

THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

"Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea." (Rev 1:11)

Chapter 1

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #1

INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is precisely that – a revelation. It came direct from heaven, given to Jesus by God. Here is a message to the churches – something God wants them to know. The thought of the Father giving the Son something to say to the churches is arresting. It reveals the heart of the Father, and the critical importance of the churches. In the giving of this book, we see Jesus functioning as the Great High Priest, administering requirements to His people. Whatever your personal view of “the churches,” consider their importance to the Father: He gave a message for them to the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the closeness of them to the heart of the Son of God: He faithfully delivered the message to them given by His Father. Ponder the involvement of the angels of God with them: a holy angel received the message from Jesus, and delivered it to John the Apostle. Contemplate the role of the Apostles with the churches: John wrote ALL that He was given to see, to be delivered to the churches. There is no acceptable excuse for a disinterest in “the churches” among men, when such a high level of concern for them is found in heaven.

Now we come to a more direct word. After being introduced to the glorified Christ, a message will now be given to John for a specific church. There comes a time when generalities must end, and attention be given to particulars. While all “churches” are part of the vast body of the redeemed, their individual identity has not been lost. Particular congregations in particular cities, within particular provinces, are noted in heaven. We will find the Lord Jesus making personalized assessments of each congregation. He does not simply view them in association with all of the redeemed. They will not be viewed as part of a movement that has been sanctioned by heaven, but as specific groups. Their condition will be evaluated in distinction from the rest of “the body.” They will be commended for their virtues, and rebuked for their liabilities. The Lord Jesus will not look at their earthly identity, but at their spiritual activities and attainments.

In my judgment, it is exceedingly difficult to find a congregation that is conscious of this Divine manner. Many have become complacent in their corporate manners, resting in their identity with a movement, embrace of a position, or simply their longevity in the community. It is true that Jesus assesses each church, and has a particular view of it. It is

in the interest of our eternal well being that due consideration be given to this reality.

Now, we will hear the assessment of Christ Jesus concerning the church at Ephesus. Like all of His analyses, Divine objectives will be the primary consideration. The church at Ephesus will be viewed in light of the purpose of God. Their activities will be assessed with the design of God's great salvation in mind. The contribution of the church to community interests will not be mentioned. Their role in helping the needy and maintaining a keen interest in the political structure of their area will not be referenced. The exclusive association that will be made will be between what the churches are doing, and what the Lord Jesus is doing: between what they are, and what salvation is intended to make them.

WHO IS SPEAKING?

"These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands . . ." As we progress through chapters two three, you will see Jesus introducing Himself differently to each church. A careful analysis of each presentation will find the Son of God submitting Himself in a manner particularly relevant to the church being addressed. The assessment of the Ephesian church reveals they had forgotten the real identity of the Savior. Their approach to religion had actually driven a wedge between them and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus begins by drawing attention to Himself in relation to the churches. He holds the messengers in His hand, and they are His representatives. Were it not for Him, they would have nothing to do, and their position could not be justified. He is both the Author and Substance of their message. When the believers in Ephesus think of their messenger, they are to think of him as in the hands of the Lord. He is not, strictly speaking, their servant, but Christ's messenger. His fundamental work is bringing the message of Jesus to the people. He is charged with making Christ's Person and purpose dominant in the people's thinking.

Too, Jesus walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands – the churches. He is in their presence, whether they realize it or not. He is not merely standing in their midst, but WALKS in the midst of them. He is acutely aware of them, and they do well to be equally aware of Him! The Ephesians are not to think of themselves as part of a group of believers in Asia, but as occupying a conspicuous position in the presence of their Lord. The awareness of His presence produces a sobriety that is essential to Divine approval. The world recedes into the background when Jesus occupies the foreground. A proper sense of values is attained in the light of His glory. O, that this posture were more prominent in the churches! – that they could hear Jesus say of them, "I KNOW . . ."

Chapter 2

THE MESSAGE TO EPHEBUS, #2

"I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." (Rev 2:2)

Notice, Jesus does not ask the Ephesians what THEY know, but alerts them to what He knows. While earthly knowledge "puffs up" (1 Cor 8:1), the apprehension of what Jesus knows exercises a sanctifying effect upon the soul. The Lord will now give an assessment of the Ephesian church. It will be thorough, and will entertain no respect of persons. Here is a fulfillment of that word from God, "The eyes of the LORD are in every

place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Prov 15:3). Again, it is written, “For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes” (Jer 16:17). And again, “Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him? says the LORD; Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD” (Jer 23:24). This is an aspect of the Divine nature with which the church must familiarize itself. Redemption has not changed the nature of God! It is a provision for the change of man’s nature, in order to Divine acceptance.

I KNOW YOUR WORKS

“I know your works . . .” The Lord Jesus is a Lord of assessment. He reviews the work He has begun, and does so with both a critical and expectant eye. He looks for spiritual productivity where He has planted. This is seen in the parable of the fig tree. There our Lord portrays the manner of the Kingdom. “A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’” (Luke 13:6-7).

This was a revelation of the Divine nature. God is intolerant with a lack of productivity – particularly since He has made full provision for it to be found in His people. However, as with our text, that Nature also provides opportunity for recovery. This is seen in the response of the vineyard keeper. He besought the master to allow him to give some special attention to the tree, digging around it and applying some fertilizer. Then, he replied, “if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down” (verse 9). Surely, God “is not willing that any should perish,” be it individual or congregation (2 Pet 3:9).

However, and make no mistake about this, fruit is expected. The “fruit” must be spiritual in nature – fruit that brings glory to God. Our text exposes us to this facet of Kingdom life. The word “works” is more general than specific. It does not refer to particular deeds of kindness, or some social effort. It rather denotes the whole life and conduct. This word is used sixty-one times in Matthew through Revelation. Its use confirms the definition just given. “. . . that they may see your good works” (Matt 5:16). “Men loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (John 3:19). “Who will render to every man according to his works . . .” (Rom 2:6). “Who is wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). “. . . and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev 20:12).

What, then, is our blessed Lord saying to Ephesus? That He knows everything they are doing! He knows how their persuasions have expressed themselves. In the case of the church at Ephesus, no evil works are mentioned. As the all-seeing One, Jesus knew all of the works of His people at Ephesus. He knew WHY they did them, what principles motivated them to do them, and what objectives were sought through them. It was no cursory view of their works that Jesus had, but one which saw the works in relation to submission to and a love for Himself. He recognized whether they were performed in the “strength of His might” or in the energy of the flesh. Their connection with grace and faith were duly assessed, as well as how they contributed to His glory. Indeed, Jesus did not say He SAW their works, but that He KNEW them! He was not viewing them to be

impressed but to judge them with righteous judgment.

O, that churches today had this perspective of Jesus Christ! Surface views are faulty views, and are not to be entertained by those bearing the name of Jesus. He does not look upon the surface, and neither should we. Hear Him well as He speaks. "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Such deductive reasoning ("according to appearance" is forbidden, because it is at variance with the Divine nature.

Chapter 3

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #3

YOUR LABOR

"I know . . . your labor . . ."

The word "labor" refers to toil, or arduous effort. The is not mere work, but HARD work, requiring extensive effort. There was nothing casual about the Ephesian efforts. This type of effort requires zeal, commitment, and resolution. Again, Jesus does not say He SEES their labor, but that He KNOWS it. He knows what has constrained it, and to what ends their indefatigable efforts are expended. The nominal Christian knows nothing of this sort of activity. The religion of convenience has taken hold of the Western Church with a vise-like grip. Congregational decisions are regularly made that studiously avoid inconvenience, toil, and extended effort. It was not so with the church at Ephesus.

YOUR PATIENCE

"I know . . . your patience . . ."

Not only were the Ephesians engaged in extensive and toilsome activities, they continued in them, even when it was exceedingly difficult. Patience is constancy, or patient continuance. It can refer to continued effort in the face of opposition and a lack of popularity. In this case, it means the Ephesians maintained their works even though it was difficult and challenging to do so. Such patience is included in the appointed means of obtaining the promises (Heb 6:12). The Lord does not chide Ephesus for their works, labor, or patience, but rather commends them..

YOU CANNOT STAND THEM

"I know . . . you cannot bear those who are evil."

Here is a quality rarely known in our place and time. The assessment of Jesus sharply conflicts with the "hate the sin but love the sinner" myth that has lately risen among those who name the name of the Lord. Keep in mind, the Lord is commending the Ephesian church at this time. He is speaking of their spiritual assets, not their liabilities. He does not say they cannot bear WHAT those who are evil DO. Rather, they cannot "bear," "endure" or "tolerate" those who are evil. Again, not those who "DO" evil, but who "ARE" evil. Were anyone but Jesus to say this, much of the contemporary church would rebuke him. But, alas, now they can only stand silent before Him. What He commends, the flesh cannot congratulate! Evil persons were a burden to the Ephesians. They made life more difficult for them. It was not a weakness, but a strength the Lord Jesus Himself commends.

Often God has spoken of His view of the wicked, and we do well to give heed to His

assessments. It is written, “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psa 7:11). Jesus said the wrath of God “abides” on those who do not believe on the Son (John 3:36). Again, it is written, “The LORD tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates” (Psa 11:5). Among the seven things God particularly hates, individuals are mentioned: “. . . A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren” (Prov 6:16-19). Evil is not always an impersonal matter! It is good to remember that iniquity in His own offspring moved God to say, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them” (Gen 6:7, NKJV). He could not bear depraved men, and therefore removed them! On another occasion, when Israel did evil in God’s eyes, they provoked Him. The occasion was so serious, the Holy Spirit moved the Psalmist to write, “Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance” (Psa 106:40). His anger “smoked against the sheep of His pasture” (Psa 74:1).

Sin makes the sinner abrasive to God. With it comes a conflict between God and man that can only be resolved in Christ Jesus! The Ephesians had this in their favor: those who were evil were also abrasive to them! They did not seek to excuse the wickedness of the wicked, or to contrive reasons for the corruption of their nature. A rare quality, indeed, in this day of India-rubber theology and spineless convictions.

Chapter 4

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #4

FAITHFUL TESTERS

“I know . . . you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars . . . ”

The writer of this book, John the Beloved, spoke in his first Epistle of those who went out from the company of the Apostles, but were of another spirit. “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:18-19). These came in the name of Christ, and claimed to be Apostles. The Ephesians, however, did not receive them upon the basis of their claim. They put them to the test, not willing to receive, without due examination, either the persons or the word of those who claimed to be of God.

Before leaving them, Paul; had told the Ephesian elders “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30). This had apparently happened, and the Ephesians had taken Paul’s words seriously. In keeping with the nature of the Kingdom of God, they were faithful to “test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). If ever there was an appropriate word for our time, it is this one. How we need churches who are willing to “test those” who purport to have a message from God.

The Ephesians found these men to be “liars.” A worthy discovery, indeed! No nice

assessment here, or savory language that dulls our sense of the enormity of misrepresentation! If God commanded that no one bear false witness concerning human relationships (Ex 20-16), you can imagine His view of those who are false witnesses concerning their relationship to Him. This was another commendable trait among the Ephesians.

Ignatius, early church father who succeeded Simon Peter at Antioch, also wrote to the church in Ephesus. His words reflect the same assessment as that provided in our text. "I ought to be trained for the contest by you in faith, in admonition, in endurance, in long suffering, for ye all live according to truth and no heresy hath a home among you; nay, ye do not so much as listen to any one if he speak of ought else save concerning Jesus Christ in truth, as indeed ye are not deceived, I have learned that certain persons passed through you from Syria, bringing evil doctrine; whom ye suffered not to sow seed in you, for ye stopped your ears, you were ever of one mind with the Apostles in the power of Jesus Christ." (William Ramsey, Letters to the Seven Churches). The point to be seen here is that they labored to maintain an identity with the Lord Jesus Christ, not allowing the encroachment of false teachers. That is a commendable quality the contemporary church would do well to restore. Even though trying the spirits can sometimes be exhaustive, the Ephesian church did not fail to insist that those coming in the name of the Lord be tested. This is a strong quality, and not at all common among contemporary churches.

YOU HAVE PERSEVERED

"I know . . . you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary . . ." This refers to the bearing of burdens – matters that weigh down the soul and make progress difficult. They were not "weary in well doing" (Gal 6:9; 2 Thess 3:13), but continued in their efforts. As a congregation, Ephesus excelled far beyond the average American church. It maintained an identity with Christ, laboring for His "name's sake." The idea behind the expression "and have not become weary" is that the Ephesians did not tire of toil. They had become accustomed to arduous effort. Again, this is a most commendable quality, and not to be despised.

Some of the energy with which they approached the faith is seen in their initial reaction to the Gospel of Christ. "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:17-20). How refreshing it would be to find such zeal today. No doubt, there are pockets of such spiritual fervor here and there. However, once again, it is not common. What is more, we will find it was not common in the day in which this message was given.

These believers abandoned their past with zeal, a most exemplary trait. Years later, they still possessed a zealous character, the Son of God Himself commending them for it. In this regard, they were fulfilling the mandate of the Spirit: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58).

The nature of spiritual life demands such a posture! Those who do not bear up under

stress and difficulty, continuing faithful in the face of opposition, and for the Name of Christ labor indefatigably, have no promise of completing the course set before them. Failure in these matters is most critical, even though it is common. Legion is the name of those who today have less fervency for the Lord than in prior times. Multitudes have experienced the abatement of their zeal and the dissipation of their labors. Such things ought not to be! Salvation provides for constancy!

This is a time when men have grown accustomed to a sword without an edge, and profession without commitment. However, the Lord Jesus had not grown accustomed to such things. He still holds a loss of “first love” against those no longer possessing it.

NEVERTHELESS

Our Lord is exacting in His assessment. He will not fail to commend spiritual virtues. However, neither will He “wink” at spiritual departures. “Love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8), but virtues will not hide serious spiritual flaws from the flaming eyes of Jesus. He will not knit-pick, so to speak, but will go to the heart of the matter. He has dealt with the “works” of the church at Ephesus, now He will look at the heart of that congregation. His assessment is arresting.

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #5

I HAVE SOMETHING AGAINST YOU

“Nevertheless I have this against you . . .”

Notice, this is not simply a gentle criticism. This is something the Lord Jesus has “AGAINST” the church. It might appear from the language of the KJV that this is something of small consequence: i.e., “Nevertheless I have SOMEWHAT against thee . . .” This, however, is not at all the case. The word “somewhat” compares their single liability with the many virtues they possessed. While it was quantitatively less than their many strong points, we will find it outweighed them all! The phrase “I have this against you” is an extremely strong phrase. It literally means, “I have this grave thing against you.” Even if we were not aware of this linguistic fact, the words that follow would convince us of its truth.

When I read this solemn warning, I think of the word of God to ancient Israel. “For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you, lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled AGAINST thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God . . .” (Deut 6:15-16). That is a condition to be avoided at all cost!

How frequently Scripture records the Lord saying, “I am against thee!” Jeremiah warned the people God was against them (Jer 21:13). Babylon also received the word God was against her (Jer 50:31; 51:25). Ezekiel cried out for God against “Jerusalem” and the “land of Israel”, “I am against thee” (Ezek 5:8; 21:3). Torus was also given this message (Ezek 26:3), and Zion as well (Ezek 28:22). The same words were shouted to Pharaoh, king of Egypt (Ezek 29:3), the land of Egypt (Ezek 29:10), and God’s own people (Ezek 35:3). Go heard the same warning (Ezek 35:8; 38:3; 39:1), and Nahum declared the same condition to Nineveh (Nah 2:13; 3:5).

These words are always attended by the greatest solemnity. If not heeded, they are a prelude to Divine cursing and judgment. While it is true, “If God be for us, who can be

against us” (Rom 8:31), if the Lord is “against us,” or has something “against” us, there is no virtue or acquaintance that can offset the condition. Only a correction of the situation will turn away Divine indignation.

I am persuaded that many have never seen Jesus in this light. Some cannot conceive of the Lord Jesus being “against” anything, particularly in His church. But they are wrong--seriously wrong!

THE INTOLERABLE CONDITION

And what is it that Jesus has against the Ephesian church? What has neutralized His view of them, provoking Him to issue this solemn warning? They have been hard workers, faithful testers, and consistent in their labors. What could possibly diminish the weight of those virtues? Here is the Divine assessment: “YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE.” It did not leave them, they left it!

Chapter 6

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #6

CRITICAL WORDING

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Rev 2:4)

The wording here is critical. Jesus does not say they LOST their “first love,” but that they “LEFT” it! The RSV reads, “You have ABANDONED the love you had at first.” The NIV reads, “You have FORSAKEN your first love.” The BBE (Basic Bible English) reads, “You are TURNED AWAY FROM your first love.” The word from which “left” (abandoned, or forsaken) is translated is extremely strong. It means leave behind, forsake, neglect, let go, or dismiss. It speaks of an act of the will — a choice to leave one thing in favor of another. It is the same word Jesus used when He said, “And every one that hath LEFT houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life” (Matt 19:29). This is the word used to describe the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, when a fever “LEFT” her (Matt 8:15). Jesus used it when He said, “the Father hath NOT LEFT ME ALONE” (John 8:29). This is a strong and aggressive term!

Notice, Jesus does not say their “first love” left them. Rather, they left it! Something moved them in a direction away from an affection for Christ. Rather than drawing near to Him, they actually withdrew while engaged in an unusual amount of correct religious activity. Their doctrinal purity, as essential as it was, allowed the dismissal of their first and fervent love for Christ. Even though they had tried false Apostles, finding them liars, they had abandoned their deep and abiding affection for the Lord Jesus Christ!

THE NATURE OF LOVING CHRIST

This is a condition with which I am painfully familiar. By the grace of God, I have found deliverance from it, but remain acutely aware of the fragility of our love for the Savior. It can be upstaged by a penchant for doctrinal exactness that is only on the surface. Hearty efforts, wrought for His blessed Name’s sake, can also wash away our “first love.” Mind you, it is not that doctrinal purity, testing false teachers, and tireless labors are bad. God forbid! Jesus commended the Ephesians for those things, and, of themselves, they are

necessary, noble, and good. The Ephesians were not rebuked for their involvement in such activities. Like the Pharisees, it could be said, “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matt 23:23).

I have observed a condition in the religious world concerning which there are few, if any, exceptions. Those who maintain a focus on doctrinal exactness nearly always are unknown for their love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rarely is tenderness found among them, particularly as regards insight into the Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ. At this point I am especially cautious. Under no conditions can faulty doctrine be tolerated or condoned! If Jesus commended efforts to maintain “sound doctrine,” we must not be found despising or criticizing such endeavors. They are not, however, to be our focus, or the primary thing. The heart of our Gospel is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Our death to sin is traced to our unity with Him in His death (Rom 6:1-8). Our spiritual life is the result of God raising us to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Rom 6:4; Eph 2:6). Jesus Himself is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).

Our love of the truth, indispensable to our salvation (2 Thess 2:10), is basically spiritual, not a mere intellectual preference. It is because of our love for the Lord Jesus that we have been drawn into affinity with the truth. That is one of the primary things revealed by Christ’s wonderful promise: “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:21,23). Our love for Christ has a sanctifying effect upon the soul. It spreads its fragrance throughout every activity of our lives. Without it, the most noble engagements become ineffective as regards eternal issues. It is no wonder the Spirit declared, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22).

Jesus does not upbraid the Ephesians, however, for NOT loving Him, but for leaving their “first love.” Peterson’s paraphrase of this passage reads, “But you walked away from your first love.” What is this “FIRST love” that they left, abandoned, forsook, and walked away from? We know it is no small and inconsequential thing, because Jesus was against them because of it. This was the love they had “at the first.” It is what constrained them to zealously abandon all competing interests, and “cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.” It moved them to burn their books of curious and occultic arts (Acts 19:19). But, alas, they did not retain their ardent affection for the Person of Christ. They could no longer say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Their approach to spiritual life was ardent, fervent, zealous, and consistent – but it did not require intimacy with the Lord Jesus! Ah, many are the churches who have also embraced this dreadful approach!

Upon coming into Christ, everything becomes new (2 Cor 5:17). Unless, however, the heart remains focused on “the things that are not seen” (2 Cor 4:17-18), the luster of that beginning begins to fade. Like an object hurled up into the air, spiritual life begins with energy, focus, and fervent love. It is intended to increase, going from “strength unto strength” (Psa 84:7) as the saved are “changed” from one degree of glory unto another (2 Cor 3:18). However, there is a spiritual gravitational pull exerted upon the soul, which causes life, like the object thrown into the air, to reach a peak, and then descend again to

earth. That descent is slow at first, but increases in speed. So it is with those who abandon their “first love.” They get closer to earth and further from heaven with quickening pace! There is nothing inherent in eternal life that causes this. It happens when Jesus is no longer the heart and focus of our attention.

That “first love” is attended by a “joy unspeakable and full of glory” because of the preciousness of Christ Jesus (1 Pet 1:8; 2:7). There is an awareness of sins forgiven, and fear no longer dominates the heart. It is the time of the “first love.” There is an unparalleled tenderness of heart that makes the redeemed teachable – and how they love to be “taught by Him” (Eph 4:20-21). The commandments are neither “grievous” nor burdensome, and there is a genuine hatred of even the “garment spotted by the flesh” (1 John 5:3; Matt 11:29; Jude 23). O, the blessedness of the “first love.” There is nothing – absolutely nothing – in salvation that encourages or provides for a departure from that tender preference!

This is the language of a Bridegroom speaking with His bride – Jesus talking to the church. In just a few years, the preciousness of Christ had waned in the hearts of the Ephesians. He was no longer dominant in their affection. They had become champions of precision but vacillating in affection – a dreadful combination! Someone has said (I do not recall the name), It is possible for all of the machinery of the church to be in fine working order, while the spirit of love and zeal which first set it in motion is on the decline!

Chapter 7

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #7

WHAT CAUSED THE DEPARTURE?

How is it that they “left,” or abandoned, their “first love?” Alas, this is not an easy question to answer, for the heart is complicated. With some, the failure to put away some lingering lust, a sin that “so easily besets,” causes the diminishment of the “first love.” For others, the mitigation of that early affection is caused by “evil communications” — unholy alliances with wicked people — which corrupt good manners (1 Cor 15:34). Some subject themselves to skeptical books, and views that challenge the authenticity of Scripture. But for the Ephesians, the departure appears to have been caused by something even more subtle than these.

I see in the Ephesians something that is very prevalent in the circles in which I have companied. It is an academic approach to the things of God. The Ephesian church had a commendable penchant for exactness. They tested those who said they were Apostles, finding them to be liars. They appeared, however, to rely more upon their studies than upon the “anointing,” provided by God to assist us in deciphering the truth (1 John 2:20-27). In my opinion, they did not engage in this testing relying upon the Lord, but rather upon their own assessment and perception of the truth. This may seem like a small and inconsequential persuasion, but it is not. We know their activities did not ascribe the preeminent place to Christ, because they “left” their “first love.” This simply cannot be done while placing implicit dependence upon Him.

John wrote of the appointed means of detecting false teachers. Allow me to quote his rather lengthy treatise of this subject. It has great relevance to this discussion. “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are

there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us; eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:18-27).

The times were dangerous. There were teachers who had actually been with the Apostles, but had not tasted of the Lord as they had. They eventually left their company in order that God might expose them as liars, possessing the spirit of antichrist. John does not write to the people because they are ignorant of the truth, requiring correction. Rather, he writes to alert them to Divine provision. In receiving the Holy Spirit, they were thus equipped to distinguish truth from error. This could not be done by the human intellect alone, as gifted as some may be. Error has a spirit to it, as well as content – and it is the spirit of it that the Holy Spirit enables the redeemed to detect.

