

PAUL AT EPHESUS.

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"And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Acts 19:10.

Paul found a small group of believers at Ephesus, but they were but poorly instructed in the way of the Lord. When he asked them if they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed, they answered, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Lamé and halting as their confession was Paul did not reject these believers. He made these twelve charter members of the church at Ephesus. Did ever a church start off with a more unpromising group? There is a great lesson in this act of Paul. In human relationships we cannot turn down the halting and the lame. If they are honestly seeking the way, that is enough. Had the church continued Paul's tolerance toward the weak and erring, it would not now be split into so many factions, each trying to undo the other.

The church of God, when it is finished, will be the most beautiful temple in all time or eternity. But there will be but one perfect stone in the whole cathedral. Some stones will be chipped and broken, some defaced and scarred, some ill-shaped and rough-edged; but only one will be perfectly fitted for the builder's art. But with these imperfect materials the Great Architect of the universe will erect a temple so beautiful it will dazzle the eyes of every one who beholds it.

Poor as the beginning was, Paul's ministry at Ephesus was one of the most fruitful of his whole life. At the very beginning there was a shaking among the dry bones of the synagogue, there were convulsions among the entrenched citadels

of wickedness. A church that can live in peace by the side of fraud, oppression, debauchery and licentiousness is not a very live church. The synagogue at Ephesus had lived by these evils a long time. But when Paul began to preach against them they started squirming in their seats. They preferred the old easy way, and got rid of Paul as quickly as they could. He had to continue his ministry in the school of Tyrannus.

"And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds." When the temples of sin begin to topple we know the kingdom of God is on the way. This was not a secret confessional to the preacher. It was open and voluntary. They not only confessed to wrong practices, but "Shewed their deeds," turning from them with abhorance. Common sins that are practiced openly can best be stopped by renouncing them openly. Sins that involve the honor or reputation of another, unless they are a ^{threat} to an individual or the state, should be confessed to God only, or confessed in part, our own part.

"Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men." It is usually the fleeced and oppressed sheep who turn first to the consolation of the gospel. But here we find the oppressors coming repentant. These men had fleeced the poor and ignorant for their own profit. They had grown rich robbing the weak and helpless. When such men repent and turn away from their greedy profits, it is indeed a great day for the kingdom. This book burning was no witch hunt. They did not appoint a censor with police powers to go in search of books that were objectionable to some ruler. These men brought the books with which they had plundered their neighbors and burned them. It was a bonfire of sin and wickedness.

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The next citadel did not fall so easily. "And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen." These silver shrines were worn by the ignorant and superstitious to ward off disease, to cure the sick, to bring good fortune. Did Paul tell these people that such practices were foolish? If they asked him, he did. But after knowing Paul's Christ, they did not need to be told this. They no longer felt the need of such trifles. They now had a sure anchor of hope that left no room for such broken reeds of comfort. Hear Demetrius' own explanation of the matter. "Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands." The poor people now had something much better than silver shrines of Diana.

Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen were alarmed at the way business had fallen off. "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth." As long as men paid good money for these useless trifles Demetrius and his fellows prospered. It made no difference if they got no return for their money. It made no difference if their children went hungry. Sin never brings wealth. It may bring a few paltry dollars to the man who is peddling it. But to the many who buy it brings only poverty.

A business that leaves the customer poorer than he was before the purchase is a crooked business. How many businesses in America are making men poorer? Can the men engaged in such merchandise say, "I am an honest man." I went to a business woman who was a friend of mine about a man who was peddling a crooked insurance policy. She said if he was making a living

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at it that justified the business. I never could have much confidence in her any more, although she was selling a good policy.

"I give them what they want; it is not my business to tell them what is good for them." If I take a man's dollar in a business transaction it is my business to give him a dollar's worth in return. That is the only rule of honesty that will stand up by God's plumb line. A man who takes money for his own personal profit, without giving or trying to give, an equal value in return, is not honest.

"Great is Diana of the Ephesians." If she was so great, why was her temple falling to pieces? Hitler once said one can shout a lie so long and so loud that men will think it is the truth. It seems that men had tried this long before Hitler's day. They shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" for two hours. They shouted it till their throats were raw and hoarse. Strange to say, Diana was no greater when they got through than she was when they started. But the eternal truth that Paul planted in the hearts of these people goes marching on.

"Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne."

Why did God permit the Judaizers to dog Paul's footsteps for years, with the cry, "Except these are circumcised and keep the law of Moses, they cannot be saved?" Why did He permit Demerius to drive this good man from his labors with a mob? Was God on Paul's side or the side of the men who opposed him? He was on Paul's side.

It is said that, when Carlyle finished his history the French Revolution, he gave the manuscript to his good friend

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John Stuart Mill to criticise and correct. A careless maid in Mill's home, thinking the papers were old and useless, threw them into the fire. Mill was heartbroken when he went to tell Carlyle of his loss. He was further plunged into grief to learn that Carlyle had destroyed all his notes on the book. When Mill left Carlyle broke down and wept. But he wrote in his diary, "It is as though the great Invisible Schoolmaster had torn up my book when I showed it to Him and said, " No, boy, thou must write better." He did. He wrote another French Revolution that is today one of the immortal histories.

When we show our book to God, thinking to win praise, how often He says, "You can write a better book than this." Is it any wonder that He must reject so much of the work of good men? The best we do is so imperfect. If He accepted the first efforts, we would never do any better. Opposition, even violent and cruel, seldom hurts the cause of truth. But it often weeds out the unfit work of men. It makes us write another book. If God accepted the first gift we bring Him, we would never bring Him our best.