

# THE DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT

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Following Christ's resurrection, His disciples went out carrying the Gospel and little by little here and there people came to know Christ as their Savior. The Word of God spread. First 3000 souls were saved (Acts 2:41), then 5000 men believed (Acts 4:4) and by the end of the fourth century people were flocking into the church. After the Roman Empire was toppled some of these Christians forgot the ideas that had been so prominent in their lives during the first 300 years. Their first love for the Lord and longing for His return began to grow dim and their light was going out more and more as they said, "We are going to have the millennium right here through our own efforts. There is just ahead a glorious time of peace and universal light." Then darkness came.

Augustine, who died in 430 A.D. toiled throughout his life presenting the Word of God and writing some of the best Christian works that had been written. Probably no man since the Apostle Paul up to the time of the Reformers had such a great influence on the Christian church as did Augustine. In his final days in Hippo, Africa, he lay on his bed waiting for the end of life. He could hear the shouts of the barbarians outside the city walls as the Vandals came across North Africa pillaging, burning, and destroying. All but three towns in North Africa had been taken, and Augustine could see the fires of their destruction beyond his city walls. It seemed that the great light the Christians living then thought was just ahead had turned to darkness.

What brought this darkness? In the spirit of compromise, Boniface, the Roman governor of Africa, agreed to give half of North Africa to the Vandals in return for their support against the Romans whom he thought were seeking to remove him as governor. Too late he found out he had been mistaken but by then he was unable to call off the Vandals whom he met and was defeated by in battle. And North Africa which had been one of the great centers of civilization, sunk into a state of barbarianism and darkness.

The area of Gaul which we now call France fell before the Frankish barbarians and that land and all Europe sunk into darkness that lasted half a millennium. Before the darkness came over the land, at least 95% of the population could read and write. After the darkness fell this would become more like one percent! The darkness lasted for centuries until the Reformation 1100 years later.

In Geneva, Switzerland you will see monuments of the Reformation with the words "After Darkness Light." Light is necessary between darkness and reformation. You cannot jump from darkness to reformation. You must have light to dispel the darkness. Darkness is not just the absence of light. In Scripture darkness is active, vigorous, and growing. It is like an octopus; it reaches out and spreads. If it is not stopped it destroys as it did the Roman Empire.

This appears to be what is coming upon our country today. The darkness is falling upon us. To destroy darkness there must be light. To have lasting reformation you must have light that reaches

into the dark hearts of people. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, and the Gospel message concerning Him brings light into sin-darkened hearts. The darkness lasted 1100 years between the time when Augustine lay dying and the time when the light burst in all its splendor upon Europe at the time of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Luther and his associates spread the light before the Reformation began, and thus prepared the way so that when the Reformation began people were ready to listen.

I can think of a time in my own personal experience when I faced darkness. I went to a college that had a wonderful Christian reputation. However, the darkness was beginning to take hold of that institution. Its tentacles were reaching out and crushing to death its Christian testimony. I remember remarking to someone in my senior year, "I hope I'll never have any convictions until I'm 50 years old, and by then I hope I'll have enough sense never to have any!" I spoke with my head and not my heart, because my heart led me to go immediately to BIOLA where I could get some convictions back like I'd had when I entered college. I had not turned against my convictions, but I had lost the feeling of any stability about them because my Christian convictions were under constant steady bombardment throughout my college years. Some professors were very subtle in the way they would take a student and play with him and lead him on to think he knew all about the theory of evolution and could convince the professor he was wrong. Then he would get the student in a corner and make a fool of him and the rest of the class saw that this student didn't really know much

after all and that they should believe what the professor said about evolution.

The philosophy professor would very cleverly get the students who came from good Christian families and who believed we should take the Bible literally to thinking they were wrong because the land of Israel did not "literally" flow with milk and honey, and Herod was not "literally" a four-footed beast when Jesus said of him, "Go tell that fox." Consequently we were supposed to use our own intelligence to work out schemes to understand world events and forget all about the Bible! The students would say about this professor, "He doesn't care what you believe. He is only interested in teaching you how to think." But I noticed that 9/10th of those students came out as little pocket imitations of him when they finished the course. He got his ideas into their heads in a most subtle way.

Those young people were not prepared for the darkness they might meet. It's easy to say, "I take all the Bible literally", when in fact no one can take any book literally. We believe the Bible is true and we take its literal statements literally, and its figures of speech as figures of speech. We do not take figures of speech as literal statements. I always say, "Take every statement in the Bible and test it. See if you can interpret it literally and do so if you can." I don't like to hear it said that a certain book is a symbolic book -- all figures of speech. That would reduce it to nonsense. It is mostly literal, but the fact it has figures of speech adds not only to its beauty but also to its clarity. When

you say that a man was a lion in the fight, you do not mean he went out and chewed up the enemy or scratched him with his fingernails. Everyone knows it is figurative language, but it is just as clear as if you said that he went out and fought bravely with all his might. In fact, the figure might make the idea even clearer.

If only these students had been prepared they would not have been so easily deceived by this professor. They needed light. It is not enough to know a thing is wrong and therefore to be against it. We need to know why we are against what is wrong. We need more of an understanding, otherwise the darkness will confuse us.

I can remember a man who aspired to become a second William Henry Green in showing the errors of the theory of higher criticism of the Old Testament. He took advanced training under the greatest scholars he could find in that field and studied under them for four years. His mind became so affected by these professors that he spent the rest of his life attacking what he had formerly believed and defending what he had gone to their schools to prove was wrong! Christian after Christian will say, "I must go to an unbelieving place to study in order to learn what the other side thinks." But I have never known an unbeliever to say, "I must go to a Christian place to study and see what they think."

When I was a student at Princeton Seminary the darkness was reaching in and taking hold of that institution. The professor who taught missions invited the president of a college in India to teach his missions class. The visitor referred to the fact that they had professors in their college who were Buddhists, Hindus,

and Mohammedans. One student asked, "Why do you have men teaching in a Christian college who are not Christians?" The college president replied, "Why some of our non-Christians are our best Christians." To him a Christian was a person who was a nice character, a pleasant fellow. We do not win people to Christ by catering to that which claims to be Christian but is not.

A young man seeking ordination to the gospel ministry in a denomination that was accepting into its ministry men who did not believe in any of the fundamental doctrines, expressly said he did not believe in the virgin birth, or in the atonement of in the full truth of Scripture. Although it seemed a foregone conclusion that the church body was going to ordain him, one good old minister who still held to the fundamentals of the faith kept on questioning the candidate. Then the group adjourned for lunch. The young man came up to his examiner and asked, "Dr. Reeves, please tell me what you want me to believe so I can be ordained."

When darkness comes in and takes over institutions, it hides its colors. Darkness tries to give the impression it is something that it is not. It reaches in and gets a hold. The next you know the truth has been cast out altogether. Instead of "After Darkness Light", the awful reality becomes, "After Light Darkness."

Jesus Christ is the true light that came into the world. In Him there is no darkness. When His light shines in the darkness, the darkness is unable to blot it out.■