This anointing abides with us through our love for and affinity with the Lord Jesus Christ. As soon as our hearts become distant from the Savior, the Spirit no longer teaches us. He is, after all, “the Spirit of Christ,” and “the Spirit” of God’s “Son” (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6). It is my persuasion that the Ephesians did not rely upon the Good Shepherd in their assessments. While they did, indeed, find the false Apostles to be “liars,” their approach allowed them to leave their “first love.” The “anointing,” however, does not allow for such a departure. Rather, it is written, “but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”

Chapter 8

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #8

RECOVERY COMMENCED

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen . . .” These are startling words, awakening the slumbering spirit of those who have “left” their “first love.” The Ephesian church was in a “FALLEN” state! Say what you may about the precision of their teaching, they had “fallen!” Anyone familiar with Scripture cringes at the word “fallen.” This is the word used to describe the condition of Satan; “How you are FALLEN from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isa 14:12). Judas is said to have “by transgression FELL, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25). Those seeking justification from Law are said to “have FALLEN from grace” (Gal 5:4). From the standpoint of their activity, they had “LEFT” their first love. From the Divine viewpoint,

they had “FALLEN!” Dreadful day, when the Lord Jesus says you have “fallen.” I wonder how many churches in our fair city, were they able to hear the Lord Jesus, would hear such words.

In the case of the Ephesians, they had fallen to their own ruin. It is as though they were in a deep crevice, having fallen from a place of safety. But they did not see themselves in this light. They had grown accustomed to living in the place of spiritual restriction, insensitive that they had “left” their “first love.” Now the Lord Jesus urges them to look up to the cliff of safety from which they had fallen. It is as though He said, Remember when you first believed, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph 1:13). Ponder that blessed occasion when, in a burst of zeal, you gathered the books of curious arts, and burned them publically (Acts 19:19). Contrast where you are now, with where you once were. Think of the joy and peace you have lost. Consider how you once “learned” Me (Eph 4:20), and were possessed by faith AND love (Eph 1:15). Remember! Remember! Such remembrances exert a powerful influence over the soul.--the recollection of times of blessedness, when the consciousness of the Lord was acute, and devotion was unquestionably to Him.

Do not miss the strength of the Divine assessment! They had labored and endured, but they had fallen! They could not bear those who were evil, but they had fallen! They had tested those claiming to be apostles, and had found them to be liars, but they had fallen! This church had held up under great stress, but they had fallen! They had endured for Christ’s Name sake, and did not give up, but they had fallen! They had retrogressed, when everything about salvation is progressive. They excelled in secondary matters, but failed in primary ones! This is the church that was told, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:3-6). The blessedness of their former condition could still be recalled, even though they had FALLEN from it.

THE DETERMINED OBJECTIVE, REPENT!!

“ . . . repent . . . ” The condition of the Ephesian church called for repentance! They had no choice but to turn from their present course, which was leading to destruction. When Jesus cries out “REPENT,” men do well to give heed. How many are the people you know, or even churches, whose fire has dimmed and affection for Jesus waned? They are all about us, and men have grown accustomed to such things. There are no doubt churches within a short distance of your location whose love for Christ has waned. They are in a state of spiritual deterioration, drifting from their moorings, and leaving their “first love.” And yet, the religious structure in which they find themselves does not allow for a call to repentance, for their condition is not viewed as wrong! Such congregations must listen to what Jesus is saying to the church at Ephesus! “REPENT!”

Remember, Jesus has been exalted to the Father’s right hand “to give repentance” (Acts 5:31). He not only gives it initially, when one turns from the broad way and idols to serve the living God. Repentance is also “given” to those who once escaped the pollutions of the world, but again were captivated by the tempter (2 Tim 2:24-26). However, He will

not do it without the effort of the offender! The church at Ephesus must “REPENT.” They must turn away from the course of action that had dulled the flame of their love for Christ – their “first love.” In spite of all of their activity, their Savior had been pushed into the background. They must REPENT of this condition, turning from it with zeal.

Chapter 9

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #9

DO THE FIRST WORKS

“ . . . and do the first works . . . ”

It is not enough to renounce flawed manners. Ephesus must again “do the first works” – the works which were done out of a fervent love for Christ Jesus. In the Kingdom, “faith works by love” (Gal 5:6), and only works motivated by faith will be ultimately acknowledged. It is not that there was a separate class of works accomplished by the Ephesians at the beginning. Those earlier works sprang from higher motives. In them the saying was fulfilled, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:14-15, NKJV). It is clear from our text that the Ephesian church was not being motivated by “the love of Christ.” They had left that love, and had taken a powerless approach to spiritual life. Their works may have appeared extremely valuable to those about them, but they did not come up to the works they did at “the first.”

LOST GROUND MUST BE RECOVERED!

The situation bears some resemblance to the time when Joseph and Mary lost the young Jesus. In their return from Jerusalem, they noticed after three days that Jesus was not with them. They had supposed He was “with the company,” and therefore went a day’s journey seeking Him “among their relatives and acquaintances” (Luke 2:43-44). In order to find Him, they had to return to the place where they lost Him ! It is written, “they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him” (Luke 2:45). It is like this with those who have left their first love. They must return to the place where they lost it, recovering “the first works.”

This is a most challenging requirement. Having “left” their “first love,” the sophist might suppose they should repent and love the Lord as they did at the first. But that is not Christ’s counsel. He cries out to them, “DO THE FIRST WORKS.” There is an aspect of the Kingdom that must be seen here. In the beginning of their walk with Christ, they were told, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Walking in those works, however, is not mere activity. The Ephesians were intensely active. Yet, they were not walking in the works prepared beforehand by God.

The “first works” were accomplished in union with the Lord – that is what gave them their validity. God has made no provision for acceptable Kingdom activity that excludes Himself or His Son. Jesus referred to these works when He said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16). The “light” to which Jesus refers is not our own! It has been given to us by our Lord! The works of reference result from a walk “in the light, as He is in the light” (1

John 1:7). They flow out from intimacy with the Redeemer. Any work that is not performed out of such a glorious union is not acceptable to the Lord. He entertains no interest in theological precision without intimate association with Himself. Where an acute sensitivity of Christ Jesus is lacking, works are reduced to mere activity. They may count well with men, but not with the Lord.

Chapter 10

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #10

AVOID DIVINE JUDGMENT

“ . . . or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent.”

In a day of religious sophistry, this aspect of Christ’s character is little known. However, if the church is to “make herself ready” to meet the Bridegroom (Rev 19:7), she must have a proper perception of Lord Jesus.

See how the One with eyes as a flame of fire speaks to the church at Ephesus! He does not suggest that His church repents: He commands it! In a straightforward and unmistakable manner, He reveals the consequences of failing to do so. He will personally come to the flagging church and “remove” its “lampstand from its place.” He will not allow them to wear His name and represent His cause to the world if they insist on remaining at a distance from Him! The church itself is threatened with removal. The Lord does not say HOW this will be accomplished, but Scripture teaches us to fear such judgment. Their light was flickering, and their service was mechanical. Jesus now fans the flame with a serious threat, seeking to bring the Ephesian church once again into intimacy with Himself.

When the Jews refused to receive Christ, He said, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matt 21:43). And again, “But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 8:12). The mighty man who revels in evil is told, “God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, And uproot you from the land of the living” (Psa 52:5). Think how God removed king Saul following his disobedience: “You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!” (1 Sam 15:26, NIV). Those who attempt to live in separation from the Lord, whether individuals or congregations, will be rejected by Him! Judgment “begins” with the “house of God” (1 Pet 4:17). Even though the Ephesians had tested false Apostles and found them to be liars, if they did not regain their “first love” and “do the first works,” the church would be removed. Her vigorous works were not enough to justify her existence. If her works did not flow from her fellowship with Christ, there was no need for her to continue. History confirms both the longsuffering and judgment of the Lord Jesus. All of the churches, saving for Smyrna and Philadelphia became extinct after 1,000 years. The church did NOT “repent,” else it would not have been removed.

During the last few years, I have become acutely aware of a great number of churches that have closed. Not a few of them had a noble beginning and a long history. Could it be that they too were “taken away”? Such a consideration is rarely entertained these days, when institutionalism and humanly-devised organization reign. There is an abysmal

ignorance of Christ Jesus in the professed church – an almost total lack of intimacy with Him. Where such a condition exists, the judgment of Christ will soon follow. How we need flaming evangelists to call the churches into fellowship with Christ! It is both pleasant and essential! Lord, give us such men!

Chapter 11

THE MESSAGE TO EPHEBUS, #11

SOMETHING IN YOUR FAVOR

“But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

It is as though the Savior seeks for a reason to speak well of the church. He has told them their indefatigable labors and constancy have been duly noted. However, when He speaks of an especially noteworthy virtue, He mentions something having to do with their affection. The Nicolaitans were the moral libertines of the day, giving free reign to fleshly appetites. They committed fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness, had their wives in common, and also ate things offered to idols. These were a sect of the Gnosticism against which John wrote in His First Epistle. Gnosticism taught that man’s superior capacity was for knowledge. The primary source of its tenets was human philosophy. Gnosticism borrowed from a great variety of thoughts – a sort of philosophical conglomeration. Its approach to life was based on human, rather than Divine, satisfaction. Gnostics did not acknowledge the humanity of Christ, a matter specifically addressed by the Apostle John (John 1:14; 1 John 4:2-3). The rejection of Christ’s humanity caused them to accentuate their own humanity. Thus, they indulged their fleshly appetites without restraint.

This sect had affiliated itself with Christ Jesus, but in a corrupt way. They viewed redemption as release from matter rather than sin. Thus they did not acknowledge immorality, or the indulgence of fleshly lusts, as wrong. They supposed themselves to have been delivered from such foolish restraints. A modern counterpart of Gnosticism is Christian Science, which rejects matter, and ascribes everything to patterns of thought. They provide reading rooms where people can read away, what they conceive to be, imagined difficulties, ranging from illness to sin. They also believe the “blood of Jesus” did more good in His veins than in being shed for the sins of the world.

This Gnosticism was the fountain in which Nicolaitanism was spawned. Their doctrine bore a great resemblance to that of Balaam, “who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication” (Rev 2:14). Two of the seven churches were succumbing to this corrupt doctrine: Pergamum (Rev 2:14-15) and Thyatira (Rev 2:20). The church at Ephesus HATED the “deeds of the Nicolaitans.” They could not abide the result of their teaching – and Jesus commended them for it. He did not call for a prayer meeting for this ungodly sect, but commended the Ephesians for their contempt for their deeds.

Jesus also declares He hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans: “which I also hate.” He declared the same thing to the church of Pergamum (2:15). Actually, all sin is hateful to Christ, and thus should also be to His church. One of the marks of our Savior is, He “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity” (Heb 1:9). In a startling revelation of the Divine nature, Jehu once said to king Jehosaphat, who had formed an alliance with the ungodly, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the

wrath of the LORD is upon you” (2 Chron 19:2).

Jesus insists that His church have the same regard toward sin as Himself – particularly something as reprehensible as “the deeds of the Nicolaitans.” In my judgment, there needs to be a revival of this type of hatred in the churches. There is altogether too much tolerance of sin.

Chapter 12

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS, #12

THE APPOINTED INCENTIVE

The One Who stands in the middle of the churches has issued a stern warning. Those who have abandoned their “first love” are threatened with removal. But the Lord does not stop here. He will provide a strong incentive for them to give heed to His words.

DIVINE COUNSEL MUST BE HEARD

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

This section is written to the messenger of the church at Ephesus, who was to faithfully deliver it. But the message is not confined to Ephesus. What God has written in a book is not only for a specific person or group. Notice, He does NOT say, “what the Spirit says to THIS church,” but “what the Spirit says to THE CHURCHES.” If men live “by every Word of God” (Luke 4:4), we dare not take a provincial view of any Scripture. The books of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, for example, are not private letters intended for no one else. Neither, indeed are the books of Romans, Corinthians, Colossians, etc., intended only for those groups. Wherever there is a soul sensitive to the Word of the living God, the message is to be heard. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Those who have ears to hear, have been given them by the Lord. To the hard-hearted Israelites the Spirit said, “Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day” (Deut 29:4).

Every person possessing a sensitivity to God is obligated to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, even though they themselves are not immediately addressed. Notice, God gave the message to Jesus. Jesus gave it to an angel. The angel gave it to John. However, it is “the Spirit” Who is saying it to the churches. This is His sword (Eph 6:17), and He will quicken, or make alive, the Word to every soul giving heed to it. Those who are “dull of hearing” (Matt 13:15; Acts 28:27; Heb 5:11) are in a most serious condition. In that condition, they are cut off from the life-giving word of Christ!

A PRECIOUS PROMISE

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

Here is the greatest of all incentives – the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God (2 Pet 1:4). This is the means through which we become “partakers of the Divine nature.” For the Ephesians, there was something to overcome – a spiritually deficient condition over which they must triumph! The Divine nature was slipping away from them. They, like many churches of our day, were operating in their own strength. Having “left” their “first love,” they were more academic than spiritual! However, because of the “great mercy” (Num 14:18) and the “great love” (Eph 2:4) of the Savior, recovery was

possible. The Lord has already told them they will be taken away, forfeiting their stewardship, if they do not repent. Now He will give them an exceeding strong reason to recover.

Observe how personal the promise is: “to HIM who overcomes.” Although the word is spoken “to the churches,” it is addressed to individual living stones. We will find this most personal approach throughout the messages to the churches. Here we are provided a perspective essential to acceptable living. Rather than being absorbed by the world, in Christ we are equipped to overcome it! While in the body, we are subject to the attacks and delusions of the wicked one. He is characterized by unparalleled ferocity, and cunning as well. The enemy had made inroads in the church at Ephesus – while they were intensely zealous and active. Mark it well, if in all of your doing you do not overcome, it makes little difference what you may have appeared to accomplish! The promise is not to those who TRY, but to those who overcome! You might say, those who CONQUER, or TRIUMPH – the victors! These finish the race, even though confronted with obstacles. They win the war, though often “cast down.” All such have tasted of “the power of the resurrection,” which enables recovery, excellence, and final triumph!

Here is a word particularly for “the churches,” and everyone with a spiritual capacity to hear! To the one who overcomes, Christ promises, “I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Sin cut mankind off from “the tree of life” (Gen 3:22-24). Uninterrupted communion with the Living God was no longer allowed, and death began its ruthless reign. This is a symbolic reference to immortality which awaits the faithful. It is a condition where “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). It involves the total absence of decline in any form. No more deterioration, dissipation, or erosion. No more necessity for recovery. For the overcomer, death in all of its aspects will be finally vanquished! For those who do not overcome, death will be perpetual.

By saying “I will give to eat,” Jesus means the overcomer will have constant and uninterrupted access to the life and fellowship of “God and the Lamb” (Rev 22:1,3). There will be no more “famine of hearing the Word of the Lord” (Amos 8:11)! Darkness in any form will be banished from the habitation of the saints. No more thirsting for God as in a “dry and thirsty land” (Psa 42:1-2; 63:1). The fruit will be found in abundance, with no hint of scarcity. No difficulty will be associated with its appropriation, and it will bring about full and total recovery from the fall. How beautifully this is portrayed in Revelation 22:2. “In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Such abundance will be for the overcomer! No permission will be required to partake of the blessedness of eternal life! No focused quest in the face of opposition will be experienced. Jesus will “give” the “right” to eat of the fruit.

Eating of the tree of life will not be a commandment, like eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood in this world (John 6:53-56). There will be no competing interests! The promise also assumes the fervent desire of the overcomer to enjoy eternal life in its fulness. An acquaintance with God will be realized by the conqueror that is longed for in the battlefield. Here, we develop the appetite. There, it shall be satiated. In this world the overcomer battles to keep his “first love” and obsession with “things that are above.”

Jesus promises the fulfillment of those deep longings will be fully realized in the world to come.

The “tree of life” is “in the midst of the paradise of God.” What a glorious thought! If the overcomer is eating from a tree in the heart of God’s paradise, then he himself is at the center of God’s dwelling. No more experiential periphery! There are three immediate references to “paradise” in Scripture, and one symbolic reference. It is assumed that man was originally placed in a sort of “paradise.” How wonderfully it is described. God “planted a garden eastward in Eden,” and placed man in it. “Every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food” was caused to grow for man. The “tree of life” was also placed “in the midst of the garden.” It is written that a “river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison . . . the name of the second river is Gihon . . . the name of the third river is Hiddekel . . . and the fourth river is Euphrates.” The areas through which these rivers flowed were noted for good gold, bdellium, and the onyx stone” (Gen 2:8-14). It was a marvelous place, indeed. But sin cause men to be thrust from that ancient paradise!

Jesus mentioned “paradise” to the penitent thief: “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Truly, a state of blessedness. Paul tells us of an occasion when he was “caught up to the third heaven,” “into Paradise,” where he heard words that could not be conveyed in human speech (2 Cor 2:2-4).

Now, in our text, Jesus promises the overcomer a place in “the paradise of God.” The glory of this paradise is the Lord’s presence (Rev 21:11,23). Here, the communion of Christ will be close and intimate. There will be, as the hymn writer affirmed, “nothing between.” There will be no prohibition in any form, no restraint of any kind, and no handicap. Nothing will be withheld from us, nor will we ever hear the words, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). Blessed contemplation, indeed, and worthy of hearty repentance and a vigorous pursuit of the “first works.” Such efforts will be honored in heaven, and assist in preparing churches and individuals to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Such are things are to be pursued!

CONCLUSION

A sensitive soul will see remarkable parallels between the church at Ephesus and many churches of our day. Such parallels are not to be left in the room of observation. Those, whether individual or congregational, who have “left their first love” must recover it at all cost. They must repent of the grievous loss, and do the “first works,” when their heart was uncluttered with the ways and manners that did not require the presence of the Lord Jesus. There is far too much church activity that is void of a strong and dominating love for Jesus Christ. It is inexcusable, and must not be tolerated. Whatever seeming good may be accomplished by those who have abandoned their “first love,” is invalidated by their spiritual condition.

Christ’s threat and promise assume that spiritual dulness robs the soul of a proper appetite for the things “God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9-10). Those engaged in intense religious activities, but who have forsaken their “first love,” do not think about Jesus taking them away. Their minds do not consider that the Lord has something “against” them. And why is this so? Because their hearts have been desensitized by their

religion! Too, the thought of having access to eternal life with no restraint is not at all appealing to them. They do not walk in communion with Jesus now, so have no thoughts of its expansion in the world to come. Though men have grown accustomed to such a condition, Jesus has not.

You must see Christ as calling His people back within the circumference of hearing, where the soul is acutely aware of its Lord. It is only within that boundary that salvation can be worked out “with fear and trembling.” May you take this message to heart, using it as an occasion to become more sensitive of the Lord. May you recover any ground you may have lost, and be found acceptable in Christ’s eyes.

The church at Ephesus has afforded us a glimpse into the nature of spiritual life. It has also acquainted us more thoroughly with the Lord Jesus Christ, and His assessment of the churches. He has a keen interest in their productivity, and longs for them to be in “the paradise of God.” But He cannot abide a departure from a love for Himself. No amount of activity, however arduous, can compensate for a loss of that. Thus He views them with a most critical eye, not to condemn them., but to save them.

Chapter 13

THE MESSAGE TO SMRYNA #1

INTRODUCTION

This book is a message to the churches! It is not a compendium of political and social information, or a prophesy of life on the earth with an absent church and a withdrawn Spirit. Such conditions would make the book irrelevant to the church. God is showing the churches what He is doing in the earth. He will also unveil the tactics of their adversary, the devil, alerting them to his subtlety. As intent as the old serpent is, however, he will not be able to proceed one millimeter beyond the boundary of Divine will! The nature of the heavenly reign will be made known, together with the effectiveness of the grace of God.

In view of God’s eternal purpose, sin and spiritual retardation are utterly absurd and inexcusable. If the Law made sin “exceeding sinful” (Rom 7:13), the greatness of salvation in Christ Jesus has made it altogether intolerable. Therefore, sin is consistently judged and condemned by the Lord. He will not allow it to continue in His church without rebuke! Too, in view of the Divine objective, faith and patience are the only reasonable pursuits for the church. Therefore, these spiritual virtues are always commended and encouraged in the church.

THREE KEY VIEWS

We will be exposed to three primary perspectives in this revelation. (1) Salvation is an aggressive enterprise, involving all of heaven. The Father has undertaken an extensive work in reconciling the world to Himself. Having raised and exalted the Lord Jesus Christ, He has positioned Him as Head over all, in order to bring “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10). The Son has marshaled all the host of heaven in His assertive reign, which is devoted exclusively to bringing us to the Father (1 Pet 3:18).

(2) Satan has launched an energetic initiative to thwart this Divine purpose. Having been soundly defeated by the Lord Jesus, the devil has turned his attention to the redeemed. He is making war against them with great ferocity, entering zealously into every opportunity

to do them evil.

(3) In the context of this consistent activity, the church must engage in strong efforts to “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:10). To fail to do so puts the church out of harmony with heaven, making it vulnerable to the wicked one. Casualness will bring sure death toward, and judgment from, the living God. Slothfulness will therefore be invariably rebuked, and faithfulness will always be applauded

Jesus will be set forth as constant in the direction and protection of His people. He will subdue their enemies, provide a haven for their spiritual nourishment, and keep vigil over them. Satan will be viewed as pursuing every opportunity afforded him to do evil to the saints, and to bring them down to perdition.

This book will take us behind the scenes, showing us how much is transpiring in the unseen world. It will call us into the battle, convincing us of the danger of slumber, and the sure reward for faithfulness.

The messages to the seven churches are to be viewed in this context. The churches will be provided a heavenly assessment of their condition – how they stand in relation to their Lord. They will not be measured by human standards, nor compared with other churches. They will be given a reason to be faithful. What Jesus says to them, he says to all churches.

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write . . .” This is the only reference to Smyrna in the Bible (Rev 1:11; 2:8)! It was a seaport city, located approximately 35 miles North of Ephesus. This was an ancient city, having been established around 1100 B.C., and noted for being a trading-center and chief port for export trade.

Historically, it was a center of the imperial cult of Rome and emperor worship. A seal displaying the “goddess of Smyrna” helps to confirm the threatening environment occupied by this church. It was a city given over to idolatry, and devoted to the glory of the Roman empire. It also ranked as one of the most beautiful cities of Asia.

There is no reference to this city in the travels recorded in the book of Acts. No special epistle was addressed to it, as there was to Ephesus. Yet, it is duly noted by the Lord of glory. The eye of the Lord is ever upon the righteous!

Polycarp, who was martyred for Christ in 167 A.D. (86 years after his conversion), was known historically as the bishop of Smyrna. His dying words, as he stood within a devouring fire, are worthy of repetition. “O Lord, Almighty God, the Father of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received a knowledge of Thee, God of the angels and of the whole creation, of the whole race of man, and of the saints who live before Thy presence; I thank Thee that Thou hast thought me worthy, this day and this hour, to share the cup of Thy Christ among the number of Thy witnesses!” This spiritual giant was a disciple of John the beloved, and some even suppose him to have been the messenger to who this touching epistle was written.

We will see from the message addressed to this congregation that it did not rank high among men. Indeed, there is no record that it even ranked high among other believers. It would not have been considered “successful” by contemporary religious standards. To appreciate Smyrna, we must turn away from the worldly mind-set, and obtain the “mind

of Christ!”

These believers were under oppression, and were going to be tested. Unnoticed by the rest of the world, they had been seen by the King. He now addresses a word to them, to prepare them for extensive involvement in the “eternal purpose” of God. Their experience will be more for heaven’s observation than earthly analysis. Principalities and powers in heavenly places will be afforded a gratifying view of God’s wisdom in the trial of this assembly.

A glimpse of the manner of the heavenly kingdom is seen in this short, but uplifting, message. It will surely bring comfort to every obscure disciple. The life of this church will have a greater impact on succeeding generations than it did upon the one it served. Such a perspective is strange to a church that is solidly ensconced in this world, but there are still congregations that fall into this category. Their works will “follow them” by impacting future generations, in addition to being recognized by their Lord before an assembled universe (Rev 14:13).

