

## THE ROAD TO DARKNESS

Before we open God's word, I'd like to read a letter I received recently from a brother and sister in South Africa. Here's what they write: "Dear Gospel Workers Ministry, Greetings in the name of our Master Jesus Christ. I have watched a DVD of my brother Jack Jones on the interpretation and relevance of Matthew 24. Over and over again have my family listened, holding on to all the words. We noted the references and are studying this out for ourselves. We at this point are on the brink of being disfellowshipped for not having full confidence in the church manual, Sabbath-school lessons, and 27 fundamentals. We believe in our Bible and our words given us by our prophet in the Spirit of Prophecy. We are unable to accept what is prescribed to us. Our system of formalism and existence in threatening is no more desired by us in the church. We have lost faith in this whole system and are earnestly seeking something safe. We have been lied to. Our confidence has been betrayed. Our experience was far more extreme than what we thought possible through betrayal from our brothers and sisters. We do not need to be lied to any more. 1995 in Bible prophecy is something all together new. Verse 15 of Matthew 24 holds out to us an explanation."

**(What this brother and sister refer to here is when the Vatican flag was brought on stage during the parade of nations at the General Conference Session in the Netherlands in 1995 and how this was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Matthew 24:15 when Jesus referred to what Daniel wrote about when stating what he said about the abomination of desolation that would stand in the holy place, or the church, and I don't have time to explain this right now, so if you want to know more about this prophecy you can go to my web site and listen to the 3 part series on Matthew 24. Then this brother and sister write the following)**

"Tell us the truth. Nothing less than the truth. Please help us understand these stupendous truths for our time. The fulfillment of this prophecy goes against all I ever believed in this church. We are not asking that you do our research for us. We need someone to help us through this. We never imagined that this would come to this. Without all our conflict and reading of omega apostasy we would never have come to these conclusions. All our reading has confirmed by the sources to remain in the church. However, we need the facts. This church rose up by prophecy and only prophecy can bring it down to the grave. God bless and thank you."

Then they give their name and address, and you can be sure I sent them a care package and I'm awaiting their response and hope to hear from them again soon, but this is the heart cry of many who see what's going on in the church and don't know what to do about it. I had many similar questions myself 25 years ago as I witnessed the apostasy

that seemed to be everywhere I looked and you probably have too, but many of the other countries of the world are just now coming to this same realization and we need to pray for them and do what we can to help them understand so they know where to turn for answers, and I believe men and women like this couple will be instrumental in doing what they can to open blind eyes to the truth for this time, and I hope you'll remember them in your daily devotions. Correspondence back and forth from Africa can take quite a bit of time, and evidently this brother and sister don't have Internet access, but when and if I hear back I'll let you know.

This morning I'd like to begin by reading a few short paragraphs from the book ***Acts of the Apostles***. The chapter is titled "A Faithful Witness," speaking of the apostle John, and it tells of the gradual process that took place within the early Christian church that caused it to take a downward spiral from the elevated spiritual position of those who formed the church at the beginning. I've titled this sermon ***The Road to Darkness*** because there are 10 steps mentioned in this chapter that the early church took from a spiritual high to a spiritual low, and it's those same 10 steps that will cause the same results in the individual lives of the members of the church today. I'm going to begin reading on **page 547** so you'll get a better idea of how this spiritual decline took place and hopefully how to avoid repeating the same mistakes today. After all, we're told in **1 Corinthians 10:11** that these things are written for our admonition, or our warning, because we live at a time when the end is about to come.

***Acts of the Apostles 547***, "After the descent of the Holy Spirit (**this would be at Pentecost**), when the disciples went forth to proclaim a living Saviour, their one desire was (**what do you think?**) the salvation of souls."

It wasn't to push their own agenda, or to seek for the highest place in the church, or to travel all over the country spewing some fanatical view, but for the salvation of souls, that's it!

"They rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints."

And so, there was no division at this point, just sweet harmony, why? Because they all had the same goal. Do you remember what Paul said, in **1 Corinthians 1:10**? What he said pulls back the curtain on the early church and lets us know that there were problems that developed, otherwise he wouldn't have written what he did. He entreated the Corinthians to "all speak the same thing, (**because obviously they weren't**) and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." What does that mean? It means that they were not all being led by the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit does not speak with a forked tongue. For the

church to be perfectly joined together was God's desire for the church 2000 years ago and it's still His desire today.

“They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth's sake. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them. By unselfish words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts.”

You see, the reason the apostle John wrote so much about love for one another is because he saw that that love among the brethren was disappearing and he wanted to see the same state of things in the church at that point that he remembered existed earlier.

“Such a love the believers were ever to cherish. They were to go forward in willing obedience to the new commandment.”

That's the new commandment Christ gave to the disciple in **John 13:34** when He said, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

“So closely were they to be united with Christ that they would be enabled to fulfill all His requirements.”

