that they have chosen the world as their judge, and in heaven their names are registered as one with unbelievers. Christ is crucified afresh, and put to open shame. Let these men know that God does **not** hear their prayers. They insult His holy name, and He will leave them to the buffetings of Satan until they shall see their folly and seek the Lord by confession of their sin."

Nine times the Lord has said, "do not do this", and to this day there has been no acknowledgment of wrong doing on the part of church leaders, but they continue to pursue the same course to this day. That means that their names are still registered in the books of heaven as unbelievers, that they have crucified Christ afresh and put Him to open shame, and that God does not hear their prayers. Now, is that serious? Yes it's serious, and do you know what else is serious? Those that are still members of the church that has done this, and still support its leaders, become corporately responsible for what they have done.

Testimonies For The Church, volume 3, page 269, "God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them. If the leaders of the church neglect to diligently search out the sins which bring the displeasure of God upon the body, they (**that is, the whole body**) become responsible for these sins."

I'm sorry to have to tell you these things, because I know it's going to cause some of you to have to make hard choices, and who likes to make hard choices; it's not in our fallen DNA. But sometimes hard choices need to be made, and they won't be unlike those Martin Luther had to make. God didn't call me into the ministry to give a peace and safety message like you can

hear in all the various churches of the day, but rather to give a message that will arouse people from their Laodicean slumber, and a message of separation from the principles of Rome are perfectly calculated to do this.

I don't like to read a lot because I don't want to put you to sleep, but I think it's important to give you a little more from the same context as what we just read. This is also from *Testimonies For The Church, volume 3, page 267*:

“Who are standing in the counsel of God at this time? Is it those who virtually excuse wrongs among the professed people of God and who murmur in their hearts, if not openly, against those who would reprove sin? Is it those who take their stand against them and sympathize with those who commit wrong? No, indeed! Unless they repent, and leave the work of Satan in oppressing those who have the burden of the work and in holding up the hands of sinners in Zion, they will never receive the mark of God's sealing approval. They will fall in the general destruction of the wicked, represented by the work of the five men bearing slaughter weapons. Mark this point with care: Those who receive the pure mark of truth, wrought in them by the power of the Holy Ghost, represented by a mark by the man in linen, are those ‘that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done’ in the church. Their love for purity and the honor and glory of God is such, and they have so clear a view of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, that they are represented as being in agony, even sighing and crying. Read the ninth chapter of Ezekiel.

“But the general slaughter of all those who do not thus see the wide contrast between sin and righteousness, and do not feel as those do who stand in the counsel of God and receive the mark, is described in the order to the five men with slaughter weapons: ‘Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.’”

Oh friend, do you comprehend the significance and seriousness of what we just read? I hope so. I hope so.

There's something else that was going on in Martin Luther's day that has a parallel experience within the Advent movement. In *The Great Controversy, pages 140, 141* it tells what Luther had to say to the people because of the influence Rome had upon the educational system of his day. He wrote this, and I quote:

“I am much afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, and engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not unceasingly occupied with the word of God must become corrupt.”

Do you remember when Ellen White wrote something similar to Seventh-Day Adventist who were thinking of sending their children to the school in Battle Creek? She said the following in *Testimonies For The Church, volume 5, page 21*:

“There is danger that our college will be turned away from its original design. . . Students are sent from great distances to attend the college at Battle Creek, for the very purpose of receiving instruction from the lectures on Bible subjects. But for one or two years past, there has been an effort to mold our school after other colleges. When this is done, we can give no encouragement to parents to send their children to Battle Creek College.”

In another place she said, “I was bidden to warn our people on no account to send their children to Battle Creek to receive an education, . . . Some think it strange that I write, ‘Do not send your children to Battle Creek.’ I was instructed in regard to the danger of the worldly influence in Battle Creek. . . The young people in Battle Creek are in danger. They will come in contact with error.” *Battle Creek Letters, page 108.*

What would she say today about those graduating from Andrews Theological Seminary having been educated in the tactics of Neurolinguistic Programming, Spiritual Formation, Psychology, and the New Theology of salvation in sin? Do you think she would encourage parents to send their children to Battle Creek today? Have things gotten better or worse since she warned about things going on there?

Did you know that Battle Creek is where the alpha of apostasy began under the influence and teachings of Dr Kellogg, and that because of the influence and teachings of the Kellogg errors, that the omega of apostasy has developed within the educational institutions of the church today and has extended throughout the entire denomination? Do you know what the alpha and omega of apostasy is? Because if you don’t, then how are you going to be able to tell when you hear it being preached from the pulpit? We don’t have time to go into this subject today, but if you ask I’ll send you a two part sermon CD that explains it very clearly, and you won’t be fooled by this last day deception.

Have you ever noticed when you read the Spirit of Prophecy that Sister White usually draws a conclusion at the end of the chapters or articles she wrote and applies them to the times in which we live today?

In the last two pages of the chapter titled “**Luther’s Separation From Rome,**” on *pages 143, 144* of *The Great Controversy*, Sister White tells us that the experience of Luther will be the experience of God’s people in the last days. And what was this experience? Martin Luther went through a process in his thinking from being a loyal subject of the church of Rome, to being one who denounced his church as Babylon and separated from it.

And here’s one other very important point we don’t have time to develop this time, perhaps next, and it’s this: don’t be fooled into thinking that separating from Rome is all you need to do in order to be saved. You must also accept and experience the true gospel that Martin Luther discovered as he climbed Pilate’s staircase on his knees and heard the voice that said, “The just shall live by faith.”

There's nothing you can do to earn salvation. There's nothing you can do to recommend yourself to God as one worthy of eternal life; it's a gift! And once you accept that gift that has been purchased for you on the cross of Calvary, and realize the love that has been offered to you free of charge, then you will be given a heart that is inclined to obey what God asks you to do. And what does Jesus ask you to do, "If you love me, **(He said)** keep my commandments."

Now, we must close by reading from *The Great Controversy, pages 143, 144*, and please notice how the experience of Luther will be our experience as we near the end.

"Opposition is the lot of all whom God employs to present truths specially applicable to their time. There was a present truth in the days of Luther,—a truth at that time of special importance; there is a present truth for the church today (**Notice, not just a present truth for the church to give, but a present truth FOR the church to accept or reject today, a truth that's to be given TO the church, and it will be given by those that aren't afraid to give it**) . . . But truth is no more desired by the majority today (**that is, the majority of the church**) than it was by the papists who opposed Luther. There is the same disposition to accept the theories and traditions of men instead of the word of God as in former ages. Those who present the truth for this time should not expect to be received with greater favor than were earlier reformers. The great controversy between truth and error, between Christ and Satan, is to increase in intensity to the close of this world's history. . . The spirit of the world is no more in harmony with the spirit of Christ today than in earlier times, and those who preach the word of God in its purity will be received with no greater favor now than then. The forms of opposition to the truth may change, the enmity may be less open because it is more subtle; but the same antagonism still exists and will be manifested to the end of time."

Friend, what will you do with the information you've heard this morning? Will you receive it and cherish it and obey it, or will you take the side of the majority because you're afraid of being persecuted for the truths sake? Or because you're afraid of losing friends and even family members for telling them the truth?

That decision is up to you and you alone, and I hope it will be the right one. May the Holy Spirit give us spiritual discernment as we contemplate these things.