We must not allow ourselves to become insensitive to the nature of spiritual life. It is not an effort to become acclimated to “this present evil world,” from which Jesus came to deliver us (Gal 1:4). The King of glory never fails to see our progress and our labors.

Efforts to keep the faith, however minuscule they may appear to men, are always recognized and encouraged by our Lord. He ever keeps vigil over His inheritance. We will find in the church at Smyrna, confirmation of the sanctifying power of faith.

Chapter 14

THE MESSAGE TO SMRYNA #2

WHO IS SPEAKING

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.’ Remember, the Lord reveals Himself to each church in a manner appropriate for their condition. Three times in this book, Jesus refers to Himself as “the First and the Last” (1:18; 2:8; 22:13).

LORD OF BEGINNINGS

He is the Lord of beginnings! “The “First!” With Him began remission, reconciliation, and Divine acceptance! He is the “First” to rise from the dead, the Beginning of a New Creation, in which the saved participate (Acts 26:23; Rev 3:14)! The New Covenant owes its freshness and effectiveness to Him. Because of the Lord Jesus, there is such a thing as the new birth, wherein we can begin again, becoming as a “child” (Luke 18:17). All of the richness and joy of “first” things can be again experienced in Him.

Beginnings are no further from us than the Savior Himself. Whatever God wants initiated is realized in Christ. He is “the First!” He is why our faith began. The beginnings of repentance and remission were because of Him (Acts 5:31). Our love of God and fervent desire to dwell in His courts found their beginning in Christ Jesus. He is “the First!”

LORD OF CULMINATION

But He is also “the Last.” What He begins is brought to culmination in Him! He is why it is said of God, “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). The work will be brought to completion to the glory of God (Heb

12:2). The people of God must never lose sight of their Savior. The appointed objective is that Christ may present them “to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). That purpose will be realized in all who cleave to Him “with purpose of heart” (Acts 11:23).

The church in Smyrna must also see Jesus as the “Last” of the old and condemned order. He is truly “the last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45), bringing to an end the reign of death. He is the “end of the Law” (Rom 10:4), concluding the condemnation of that “ministry of death” (2 Cor 3:7). Whatever God wants terminated is ended in Christ. He is “the Last!” This is how the Lord Jesus wants His church to know Him!

LORD OF REVIVAL

“Who was dead, and came to life.” Our salvation was accomplished by the Lamb of God absorbing the curse of God, and then returning! He endured the worst that men could inflict – and then returned! The “power of darkness” was permitted unfettered access to Him for a season (Luke 22:53). He submitted to the grip of the “last enemy,” and he who “had the power of death” (Heb 2:14), and then returned!

This word – “Who was dead, and came to life” – speaks of the “power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10). This is a triumphant note! It is an experience for which the Apostle Paul joyfully abandoned every competing pursuit (Phil 3:8-14). This power enables the child of God to recover from sin, the debilitating effects of persecution, and ultimately from death itself, which is “the last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26). In this power the saying is fulfilled, “for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again” (Prov 14:14). Again, it is written, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psa 34:19).

This is the word Smyrna needs to hear; a word that assures them they will recover from their trials. The Lord will sustain them, and their enemies will not realize ultimate triumph over them.

Chapter 15

THE MESSAGE TO SMRYNA #3

I KNOW YOUR WORKS

“I know your works . . .” This is the same word addressed to the church in Ephesus, who had “left” her “first love” (Rev 2:4). For Ephesus, this was a convicting word. For Smyrna, however, it was a comforting one. The condition of the heart, and the level of involvement with the Lord Jesus, determine the effect of His Word upon us. The very same word, spoken with differing effects!

In an effort to avoid an overestimation of “works,” some speak disparagingly of them, as though they were of no value before Christ. We must take care not to be caught in this diversion. If it were true that “works” were completely inconsequential, Jesus would not rebuke men for being deficient in them, or give commendation for excellence in them. It is true that we are not justified “by works” (Rom 4:2; Tit 3:5). It is equally true that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). The Lord Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people,

zealous for good works” (Tit 2:14).

The Lord Jesus knows the works of His people from the vantage point of these texts. He compares the activity of His church with the works God has before prepared, and in which He has ordained they walk. “I know your works” means, I know whether or not you are walking in the light. I know if you are participating in the purpose for which you were called out of darkness! The people of God are assessed in respect to the purpose of God, not the goals of men. That purpose has been disclosed by and in the Person of Christ and the message of the Gospel. Essentially, it has to do with taking a people out of the world for the name of the Lord (Acts 15:14).

The saints of God are being oriented for “the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (2 Pet 3:13). Jesus measures the churches progress in that orientation.

In our time, a great deficiency of this perspective dominates the professed church. There is a crying need for those with ears to “hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” He is still speaking to the churches, and they are admonished to hear what He is saying.

The tendency of men to compare themselves with their peers is altogether too prevalent. How appropriate is the Word of God on this matter. “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Cor 10:12, NIV).

Jesus knows our works! He sees them from heaven’s point of view! He assesses them within the context of Divine purpose! How comforting this is to the faithful, and how convicting to those who are drifting from their spiritual moorings. We will now see how Smyrna will be assessed by their Lord.

The message is not unrelated to the churches of our time. We, like all previous and succeeding generations, are to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” That message is pertinent to our survival in the good fight of faith, and we do well to hear it with keen interest.

Chapter 16

THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA #4

I KNOW YOUR TRIBULATION

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." (Rev 2:9)

There is an interesting perspective to be seen in these words. The church of Ephesus was reminded of its “first works,” and urged to repent and again do them. Christ’s words to Ephesus, by way of contrast, are arresting.” . . . you have tested those who say they are Apostles. . . and have found them liars . . . you have persevered . . . and have labored for My name's sake. . . you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen. . .” (2:2-5).

However, with Smyrna, there is not a single reference to the past – only to the present and the future. Read again our Lord’s short message to this church.”These things says the

First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

This is the language of fellowship! These believers are in the crucible of trial, and thus the Lord speaks comfortably to them. "I know your . . . tribulation . . ." "The eye of the sympathizing Lord is upon them! They may be, for a season," cast down," but they will not be "destroyed" (2 Cor 4:9). Jesus is near, and the knowledge of that emboldens the child of God to stand tall against the fiercest of opposing gales.

Faith inducts us into the realm of tribulation in this world. How well Jesus said it: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And just what is "tribulation?" We all do well to have a working knowledge of this term, for "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Tribulation is a "must" by the nature of spiritual experience and the design of Divine intent. It is the unavoidable result of living by faith.

"Tribulation" comes from a word, which means "pressure, or a pressing together." It is reflected in the pressing of grapes, in order that the sweet juice may be extracted. When applied to Kingdom experience, "tribulation" is the result of the sharp conflict that exists between the faith of God's people and the unbelief of the world. It occurs as the light of the redeemed exposes the darkness of an alienated world. Distress of spirit results, and often pain of body, as persecutions are endured. Make no mistake about it, there is undeniable conflict between "this present evil world" and "the world to come," into which faith ushers us.

Tribulation plays a key role in the preparation of believers for their reign with Christ. It is the appointed means of developing perseverance. As it is written, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance" (Rom 5:1-3). The natural man is incapable of reasoning in this manner. "Flesh" perceives difficulty and distress as insurmountable hindrances to persevering, or remaining faithful. It pursues the way without conflict, seeking for a road without obstacles.

The sanctifying impact of faith, however, enables the believer to see the goal more clearly because of the world's opposition. The rejection of this world accentuates our citizenship in the world to come.

When Jesus says, "I know your tribulation," it means infinitely more than a mere awareness of it. He beholds the suffering church with a mind to sustain and uphold it. He will not allow His people to be "tempted above" what they are "able to bear" (1 Cor 10:13). He will grant them power to stand, when others are falling. They will be given bread from heaven to sustain and nourish them in the battlefield. The church at Smyrna continued to stand in tribulation because of their Lord!

What a difference there is between the church at Smyrna and that at Ephesus. The church

at Ephesus worked hard, but apparently did not suffer for righteousness sake. Yet, that church “left” their “first love.” The church at Smyrna is not commended for a lot of works or arduous labor, yet is not upbraided for any deficiency at all. They had kept the faith in “tribulation.” This church maintained their grip on eternal life when sorely pressed.

Chapter 17

THE MESSAGE TO SMRYNA #5

AN IMPORTANT SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE

An important spiritual principle can be seen here. It is possible for a church or individual to be in such circumstances that productive activity is out of the question. This is of no consequence to the institutionally minded, but has great relevance to those intent upon keeping the faith. There is more to spiritual life than impacting the lives of others!

There are times when all of our spiritual energies must be devoted to **STANDING!** As it is written, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph 6:13, NKJV). Kingdom initiatives are sometimes held in abeyance while the ground we have gained is maintained. There are times of special trials, like that of Job, when keeping the faith is all we can do. However, that is not to be despised. The heavens behold the redeemed in the crucible of conflict, often attacked by the forces of darkness with great ferocity. Such is the “evil day” when all of our ransomed powers are required to “stand.” Blessed is the person who recognizes such a time, and throws his spiritual energies into keeping the faith and standing. Christ will surely bring comfort to such souls.

When Jesus agonized in prayer in Gethsemane, His sword was sheathed for a short season as He grappled with temptation and trial. With care, He delivered His disciples to the Father, to be kept while He contended with the foe, preparing to have our iniquities laid upon Him. Hear His plaintive words, “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (John 17:11).

The church at Smyrna was under assault, and the Savior knew their tribulation. He beheld to sustain and uphold them. His omnipotent hand will be upon them, and against their foes. Nothing shall befall them for which they are not made equal.

I KNOW YOUR POVERTY

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty . . ." (Rev 2:9)

WEALTH IN POVERTY

"I know your . . . poverty (but you are rich) . . ." Here is another exposure of the absurdity of the world’s religion. It has become fashionable in some circles to speak of poverty in a derisive manner, calling it the curse of the Law, and saying the people of God have been delivered from it. But what will the propagators of such foolishness do with the church at Smyrna? Here is a church in which no fault was found. Not a single syllable of rebuke is uttered against it. The church at Smyrna is not urged to recover any lost ground, or return to a superior previous condition. Yet, Jesus declares He knows their poverty. She has been deprived of earthly conveniences, stripped of all good appearances. “But,” says her Lord, “you are rich!”

I recall this poignant word. “Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5). Prosperity in this world is not a sure sign of the blessing of God! Like the Hebrew believers, they had no doubt experienced the plundering of their goods (Heb 10:34). This is of particular note because of the city in which these saints resided. Smyrna was noted for its wealth – but the saints of God did not share in it. The conflict between the passing world and the eternal one was experienced in the church at Smyrna. The world heaped no praise upon this church! Its members were not held in high regard. In this fair city, highly regarded by men, the saints of the Most High God suffered tribulation and became poor!

I have often wondered what the contemporary church would have left to commend it, if it was stripped of all its earthly possessions. If it was found in “poverty,” like the church in Smyrna, what would commend it to the Lord? With great sorrow of heart, I must admit that too many assemblies have nothing more than a building, large budget, and professional staff. They do not feel comfortable in the Lord’s presence, and heavenly hosts have no joy when standing in their presence.

YOU ARE RICH!

The exalted Lord now gives His personal assessment of this poor and oppressed church. “YOU ARE RICH!” Their real possessions were in abundance! The wealth they held was recognized in heaven! Like the Apostles, it could be said they were “as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:10). Their riches were not mere figments of the imagination. Nor, indeed, were they inferior to the “uncertain riches” of this world (1 Tim 6:17).

There are eternal treasures that enhance the worth of those possessing them! James spoke of being “rich in faith” (James 2:5). Others are admonished to be “rich in good works” (1 Tim 6:18). There are also the “the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering” (Rom 2:4), and the “riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33). Who can forget “the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7), “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18), and the “riches of the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2). Even the “the reproach of Christ” is “greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,” as Moses well knew (Heb 11:26). Who can forget the glorious proclamation, “Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). There are heavenly riches that enhance our lives in this world, sustaining us when all else fails. Rich, indeed, is the congregation that, like Jesus, has “food to eat of which you do not know” (John 4:32).

In summary, the church at Smyrna was “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21), having obtained and maintained heavenly resources. While They could not barter for worldly goods, they could traffic in heavenly commodities. They had access to “the wisdom that comes from above” (James 3:17), “bread from heaven” (John 6:32), and “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3).

Jesus considered Smyrna to be “rich!” This church had availed itself of the things provided in Christ Jesus. She had chosen to traffic in heavenly realities, and to procure riches inaccessible to moth and rust. O, that such an assessment could be made of us, and of our churches! In the last analysis, no other view of the church is of any value. If a church has no heavenly abundance, it is wretched and poor, regardless of its claim.

The church at Smyrna needed to hear this word from the Lord. She was in the tribulum – the threshing instrument – experiencing hardship, difficulty, and rejection. This word would cause a resurgence of her strength! It was like good news from a far country, assuring the suffering ones they were not alone. She was rich in what really counted, and she needed to hear it! The Lord has a mind to comfort and encourage His people when they need it. It is on the part of wisdom for us to share His interest in their welfare. Never be fearful of telling God’s people of their virtues. There are times when it is especially important for them to hear such things. We need not fear such activity, for it is the nature of our Lord Jesus Himself to do so. Encouragers are a blessing to all in tribulation.

Chapter 18

THE MESSAGE TO SMRYNA #6

I KNOW THE BLASPHEMY

SAVAGES IN RELIGION

“ . . . and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” Now Jesus identifies some of the oppressors of His people. He charges them with “blasphemy,” because they have dared to identify themselves with the God of heaven. They had put a holy name to an unholy thing, and the Lord has seen it! Here again, a great paradox is seen: savages in religion!

Many are the souls who have suffered attacks from those wearing the name of the Lord. It started when Cain killed Abel (Gen 4:25). It continued in the persecutions Moses endured from the very people he was leading (Ex 17:4). The holy prophets were all opposed by the people (Matt 5:12; Acts 7:52). The Lord Jesus Himself was rejected by the Jews, who killed Him (John 1:11; Acts 3:15). With remarkable consistency, the people of God have experienced opposition from those claiming to be of God. Not a single abuse has gone unnoticed by the Lord of glory.

A SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

The strength of the Lord’s word must not escape us. Here was a religious body Jesus said was “a synagogue of Satan.” The church at Philadelphia was also opposed by such a group (Rev 3:9) – a group of people through whom the devil himself worked!

And what is “a synagogue of Satan”? It is a place where Satan works without restraint; a place where his diabolical desires are carried out in a religious setting. Is it not a dreadful thought that there are bodies of people who gather to do the will of the devil? They do not think themselves to be engaged in such wickedness, yet they are!

Those who take it upon themselves to oppress the saints of God are doing the work of the devil. They are carrying out his intentions, and shall be judged for doing so. Christ Jesus gives them no credit for sincerity. He does not mention their orthodoxy, or any supposed good they have done. They have cursed the people of God, and thus will incur His curse. Make no mistake about this: it will not go well for any body of people Jesus identifies as “the synagogue of Satan!”

The identity people claim with God becomes blasphemy at the point they oppose the saints of God. All claims of association with God are negated when His people are hated and maligned.

Elsewhere, the Spirit speaks of true Jews, i.e., those recognized by the God of heaven. "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Rom 2:28-29). It is what people ARE that compels them to do what they do! If they have not been transformed inwardly, they are not the people of God. If God does not praise them, and their hearts have not been circumcised, they are not recognized by the Lord as a people.

The Lord particularly identifies those who say they are "Jews." These were the people who had been given every spiritual advantage. Of them it is written, "who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen" (Rom 9:4-5). Yet, in spite of these remarkable benefits, they not only rejected Christ themselves, but aggressively opposed those receiving Him. To them, "Christ crucified" became a "stumbling block" (1 Cor 1:23). With an aggressiveness that boggles the mind, they had Paul beaten "five times" with "forty stripes save one" (2 Cor 11:24). Their encroachments on the early church are vividly described in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess 2:14-16).

Now, they prove obstacles to the believers at Smyrna, aggressive in their opposition to the Gospel. History tells us that when Polycarp was martyred, the Jews helped to gather wood to have him burned alive – so fierce was their hatred of the name of Christ! But in their zeal, they were pawns in the hands of the devil!

What a dreadful identity: The synagogue of Satan! That is the Savior's own assessment of those "Jews" who made life more difficult for the church at Smyrna. Let us be zealous to encourage those in Christ Jesus, not adding to their sorrow. Our encouragements are a blessing.

Chapter 19

THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA #7

DO NOT FEAR!

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days . . ." (Rev 2:10)

THE RIGHTEOUS IN PERSECUTION

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer." Here is another paradox: the righteous are persecuted! For some, this is too difficult to comprehend. They imagine that because Christ has "received us to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7), all will go well with us. Ignorant of the nature of, and reason for salvation, they equate well-being in the world with Divine favor. How appropriate is the word of God through Isaiah the

prophet.”The righteous perishes, And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil” (Isa 57:1, NKJV). The “evil” from which the “righteous” are taken away” is in this world.

We are being exposed to the manner of the Kingdom, and the nature of Christ’s reign! If there remains in anyone the notion that Jesus rules in order to our temporal comfort and the possession of worldly gain, the message to Smyrna will be a hard lesson. Mind you, this is the King speaking to His people, even to a most favored people who are rich in His eyes. Already they have suffered, even being reduced to poverty. But there is more to come!

DIVINE WISDOM BEING SHOWN

Through the church, “the manifold wisdom of God” is being shown to “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). There are aspects of His character that have not yet been revealed as He desires. He has chosen to make some of these known in His work with His people “the church.” He will set the church forth as superior to every circumstance created by wicked men, and the devil, with whom such have been joined. He will allow them to go through suffering, in order that the durability of what they have received may be seen by heavenly hosts. When they suffer, as they live by faith, they will lose nothing but dross, and the heavenly treasure they hold in earthen vessels will be enhanced and made more precious.

MADE WORTHY

In persecution, the people of God are made worthy of the Kingdom for which they suffer. This has a strange sound to those unfamiliar with Kingdom manners. Yet, it is plainly taught, and that for our upbuilding. “So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, THAT YOU MAY BE COUNTED WORTHY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, FOR WHICH YOU ALSO SUFFER” (2 Thess 1:4-5, NKJV). Suffering necessarily precedes reigning with Christ. As it is written, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim 2:12). And again,”and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom 8:17).

THE CONSIDERATE JESUS

The rejection of this world confirms our acceptance in heaven, where our names are”written” (Luke 10:20; Heb 12:23). The Lord does not leave His people to grope in the darkness on this matter. He tells them what is coming, and admonishes them not to fear. When He dwelt among us, Jesus spoke of a time when great calamity would strike the sons of men. Of that time He said, “men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Luke 21:26). But it is not so with His people! A deluge of trial is about to fall upon the saints at Smyrna! But with authority and grace He cries out, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.” They have already endured poverty and blasphemy, but worse things are to come – perhaps prison and even death! Their hearts must be “established with grace” at this time, and not shaken with or dominated by fear (Heb 13:9). God has “not given us the spirit of fear,” and times of trial confirm this to be the case (2 Tim 1:7).

I think of the word Jesus gave to His disciples concerning the destruction of Jerusalem – a time of fierce opposition. “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls. But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:16-20, NKJV). Even that dreadful hour was not to be executed without the controlling hand of Christ Jesus. His presence guaranteed that “not a hair of their head” could be lost!

So it would be with the church at Smyrna. What was to occur would be done within the circumference of Christ's will and reign. It would serve His purpose, and would have no power to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. They were not to fear, because their trial would not impact upon their standing with God! It would not diminish their inheritance or put them beyond His sustaining grace.

When we hear the words “fear not,” we must know that saints will be tempted to fear in times of trial. It is then that we must take hold of the words of the “sweet Psalmist of Israel.” “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You” (Psa 56:3, NKJV). Fear can be thrown off by faith, and that is what the Lord is exhorting the church at Smyrna to do. This is not psychological hype. Fearlessness in the face of great difficulty is possible because of the great Shepherd of the sheep. He that keeps us will not slumber (Psa 121:4). It will require effort to “not fear any of those things” Smyrna was about to suffer. But the word of the King comes with power to do what He urges.

Chapter 20

THE MESSAGE TO SMRYNA #8

TESTING IS COMING

" . . . behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days . . ." (Rev 2:10)

COMMITMENT IN TRIAL

“Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison . . .” (NKJV. What a candid word! How it reminds me of Christ's word to Peter.”Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31-32, NKJV). Perhaps, because of the strong faith of the brethren at Smyrna, Satan had asked for some of them also. He is of a mind to do this, even as he did with Job (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5).

The Lord speaks to His people with ultimate reality in mind. He does not say the governor will cast some of them into prison, or that the Jews will have some of them incarcerated. No! It is “the devil” who is about to do this! He is their adversary, and they must arm themselves to resist him, “steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet 5:8-9).

HOW FREE IS SATAN?

For some, this introduces a problem, for it is written, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18).

Because of a misapprehension of the nature of spiritual life, some have assumed they can simply dismiss the devil, and he will cease to harass them. What will they do about the saints at Smyrna? Jesus does not say Satan MAY cast some of them in prison, but that he will do so!

By "toucheth him not," Scripture means Satan does not have free access to those in Christ Jesus. They are not accessible to him "at his will," as is the case with those in unbelief and disobedience (2 Tim 2:26). The devil cannot accomplish his intent with believers. He cannot take their faith from them or drag them into hell, so to speak. He can tempt, buffet, and sift the people of God, but only when given leave to do so by God. He cannot touch their real life, or alienate them from God. When the last word is said, those living by faith "overcome the wicked one" (1 John 5:18).

Every believer will have to contend with the devil, but it will always be within the framework of the Divine will. Although the old serpent desires that we perish, God "is not willing that any should perish" (1 Pet 3:9), and, if they will keep the faith, will not permit Satan to bring His people down.

Notice how the reign of Christ is made known. All of them would not be thrown into prison -- although that is how the devil would love to have it. Only "some of you" will be accessible to the old serpent. He does not tell them which ones, for they must all arm themselves with a sober mind and "Whole armor of God." You may rest assured, however, it will only be those who are so armed that can survive the assault.

The church at Smyrna may rest assured none will be tried above their ability. The Lord will not permit this to happen. As it is written, "God is true, who will not let any test come on you which you are not able to undergo; but he will make with the test a way out of it, so that you may be able to go through it" (1 Cor 10:13, BBE). Every trial is controlled and monitored by the Lord of glory! He does not tell the church that some of them will be thrown into prison by Satan because there is nothing He can do about it. He is going to be with them in the trial, like the angel of the Lord was with the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. They will not go into prison alone!

The saints of God must realize there are higher purposes being served than their own selfish interests. Angelic hosts are beholding the faith of the elect with great wonder. They see the divers wisdom of God in the sustaining of believers under great duress. They have a "treasure" in those frail earthen vessels that prison cannot take from them. They will come forth as pure gold (Job 23:10).

Chapter 21

THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA #9

TESTING WILL BE MEASURED

" . . . and you will have tribulation ten days." (Rev 2:10)

Jesus told His saints in Smyrna that the devil was going to try some of them, and their affliction would be temporary, and in strict accordance with the will of the Lord. It will be for a measured time, and will be brief -- "ten days." A Sovereign Lord will see to that.

It is still true, "My times are in Your hand." Therefore, the saints may pray, "Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me" (Psa 31:15).

The Lord has placed boundaries around the sea. As it is written, "The waters stood above the mountains. At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away. They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys, To the place which You founded for them. You have set a boundary that they may not pass over, That they may not return to cover the earth" (Psa 104:6-9). If this is the case with nature, how much control must exist in the "great salvation" which Christ Jesus is managing! There are boundaries around your sufferings also, just as surely as there are around the seas!