That's living without sin, by the way, and not the popular idea of living an ease loving accommodating religion like we see today in most of the churches. Christianity is a religion of self-denial and not a live as you please religion that only requires an assent to the truth. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can be enabled to fulfill all Christ's requirements, and unless we realize that, we will never have real victory over sin and temptation.

“Their lives were to magnify the power of a Saviour who could justify them by His righteousness.”

And guess what? after one is justified by Christ's righteousness the process of sanctification begins, which is living a life of holiness. In other words, after we're forgiven, and that's what justification is, then God expects us live in obedience to His commandments through the power of the Holy Spirit. Then these very sad words: “But gradually a change came.”

Oh oh, here comes the downward spiral I was talking about and how it began. #1, “The

believers began to look for defects in others.”

Now tell me, what did that have to do with their one desire to see souls saved? Obviously nothing, but that's where the whole problem began. When they lost their first love they began to look for defects. It doesn't say they began to notice defects in others, but they were actually looking for them, and when they looked for defects, do you suppose they found any? No doubt. We're all at different stages in our character development, are we not? And if we are searching and digging we will surely find defects. It's fine to search our own hearts to see if there be any wicked ways in us, but not when it comes to others. There's a perfect example of this going on right now with the Democrats looking for defects in President Trump and the so called Russian collusion we've heard so much about with the Trump Campaign, which is based on a fake news report to begin with, and the Democrats are hopeful that something will surface if they keep digging, even if they have to make something up, and unfortunately this same kind of thing happens within the church. Too bad! After looking for and finding defects in others it says the believers began, #2, “Dwelling upon mistakes.”

Isn't that the way it goes? Once defects are found and mistakes are discovered, then we dwell upon them until they get blown way out of proportion in our minds, and the more we think about them the bigger they become until we start, #3, “giving place to unkind criticism”.

So they didn't just look for defects and dwell on mistakes, but now they started to voice their criticism to the one they perceived was in the wrong and to tell others what terrible people they were until #4, “they lost sight of the Saviour and His love.”

And again, this is why John dwelt so much upon brotherly love in his epistles. He saw this happening to the church and he wanted to draw their minds away from these things and back to the Saviour and the one desire to see souls saved, and I hope we can get the message ourselves and apply it to our movement today. Then once they lost sight of the Saviour #5 “They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies”.

Isn't it interesting that once Christians lose sight of the Saviour and His love that they tend to try to fill the void by placing more emphasis upon the forms of religion? And then they wonder why their children want no part of mom and dad's religion? You know, just going to church because they know they should, but they'd really rather be doing something else or going somewhere else. Children are very quick to see hypocrisy, and they want nothing to do with it, and as soon as they're old enough, they're gone. People that lose sight of Jesus and His love for the sinner become more strict to follow outward ceremonies, and are the same ones who can't wait for Sabbath to be over so they can do

their own thing. Oh they'll never say so, but in their heart the Sabbath is not a delight as it should be, but is nothing more than a duty and an obligation. And my dear brother and sister, I hope these characteristics aren't describing you, but if they are, you need to recognize the signs before it's too late, because eventually they will lead to a place you don't want to find yourself. I know this to be true because I experienced a partial falling away many years ago and I thank the Lord that I woke up and recognized where I was headed and made a course correction before I slid too far down the path to be recovered.

Then what do you suppose is the next step after becoming more strict to follow outward ceremonies? They became #6, "more particular about the theory than the practice of the faith."

Do you know what a theory is? A theory is an explanation of something, which is independent of the thing you're trying to explain. In other words, it's a set of beliefs that have not been proven by an actual experience. For instance, a person might say that Malachi 3:10 says if we return a faithful tithe, God will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that there won't be room enough to receive it, but if that person doesn't prove this promise by actually returning that tithe, it's just a theory, and the same can be said for many other promises and beliefs. The devil doesn't care if you have a theory of the truth as long as you don't practice it. In fact, you can be a very efficient agent for him if you say you believe the truth but don't practice it. The church is full of people like that, and that's one of the reasons we're still here.

Once the early church developed a theory of the truth with no action to obey, it says #7, "In their zeal to condemn others, they overlooked their own errors."

That's what happens when people become spiritually blind, and this blindness begins to come upon us when we take the very first step of looking for defects in others. Every one of these steps shows that a person is in a lost condition, because if Jesus abides, you won't be doing any of these things. It becomes progressively worse as each step is taken, because Jesus is no longer the Lord and Master of your life, and of course, when the early church reached step #8, it says, "They lost the brotherly love that Christ had enjoined, and, saddest of all", #9 "they were unconscious of their loss."