Not simply would only "some" of them be cast into prison, they would have tribulation for only "ten days." That is another way of saying "comparatively brief." Often we read of this perspective of suffering in Scripture. There will be hardship, and even tears, but joy will follow in the mourning. "Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning" (Psa 30:5). Ultimately, all trials will come to a grinding halt at the return of our Lord. "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (Heb 10:37).

From the perspective of faith, we are grieved by trial only for "a little while." "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for A LITTLE WHILE, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials" (1 Pet 1:6). Even then, the trial serves a higher and eternal purpose. Such tests are in order "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:7, NKJV).

As we peruse the book of Revelation, we will find frequent references to periods stated in terms of "days." God's witnesses are said to prophesy "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (11:3). When the witnesses of God are rejected and slain by the world, "nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days," after which the spirit of life will again enter into them (11:9,11). Under the figure of a woman, the church is said to be fed by God in a prepared place for "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (12:6). In each of these, the precise length of time is not the point. The Spirit is developing a perspective for us in His use of the word "days." In the case before us, "ten days" means a brief period. It is brief in comparison with the blessedness of the reward. It is precise in the sense of being strictly controlled by the Lord.

Whether the looming trial consummated in the death of those being tested, or was abruptly ended so they could return to normal life, is of no consequence. The point is that Satan was not going to realize his objectives. His purpose would end, but God's would not!

Now, you must learn to take the truth of God for your own, applying it to your case. This is why we are to "hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches" – because it has relevance to our present condition. If you are being tested, it is only for a short while, and you will not be forsaken during its heat. Be of good cheer, then, and hold on your way. The glories of the world to come will wash away the recollection of these fleeting hardships. Here is the word of the Lord to us. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:16-18,). As the old camp-meeting song says,

“We’ll soon be done with troubles and trials!” God be praised the Lord Jesus is with us in the midst of them all!

Chapter 22

THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA #10

THE PENETRATING PROMISE

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev 2:10)

TRIUMPH IN DEATH

Beneath the city of Rome, there is a massive collection of underground routes. They are tunneled in rocky strata, and are even today open to the public. But these are an epitaph to the cruelty of this world, for they are actually cemeteries, known as the Catacombs. Here lie the remains of countless numbers of martyrs, slain for the word of their testimony. Some bodies were taken there from torture racks, and others from arenas where believers offered their last sacrifice in a shroud of flames. In these dark areas, we are told, Christian art was birthed. The saints of God took hold of hope as their comrades remained faithful until the death. Numerous accounts have been recorded of brave souls that refused to deny their Lord, keeping the faith until required to die because of it. Some of those saints were from Smyrna, not the least of which was Polycarp. In those days, believers did not always die of old age, or some crippling disease.

Jesus apprized His people at Smyrna that some of them would be thrown into prison. They would be put to the most severe test, and would be required to stand under the most oppressive circumstances. The Lord gives the heavenly requirement, then speaks of the sure reward. This word has been passed down through the generations, and every believer has at some time heard it. “Be faithful until death!” That is the word! Christ will now allow vacillation. No wavering under stress. Faithful until death, whether that death be by natural causes, or under the merciless hand of persecutors.

And what does “faithful” mean? It means “believing, true, trustworthy, and sure.” It means the grip on eternal life will not be forfeited for anything or anyone. The eyes will not be turned from the heavens, nor the heart from the Savior. No lure, however cunning, will cause the one who is faithful until death to remove his hand from the plow. This world, at its best and at its worst, is perceived as temporary, and therefore unworthy of making shipwreck of the faith.

Now death is a sure appointment, for as it is written, “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). When that appointment is, we do not know, but all shall keep it. Our Lord does not ask us to be faithful until the end of the day, or until the trial is over. Our vision must reach further than the moment. Faithfulness is a requisite as long as we are “in the body” (Heb 13:3). When times are good, let us be faithful, and when times are oppressive. When we soar on eagle’s wing, or when we walk in sore drudgery, faithfulness is the word! Even if our faith leads to our death, may it be kept fervently!

Living for Jesus requires that kind of determination! It is so vital, that even when some of the number are about to be cast into prison by Satan, they are reminded “Be faithful until death!” This is another way of saying, “they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11). It is “enduring to the end” (Matt 10:22), and in your patience possessing your

souls (Luke 21:19). This is hating your life “in the world” in order that you might “keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25).

We do not hear much of this kind of devotion today – at least not in our country. Some have failed to be faithful over far less consequences than death!

THE CROWN OF LIFE

To those who are “faithful until death,” the glorified Christ promises “a crown of life.” James also spoke of this crown, promising it to the individual that endured temptation. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12, NKJV). What is the “crown of life,” and why does it provide a strong incentive to be faithful until death?

A “crown of life” involves the triumph of life over death! Those receiving such a crown shall personally experience death being “swallowed up of life,” thereby losing all of its presence and power (2 Cor 5:4). Never again will they be subject to trial. That is an experience reserved for those who occupy a domain of jeopardy! While they were in the world, the “Seed” of God remained in them, bringing connection with the unseen realm and vital union with the Living One Himself (1 John 3:9). The “crown of life” is given when our total persons have been swept into vitality with the Living God – when spirit, soul, and body are in joyous and productive harmony with the Savior. No part of us will be recalcitrant or withdrawing. Nothing will have to be subdued within us. Glad day, when the “crown of life” is granted!

A “crown of life” also speaks of a reign. Those who are “faithful until death” will be required to “suffer with Christ.” They will taste the bitterness of apparent defeat, as they may appear to have lost. As Jesus was “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor 13:4), so many who follow Him go through valleys of unspeakable depth and frailty. But that will not be the case when they receive “the crown of life.” That will be a kingly crown, and they, according to the promise, “will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). Of that grand and glorious reign it is written, “There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:5). Thank God for that kingly “crown of life!”

One other aspect of “the crown of life” that is refreshing. This is another view of our glorification, when the good work of God will be brought to culmination before an assembled universe. The Divine appointment is, “and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (Rom 8:30). This is when the likeness of Christ shall characterize every aspect of our persons, praise the Lord! As it is written, “we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). That will be the crowning glory of Christ’s work, the rich reward of our faith, and the commencement of uninterrupted communion with our Lord.

All of this will be given to those who are “faithful until death” – and the half has not yet been told! Such a prize is worthy of your best effort under every circumstance of life!
HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS!

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . . “ Again, the nature of Scripture is perceived. Here is a word to the messenger of the church at Smyrna, to be given to that congregation. In a broader sense, it is declared to “the churches”

collectively. In a more specific sense, the individual who has the capacity to hear is to take the message personally. The Word of God deals with eternal issues, not mere provincial challenges. If “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4), then hearing should be one of our chief strengths. We live by “every word” that comes from God, because it is relevant. It addresses our situation, and contains nourishment for our soul.

An “ear to hear” is a circumcised ear (Acts 7:51), sensitive to the voice of the Lord. It involves a heart that is alert to the will of God, and delights to know His will. The individual with such an ear is comfortable in the presence of the Lord, and thrives in His court.

To “hear what the Spirit says” involves more than merely exposing ourselves to His word. By an act of our will, we expose our hearts to the Word. We take the words into our thought processes, to contemplate and ponder. The Word is thus hidden in the heart, that we might not sin against our Lord (Psa 119:11).

Those who hear what the Spirit says to the churches pledge to guard themselves against the intrusion of Satan’s devices. They determine to lay hold of the promises made to the overcomer.

Chapter 23

THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA #11

THE FINAL PROMISE

“ . . . He that overcometh shall not be hurt by the second death.” (Rev 2:11)

Again, a glorious promise is given to build the confidence of the hearers. The promise assumes a vital interest in the world to come. It will have no meaning to the person who is not engaged in the good fight of faith. However, for those who have taken up their cross daily, and are running the race with patience that is set before them, it is a promise to obtain. It is spoken to suffering saints, some of which will lay down their lives because of their testimony. The smoke of spiritual battle is in the air, and the clash of contrary forces is felt.

This is the first time in all of the Bible that the phrase "second death" is mentioned. It is not defined until much later, but the sense of its meaning is apparent to the sanctified soul. There are two senses in which both life and death may be experienced. In both cases, one is optional, and one is not. Everyone is involved in the first, not everyone in the second. There is life in the body, and there is eternal life. There is also death in the body, and a second death. Someone has well said, “If we are born twice, we will only die once. But if we are only born once, we will die twice.”

The “second death” is a different kind of death – a second type of death. The first death, common to all (Heb 9:27), is a separation of the spirit from the body. The “second death” is a separation of the individual from God Almighty. The “second death”, is described in sobering-words. “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev 20:14). “But the cowardly unbelieving, abominable, murderers’ sexually immoral, sorcerers idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death” (Rev 21 :8).

While men have taken upon themselves to philosophize about the second death, the sensitive soul determines to avoid it. Whatever you may think about "the lake of fire", and "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone " you do well to make every effort to avoid being cast here!

This is the ultimate punishment, the final curse. It is being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess 1:9). Jesus spoke of it as a place where "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched, " to be avoided at all cost (Mark 9:44-48). From this death there shall be no recovery!

Speaking of the second death, Jesus once said, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). How appropriate for those in Smyrna, who were being harshly opposed by those who could kill the body! Jesus told them not to fear any of the things they were going to experience. They were to keep their faith, even though their enemies appeared to triumph over them.

Those who suppose faith insulates us from hardship in this world are in serious error. The landscape of this world is cluttered with the graves of faithful saints whose blood was shed because of who they were. Their enemies seemed superior, and took delight in ridding themselves of the saints of God. But there is a day of reckoning on the horizon. How men stand in that day is the most critical consideration of all!

The "second death "will bring no dread to the one who keeps the faith. for faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). On Mount Sinai, Moses exceedingly feared and trembled, although a holy man (Heb 12:21). But he will not do so when the lake of fire is opened to receive the condemned! Nor, indeed, will any soul that has continued to believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1 John 5:5).

If you have ever feared being condemned, take hold of this promise! If you overcome and you can by the grace of God, you will have nothing to fear from the second death. It will have "no power" over you (Rev 20:6). If you continue to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, He will stand by you in the day of judgment! Then, the second death will not hurt you!

I realize it is not fashionable today to talk of or contemplate the day of judgment and its consequences. It is essential, however, that those who wear the name of Christ give attention to such considerations. It will prove to be a deterrent to ungodliness, and a strong incentive to godliness.

Chapter 24

THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA #12

CONCLUSION

In every age, the church of Jesus Christ has suffered the reprisals of an unbelieving world. While this has taken different forms, it has always revealed a sharp and undeniable clash between those who believe God and those who do not; those who have come to Christ and those who have not; those who are living by faith and those who are not. It has always confirmed that those who live by faith are not of the world, and do not fit into its patterns. By the same token, it has demonstrated the alienation of the world from God. As it is written, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2

Tim 3:12). Jesus said to His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). It is said of Barnabas, that he was "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in th faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Paul wrote to fairly new believers, "For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know" (1 Thess 3:4). Peter wrote to believers, "if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Pet 2:21).

Now, in our text, Jesus announces to the church at Smyrna that they are going to suffer: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev 2:10). Jesus is straightforward in addressing His church. He teaches the "members" so they will not be surprised by either blessings from God, or persecution from the world.

The preachers and teachers of our time have not done well in following this example of Jesus. Too many people do not detect the blessing of God, and are confused by opposition and persecution. A new breed of minister has arisen, trained by the Bible Colleges and Seminaries of the land, that is a purported specialized in problem resolution. But they are not telling the people what to expect, which accounts for the supposed need for counseling the people. It is a sad state of affairs, and is the result of them not regularly exposing their minds to the Word of God – laboring in the Word and in the doctrine (1 Tim 5:17).

The church at Smyrna stands as a constant source of consolation to everyone who has suffered for righteousness sake. The message given to it has doubtless calmed many a soul who has stood condemned before the devil's crowd, and bowed the neck before the enemy's sword. The world has never been worthy of such noble saints, yet has always had to contend with them.

When the struggle becomes intense, and holding our ground is about all we can do, the Lord speaks comfortably to us. He does not lay upon us burdens we cannot bear, but exhorts us to keep the faith. We will not be asked to endure anything beyond our capacity, and in it all, the Lord Jesus will be with us. Our responsibility is to give fear no place in our hearts. We are also to look at our afflictions as short and brief-only for a moment. Soon, we shall be with the Lord. with all adversity behind us. Until then, our afflictions will be the occasion for Divine consolation, when hope shines more brightly!

Chapter 25

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #1

INTRODUCTION

As the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus remains involved with His people. The book of the Revelation is a wonderful example of this truth. The churches to whom this book is written had all been exposed to the Gospel of Christ, and were duly instructed in the manner of the Kingdom. They had been in place for several years, and were all noted for some form of religious activity. From the viewpoint of many, there was no need to

provide a message for these churches. Such people imagine that the thrust of Divine activity is the evangelization of the lost. The book of Revelation is a contradiction to this distorted view of the Kingdom! The salvation of the lost involves a process that extends from the new birth to the removal of the individual from the natural order. Getting people into Christ is NOT the primary work. Rather, the main work is bringing them to stand before God faultless and with exceeding joy. This involves the Intercession and Mediation of the exalted Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the ministry of holy angels. In fact, this is why Jesus was exalted – to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10), leading, sustaining, and perfecting them.

It is not enough to merely profess identity with the Savior. There is a Divine insistence that the people of God avail themselves of the benefits provided in Christ Jesus. A profession of faith is not enough! There must be spiritual life in order to Divine acceptance. That is why judgment “begins with the house of God” (1 Pet 4:17). This judgment is not to be equated with condemnation. It refers to Divine evaluation, which may result in approval as well as condemnation. For the church in Ephesus, the judgment of Jesus resulted in a stern rebuke. For the church in Smyrna, it resulted in a word of comfort. Now, for the church in Pergamum, another rebuke will be issued.

We must see that this is the manner of King Jesus – to evaluate the churches. Before He unveils the determination of the heavens to them, He will assess them. Our hearts must not miss this perspective. When, from His regal throne, Jesus determined to give a final message to the sons of men, He addressed it to “the churches.” He then admonishes every person who has been renewed (he with “ears to hear”) to hear what the Spirit is saying “to the churches.”

These considerations must ever be kept before us as we review this book. Our approach must not be a novel one, characterized by fleshly curiosity. This is a message to the churches, designed to alert them to Divine assessment, and the absolute requirement for being pleasing in the sight of the Lord. If we lose sight of this, our perceptions of the Revelation will degenerate into that of mere men. In such a case, all value will be lost, and no spiritual gain will be realized.

All of heaven is involved in the giving of the message: God, Jesus, the Spirit, and an angel. Now, every one with a spiritual capacity to discern the voice of the Lord, is to hear what is being said. That means we are being confronted with a relevant and pertinent message – one that is not to be ignored. Man lives “by every word of God” (Luke 4:4), including the book of the Revelation of Jesus. The fact that so many believers ignore this book, thinking it to be beyond them, indicates a spiritual deficiency that must be addressed and resolved.

Chapter 26

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #2

WHO IS SPEAKING

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum (Pergamos, KJV) write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this.” The KJV uses the word “Pergamos,” which is a transliteration of the Greek term (Pergamoj) – translating the Greek letters into English letters, rather than translating the word. This is the same approach taken in using the word

“baptize” (baptizw).

The city of Pergamum was a significant and highly regarded one. It was a political and cultural center, noted for its beauty and scholarship. Jesus, however, makes no reference to the political, educational, or social structure of the city. Nor, indeed, does He send a message to its political officials, or endeavor to correct its decadent morals. He selects “the church in Pergamum” as the target of His message. Those who bear the name of Jesus must catch the significance of the church, to which they belong. It is not a mere institution, or a secondary consideration to some preconceived work of greater prominence. Because Jesus “loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph 5:25), He first addresses it, striving to bring it into accord with Divine purpose.

Jesus again addresses the church in one of His revealed capacities: as “The One who has the sharp two-edged sword.” Earlier, when John saw the glorified Christ, he said “out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword” (Rev 1:16). The Lord Jesus discloses and corrects conditions with His Word. It is what comes out of His mouth that makes the difference. He does not say, The One Who has wrought great miracles says this — although He did, indeed, work magnificent and revealing miracles. But when He sought to correct or encourage a church, He did not work a miracle, but spoke a word. The sword comes out of His mouth!

A deficient church does not need Jesus to do something for them as much as they need to HEAR what He has to say! Also, the Lord does not need a church to do something for Him as much as He needs one whose ear is tuned to the heavenly pitch – a church where a love for the truth is found.

The Word of the King will cut to the heart of the matter. Both diagnosis and remedy are found in His Word – in what He has to SAY to the churches. One might suppose that since the rest of the Bible had already been written, the study of the Scripture would be sufficient. What further need for Jesus to speak? It must ever be remembered that salvation involves being “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), not merely a book. Let none suppose for a moment that the Scriptures may be neglected with impunity. That is not at all the case. It is only, however, as that Word is related to the Lord Jesus in our perception that it obtains power for the individual.

Do not forget it! What Jesus accomplishes is by means of His Word. That is how He created the worlds (Gen 1:3,6,14). It is the means through which all of nature is held together in dependable precision (Heb 1:3). And, that is how He nurtures and leads His people. Through His word the Gospel is brought to the alienated, and that is how our minds are brought into accord with our God. As it is written, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12, NASB).

Jesus not only sustains the entire creation with “the word of His power” (Heb 1:3), He deals with His churches by means of His word. He does not correct them by psychoanalysis. He does not comfort them by means of physical ease and social tranquility. The sword that fights for us or is against us proceeds “out of His mouth!” It is no wonder this picture is placed so vividly before the church in Pergamum

That same “sword” is also “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17). Just as Jesus speaks the

word to the churches, the Holy Spirit brings it home to the heart, convicting or strengthening. It proceeds from the mouth of the exalted Christ as to its source. It is utilized by the Spirit as regards its effectiveness. The church in Pergamum is confronting Deity!

The descriptive phrase “two edged sword” refers to the effectiveness of Christ’s Word. Of His words Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). This is a declaration of the ability of Christ’s words to quicken the soul, making it sensitive to both God and His will. Christ’s words are also the appointed vehicle through which illumination and sanctification come.

When, therefore, Jesus identifies Himself as the One from Whose mouth a sharp two-edged sword proceeds, He is alerting the church in Pergamum that He will address their situation. He will deal with them not only to divulge their condition, but to correct it. He will provide the means to recovery. Herein is seen the greatness of our Savior, as well as His desire to purify us from all iniquity.

Chapter 27

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #3

“I know your works . . .”

It is arresting to consider that every church is greeted with these words, “I know your works” (2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15). This ought to tear us away from the notion that our works are of no consequence to Jesus! While we are not justified by works, it is the ordinance of God that we are created in Christ Jesus “for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). The people of God have been separated from the world for the Lord Himself. In regards to our activity, no posture is acceptable but one in which we are “zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14).

This ordained circumstance is why Jesus first looks at what His churches are doing – their “works.” We must not allow an institutional mind-set to rob us of this perspective! On the whole, most churches are not recognized for their works. In fact, many of them are self contained, keeping much to themselves. The thought has not occurred to them (at least not with any apparent power) that they have been called into the fellowship of Christ to engage in arduous and God-glorifying activity. Their “works” are to be characterized by the subduement of the flesh and a kingdom initiative that, to some degree, neutralizes the works of darkness (Eph 5:11).

WHERE SATAN DWELLS

I KNOW THY WORKS and WHERE YOU DWELL

"I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." (Rev 2:13)

“I know . . . where you dwell, where Satan's throne is . . . where Satan dwells.” There are places dominated by Satan, where “the works of darkness” are found in apparently unrestrained abundance. Such places are citadels of wickedness, where unusual influence to engage in iniquity is brought to bear upon the soul. Just as there are holy places,

associated with Divine activity, so there are wicked places, identified with the work of Satan. I recall many business trips to New York, Los Angeles, and other similar cities, where the power of darkness was especially evident. During my first trip to India, I have vivid memories of the awareness of the rule of Satan that swept over my soul as we landed in Bombay. This is a very real condition.

Here was an “inner city” church. Christ’s assessment of their location is worthy of our consideration: “where Satan’s throne is.” It was a place where idolatry and immorality prevailed. Jesus tells the church why – because Satan’s throne was there! It was an area in which the devil could work more freely, and where his influence was more prominent. The “power of darkness” (Lk 22:52; Col 1:13) was in this place in a disproportionate way. The churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia (the only churches of the “seven” that had no fault against them) confronted “synagogues of Satan” (2:9; 3:9). Both of these churches were faithful, neutralizing the power of darkness in their area. The old serpent’s throne was not there as it was in Pergamum. In this city, the saints did not confront the “synagogue of Satan,” but the “throne of Satan.”

SATAN IS BEHIND THE OPPOSITION

Pergamum was a center of imperial worship and authority. Here was built the first Asian Temple of the divine Augustus, which for more than forty years was the one center of the Imperial religion for the whole Province. Ramsay tells us, “The authority over the minds of its Asian subjects, possessed by the State, and arrayed against the Church, was mainly concentrated in the Temple.” This political situation, however interesting, is not identified in these terms by Jesus. He calls the city “the seat [or throne] of Satan.”

There is a principle here that is reflected throughout the book of Revelation. Satan is behind all opposition to God’s people! In a vivid description of opposing political power, John is told that Satan is the one animating that influence. “Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. THE DRAGON GAVE HIM POWER, HIS THRONE, AND GREAT AUTHORITY” (Rev 13:1-2).

The spiritual environment in Pergamum was such that Satan could raise up and empower governmental opposition to the church. Here was an environment in which he could work more freely than is ordinary. The persecution leveled against that church was instigated by Satan, though carried out through the government.

There is an apparent parallel between PERGAMUM and the United States of America. In our nation there has been a shift of emphasis, so that believers in Christ are not only a minority group, they are opposed, maligned, and treated with prejudice on every hand. It is now unlawful to pray publically in Jesus’ name. Sodomites are defended, and even given special privileges. Christian chaplains have been hamstrung when it comes to ministering in the name of Jesus. Can it be that our country has become a throne of Satan?

Chapter 28

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #4

A CULTURAL SEAT

Unlike Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was not noted for its trade and commerce. It was a place of culture and refinement. Adorned with cathedrals and dignified by a university-climate, some would have thought this a good place to live. But it was not. The throne of Satan was there! He disseminated his corruption from that place, and pioneered the spread of spiritual blindness, fleshly indulgence, and “science falsely so called.”

As Satan’s seat, here was a city where culture itself became a deterrent to godliness. The discipline of the mind thus became a means to carnality rather than godliness. The philosophies of men not only contradicted faith in Christ, but was aggressive in its opposition to it.

Where Satan’s throne exists, danger is imminent. Those who dwell in such places must be strong in faith, and armed with the whole armor of God. Slovenly spiritual manners will not allow survival in such realms!

There still remain cities where Satan is dominate in an unusual way—cities that are Satan’s headquarters. Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, not to mention Las Vegas and Hollywood – they are citadels of Satanic influence. It is not unusual for such places to also be cultural centers, with purported educational and scholastic superiority. Nevertheless, like Pergamum, they are the place of Satan’s throne.

Satan also has his throne in cities that are noted for their many churches – dead churches that lack spiritual life, and disseminate false doctrine. They are cities where the work of God is not being done because the Holy Spirit is quenched and grieved. The people who claim to be Christians are lovers of the world, have not set their mind on things above, and do not live by faith – even though they are noted for being “church people.” Satan’s throne is located where this kind of religion is dominant.

The awareness of this circumstance should alert the people of God. They are not to trust in what flourishes where Satan’s throne is found! Those who seek to authenticate their work for Christ with credentials attained in the realm of Satan’s throne do well to rethink their quest. Such a procedure is far more serious than commonly perceived.

Paul was from Tarsus, also an educational and cultural center. It had an outstanding university in which men of renown taught (Antipater, Archedemus, Nestor, Athenodorus surnamed Cordylion, Tiberius, Plutiades and Diogenes, Artemidorus, Diodorus, etc.). Yet, in all of his recounting of the past, not a single reference is made to the cultural climate of Tarsus! He referred to himself as “a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city,” and “a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia” (Acts 21:39; 22:3, NIV). He knew that whatever advantages he held in the Kingdom were not owing to Tarsus or its purported culture.

This was also the case with the church at Pergamum. Whatever few advantages they held

were certainly not due to the cultural resources in Pergamum. With all of its social advantages and scholarly superiority, Jesus identified it as the city where “Satan’s throne” was situated. May the Lord restore this kind of perception in His people. It will protect them from the evil one, and bring to the blessing of the Lord.

Chapter 29

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #5

HOLDING FAST CHRIST’S NAME

“ . . . you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith . . . ”

Three other times our Lord uses this expression (“hold fast”) in this book. To the church at Thyatira He said, “But that which ye have already HOLD FAST till I come” (2:25). The church in Sardis was told, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and HOLD FAST, and repent” (3:3). Jesus also told the church in Philadelphia, “Behold, I come quickly: HOLD THAT FAST which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (3:11).

This is a Kingdom manner of life! The Thessalonians were admonished, “Test all things; HOLD FAST what is good” (1 Thess 5:21). Young Timothy was exhorted, “HOLD FAST the pattern of sound words . . . ” (2 Tim 1:13). Our identity with Christ requires that we “HOLD FAST the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Heb 3:6). Perceiving that we have a great High Priest Who is passed into the heavens, we are to “HOLD FAST our confession” (Heb 4:14; 10:23). We are, then, addressing a subject most pertinent to the life of faith.

The church in Pergamum is commended for holding fast to Christ’s name. What does this mean? First, it confirms believers are presently in the realm of struggle. Forces of darkness continually try to take from us what Christ has given to us. They make every effort to move us beyond the boundary of confidence and assurance. They cannot do this by force, so they employ delusion, or “cunning craftiness.” Holding fast relates to the believer’s effort to keep what has been received, and maintain an identity with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This aggressive term postulates intense opposition and a determination to take hold and keep hold. As used in this text, this expression has a basic meaning of being strong or possessing power; (1) take hold of forcibly, seize, grasp; (2) take into custody, seize, arrest; (3) take control of, hold fast; (4) hold back, restrain from, hinder, prevent; (5) of following a doctrine, creedal confession, or course of life hold fast to, keep hold of, continue firmly in ; of causing a state to continue retain, keep. Jesus vividly described this Kingdom manner in these words. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt 11:12). More literally, the kingdom of heaven is “gotten by force.”

The church in Pergamum had been aggressive to keep the Name of Jesus. They maintained a tenacious grasp on it even though influences were brought to bear upon them to loosen their grip. But what does it mean to hold fast the Name of Christ? Even when they were subjected to peril, they refused to abandon their allegiance to Christ. It is one thing to claim to be a Christian when it is not vigorously opposed by those around you, and it does not thrust you into danger. It is quite another thing to keep your profession when it is dangerous to do so. In the very citadel of Satanic power, they insisted on being identified with the Lord Jesus Christ!

The faithful in Pergamum did not DENY the Son of God, even when pushed to do so. Remember, Jesus said, “But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:33, NKJV). To hold fast the name of Christ is NOT to be ashamed of Him (Luke 9:26)—even when faced with scoffing, persecution, or even death.

Chapter 30

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #6

DID NOT DENY MY FAITH

"I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and HAST NOT DENIED MY FAITH . . ." (Rev 2:13)

Jesus also commends this church for NOT denying His faith. Here is an concept we would do well to incorporate into our thinking – denying Christ’s faith. To “deny” is to contradict, i.e. disavow, reject, abnegate: – deny, refuse. Scripture speaks of those who DENY the power of godliness (2 Tim 3:5), and the Lord (2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4). With great solemnity the Spirit testifies, “If we DENY Him, He also will DENY us” (2 Tim 2:12). It is said of those living in glaring contradiction of the new creation, “but in works they DENY Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” (Tit 1:16).

Like “holding fast,” denying is not casual, but aggressive. It requires the assertiveness of the human will. It took considerable effort and determination for Peter to deny Jesus three times in one night (Matt 26:69-75). Conversely, it required a significant exertion of the will for the church in Pergamum to “NOT deny My faith.”

One might suppose Jesus would have said they had not denied His name, or His Person. But He says they have not denied “MY FAITH.” Paul wrote of the person who refused to provide for his house as one who had “denied THE faith” (1 Tim 5:8). But Jesus says “MY faith.” The KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, Darby’s, and Young’s, translate the expression “MY faith.” The NIV and NRSV versions translate it “your faith in me.” What is the difference between the two expressions?

One is objective, and the other subjective. The objective view shows IN WHOM the faith resides: faith IN Me. The subjective view shows the experiential aspect of faith: RECEIVED FROM CHRIST, i.e., “My faith.” In the latter case the faith was Christ’s by origin. In this case, the church in Pergamum did not repudiate or abandon the faith given to them by Christ. In the former case, they did not repudiate their faith in Christ, or refuse to trust Him because of oppression.

Both views are correct, thus providing us a full view of the faith. While it is received, or “obtained” (2 Pet 1:1), it evidences itself in personal and conscious reliance upon the Lord’s Christ. Jesus commends this congregation for not denying His faith, even when pressed to do so. O, there needs to be a return to this set of values! Those who, under stress, do not deny the faith given to them, retaining their reliance upon Christ Jesus, are to be commended! Such retention is a great accomplishment. That is why Jesus commends it – even in those with major deficiencies.

Chapter 31

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #7

MY FAITHFUL MARTYR

“ . . . even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you.” (Rev 2:13)

The commendation just given to the church in Pergamum was especially meaningful in view of the circumstances. They were living in a time of fierce and bloody opposition. They did not merely argue with philosophers, but encountered those who were “able to kill the body” (Matt 10:28). In the beginning, the church was found “praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). But, alas, those days soon passed. Even in Jerusalem, persecution broke out against believers. It is written, “time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:2). Throughout history, the latter condition has been more the norm than the former. So it was in Pergamum. There was blood shed because of the testimony of the saints.

A word concerning the nature of spiritual life is in order at this point. Those who insist on lives of relative ease, and cannot stand the opposition of their peers, will not be able to keep Christ’s faith or hold fast to His name. What we have received in Christ Jesus is contrary to the world. The reason many people do not experience much opposition from the world is that the world cannot see any difference in them. It is not threatened by their presence, and thus is quite willing to leave them alone. But it was not so in Pergamum, seat of political power, source of unspeakable beauty, and in possession educational superiority.

A single saint is mentioned – and this is the only mention of him in the Bible: Antipas. Even church history ignores this man, as though he were hidden from their view by Divine providence. From an earthly perspective, we do not know why Antipas was martyred or who instigated his death. Jesus provides a different view of the situation – a heavenly view. He refers to a specific time in which perseverance was particularly noteworthy: “those days.” He identifies the person martyred as “Antipas . . . My faithful martyr.” Some of the versions say “Antipas my witness, my faithful one.” This good brother held on to his faith at the cost of his life – and Jesus saw it all! He was “faithful until death.” He was a witness in his death as well as in his life. Jesus put his name in the Bible!

Those who suppose consistent protection from the enemy is guaranteed by a strong faith will have a lot of trouble with Antipas (not to mention Isaiah, James, Stephen, Paul, and Peter). There is a time when God’s witnesses “finish their testimony” (Rev 11:7) and “finish their course” (2 Tim 4:7). At that time, we have no revelation about how we will make our exit from “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4). Occasionally, Jesus has revealed to strong brethren particulars about their death. He told Peter, “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.” Having revealed this, however, “Jesus said to him, Follow Me” (John 21:18-19). Peter was crucified, church history apprizes us, in fulfillment of this prophecy. Such revelations, however, are exceedingly rare. We are not promised the particulars of our death.

Note that Antipas was “killed among” the church in Pergamum. There was an onslaught leveled against this church by the devil himself, and Antipas was “killed” in that initiative. But, here is something of special significance. Jesus does not identify Antipas

as one of them, but as His own: “MY faithful martyr!” He was “among” the Pergamum brethren, but he belonged to Jesus! This is a true Kingdom view of the faithful. Spiritual kindred with whom we fellowship are our brethren, and we cherish their presence, but they belong to Christ! This is why the Romans were admonished not to judge one another inconsiderately. “Who are you to judge ANOTHER’S servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand” (Rom 14:4). The relationship one sustains to the Lord of glory is always the dominate one. This is how Jesus views the matter, and it is how we must view it also.

One final note on the martyrdom of Antipas. Jesus does not identify the depraved ruler responsible for the final decree. Nor, indeed, does he mention the reason for the aggression against the church. The credit is traced directly to Satan: “Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, WHERE SATAN DWELLS.”

This is the second time “where Satan dwells” is mentioned. The first time Jesus says the church dwelt where Satan’s throne was. This time, however, He says Satan dwells among them: “who was killed among you, where Satan dwells!” The NIV softens the statement by saying, “Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.” It is doubtless true that the city of Pergamum itself was a dwelling place for Satan. We will soon find, however, that the adversary had also found a place within the church itself. When a church is located where Satan’s throne exists, it should be expected that he will launch an initiative against that church, which is a threat to his kingdom of darkness. Further, he will make every effort to do so from within the church.

A word about the relative anonymity of some saints is in order. There are a number of God’s children who are mentioned only one time in God’s Word. Antipas is among that number, although more is known of him than of many of the others. I want to list some of them in tribute to their faith, and in anticipation of their exaltation in the world to come. Crescens, Carpus, Andronicus, Junia, Amplias, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodion, Narcissus, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas (Rom 16:7-15; 2 Tim 4:10-13). Antipas stood among this number, “unknown” in the world, but “well known” where it counts (2 Cor 6:9)! Every seemingly obscure disciple should draw comfort from Antipas. They too are duly noted by Jesus!

Chapter 32

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #8

I HAVE A FEW THINGS AGAINST YOU!

“ . . . But I have a few things against you . . . ” (Rev 2:14)

This is the first of the seven churches to whom Jesus said these words. He also did to another church – Thyatira (Rev 2:20). The words should cause fear and trembling in anyone to whom they are addressed – even to anyone who senses they apply to him.

The carnal mind will find it difficult to believe a church like Pergamum could have something “against” it. After all, the Lord Jesus Himself had commended them. They had held fast to His Name where Satan’s seat, or throne, was positioned. Under great duress, they did not deny His faith, but kept it with commendable zeal. They had even experienced the martyrdom of one of their members, and had chosen to side with the Lord in that martyrdom, rather than be intimidated by it. While it is true that “love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8), arduous activity will not. God is the only one who

can “cover” sins (Psa 32:1; Rom 4:7), or “blot” them out (Psa 51:1,9; Isa 44:22). Further, if He has not blotted them out, covered them, or forgiven them, they glare at Him every time He looks at the guilty party. As confirmed by this text, all of this is also true of Jesus when He looks at His churches.

The nature of Christ remains constant, and is unchangeable. This is the true meaning of the expression, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). This does not mean Jesus always does the same thing, for He does not. He allowed James to be killed at the threshold of the church (Acts 12:1-2), and permitted his brother John to outlive all of the other Apostles. Also, at the same time Herod killed James, seeing that it pleased the Jews, he determined to kill Peter also, who was miraculously delivered (Acts 12:3-10). For that matter, although Peter was delivered from prison then, yet in the end, he was martyred while in prison. God’s people do well not to be spiritually naive, failing to see that our Lord rules in a discriminating way.

Have you thought of the gravity of the words, “But I have a few things against you . . .” There are people who, under the influence of the evil one, cannot believe Jesus looks critically upon His people. They delight in thinking of Him as never saying anything bad about anyone. But that is only a delusion. Jesus has spoken “badly” about a lot of people (Matt 7:15; 11:21-24; 23:13-36; Mk 8:33; Lk 6:24-26; 11:46-52; 22:22; 13:32,34-35; 20:47; John 5:29).

Judgment does begin at the house of God, as it is written: "For the time is come that judgment MUST begin at the house of God: and if it FIRST BEGIN at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Pet 4:17).

Jesus just not smile condescendingly when He sees transgression in His people, or His churches – and woe to that person who leaves people thinking that He does. Think of some of the words Jesus said to His disciples during His earthly ministry, when they were obtuse: "And when Jesus knew it, He saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?" (Mark 8:17); "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" (Matt 17:17); "But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt 16:23); “Ye know not what ye ask” (Matt 20:22). "But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56). Know of a surety that if you have sinned, Jesus will never pretend as though you did not! Both His nature and His work will not allow Him to do so.

Of course, after the day of Pentecost Jesus did not have to speak to His disciples in such a manner, for their understanding, under the administration of the Holy Spirit, had been fruitful. Their nature had been changed – but the nature or character of Jesus has not changed, as the church in Pergamum will find out.

When the Lord finds things that are contradictory of His nature and impede the truth, He will not overlook them. Such things, if not crucified, have the potential of cutting people off from the Source of life.

Chapter 33

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #9

THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." (Rev 2:14)

This is a difficult word for those who say doctrine is of no consequence. I have often heard people say, "We do not deal with doctrine, that is the source of too much division." That may sound good to the mind of the flesh, but it is absurd to the spiritual minded.

Here is a church that was allowing things to be taught that Jesus could not tolerate. In this matter, He was "against" them because of this very transgression! You cannot get more serious than that!

Note the first thing Jesus had against this church. They had held fast to His name, and had not denied His faith. Yet, they tolerated teachers who caused people to sin! This was not the persuasion of the entire church, only of some within it. These subversive teachers held to "the doctrine of Balaam." Here is one of the mysterious men of Scripture who proved to be a contradicting dichotomy. He lived during the time of Moses, and was a prophet of God. One of the most poignant expressions of the Divine nature was uttered by this strange prophet. Read it and marvel. "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, And the shout of a King is among them. God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox. For there is no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!' Look, a people rises like a lioness, And lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain" (Num 23:19-24, NKJV). Yet, he fell under the condemnation of the devil because of a covetous spirit.

Balak, king of the Moabites, saw how God was with the Israelites, and what they had done to the Amorites. He, together with all of Moab, was stricken with fear, and sought the demise of Israel. They determined to seek out a prophet in Israel, and pay him a reward to exercise divination against Israel, bringing a curse upon them. Balaam was selected as the target for the reward. Upon confronting these people, Balaam told Balak he could not curse those God had blessed, and that no divination against Israel could be successful. In a stern word to the servants of Balak, Balaam said, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more."

Rather than dismissing the men, Balaam told them, "Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me." In a test of his faith, God appeared to Balaam that night saying, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you; that you shall do." In the morning, Balaam did not wait for the men to call him, but rose, saddled his donkey, and went with the men. Scripture tells us "Then God's anger was aroused because he went." The Lord then sent an angel to obstruct Balaam's way. The well known incident of the donkey talking to Balaam occurred at that time.

After a series of good words, Balaam, desirous of the rewards brought from Balak, succumbed to the wicked one. He told Balak there was no way he could curse those God would not curse. However, he reasoned, if some beautiful women from Moab could

entice the men from Israel to commit fornication, and thus lure them into idolatry, God would be against His own people (Num 22-23). The ploy worked, and Israel was judged for their sin (Num 11:8).

Chapter 34

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #10

PETER'S REFERENCE TO BALAAM

In his teaching about false prophets, Peter said Balaam was one “who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet 2:15). Jude refers to the false prophets of his time as those who “have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit” (Jude 11). In our text, Jesus says of Balaam, he “who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”

In this case, fleshly indulgence and the recognition of idols was taught for personal advantage. Like the false prophets of old, these men had nurtured people for destruction by making provision for the fulfillment of the lusts of the flesh. Their doctrine allowed people to maintain theoretical identity with Christ, while doing the things He hates. Their teaching allowed for honor to be given to other gods, eating meat that had been offered to them, and doing so with a consciousness of the idol (1 Cor 8:7).

Some at Pergamum might have said they did not agree with what was being taught by these messengers of Satan. He does not gloss their sufferance of false prophets, or view it as longsuffering and patience with their fellow man. Jesus rather holds against them their toleration of the condition. Remember, this is the real Jesus to whom we are being exposed.

It is imperative that the church see this aspect of Christ's nature. The people of God are to view what is taught among them with great sobriety. They are to be able to “try the spirits,” determining whether they are of God (1 John 4:1). Note, Jesus does not say this to only the elders or leaders, but to all the believers in Pergamum! HE does not allow them the luxury of depending upon others to assess and correct the condition. This was not a matter to be settled by church politics! The people were apprized that the Lord of glory had something against THEM! They were allowing things to be taught that angered Him and made the people spiritually destitute.

Earlier in the history of the church, an edict was issued by the Jerusalem leaders concerning both fornication and eating things sacrifice to idols. “But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood . . . That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well” (Acts 15:20,29). In spite of this clear word, teachers arose who actually promoted what was here forbidden – within the church! Further, like Balaam, some were even being paid for teaching in such a reprehensible manner.

To teach what is wrong, men are required to ignore the truth. Their contradictions are not innocent, but deliberate. Indulgence in immorality and idol worship is never inculpable when found among the people of God. It always requires a denial of the truth.

Chapter 35

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #11

THE TEACHING OF THE NICOLAITANS

"So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." (Rev 2:15)

There appears to have been a tolerant spirit among these people. Not only were some holding to the doctrine of Balaam, teaching corrupt things for wages, there were some in their number who held to views that were utterly false. For the sophisticated church of our time, one might suppose this was all right. "After all," some may reason, "If they hold their doctrine privately, it is of no harm to us." But that is not the case, for Satan works through false doctrine, just as Jesus works through "sound doctrine." Whether the false doctrine is entertained privately or taught publically, it still has a leavening influence – and, above all, the acceptance of it is totally unacceptable with the "God of truth."

The church in Pergamum is not upbraided for teaching the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, but for having some in their number that had embraced such teaching. If this is how Jesus looks at the churches (and it most assuredly is) it would be interesting to know how He views many contemporary churches that are very familiar to us all. What of those churches who have some among them who hold to the doctrine of annihilationism, soul-sleeping, corrupt views of the second coming of Christ . . . etc.?

The truth of the Gospel is abrasive to doctrinal error, and to those who hold to delusions, as "some" did in Pergamum. Even when an aggressive effort is expended to hold fast to the Name of Christ, and not deny His faith, doctrines can be held by some within the church that alienate people from God, anger Jesus, and quench the Spirit. They may not promote them, but Jesus knows they are being held by some in His churches. He does not treat the matter lightly. The existence of those who had embraced Nicolaitan teaching was something Jesus had AGAINST the church at Pergamum.

You will recall that Ephesus was commended for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which things Jesus also "hated" (Rev 2:6). The KJV and NKJV include these words in the message to Pergamum, "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, WHICH THING I HATE." The fact that Jesus hates what some people do and teach is too difficult for the squeamish to receive. However, it is far better to acquiesce with the judgment of the Lord on this matter, than to be rebuked by Him for having some in our number who embrace such permissive teachings.

We do not know a lot about the Nicolaitans. They did promote the indulgence of the flesh, reasoning that the fleshly appetites came from God, and thus could be gratified without fear of Divine reprisal. Briefly stated, their doctrine allowed those who were converted to return to their immoral ways. We live in a time when this should not have a strange sound to us. We have "gay and lesbian" churches throughout the land, a sort of modern representation of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

As a matter of principle, when our religion salves our conscience concerning unacceptable behavior, the Lord Jesus is against us. When a church has within its number those who embrace such folly, whether they teach it or not, Jesus has something against that church – He is against that church because they tolerate the condition. Whether aggressively taught or passively embraced, doctrines that do not discourage sin bring the individual under the judgment of Christ.

Chapter 36

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #12

REPENT!

“Repent therefore; or else I am coming to YOU quickly, and I will make war against THEM with the sword of My mouth.” (Rev 2:16)

When John the Baptist came preaching, he cried out “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matt 3:2). As soon as Jesus began His public ministry, it is written, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17-18). Repentance stands at the threshold of Kingdom experience. Initially, it is turning away from what has alienated us from God, and turning to our Savior. The Athenian philosophers were told that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:30-31). In obedience to his calling, Saul of Tarsus declared in Damascus and throughout all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, “that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:20).

Once a person is “in Christ,” he is not finished with repentance. This is the means through which recovery from “the snare of the devil” is realized (2 Tim 2:25-26). Repentance is more than simply a change of mind – although it surely involves a change of mind. It is an AGGRESSIVE change of commitment and direction. The individual who repents zealously turns from the offensive way to the sanctified One. In repentance, there is an abandonment of one way in order to the embrace of another. The repenting one experiences a hatred for the old way because it has disqualified him for the way of blessing. The “broad way” always leads to “destruction” (Matt 7:13).

Only two of the seven churches to whom the Revelation is addressed (Smyrna and Philadelphia) had nothing against them. The other five were told that Jesus had something against them, and all of them were told to “repent” (2:5,16,21,22, 3:3,19). In Christ, recovery is both possible and imperative. Salvation makes no provision for backward motion, a lack of progress, or disinterest. When men sin, they must repent. That is the law of the Kingdom!

Satan has deluded many into believing recovery is possible without renouncing what has offended Christ. That is a delusion. Others imagine they can grow without initiative or effort. That also is a distortion. The church that was tolerating those who taught doctrines – that not only permitted, but encouraged sin – were told to “repent.” Those holding these views, whether they taught them or not, were to “repent.” They were to let go of the offensive thing, turn around, and eagerly embrace the Lord they had offended. This involves thinking differently and abandoning the manner of life rebuked by Christ. In my judgment, we are in need of a wave of repentance in the churches.

“OR ELSE!”

Should the church in Pergamum choose to ignore the counsel of the One with the two edged sword proceeding out of His mouth, there will be consequences. Our Lord’s admonitions are never mere suggestions. They are to be taken seriously, and acted upon with zeal and determination.

The Lord does not allow a lot of time for the people to consider His admonition. “Repent, or else I will come to you QUICKLY (suddenly) and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” The thought of Jesus being your opponent, engaging in an initiative against you, is sobering, to say the least. At all costs this circumstance must be avoided.

Lest we casually dismiss this warning, we should consider what Jesus has done with His word. It is a powerful sword, indeed! The worlds were created by His word (Gen 1:3,6,14). Winds were calmed and seas were stilled by the words coming from Christ's mouth (Mark 4:39). Once He "rebuked" a fever, and it left Peter's afflicted mother-in-law (Luke 4:39). Demons inhabiting a man in a synagogue came out of the man at the command of Jesus (Mark 1:25-26). When soldiers came with Judas to arrest Jesus in the garden, He asked them, "Whom are you seeking?" When they said "Jesus of Nazareth," He simply said "I am He," and "they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-8).

The point is that when Jesus FIGHTS AGAINST us with His mouth, an inevitable curse will ensue. Those living by faith have Christ's word working for them. He intercedes for them thereby effecting their salvation (Heb 7:25). His words, in such a case, are "spirit and they are life" (John 6:53). But when He FIGHTS AGAINST people with His Word, He opposes them, frustrating their cause, and making Himself their enemy. Candidly, it is dreadful to contemplate such a circumstance! To have Jesus speak and fight against us must be avoided at all cost.

There appears to be an allusion to Balaam, who, in his quest for self gratification, confronted the angel of God, who had a sword (Num 22:23). In fact, in the end, Balaam himself was slain with the sword (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22). Since Pergamum had some who taught the "doctrine of Balaam," they are threatened with the judgment of Balaam. They must take Christ's assessment serious. He has not overlooked their toleration of what He hates. Yet, in His compassion, He first warns them, lest they lose faith altogether and be separated from Him.