Oh brothers and sisters, what a terrible condition to be in, to think you're all right when you're all wrong; to think you're going to heaven when you're headed down the broad road to destruction; to think you know Jesus when you only know about Him. When a person who once knew the truth gets to the point where they have had this kind of a loss, but are totally unconscious of that loss, how do you recover from that? When a person becomes deceived they don't know they're deceived, and usually they continue down the

same path unless they receive a very disturbing wake-up call of some kind, and even then, too many times even that's ignored. That's what happened to many in the early church, until #10, they “did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives and that, having shut the love of God out of their hearts, they would soon walk in darkness.”

So, we need to examine our own hearts this morning. If happiness and joy are gone out of your Christian experience, watch out, because you'll soon be walking in total darkness. There is no good reason for a Christian to be unhappy and joyless. I'm not talking about occasional feelings that come to us, we all have those, but if you are unhappy most of the time and you find no joy in serving Christ and living the Christian life, there is a problem with that, and you're in danger of being self-deceived.

Please notice what it says in *The Desire of Ages, page 322*, because we can't put any of the blame on God for our own downward spiral. It says, “It is not God that blinds the eyes of men or hardens their hearts. He sends them light to correct their errors, and to lead them in safe paths **(this is exactly what the brother and sister from South Africa are looking for, something safe)**; it is by the rejection of this light that the eyes are blinded and the heart hardened. **(And it doesn't happen all at once as we've been reading. There are steps an individual takes along the way that are very subtle, and if one is not spending time with God on a daily basis, they will not realize the changes that are taking place in their own lives and in their own spiritual condition.)** Often the process is gradual, and almost imperceptible. Light comes to the soul through God's word, through His servants, or by the direct agency of His Spirit; but when one ray of light is disregarded, there is a partial benumbing of the spiritual perceptions, and the second revealing of light is less clearly discerned. So the darkness increases, until it is night in the soul.”

And dear friends, when it becomes night in the soul, I don't know how you recover from that. We have been given so much truth as a people, and if we begin disregarding that truth in any area, we are on the road to darkness whether we know it or not. And guess what, when it becomes night in the soul, there is no step 11. When you reach this point God has to give you up to the folly you've chosen. After a certain point, there is no remedy for spiritual blindness that's self-inflicted. You wonder why there's so much division and fanaticism and errors among us? It's because too many of us are somewhere on this 10 point slide and don't realize it, that's why! Somewhere along the way we lost sight of Jesus and that one desire to see souls saved in His kingdom. Oh how we need to retrace our steps to see where we've gone wrong and stop this 10 step process in its tracks.

Now I want you to listen once again to these 10 progressive steps in there order without any comment, and as I read this one short paragraph once again from *Acts of the*

**Apostles**, please search your own heart to see if you are somewhere on this road to darkness.

“The believers began to look for defects in others. Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and His love. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory than the practice of the faith. In their zeal to condemn others, they overlooked their own errors. They lost the brotherly love that Christ had enjoined, and, saddest of all, they were unconscious of their loss. They did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives and that, having shut the love of God out of their hearts, they would soon walk in darkness.”

The apostle John, the faithful witness, realizing that brotherly love was waning in the church, urged upon believers the constant need of this love, and his letters to the church are full of this thought, and I'd like to look at some of his inspired instruction before we close.

**1 John 4:7-21**, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation **(or an atoning sacrifice)** for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.”

**1 John 2:7-11**, “A new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his

brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth **(in other words, he's unconscious of his loss as we read earlier)**, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

**1 John 3:11-16**, “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

Friends, this kind of love is what's missing in our movement, wouldn't you agree? And it's also the reason why there's so much division among us, and the reason we're not all speaking the same thing, and the reason we don't all have that one desire for the salvation of souls. Oh how I pray that we will all wake up and take inventory of where we stand with God and with one another, that the Holy Spirit will apply the eye salve that we might see, and if we see that we are somewhere on the 10 step process on the road to darkness that we will recognize it before it becomes night in the soul. We have a glorious future before us, and the work is going to be finished with or without us, but how much better if it's with us. That's what God wants, and I hope it's what you want.

I'd like to finish up by reading this one last paragraph from ***Acts of the Apostles, page 548***, “It is not the opposition of the world that most endangers the church of Christ. It is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers that works their most grievous disaster and most surely retards the progress of God's cause. There is no surer way of weakening spirituality than by cherishing envy, suspicion, faultfinding, and evil surmising. On the other hand, the strongest witness that God has sent His Son into the world is the existence of harmony and union among men of varied dispositions who form His church. This witness it is the privilege of the followers of Christ to bear. But in order to do this, they must place themselves under Christ's command. Their characters must be conformed to His character and their wills to His will.”

If that's what you want more than anything else, I invite you to kneel with me as we recommit our lives to Jesus; that we might have that one desire to see souls saved and make whatever sacrifices necessary to place ourselves under Christ's command for a finished work.