Chapter 37

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #13

THE GLORIOUS INCENTIVE

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." (Rev 2:17)

There is a condition that will become increasingly obvious in the messages to the churches. Jesus provides unusual promises to draw those in unusual sin to Himself. Let it be clear, Jesus is not looking for a reason to judge His churches, but for a reason to deliver and glorify them. When He uncovers a situation that is unacceptable, and delivers poignant threats to them, it is in order that He might save them. The truth of the matter is that Jesus has determined to present a church to Himself that is "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). We are told that in that fair city to which we are journeying, nothing that defiles or traffics in the lie will enter (Rev 21:27). We are also at a point at which the pronouncement will be made, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev 22:11). With characteristic clarity Jesus reminds His churches that He is coming "quickly," and His reward will be with Him, "to give every man according as his work may be" (Rev 22:12). Salvation has to do with making men ready for that occasion.

We have a good example of the use of incentives in our text. Jesus has just threatened to

come and fight against this church with the sword proceeding out of His mouth. However, He does not leave the matter with a threat. We do not become “partakers of the Divine nature” through threats, but through promises (2 Pet 1:4). There is a condition to be overcome in Pergamum. After telling them what He will do if they do not “repent,” the Lord now provides a glorious incentive for them to overcome the Satanic initiative to which they have been succumbing.

Lest we forget, this message is not confined to the church in Pergamum! Following the message delivered to them, the refrain is given: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev 2:17). Again, Jesus speaks to every individual reading this book. Remember, a blessing has been pronounced upon “he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein” (1:3).

There are circumstances in this book that perfectly parallel that of contemporary churches and individuals! We will hear threats that can be taken personally by both congregations and individual personalities. Now we will consider another promise that applied not only to the church in Pergamum, but to all of the churches. It also applies to individuals as well – “He who has an ear.” Thank God for the personal and profitable nature of His word!

Do not read this book as something pertaining only to a church and time in the past. The Spirit not only gave this book, He is speaking today through it to everyone with a capacity to discern the Word of the Lord. The promise is not merely to Pergamum, but to “he who overcomes.” That brings every believer into the picture. Here is something God wants to give to all of His children!

Chapter 38

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #14

THE HIDDEN MANNA

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." (Rev 2:17)

This speaks of unimaginable privilege, and is to be contrasted with the dreadful practice of eating things “offered to idols.” Whereas that eating brought the judgment of Christ, eating the hidden manna will bring the blessing of God.

The allusion is to the pot of manna that was placed in the ark of the covenant. “And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations” (Ex 16:33). “The ark of the covenant . . . wherein was the golden pot that had manna . . .” (Heb 9:3). This manna was NOT to be eaten. It was HIDDEN from the people. While it was of the same substance as the manna eaten by the Israelites for 40 years, it was not accompanied by the same privilege. Too, it did not stink and breed worms, as manna that was retained in the wilderness beyond the allotted time (Ex 16:20). That golden pot of manna was indicative of the remarkable advantages to be given those living in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

There is spiritual sustenance that is NOT available to those who allow Satanic influence in their presence – it is “hidden manna.” There is food for the soul that may only be possessed by walking in the light, living by faith, and walking in the Spirit (1 John 1:7;

Rom 1:17; Gal 5:16). The sweet things of God simply cannot be possessed by the carnal and spiritually undisciplined mind! Ultimately, we will eat of this manna throughout the ages to come.

This is the nourishment of which David spoke. “The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant” (Psa 25:14). This does not speak of the mere conveyance of information – like a heavenly library. This is life-sustaining revelation! Hidden manna is more nourishing than public manna! Allow me to put it another way. Knowing the significance of Scripture is more precious than just knowing the text of it, although such knowledge is imperative! O, if people only knew what a great price they pay by allowing Satan to work in their midst! They are thus deprived of the hidden manna, through which they could become acquainted more thoroughly with their precious Lord.

David again spoke of this hidden manna. “They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures” (Psa 36:8). The “hidden manna” equates to the “fullness” of God’s house. Later, the Spirit would refer to this fulness as “the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13), accentuating the means through which it is received. The church at Pergamum could have access to this “fulness” if they will repent of their godless toleration.

Solomon even spoke of this blessing. “His secret counsel is with the upright” (Prov 3:32). You cannot fully appropriate the things of God academically. Such things are hidden from the wise and the prudent, who insist on anchoring themselves to this world (Matt 11:25). Regardless of the intellectual abilities and mental disciplines of the church in Pergamum, if they did not repent of their wickedness, they could not eat the nourishing manna that is hidden in Christ Jesus. Spiritual nourishment requires separation from the world.

Isaiah contrasted the blessedness of this privilege with the curse of walking in darkness. “Behold, My servants shall eat, But you shall be hungry; Behold, My servants shall drink, But you shall be thirsty; Behold, My servants shall rejoice, But you shall be ashamed; Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, But you shall cry for sorrow of heart, And wail for grief of spirit” (Isa 65:13-14). It is alarming how common it is for professed believers to imagine they can be blessed while occupying the room of cursing! One who is at variance with Jesus will not sit at His table! They will not have “the mind of Christ,” know the richness of Divine fellowship, or experience God being for them (1 Cor 2:16; 1 John 1:3,6,7; Rom 8:Rom 8:31). I am convinced there are churches all about us who need to hear this word. Within them, there are people with ears to hear – a capacity to sense the voice of the Lord. May they hear this glorious promise!

Of this sustaining manna, Jesus said, “I have food to eat of which you do not know” (John 4:32). This food was “hidden” to the disciples at that time. It sustained Jesus, while they became hungry. “Hidden manna” is superior food of which those who are not offended by Satan and this world are totally ignorant. It simply is not available to them. Many a soul is spiritually starved because they live too close to the world, and too readily imbibe its manners.

Ultimately, the Lord Jesus Himself, being the “bread of life” (John 6:35), is the “hidden manna.” Having “passed into the heavens” (Heb 4:14), He is no longer accessible to those living in the flesh. Only those who come away from the course of this world will be afforded the privilege of eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:48-58). To put it

another way, they will have transcendent fellowship with Him.

Finally, there is a reference here to the world to come, in which the saints shall have their hungers and thirsts thoroughly satisfied. They will no longer see “through a glass darkly,” but will know “even as they are known” (1 Cor 13:12). The experience of spiritual satisfaction that is begun here will be culminated there! Blessed is the person who hears this promise, and sets himself to appropriate it by repenting of all that has deprived him of the blessing of God.

Chapter 39

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #15

A WHITE STONE

" . . . and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." (Rev 2:17)

This “stone” is thought to be an allusion to various customs of the times. Some suppose the reference to be to a Grecian custom, which used white stones to mark special days. Others say it portrays the Roman custom of giving white stones to conquerors in the Olympic games. Others think it refers to the Roman Judicial custom of giving white stones indicate to absolution, as compared to a black stone which depicted condemnation. There are, of course, apparent parallels in each of these references. We could see in the white stone the guarantee of special and blessed days throughout eternity. We will also be recognized as conquerors in the race of life and conflict with Satan. There will also be a personal awareness of complete exoneration from all guilt, and relief from all handicaps. I do not choose to accept these views as the intention of the Spirit, Who is speaking to the churches. There is a principle I recommend for those who delve into the various terms and figures employed in Scripture. You can look to the social customs of the day to find the significance of the reference, and yet, as Paul would say, “I show you a more excellent way.”

One of the primary ministries of the old Scriptures is the development of a spiritual nomenclature in which God communicates with His people. Whenever possible, the significance of symbolic language should be sought in Moses and the Prophets. That is one of the primary functions of their writings. The effects of such perceptions will be more edifying and lasting than mere earthly parallels, particularly those conspicuously absent from Scripture.

The fact that this is a “WHITE stone” is significant. This is a depiction of purity, as God counts pureness. It is also a color associated with Divinity and Divine acceptance. The word “white” is used 19 times in this book, and ALWAYS relates to the Lord Himself, or those in association with Him. We read of Jesus’ “WHITE” hair, riding a “WHITE horse,” sitting on a “WHITE cloud” and occupying a “white throne.” Holy personages around the throne of God are declared to be “clothed in WHITE robes.” The “armies of heaven” are said to ride “WHITE horses” and are seen wearing “fine linen, WHITE and clean.” Overcomers are promised a “WHITE stone,” the blessing of walking with Christ “in WHITE,” and being clothed in “WHITE raiment.” Those whose blood was shed for Jesus are said to be clothed in “WHITE robes,” together with all who came out of “great tribulation.” The seven angels which came out of heaven’s temple with the seven last plagues were “clothed in WHITE.” The glorified church will be granted to be arrayed in “fine linen, clean and WHITE” (1:14; 2:17; 3:4,5,18; 4:4; 6:2,11; 7:9,13,14; 14:14; 15:6;

19:11,14; 20:11).

“White” is a heavenly color representing heavenly recognition and honor. A “WHITE stone” comes from heaven as a token of Divine acceptance, recognition, and reward. It denotes the Father’s “Well done!” Heavenly approval and participation are promised to those who overcome!

But this is a “stone,” not a scepter, crown, or sword. What is more, it is stone with a name written in it. I cannot help but recall the imagery of the tabernacle, so often used in this book. Stones were a prominent part of the “service” ordained in the tabernacle activities. An intricately woven ephod was worn by the priest. It had two shoulder pieces that were joined together. This ephod was held upon the shoulders of the high priest with “two onyx stones.” With remarkable precision, names were written upon each of those stones. “Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone, and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial” (Ex 28:9-12).

The identity of the people of Israel with God Himself is seen in this arrangement. He knew them and thought upon them. The same thoughtfulness is seen in the stones placed in the “breastplate of judgement.” There twelve stones were placed, each one bearing a name of one of the twelve tribes (Ex 28:15-21).

Note that no individual names were on the stones, only the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The individual was not recognized, but the tribe to which he belonged. This was the arrangement under the old covenant. How different from our text! Jesus promises a stone, upon which is written the name of the individual overcomer! More precise recognition, more personal reward! The “white stone” is a token of the personal recognition and blessing of the Lord of glory. This aspect of the Divine nature was duly revealed in the shadow of the tabernacle.

Chapter 40

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #16

A NEW NAME

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I . . . give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." (Rev 2:17)

As I have already indicated, the blessing of recognition is personalized in Christ Jesus. The overcomer will not receive a white stone with the name of the congregation to which he belonged engraved upon it! His family name will not be there. Nor will his earthly name be found inscribed upon it. It will be a personal “new name.” That is, it will be a new kind of name, one that perfectly matches his character and ministry in the world to come.

Scripture introduces us to the Divine manner of giving new names. Abram was given the new name of Abraham (Gen 17:5). Sarai was given the new name of Sarah (Gen 17:15). Simon was given the new name of Peter (Mark 3:16). Jesus gave the new name Boanerges to James and John (Mark 3:17). In each of these cases, the new name revealed

their character and/or ministry. Abram became “the father of many nations,” and therefore had his name changed to “Abraham.” Sarai became the “mother of nations,” and was therefore called “Sarah.” Simon became a rock, and was therefore called “Peter.” James and John were “sons of thunder,” and were therefore called “Boanerges.” These were all NEW names. In them the person and work of the individual were seen.

That will also be the nature of our new name. It will strictly accord with what we will be doing and will precisely portray who we are! No one will be dissatisfied with their name, and there will be absolutely no association of that “new name” with wickedness. Judas so defiled his name, that it is forever associated with iniquity—even though it was also worn by one of Jacob’s sons (Matt 1:3), a brother of James (Lk 6:16), another Apostle (John 14:22), and Barnabas (Acts 15:22). But no such associations will be made with your new name! Praise the Lord!

WHICH NO MAN KNOWS

Here we see the personalness of our relation to Jesus in the world to come. In this world, the individual is often lost in the masses. A specific Israelite was ordinarily lost in the identity of his tribe. Individual Israelites that came out of Egyptian bondage were swallowed up by national distinction. Contemporarily speaking, many a precious individual is lost in the crowd of the assembly to which they belong. Such identity-handicaps will forever be removed in glory!

There will be a closeness to Christ, experienced by all who overcome, that is only fully realized by the one possessing it. Jesus will know us personally, and interface with us personally. A sense of Divine acceptance will be realized that will belong alone to you. In this world, it is possible for a discerning person to know more about your relationship to Christ than you do. This very truth occasioned many Apostolic admonitions. Through the Spirit, they knew more about the believers heavenly associations than they did.

But that condition will not exist in the world to come! You will know more about your relation to Jesus than any one else knows. Let us state this in words which the Holy Spirit teaches. “Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor 13:12). The joyful satisfaction that will be realized through this knowledge is too great for us now! What confidence, assurance, and boldness will result from this experience transcend the boundaries of both language and conception now.

Do you not see what powerful incentives Jesus has given the church in Pergamum to repent? History confirms they did not take the word of the Master seriously. Yet, I cannot help but believe there were some – a remnant – who heard what the Spirit was saying to the churches. Such people repented, and once again pressed forward to obtain the prize. Today, those triumphant souls are with another of their number, Antipas, who lost his life that he might forever gain it. How blessed the soul who listens to the Lord! Eternal blessings will be realized, and cursing avoided.

Chapter 41

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM #17

CONCLUSION

We have just considered a church that attempted to join delusion and illumination, wickedness and righteousness, indulgence and crucifixion. Such a joining is not possible! Well did the Spirit say, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with

darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people. Therefore Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty" (2 Cor 6:14-18).

No earthly relation, however seemingly precious, is worth the forfeiture of Christ's approval. The toleration of wicked teaching is not worth the rebuke of Jesus, which it will surely bring! Every believer, as well as individual congregations, are to take religious associations seriously. Those who are living at enmity with God cannot be allowed to be our close associates.

Note also that it is possible to hold fast to a formal identity with Jesus without being perceptive of our surroundings. With apparent zeal, the church in Pergamum held fast to Christ's name, refusing to disown Him during persecution. They would not deny His name! Yet, the same people tolerated those who taught damning doctrines, and encouraged people to live in immorality and idolatry. Listen, those imagining that spiritual life is simplistic, not requiring much effort from us, are living in a state of delusion. If we learn nothing else from Pergamum, let us learn that alertness is as much a requisite to spiritual life as formal identity. If we allow the old serpent to lull us into spiritual sleep, we will inevitably fall into his snare and incur the rebuke of Jesus.

Last, let us rejoice in the character of our Savior. Though He saw an intolerable situation, against which He would surely fight if need be, yet He opened a "door of hope" to the people. Here is an example of a "way of escape" provided in the hour of temptation. The fact that He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9), is not a mere doctrinal detail. This is a true representation of the case, designed to provide an incentive for recovery from falling. The Lord Jesus views "the churches" with a mind to their recovery and spiritual stability. He wants His people to be with Himself in the world to come, arrayed in white, and standing triumphantly upon the sea of glass. If they will listen intently to what the Spirit is saying to the churches, they will surely receive the blessing!

Chapter 42

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #1

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write . . ." (Rev 2:18)

INTRODUCTION

The book of the Revelation is addressed to the churches – those who have been "joined to the Lord" (1 Cor 6:17). Here we are exposed to the heart of Christ Jesus, and His deep concern and desire for His people. Forever remove from your mind any notion that our relationship to the King is a static one, entailing neither unusual danger nor blessing. Those who teach believers can never fall away, or incur the judgment of Jesus, will do well to digest the words of this book. With great power, it devastates the imagination of a Lord that lovingly overlooks departures from Himself and His will.

Here we are exposed to the current reign of Jesus – a reign that has been set in motion for the people of God. As it is written, "and He (God the Father) has put all things under His (the Lord Jesus) feet and has made Him the Head over all things FOR the church" (Eph

1:22, NIV). Jesus reigns over everything and everyone in order to the salvation of “the elect.” His reign, however, involves the participation of the redeemed. The reign itself is not conditioned upon that participation, but the benefits of it are. The Lord Jesus reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, whether we are in fellowship with Him or not. However, the benefits of that reign will not accrue to the individual or church that is not maintaining a lively association with the King.

Any approach to the Christian life that focuses upon the people, thrusts them into jeopardy. Satan and all his emissaries appeal to individual, rather than Divine, interests. Our introduction to Satan’s work in Eden confirms this to be the case (Gen 3:1-6). The concentration of the heavenly Kingdom is the Lord Jesus Himself. His accomplishments are the primary achievements, and His activity is the central consideration. There are no exceptions to this. All who are in harmony with Jesus are approved, and all out of accord with Him are rebuked. In this book, the Lord Jesus evaluates the churches from this perspective. The works of the churches are assessed from an eternal viewpoint, without regard to their outward appearance. We here behold how Jesus thinks about His people, and it is arresting. You will find His words conducive to the greatest degree of sobriety, a condition sorely needed in our time.

THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

There is only one other mention of this city in Scripture, and it is a significant one. Perhaps you will remember it. “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us” (Acts 16:13-15, NKJV). Our acquaintance with this city begins with an introduction to a godly women. It concludes with an introduction to an evil one.

This is the longest of the seven letters, and we will soon see why. Thyatira and Pergamum were the only churches of the seven that were corrupted with the Nicolaitan teaching. In both letters, the Lord Jesus expresses an utter hatred for that teaching. Men may be indifferent concerning the teaching of corrupt leaders, but the Lord is not.

Whereas Ephesus and Smyrna were cities of commerce, and Pergamum one of culture and politics, Thyatira was a military city. Before going further, it is good to note how the Gospel penetrated all levels of society. This is a powerful testimony to its relevance and efficacy for all people. The glorious Gospel of the blessed God provides a “common salvation” (Jude 3) for the universal dilemma of sin. The great salvation of God is for all people and all time, and needs to be proclaimed in power.

WHO IS SPEAKING

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this” (NASB). The Lord continues to reveal Himself in the capacity that is most appropriate for the situation. The Ephesians had left their “first love,” pushing Christ, as it were, into the background. Therefore Christ revealed Himself to them as “He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, Who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands” (2:1). The Ephesian church had forgotten this, and therefore neglected and left their tender and sensitive

preference for the Son of God. The church in Smyrna was a suffering church, battling to keep the faith and cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Therefore, the Lord revealed Himself to them as “the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life” (2:8). Because He Himself had went down into the shadow of death, He was able to succor and strengthen those in trial. The church in Pergamum had endured some opposition, and at least one of their number was even martyred. Notwithstanding, they were tolerating the dissemination of false doctrine, and some of their people held to false and damaging teachings. Therefore, Christ revealed Himself to them as “He who has the sharp two-edged sword,” cutting to the quick, and ready to fight against those who will not hear Him (2:12).

This characteristic of our Lord is what makes Him and His Word relevant. To the spiritually uncultured mind, relevancy has more to do with carnal likes and dislikes than the human condition, as perceived by the Lord Jesus. Kingdom relevancy, however, has to do with bringing us into accord with God. It deals with what is required to stand or recover – whichever is appropriate. Neither God nor Jesus ever depart from their objectives to deal with us from a purely worldly point of view. If this perception was embraced by the contemporary church, it would so radically alter its manners that one would scarcely be able to recognize it. At the point a church – any church – is out of synch with the heavenly agenda, it is in serious jeopardy. Conversely, whenever the church is in accord with the Divine objective, it will always be commended. There are no exceptions to this rule.

The church at Thyatira is seriously deficient. Although it has increased in the area of deeds, it has allowed a wretched teacher to flourish in its presence. Therefore, the Lord speaks to this church in the capacity of “the Son of God, Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass” (2:18).

Chapter 43

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #2

THE SON OF GOD

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass." (Rev 2:18)

This is the first church to which Jesus reveals Himself as “the Son of God.” In fact, in every major translation, this is the ONLY time the phrase “Son of God” is mentioned in this book! Yet, in this term we find the premier revelation of the Person of Jesus Christ! This is what the Father revealed to Peter in “the coasts of Caesarea Philippi” (Matt 16:15-17). It is how the Father wants Jesus to be seen! On the threshold of Christ’s ministry, when Satan was allowed to tempt Him, this is the truth he chose to challenge: i.e., that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt 4:3,6). When Jesus came into “the country of the Gergesenes” he faced a legion of demons housed in a single depraved wild man. The one thing the demons recognized was that they were facing “the Son of God” (Matt 8:29). When He rose from the dead, Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4). The perception and embrace of this truth – namely, that “Jesus is the Son of God” – makes a person an overcomer (1 John 5:5). When, therefore, Jesus addresses the church in Thyatira as the Son of God, He speaks in His loftiest and most powerful capacity. He will show them they have failed to consider Him in this station, and have thus fallen into contemptible toleration. They were His church, but the

knowledge of this was quickly slipping from them.

“The Son of God” is Jesus in His commissioned capacity. It declares Him as fulfilling the purpose of God the Father. The objective of all spiritual gifts is to bring believers “to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:13). He comes as “the Son of God” to give us an understanding of God, inducting us into an experience of Divine familiarity that strengthens the soul, equipping us to be spiritual in an unspiritual world (1 John 5:20). The Lord addresses the church at Thyatira as the One Whom they have contradicted, and whose purposeful ministry they have ignored.

EYES LIKE UNTO A FLAME OF FIRE

John had seen the glorified Christ, and “His eyes were like a flame of fire” 1:14) – piercing and revealing. One man has said of these eyes, “seeing into, discovering, and exposing the horrid actions and wickednesses of men done in the dark” (John Gill). Later, near the close of this book, the Lord Jesus is again seen in this manner: “His eyes were like a flame of fire” (19:12). This view is shown to be a militant one, where the Lord is set against something or someone, and comes to make war. As it is written, “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire . . .” (19:1-2a, NKJV).

The church at Thyatira does not receive a message from One perceived to be loving and tender. They have countenanced conditions that are deplorable to their Savior, and He comes to them as warrior with an unsheathed sword. It is a frightening picture, calculated to awaken lethargic souls to the jeopardy in which they have been found.

THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

"Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea." (Rev 1:11)

Chapter 44

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #3

FEET LIKE BURNISHED BRASS

“ . . . and His feet are like fine brass . . .” (“burnished bronze,” NASB)

This speaks of firmness, and a total lack of vacillation. In the capacity of a man, Jesus has passed through the Refiners fire, and has exited without flaw. He maintained His commitment to Divine purpose when among us, and He does so now. Here is Strength that will trample down all opponents, bringing them into subjection. As it is written, “then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Cor 15:24-25, NASB). Satan has deluded many a church into associating this revelation only with those who are avowed enemies of Jesus – those who obviously are set against Him. The church in Thyatira, however, will find it applies to anyone and everyone who is operating in contradiction of the revealed Divine program. This includes all who, for whatever reason, are competing with Jesus by

perpetrating, or allowing to be perpetrated things conflicting with the salvation of God. Make no mistake about this, those who are at variance with Jesus will be trampled under His feet! Referring to Himself as a Stone, Jesus said it this way: “Everyone who falls on that Stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed” (Luke 20:18, NIV). Whether individuals or churches, those who insist on remaining at variance with the King of kings will be crushed beneath His feet.

In one of his great songs to the Lord, David mentioned the role of His feet in overcoming his enemies. “They looked, but there was none to save; Even to the LORD, but He did not answer them. Then I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth; I trod them like dirt in the streets, And I spread them out” (2 Sam 22:42-43). In our text, Jesus is revealed as a righteous Judge, trampling His foes uprightly and justly. He does so as One Who strictly seeks the will of the Father. We will now be given a view of the wrath of the Lamb, and its threatening consequences to those who obstinately continue in a displeasing state. Suffice it to say, when a church confronts the Savior in this capacity, it is time to take a serious look at what it is doing.

The Lord Jesus Christ is both meek and mild, but that is not all He is! Behold how He speaks to scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-29), as well as Sadducees and lawyers (Luke 11:46-52). The most fearful utterances in the Bible came from the Savior Himself. A single example will suffice to confirm this to be the case. “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire; where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt” (Mark 9:42-49).

Those who insist upon remaining in sin will eventually face a fierce and merciless King. When He returns, those who have lived contrary to His Person and purpose will behold “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16). While we do not enjoy dwelling upon such things, it is essential that we consider Him in this capacity. Far better for sinners to ponder the indignation of Jesus now, and find incentive to turn from their sin, than to face an angry Christ! Remember, this is a message the Spirit is speaking to the churches. Additionally, the individual who “has an ear” is to give heed to what the Spirit is saying.

THE COMMENDATION

The searching eyes of the Lord will first find something commendable. This approach is designed to awaken their slumbering spirits. It is an appeal to the new creation, which is about to be smothered by a goodwill towards wickedness. “I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first” (NASB). The churches must maintain a lively awareness that Jesus knows what they are doing. That precious knowledge will prove a deterrent to involvement in prideful pursuits that are at variance with God’s “eternal purpose.”

TOUR LOVE AND FAITH AND SERVICE AND PERSEVERANCE

Here is quite a commendable list of spiritual qualities! Love and faith are often coupled in Apostolic accolades, and rank high in the Divine agenda. Philemon was commended for a faith and love that focused on Christ and benefitted believers. "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (Philemon 4-5). The Galatians were told of faith working through love. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" Gal 5:6). Both the Ephesians and Colossians were commended for their faith in Christ and love for all saints. "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints" (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4). The Thessalonians were commended for their work of faith and arduous labor of love. ". . . remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father" (1 Thess 1:3). They were also urged to protect themselves with faith and love. "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love . . ." (1 Thess 1:5).

Both of these indispensable virtues come from God. Neither are originated in human energy or summoned into the heart by mortal wisdom. "Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 6:23). "And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 1:14). What comely qualities these are! Love and faith produce considerate ministry, or "service." Perseverance, or patience, endures tribulation and hardship. On the surface, it is difficult to conceive of a more commendable condition. Surely, there will be no fault with a church that had faith and love, exhibiting it in service to both God and man, and continuance in the faith in the face of opposition! But there is more!

Chapter 45

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #4

AS FOR YOUR WORKS . . .

A most unusual condition existed in the church at Thyatira. They were increasing in their works: "And as for your works, the last are more than the first." The NIV reads, "you are now doing more than you did at first."

This church would have been in the top ten, and probably written up in religious journals. It retained what it had received at the first, holding it fast. But that is not all. In an exceedingly rare display of fortitude, they increased in their works. This is most unusual in the churches with which I am familiar. It is not uncommon for congregations to regress in their works to a point where strong stimuli is required to awaken them to activity. But it was not so with the church in Thyatira.

Actually, increase is the manner of the Kingdom. The productive seed, Jesus said, is seen in the growth of the individual "who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt 13:23). Observe that fruitfulness started with "A hundredfold," and went down to "thirty times what was sown" (NIV). Mark reverses the order, saying, "It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times" (Mark 4:8). While fruitfulness of this magnitude is surprising to the contemporary believer, it is not amazing to heavenly hosts. Scripture speaks of the righteous going from "strength to strength" (Psa 84:7), being

changed “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18, RSV), and the righteousness of God being revealed “from faith to faith” (Rom 1:17). Increase is the manner of the Kingdom!

If the church is commended for their works being greater now than they were in the beginning, you can be sure an absence of this characteristic makes one subject to Divine judgment. It is of great concern that all too often spiritual stagnation is present in the churches. There is no acceptable excuse for this condition. Nothing about salvation will contribute to that state. Fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3) will not yield such a condition. Thus, the Lord Jesus commends this church for its increase of “the fruits of righteousness” (Phil 1:11).

Yet, we will find this condition is not sufficient to gain the total approval of the Lord Jesus. He did not die and raise from the dead to merely thrust us into activity. The church at Ephesus was threatened with removal because they had “left” their “first love,” even though intensely active. The church at Pergamum was told Jesus would fight against them if they did not repent of their godless toleration, even though they too were holding fast and active. It is wonderful, and absolutely essential, that Jesus commend us. His approbation, however, must not be mixed with disapproval – a condition that appears contradictory and impossible. Yet, this is precisely what we see in five of the seven churches: a Jesus that commends, yet has something against the churches. Among other things, this reveals the impartiality of Jesus, and His lack of respect for the persons of men.

Chapter 46

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #5

THE DREADFUL FAULT

“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (NASB).

Jesus refers to the false prophetess in question according to her character – “Jezebel.” You will doubtless recall this wicked woman, wife of contemptible Ahab. She vigorously opposed Elijah after he had killed 450 prophets of Baal, following a contest of gods (1 Kgs 19:1-2). Jezebel was “the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians,” and was married by Ahab as he walked in the sins of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 16:31). This wicked woman instigated a slaughter of the “prophets of the Lord,” during which Obadiah hid one hundred prophets in two caves, taking it upon himself to sustain them (1 Kgs 18:4). The unusual wickedness of this woman is seen in the Divine commentary on her husband, Ahab. “Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, BECAUSE Jezebel his wife incited him. And he acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel” (1 Kgs 21:25-26, NASB).

Jezebel, then, provides us an example of someone dwelling in the presence of the people of God, teaching, and even urging, conduct that was reprehensible to God. It all happened because Ahab, king over Israel, added to his unspeakable iniquity by marrying this wicked woman. He attempted an alliance with those God hates! He did it within a nation that had been separated unto the Living God, and in flagrant contradiction of His revealed will.

Now Jesus upbraids the church in Thyatira for allowing the same condition to arise in it. An enemy had penetrated their ranks, and was exercising an unholy influence among the people whom Jesus had separated unto holiness (Tit 2:14). No church of any age can allow itself to think it is beyond such a thing as this! We face an adversary that is fierce and cunning. In the case before us, he managed to find an open door into which he aggressively entered. There, he positioned a teacher who influenced those in the church to be immoral and idolatrous! As if that was not enough, those not caught up in the rebellion allowed it to continue without rebuke or opposition. Of the condition, Jesus says, "I have a few things AGAINST you."

Jesus does not say they encouraged this false prophetess, or gave her any sympathy. They just left her alone, leaving her iniquity unchecked. This reminds me of incident for which Eli was rebuked. His sons were committing despicable iniquity before the "temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was." God rebuked him "because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them" (1 Sam 3:13). Although Eli had rebuked his sons (1 Sam 2:22-25). Yet, he did not forcibly deal with them as the Law commanded (Deut 18:21-18-21). Solemnly the people of God are told, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph 5:11). Other versions translate the verse "expose them," rather than "reprove them." The exposure, however, is to come through reproof, not merely by a contrast with the a righteous life. Iniquity unrestrained will increase!

Notice, the wicked teaching had not caused any diminishment of their good deeds. We must see that good deeds, however beneficial, are not viewed as a substitute for the proclamation of the truth. Nor, indeed, can they avert the judgment of Christ against those who dare to tolerate what He hates. It is possible to imagine that legitimately good deeds can outweigh bad ones – that men are evaluated on a plus-minus basis, so to speak. If they have more good deeds than bad deeds, some are deceived into thinking they are approved by God. But this is not at all the case. The church in Ephesus were punctilious in their quest for proper teaching. They were persevering, and had an appropriate hatred for the perpetrators of immorality and idolatry. But all of that did not outweigh the fact they had "left" their "first love." Now Thyatira is told their faith, love, service, perseverance, and increasing works have not outweighed their toleration of a false prophetess.

When propagated or embraced, a lie neutralizes the goodness of our works. The incident of Ananias and Sapphira proves this to be the case (Acts 5:1-10). It was good to give to the work of the Lord. However, when that giving was built upon a lie, it became a curse to Ananias and Sapphira, not a blessing. This was the experience of the church in Thyatira. It was not only involved in works, but had actually increased in this aspect of Kingdom life. Notwithstanding, its toleration of this wicked woman had incurred the indignation of the Master. We all do well to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches! It may come as a surprise that such contradicting manners could be found simultaneously. It must be remembered that we have the "treasure" of salvation in an "earthen vessel" (2 Cor 4:7). The "law of sin" still remains in our flesh, ever present, even when we desire to do good. As it is written, "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good" (Rom 7:21). While it is true, we have been liberated from enslavement to this depraved principle (Rom 8:2), we still have to contend with it. If we do not aggressively "crucify the flesh," denying it prominence, it will soon lead us into

bondage to sin. The church in Thyatira had not developed a sufficient hatred for the deeds of the Nicolaitans, and thus tolerated that wicked prophetess to continue to teach among them. Too, because of the presence of “another law” within every believer, this teacher was able to seduce some of them, appealing strongly to that old nature.

Those imagining we are locked into salvation, with no danger of being drawn into the flesh, must take a second look at Thyatira. Jesus said this wicked woman seduced HIS servants to commit fornication, and eat meats in honor of idols – HIS SERVANTS! As if that were not enough, the church, by not stopping it, consented to the continuance of the practice. They probably did not make this a tenet of their faith, so to speak, or that such conduct was officially condoned by them. They did not, however, oppose it with godly zeal, forbidding it to continue. Jesus said this was something He had “against” them: “You TOLERATE the woman . . .” Once again, those who imagine doctrine is of no consequence, or that doctrinal correctness is an unworthy objective, need to consider this church. Teaching error is never right, even when it is done with a supposedly excellent spirit, or when it is tolerated in purported love.

There is another thing about this incident that is worthy of comment. Jesus does not rebuke this church for allowing a woman to teach, but for allowing her to teach His servants to commit fornication and eat meat offered to idols. Those who choose to believe women are strictly forbidden to teach in the church, according to 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34, must reckon with this text. Had this rebuke been delivered by many self-appointed interpreters of the Word, the church at Thyatira would have been rebuked for allowing a woman to teach, regardless of what she taught. The fact that Jesus did not speak in this manner should constrain men to re-evaluate their interpretations. Some, seeking to preserve their exegesis, have suggested this has no reference to a woman at all – that it is a figure of speech. If this is the case, it is an example of Jesus referring to a false prophet as a “woman” and a “prophetess.” It requires an extraordinary imagination, in my judgment, to take such a position. It is enough to say, our views of Scripture are always to be found in strict harmony with the statements of our Lord. They are never to be found in conflict with His words.

Chapter 47

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #6

SHE MISREPRESENTED HERSELF

“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess . . .”

Of this spiritual intruder Jesus said, “who calls herself a prophetess.” But, she was no prophetess, unless speaking for the devil so qualifies a person. Many souls have been deluded because the person teaching them claimed to be something they were not: a prophet, preacher, Apostle, elder, etc. Remember, the church in Ephesus excelled in this regard: “you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false” (2:2). But the church in Thyatira was not as noble. It tolerated falseness rather than putting it to the test!

It makes no difference who proclaims himself to be from God, we are to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1, NASB). This activity distinguished the Bereans as being “more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great

eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:1, NASB). O, that there was a revival of this type of spirit in the churches! It would soon produce a great deal of spiritual traffic between heaven and earth! There is, however, a complicating factor. Unlike the Jewish synagogue, modern churches do not have a time or place in their gatherings when what is said can be challenged. The whole “service” is generally arranged so that no public discussion is allowed.

WHEN JESUS GIVES SPACE

“And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.” “And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality” (NASB). Again, note Jesus did not give her time to repent of the act of teaching, but of her immorality, or fornication (KJV). Here is a token of the graciousness of our Lord: He gave the one perpetrating fornication and idolatry “time (or space) to repent.” In the words of Ezra, this was “a little space” in which grace was shown to this false prophetess (Ezra 9:8) – a time when recovery was possible. This surely confirms the Lord “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Nineveh was given “40 days” to repent of its sin, even AFTER its wickedness had come up before God’s face (Jonah 1:2; 3:4). It is God’s nature to provide ample time to recover from sin, although men dare not exploit such Divine consideration. Scripture affirms, and experience confirms, that “the sentence against an evil work” is not always “executed speedily.” For this reason, “the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl 8:11). One man has said, “God does not always punish summer sins in the next winter.” Indeed, the longsuffering of God, although designed to lead us to repentance, becomes the occasion for continuance in sin when the heart is calloused. Notwithstanding, “space to repent” is a genuine provision for the wicked to turn from their ways. Divine extension is not to be taken for granted, exploited, or ignored. Rather, it is to be acted upon quickly. Those so responding will be faced with a gracious God Who is ready to forgive.

We are not told how much time was given for this false prophetess to repent, but it was an adequate amount of time for her to turn from her wicked ways. It was longer than a convicted soul thinks himself worthy, and shorter than the hard heart supposes is deserved. But make no mistake about this, when the Lord Jesus gives “space to repent,” it is always adequate for repentance to take place.

Chapter 48

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #7

“And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, but she repented not.” (Rev 2:21).

JEZEBEL DOES NOT WANT TO REPENT

Even though the Lord was considerate of this woman, she was not considerate of Him. As it is written, “she does not want to repent of her immorality” (NASB). The NIV reads, “I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.” Jezebel despised the riches of Christ’s forbearance, refusing to respond to the gracious space given her to repent. As it is written, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:4, NASB).

It is a dangerous thing to spurn the overtures of the Lord, particularly when they are

wrapped in time allotted for repentance. Yet, this evil teacher took no advantage of the Lord's grace, lightly esteeming it in preference for her wicked ways.

Sin has an anaesthetizing quality about it, desensitizing the soul to the Lord. Eventually, those willingly souls, who choose to live within sin's grip, become hardened and calloused. Little wonder the Scripture reads, "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy" (Prov 29:1, NASB). Iniquity, particularly that which is of a religious sort, lulls the sinner into foolish thinking. "He says to himself, I shall not be moved; Throughout all generations I shall not be in adversity" (Psalm 10:6, NASB). As we shall soon see, nothing could be further from the truth.

One other consideration is necessary. This woman subverted the servants of Christ with words – teaching. She did not make His servants commit fornication and eat meat in honor of idols. Rather, she "taught" them to do so. Never underestimate the power of words! As it is written, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov 18:21). The false prophetess of Thyatira was promoting spiritual death by what she taught.

It is possible to teach people to commit fornication without actually saying, "You can commit fornication." There are some doctrines that will lead people to the conclusion they can commit fornication, and still remain a member of the body of Christ. Such intrusive teachers affirm that once a person is "saved," the door is slammed shut, and it simply is not possible for them to ever be severed from the Lord, no matter what they do. Such teachers are brothers to Jezebel.

TIME DOES NOT EQUAL RECOVERY

In the flesh, time is against us, not for us! Sinners do not recover by outgrowing their love for sin. Wicked tendencies do not go away with the passage of time. Here was a Divinely allotted period of time wherein full recovery could be realized – yet it was not. If the heart is not tender toward the Lord, taking advantage of "space" to repent and draw near to the Lord, it will become hardened "through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13). Many a soul has drifted into a state from which recovery was not possible simply because they, like this Jezebel, were unwilling to repent. In matters pertaining to the soul, procrastination is lethal!

Chapter 49

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #8

THE LOOMING JUDGMENT

"Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." (Revelation 2:22-23 (KJV))

The warning issued to this church is one of the most stern in all Scripture. The language jars upon the soul, and reveals an aspect of Christ with which we do well to become familiar. There is a harshness here that is conducive to great sobriety. "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (NKJV). When the Master warns of casting people "into a

bed,” “into great tribulation,” and killing “her children with death,” the soul must awaken from slumber, and rise to a condition of sobriety and alertness! Mind you, these are words written to the church. They are not addressed to the corrupt politicians in Thyatira, or to the idolaters and whoremongers within the heathen community. These are words for Christ’s church, into which intolerable corruption had crept. He had been forbearing with the situation, but the forbearance now comes to a grinding halt. He will not allow the condition to continue!

The language of this text reminds us of the ancient Jezebel, and the effectiveness and result of her teaching. Jezebel so effectively taught her son Ahaziah that he trusted more in idols than in the living God. Toward the end of his life, he fell through a lattice in his upper chamber, and became confined to a bed of sickness. Because of the instruction of his wicked mother, he sought counsel of “Baalzebub, the god of Ekron,” as to whether he would recover from the sickness. God sent word to king Ahaziah through his prophet Elijah, “You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!” (2 Kgs 1:1-4). This incident provides the language now used by Jesus against the church in Thyatira. Once again, we behold the Divine manner, a manner that is consistent throughout Scripture. In preference to contemporary occurrences, Scriptural incidents are nearly always used to buttress sound teaching. Now, in our text, Jesus will hurl the false prophetess of Thyatira and her followers into a bed of affliction, even as Ahaziah fell from a lattice, and eventually died in a bed of sickness.

Both the teacher, and those receiving her teaching would be judged together. They had committed fornication against the Lord. Now He will hurl them into a bed together – but it will not be for the satiation of sinful lusts. No pleasure will come from this circumstance. Because forbearance failed to awaken this false prophetess, she will now experience the “severity of God” (Rom 11:22). As Robertson says, the word “severity” means “to cut off, properly denotes excision, cutting off, as the gardener cuts off, with a pruning knife, dead boughs, or luxuriant stems.” We are not talking about mere chastening here. This activity will result in the removal of this blight from Christ’s church! As those seduced were joined together with the seductress in unholy departure from the Lord, so together they will be cut off from the body of Christ. As Jesus said elsewhere, “If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch” (Matt 55:14).

If Jesus was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, that He might BRING US TO GOD” (1 Pet 3:18), how serious is it for people to be led AWAY from God? There is no earthly language capable of adequately describing the seriousness of such a situation. That is why the Lord Jesus speaks so harshly of the condition. His opposition will be direct, unmitigated, and effective. One has well said, “the chamber of voluptuousness shall become the chamber of torture” (D. Thomas, 1950).

The occasion is strikingly like that associated with Phineas, a righteous man of old who stayed a corrupting and spreading plague from consuming Israel. It is said of him, “he turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel, in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy,” and was therefore granted God’s “covenant of peace” (Num 25:11,12). The manner in which this man turned away God’s wrath is arresting. On one occasion, Israel began to mingle with the cursed Moabites, bowing down to their gods, and committing fornication with their women. God’s anger rose up, and He commanded those who had joined themselves to

Baal to be slain. Phineas, in his zeal for the Lord, arose to do His bidding. Here is what is written of his deed. "He arose from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked" (Num 25:7-8, NASB). Of this event, Psalm 106:29-31 says, "Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds; And the plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and interposed; And so the plague was stayed. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, To all generations forever" (NASB). Sin, like a cancerous growth, must sometimes be cut out of the people of God. Here was such an occasion.

Once again, the bed of sin becomes the bed of suffering. This is Divine retribution, and it is sure for those who refuse to repent. The language is also similar to that spoken against wicked Ahab, who had Naboth killed so he could take his vineyard. "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs shall lick up your blood, even yours" (1 Kgs 21:19).

The harsh judgment of God is also seen in His dealings with the Corinthians. Scripture apprizes us this church was inconsiderate of the Lord Jesus at the Lord's table. Rather than focusing their attention upon Him, and declaring His death until He come, they used the occasion to satisfy their own fleshly appetites, even practicing inconsideration of their brethren. For this, they were chastened severely by the Lord, some of them even dying at His hand. The solemn judgment is reflected in these words, "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor 11:30-32). Our conduct in Christ's Kingdom is to be attended with the greatest sobriety, lest we are led astray by, or become tolerate of, the communication of things He hates.

Another observation is necessary. Those who partook of the sins of this false teacher, forsook the works and word of God to do so. You must relinquish your hold upon the truth to take hold of a lie. You cannot respond to Satan without ceasing to respond to God. It is not possible to give allegiance to a false god without abandoning the true God. This is involved in our Lord's words, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other" (Matt 6:24). Competing spiritual influences cannot be heeded simultaneously. We do have two ears, but can only concentrate on one directing voice at a time.

Chapter 50

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #9

KILL HER CHILDREN WITH DEATH

"And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. (Rev 2:23)

What a stern and awakening word! Here again we recall God's judgment against Jezebel and Ahab. It was swift and thorough, as will be the case with the wicked clan of Thyatira. Jezebel's two sons were killed, as well as the seventy sons of Ahab (2 Kgs 10:1-7). The

language of our text indicates that the perpetrator and recipients of the false doctrine lurked in the shadows, so to speak, spreading their venom to the hurt of Christ's servants. But Jesus, with eyes as a flame of fire, will pry into their wickedness, and find them out. He will obliterate their name, cutting them out as God did "memory of Amalek" (Ex 17:14).

The text proclaims that Jesus was going to visit the teacher, those who had joined in her teaching, and those who were deceived by her teaching, with sickness and death. To be more precise, they would die of sickness, like King Asa, who died of a disease in his feet, because he sought the physicians and not God (2 Chron 16:12-13). John would call their sin, "sin leading to death" (1 John 5:16-17). Judas committed such a sin – one that led to his own death (Acts 1:17-20,25). In the siege of Jericho, Achan also committed a sin which resulted in his death (Josh 7:1-24). Those who imagine no sickness or death can come from God do well to consider this solemn text.

The sternness of Christ's language is mandated by the severity of the transgression. He will not allow those embracing the very thing that required His death to go unpunished. Those who sow to their flesh will, of the flesh, reap corruption (Gal 6:8). The person who seeks to gain the world, whether by the satiation of base appetite, or committing to false gods, will do so at the expense of their own soul. Jesus asks this poignant question, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37).

THE OUTCOME OF THE JUDGMENT

" . . . all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds." It is obvious that knowing this aspect of our Lord is essential to living acceptably before Him. And why is this so? It is more than a mere matter of Law. Spiritual life requires an awareness of and sensitivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not possible to live with our heads bent toward the earth and, at the same time, receive the blessing of the Lord. The less our consciousness is of Christ, the least capable we become of pleasing Him or receiving good things from Him. His Divine power will NOT sustain the one who chooses to live without considering the Son of God – and there are no exceptions to this rule. The churches need to know this! Legion is the name of supposed Christian people who are really not hearing or following Christ. They have been subverted by erroneous teaching, into doing and believing things that are offensive to the Savior. They will not go undetected!

If we are sensitive to the Lord, we can learn from the experience of others. The churches could benefit from the awful judgment about to be exacted upon some in the church in Thyatira. Their view of Christ could become more precise, and their persuasion of His nature more discerning. In my judgment, we are living in a time when the real Christ is little known. Corrupted views of Him have been so effectively spread throughout the professed church that people appear incapable of discerning Divine judgment. These are truly "perilous times, requiring a clear presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 51

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #10

TO THE FAITHFUL

“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them . . .” (NASB).

The Lord Jesus does not fail to speak to the faithful – in this case, those who have not been carried away with false teaching! Regardless of the spiritual tumult and abuse that is around them, He breaks through the chaos to strengthen His people. It is something you can count on.

The term “the rest” equates with the word “remnant,” elsewhere used to identify those who keep the faith under difficult circumstances and Satanic attack (Gen 45:7; 2 Kgs 19:30-31; 2 Chron 34:21; Ezra 9:8; Jer 50:20; Rom 9:25; 11:5). These are those who, like the three Hebrew children, do not bow the knee to what is false. Such “do not hold” to the false teaching of Satan’s ministers. They are bold to “hold fast” when it is not fashionable to do so. When doctrinal obstacles are thrown in their path, they find a way to get past them without imbibing them. They see through the machinations of men, and hold tenaciously to the truth of God. Jesus now recognizes them, and speaks comfortably to them.

First, he recognizes their refusal to embrace the lies that have been taught by Jezebel. Because of that refusal, they have not “known the depths of Satan.” These were teachings presented as “depths” – a claim to superior knowledge and experience. That is why the text reads, “the depths of Satan, as they call them” (NASB). The American Standard Version reads, “as they are wont to say.” The NIV reads, “Satan's so-called deep secrets.” There is such a thing as “the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10). However those are dispensed by the HOLY Spirit. Satan sets before men things he has originated and calls “deep things,” but they are profoundly evil, are not in any sense true.

Here was a body of people – a remnant – who were exposed to “the depths of Satan” when they, as men are wont to say, “went to church.” It was in a gathering supposedly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ that Satan was allowed by the people to deliver his oracles through one of his prophetesses. This condition continues to exist in many of the churches of our day. Unfortunately, many of them are mega-churches where multitudes of people are regularly exposed to false and damaging teaching. It has become fashionable pre-are the people to receive such erroneous teaching by purported praise music – which tactic has proved very effective.

Jesus relates the condemned teaching to Satan. That was not, of course, the way the false prophetess represented it. The Gnostics called their teaching “the depths of God,” and “the depths of Bythos.” But this teaching came from the depths of hell, and was truly of Satan. Other similar doctrines are appropriated called “doctrines of demons”– master pieces of Satan’s craftiness and subtlety (1 Tim 4:1). This is an aspect of Satan’s activity, of which we must be aware.

The devil is a prodigious teacher, but it is always for evil. He endeavors to make sin reasonable and attractive, often in the name of scholarship as well as license. His teachings, however, anchor people to the cursed order, and incite the anger of the Lord against those who embrace them. Thank God for the remnant that refuse to take hold on such doctrines! Jesus will always find and console that remnant!

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #11

HE WHO OVERCOMES

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5)

Consistently, the fulfillment of the promises are held out to those who overcome (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). In his first epistle, John specifically identifies the overcomer. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 4:4-5,). It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to save the soul. This is accomplished in a two-fold sense. First, faith apprehends the Person of Christ in all His saving efficacy. Second, He dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17), and we have peace with God by faith and through Christ Jesus. Learning Christ (Eph 4:20-21), or assimilating His Person into the fabric of our being (eating His flesh and drinking His blood, John 5:54-60) insulates the soul. Satan is not able to penetrate the walls of salvation that surround the individual in Christ!

Overcoming has to do with maintaining our proximity to, and affiliation with, the Lord Jesus Christ. Victory is more related to keeping the faith (2 Tim 4:7), cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23), and resisting the devil (James 4:7). We actually overcome the devil, the world, and the flesh, indirectly. By focusing upon the Lord Jesus, sin loses its attractiveness, and Satan loses his effectiveness. Just as God is repulsed by the lie, so Satan is driven back by the truth.

The church at Thyatira, by allowing the perpetration of “damnable heresies” (2 Pet 2:1) were rupturing their association with Christ. They willingly remained in the presence of something intolerable to their Lord. As it is written, “what harmony has Christ with Belial” (2 Cor 6:15). The closer we are to error, the further we are from the truth. The less distance there is between the believer and the devil, the more distance there is between him and Christ Jesus. The more tolerant we become of sin, the less tolerant Jesus becomes of us! Overcoming involves keeping a distance between our hearts and the delusions of our adversary. When our “affection” is set “on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2), sin and its perpetrators become offensive to us. That is the posture that enables us to be overcomers.

The promise that follows is only for those who successfully resist the encroachments of the devil—overcomers! It is designed to strengthen the determination of the believer to continue in the faith. It is also calculated to awaken the spiritually lethargic, and engage them once again in the good fight of faith.

Chapter 53

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #12

KEEPS MY WORKS

“And he who overcomes, and keeps My deeds until the end.” (Rev 2:26).

Note this expression: “keeps My deeds . . .” The NKJV reads, “my deeds.” The NIV and NRSV take unusual liberty in translating the text. “To him who overcomes and DOES my

will to the end” (NIV). “To everyone who conquers and continues to DO my works to the end” (NRSV). For those who are interested, the Greek phrase translated “keeps my works until the end” is τηρᾶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου. Literally, it would read, he that keeps until the end my works. Obedience and doing what Christ desires are surely involved in this expression, but they are not the kernel or whole of it.

First, these “works” are in stark contrast to the deeds of Jezebel. It is said of her, “she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray . . . her immorality” (v 20-21, NASB). Her doings were extended in those who embraced her wicked ways. When her followers chose to be identified with her, they began to do her works, carrying out her will and ceasing to do Jesus’ will. The Lord is speaking primarily of identity, not merely a classification of deeds. It was their identity with this spiritual imposter that made the deeds reprehensible.

In this phrase, the emphasis is placed upon what the leader does, not what the followers do. At least two times, Jesus referred to His enemies as engaged in the doing the works of the devil. “I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father . . . You do the deeds of your father . . . You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (John 8:38,41,44, NKJV).

When Jesus says, “he who . . . keeps My works until the end,” He refers to maintaining fellowship with Himself. The works that are “kept” are primarily His redemptive works, and secondarily those relating to sanctification, or participation in His present reign. After all, this is why He has cleansed us from all iniquity – to engage us in His work. As it is written, “Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father” (Rev 1:5-6, NKJV). The designation “kings and priests” has to do with Kingdom ACTIVITY—“works,” or “deeds.”

Jesus referred to His own works as being those of His Father. “But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish; the very works that I do; bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36). “Many good works have I showed you from my Father” (John 10:32). “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him” (John 10:37-38). In the language of our text, Jesus “kept” the works of His Father by keeping in accord with Him. He maintained His fellowship with the Father, thereby enabling His (the Father’s) “works” to be exhibited through Himself.

In the same way, keeping Christ’s works involves Him “dwelling in our hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17), dining with us (Rev 3:20), and manifesting Himself to us (John 14:21). By allowing a false prophetess to promote sin in their presence, the church at Thyatira was pushing Christ out of their presence. Light and darkness cannot mingle, nor will Christ remain where the devil is prominent. It simply will not happen. With strong and compelling words, therefore, Jesus pleads for a return to accord with Himself. He calls them to intimacy with Himself, where His vicarious work is kept in continual memory, and accord with Himself is maintained at all cost. This must be done “until the end,” or the consummation of all things.

From the perspective of our natural environment, “the end” is when the heavens and earth are burned up (2 Pet 3:10-12). From the outlook of our life in Christ, “the end” is the

return of the Lord (Col 3:4). If we consider “the end” from the stance of our warfare, it is when we have finished our course, and are freed at last from all contradiction (2 Tim 4:7; Heb 12:1-2). The promise that follows is ONLY for those who finish the race, who maintain fellowship with Christ, remaining suitable vehicles for the fulfillment of God’s will.

GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS

The very statement assumes a fundamental variance between “the nations” and those in Christ Jesus. “The nations” represent competing bodies of people, organized and functioning with their own interests being dominant. Although political power is ordained of God (Rom 13:1-3), it is not intended to be lasting, nor is it holy, in the strictest sense of the word. This is not an area that is to occupy the preeminence in our thought or devotion.

Nine times “the nations” are mentioned in Revelation. At the beginning of the book, they are consistently viewed as our enemies. We will, as here promised, be given authority over them (2:26). They are depicted as being “angry” at the favor given to the righteous by God (11:18). “The nations” are said to “fall” in the wake of God’s wrath (16:19), and to eventually be “smitten” by the conquering Jesus (19:15). The devil is said to have “deceived the nations” (20:3,8).

Over and above these nations are “the nations of those who are SAVED” (21:24), to whom the dominion will be given. These shall bring all honor to the Lord, in contrast with the nations of the world, who sought to rob Him of His glory (21:26). For them – “the nations of those who are saved” – complete recovery will be realized (22:2). But until then the “nations” of the world are a repository of people in which saints are found. However, these worldly nations consistently oppose the saints now (7:9; 10:11; 11:9).

There may be an allusion to the political situation at Thyatira. This city had a hero named Tyrimnos, who represented their conception of the city’s function in the world. An image of this hero was found on one of their coins. He rode on a horse, carrying a battle-axe, and was perceived as dashing his enemies to pieces. All of that, of course, was merely the imagination of the political entities in Thyatira. What Jesus has to say is absolute truth! He is the real conqueror, and has no real competitors (Rev 6:2).

The extent of our involvement in the reign of King Jesus is far larger than ordinarily perceived. The saints are told, “If we endure, We shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12, NKJV). This is an aspect of being “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), and is precisely what is here promised. Having “authority,” or “power” (KJV), over the nations equates with being made “the head, and not the tail” (Deut 28:13). It is the opposite of having “tribulation” in the world, the current experience of believers (John 16:33). It is true that we “enter” the Kingdom “through much tribulation” (Acts 14:22), but that condition will be brought to a swift conclusion in the fulness of time! Currently, a sharp conflict exists between “the nations” and the people of God. Because we are yet “in the body” (Heb 13:3), we often appear to be inferior in this war. But that is only because our day has not yet come.

The outcome of the conflict between “the nations” and the people of God is vividly depicted by Daniel. He foretold what is here promised by Jesus. “But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and

ever . . . and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom . . . Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Dan 7:18,22,27, NKJV). The language is so lofty, it requires strong faith to embrace it. Those who envision the next world as being relatively inactive, must adjust their thinking. In Christ, we are being cultured for an eternal reign of staggering proportions. When the Spirit says, “the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One,” it is meant to challenge our hearts, thrusting us into more consistent involvement with “the Highest One” now!

This promise, then, speaks of a complete cessation of opposition from the world – from its “nations” among whom the saints were dispersed. Even more, it declares the superiority of the saints will become evident in dominion and rule. We will not longer be subject to the laws of men, but adversarial men will, in a decisive way, be subject to the saints of God. That dominion will be revealed when the saints “judge the world” (1 Cor 6:2). We must be willing to wait for this dominion, and not attempt to seize it prematurely. Remember, that was a temptation Satan leveled at Jesus (Matt 4:8; Lk 4:5-7). Life in this world, therefore, can never be given preeminence in the hearts of God’s people, regardless of the form it takes. Our lives are “hid with Christ in God,” and our “citizenship is in heaven” (Col 3:3; Phil 3:20). That condition does not allow us to be dominated by the world in any form! Jesus.

Chapter 54

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #13

HE SHALL RULE THEM

The “kingdoms of this world,” which govern “the nations” will eventually be swallowed up by the “Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.” Later, this is announced with power in this book: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev 11:15). It is edifying to note that the same language used of Christ Himself, is also used of His people in the promise to the faithful of Thyatira. “She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne” (12:5) . . . “Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron” (19:15). The promise, therefore, again confirms we are “joint heirs with Christ,” and shall “reign with Him.” This is all according to the Psalmic promise which foretold Christ’s ultimate and apparent dominion. “Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel” (Psa 2:8-9).

The rule promised to those who overcome is to be a forceful one – “He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels.” It is also to be a strict accord with the rule of Jesus—“as I also have received from My Father.” As Christ triumphed over His enemies, so will we triumph over ours! Our triumph will be an obvious one – a public one, if you please. While the particulars of this reign are not provided, we do have some key information about it. It is apparent that the judgment of

the world is included in this reign, and perhaps is even the whole of it. Here is fulfilled the affirmation of the Spirit, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (1 Cor 6:2-3). The conflicts of “the nations” with “God’s elect” (Rom 8:33) have not yet been finalized. While the “spirits of just men made perfect” have been removed from the arena of conflict, they have not yet been vindicated. Later in Revelation, we confront “the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (6:9). They are seen as crying out for vindication: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (6:10). They are not told such recrimination will never take place, but that they must wait for it (6:11). The promise before us is the time when what they requested will be fulfilled – and it will come through the saints themselves.

The judgment of the world will be accomplished by God Himself – this is the declaration of Scripture (Rom 3:6; Heb 12:23; 13:4). That judgment, however, will be executed “through” Christ Jesus the Lord, Whom God has appointed for that purpose (Acts 17:30-31; Rom 2:16; 2 Tim 4:1). Now, it is proclaimed that Jesus will accomplish the judgment through His saints, who, in salvation, were effectively joined to Him!

Imagine the trials, or adjudications of earth being resumed, with the saints presiding: Stephen and the rulers of the people, Peter and John before the counsel, Paul before Felix and Agrippa . . . etc. In that climactic hour, the saints shall prevail! At that time, the saints will be the presiding judges. We might hear something like this, “Hear ye! Hear ye! The trial of Stephen will now resume: Judge Stephen presiding!” They shall strike down every argument, misrepresentation, and excuse. Truth shall triumph through them, to the praise and honor of the Lord and His Christ. But only the overcomers will participate in this grand judgment. All who have themselves been overcome, will be struck down as with a rod of iron.

Ultimately, this speaks of our triumph over the wicked one himself, the devil. It is written, “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20). That glorious victory will be carried out to the finest detail! All who have lived under the dominion and influence of Satan will be included in the crushing! All iniquity shall be judged together, as it were. Whether it be the devil himself, his angels, or “the nations” who submitted to his rule, the saints shall play a determined role in their demise!

Praise be to the Lord for a promise so great! The hosts wickedness shall be completely disassembled by means of the saints’ judgment. When it is through, they will be “broken to shivers.” Neither cause nor unity will be left! Every vestige of opposition will be shattered to pieces. There will be no more amalgamation of wickedness – none at all. As Solomon said, “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished” (Prov 11:21).

Chapter 55

THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA #14

THE MORNING STAR

“And I will give him the Morning Star. (Rev 2:28).

The greatest of all promises, indeed – “THE MORNING STAR.” At the conclusion of this

book, Jesus identifies Himself as this Star. “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (22:16). Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, spoke of Jesus as “the Dayspring from on high” (Luke 1:78), or the “Sunrise,” or “Dawning of the day” – the Source of all illumination and refreshment. Malachi referred to Him as “the Sun of righteousness” with total healing efficacy (Mal 4:2). Peter called Him “the Day Star” (2 Pet 1:19).

The “Morning Star” is Jesus Himself, in all of His effulgence. The overcomer will be given the Son of God Himself in a personal and effective way transcendent to anything previously experienced. Now, Jesus “dwells in our hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17). Then, He will give Himself to us in His fulness. This is described in breathtaking language by the Lord Himself. “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when He comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that He will gird Himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them” (Luke 12:37). We are not presently capable of discerning the fulness of this promise. The Lord Jesus will not serve us as His superiors, but as those being rewarded for their faithfulness. He will not “serve” us in the sense of giving us our whims, but granting us the “desires of our heart” (Psa 37:4). There, in the glory, we will be satiated with Christ Himself, with nothing between. There will be no second-hand knowledge, or sense of deficiency. His service will result in our joy and His praise. Since He is the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:3), to have Jesus is to have everything!

He is called the “Morning Star” because of the nature of us spending eternity with Him. The fresh rush of joy and satisfaction will never be lost! There will never be a sense of depletion or dissipation. Eternity with Jesus will be like an ever increasing morning, growing brighter and brighter. New vistas will be beheld, new works enjoyed, and new aspects of His Person perceived. For those willing to “hold fast,” and “keep” Christ’s “works” until the end, there will be no disappointment. There, amidst an incalculable gathering of perfected personalities, you will enjoy a personal union with Jesus that you can scarcely imagine. There will never be a sense of aloofness or distance experienced! No darkness in any form, or inadequacy will ever again be experienced. God be praised for the coming Gift of “the Morning Star!” IS ANYONE

LISTENING?

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (NASB).

This is no mere history book, nor is it a lifeless forth-telling of events to come! This book is personal, and its promises for the individual are real. Again, this is a message to the churches, but the individuals are to hear it personally – “he who has an ear.” That is because the warnings are really on a personal level. If any individual is tolerating things Jesus hates, they are to hear the words the Spirit says. If there is one who longs for a personal word from Jesus, there IS one capable of hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

We have heard Jesus say to a congregation, “Nevertheless I have a few things against you.” To Ephesus Jesus said, “I have this against you” (2:4), but to Pergamum and Thyatira He said, “But I have a few things against you” (2:14,20). His judgment is thorough, and is executed strict accord with His nature and purpose. It is our business to make sure Jesus does not have anything against us or the church with which we are

identified. Now, may you be given grace to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

Chapter 56

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #1

INTRODUCTION

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write . . .”

The book of Revelation is a commissioned book, charged by the glorified Christ Himself to be written and sent to the seven churches in Asia. “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (Rev 1:10, NASB). These churches, we will find, were specific congregations, and represent bodies of professed believers from all ages and in all places. In them conditions are found that are by no means confined to Asia. There are strengths mentioned that can be found wherever the name of the Lord is embraced. There are also deficiencies that are common in all ages – deficiencies that are the direct result of succumbing to delusive assaults of the wicked one.

Because of these common circumstances, the message to all seven of the churches is solemnly concluded with the words, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). This exhortation is even found in the very heart of the book (Rev 13:9). No believer is excluded from the blessing of this book. Its message is pertinent to all churches, regardless of their condition, and to every individual with a capacity to hear what the Spirit declares in Scripture. Let no one fear to take up this book because of the symbolic terms and figures found there. The heart of the message is not found in symbolism, but in the spirit of the book.

Later, we will read of a “dragon” (12:3,4,7,9,13,16,17; 13:2,4,11; 16:13; 20:2), two “beasts” (11:7; 13:1-4, 11-18; 15:2; 16:2,10,13; 17:3,7,8,11-17; 19:19-20; 20:4,10), and a “false prophet” (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). There will be reference to a prostitute enjoying apparent unrestrained success (17:1,15,16; 19:2), and a corrupt city that has forged an alliance with the wicked kings of the earth (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21). We will read of “trumpets” (8:2,6), “thunders” (10:3,4), and “vials” of Divine judgement (16:1; 17:1; 21:9). The Spirit will tell us of the “dragon” spewing out a destructive “flood” designed to destroy a “woman” (12:15-16). The book contains reference to a “bottomless pit” (9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3), “locusts” (9:3,7), and four horses with riders (6:2-8). We will be exposed to the “souls” of those beheaded because of their testimony (6:9). There is even reference to “the mark of the beast” (13:16; 16:2; 19:20), and a dreadful exhibition of Divine wrath that results in a flow of blood from a winepress that is up to the horses’ bridles (15:19-20). We will read of miracles being wrought by the enemy of the saints (13:14-15), and authority being given to a blasphemous beast to make war with the saints and overcome them (13:5).

For many, this makes the book irrelevant. However, we must not allow ourselves to be intimidated by these figures. This is a message to the churches – a needful message. This is a revelation God gave to Jesus, to give to an angel, to give to John, to give to the churches! It is not a novel, but a revelation. There is a most serious tone throughout the book. You will also find a remarkable number of promises, and references to the future of the righteous. The first part of the book (chapters 1-3) is calculated to capture our

attention, producing introspection and a hearty appetite for fellowship with our Lord. The special words to the messengers of the seven churches confirm the relevance of the rest of the book, which is the bulk of the message given to them.

Throughout this book, the message is addressed “to the churches” (1:4,11,20; 2:7,11,17,23,29; 3:6,13,22; 22:16). The entirety of this communication relates to the relationship of the churches to the Lord Jesus Christ. It also has to do with preparation for eternity, the resistance of the devil, and the good fight of faith. We will read of the end of all things, and the events that attend that grand conclusion, i.e., 1 – the coming of Christ (1:7; 3:11; 16:15; 22:12,20), 2 – the resurrection of the dead (20:13a), 3 – the judgment (1:7; 6:15-17; 11:18; 20:11-15; 22:12), 4 – the reward of the righteous (21:1-5; 22:1-5), and 5 – the punishment of the wicked (6:15-17; 11:18; 14:9-11; 20:15). But this is not the heart of the book. In Revelation, Jesus is urging the churches to PREPARE for these things, i.e., to “prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12). He alerts them to the nature of Christ’s reign, and the tactics of their adversary, the devil. If, in our approach to this volume, we fail to remember these things, we will fall into the snare of Scripture-perversion.

With great solemnity, the Lord Jesus Himself warns those who dare to tamper with the words of this book. “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (22:18-19, NASB). That should provide sufficient incentive to keep a godly focus in our review of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

This book is for churches who are meticulous in their approach to teaching, who will not allow false doctrines to creep in—but who have left their first love (Ephesus). It is also for churches that are under severe persecution, a condition requiring everything they have to stand (Smyrna). Churches who have become complacent in the teaching they allow must also give heed to this book (Pergamum), together with assemblies that tolerate the perpetration and holding of doctrines that are reprehensible to the Lord Jesus Christ (Thyatira). Now we will confront a church that appears to be successful and flourishing, but is actually spiritually dead and insensitive to its Lord (Sardis). The message is also for them, from chapter one through chapter twenty-two. Here is a word from Jesus to the saints of all generations, under all conditions, and in every spiritual state.

Chapter 57

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #2

“These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars . . .” (3:1). Four times “the seven Spirits of God” are mentioned in this book. (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). We are told these stand before the throne of God: “there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (4:5). They are also associated with the Lord Jesus Christ and His activity: “having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth” (5:6). This is the heavenly view of the Holy Spirit of God.

WHO IS SPEAKING?

In this book, the term “seven spirits of God” is contrasted with Satanic influences. “And I

saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (16:13-14). The clear implication is that Divine power is superior to that of the devil: “seven spirits” versus “three unclean spirits.” On the one hand, the Spirit of God is impressing redemptive truth upon the people of God, sanctifying and readying them for the world to come. Conversely, Satan’s “spirits” send a flood of delusion into the world, “working miracles” that beguile and set those who receive them against the God of heaven.

The Holy Spirit, in His convicting and sanctifying work, is before the throne of God. That is, He is executing the will of God in the earth. The Spirit is also portrayed in association with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is “He who has the seven Spirits of God” (3:1). Here we see the Spirit working in strict accord with the “great salvation” being accomplished by the Son of God. He never departs from that salvation, and never works independently of it.

When Jesus identifies Himself as the One who “has the seven Spirits of God,” He is declaring He holds the history and destiny of the churches in His hand. They will either fall or be exalted by Him! He is the Fulcrum and Director of the churches, whether they are aware of it or not. The Lord Jesus controls the Divine action taking place in the churches. If they are not in accord with Him, there is no possible way for the Spirit to work in or through them.

The expression “seven Spirits of God” emphasizes the completeness or thoroughness of this work through the Holy Spirit, and perfectly accords with the rest of Scripture. To refresh your mind on the glorious comprehensiveness of the Spirit’s working, consider the following.

- 1 — The church is made a habitation of God THROUGH THE SPIRIT (Eph 2:22).
- 2 — Sanctification, or being set apart for Divine use, is an accomplishment OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2).
- 3 — THE SPIRIT fortifies the human spirit so Christ can dwell within (Eph 3:16-17).
- 4 — We abound in hope through the power OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Rom 15:13).
- 5 — The effectiveness of the Word of God is traced to the WORKING OF THE SPIRIT (Eph 6:17).
- 6 — The circumcision of the heart is accomplished BY THE SPIRIT (Rom 2:29).
- 7 — THROUGH THE SPIRIT, we put to death the deeds of the carnal nature (Rom 8:13).
- 8 — The children of God are led BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD (Rom 8:14)
- 9 — We are alive to God BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (Gal 5:25)
- 10 — THROUGH THE SPIRIT, we anticipate the hope of being righteous (Gal 5:5).
- 11 — BY THE SPIRIT, we were washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11).
- 12 — The presence of Divine attributes within the believer is actually “THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT” (Gal 5:22-23).

When Jesus says, “These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars,” He is alerting the church in Sardis to Divinely appointed means. First, He will work in the church through the Holy Spirit, convicting, strengthening, and activating. Second, He will do so through His messengers, who are His representatives. The Spirit will work through the message of the messengers upon all who hear “what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

Chapter 58

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #3

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The Holy Spirit is always before the Throne of God, executing His good pleasure in accordance with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. No aspect of the Kingdom which we have “received” (Heb 12:28) functions independently of the Holy Spirit: He is always before the Throne. God accomplishes His purpose through the instrumentality of His Spirit. The Lord Jesus governs the Kingdom by means of the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Administrator. No person or church can afford to ignore the One Who stands before the throne, and Who works in strict concert with the reigning Son of God.

The Church of Sardis, then, is addressed by Him who controls and directs the Divine action in the Churches as they exist in the world, and who holds in His hand their messengers, with their history and their destiny. Their response to Him will determine where and how they will spend eternity.

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

The book of the Revelation is the only place in the Bible we read of the city, or church, of Sardis, and the words of Jesus are the only assessment of it we have. Perhaps it would be better for all of us if this were the case with every church. I fear men have plagued us with extraneous and highly biased information about contemporary churches.

We do not know how or when this congregation was established, but Jesus was acutely mindful of it. Heaven and earth are rarely, if ever, in synch in their assessments. We have a classic example of that in the church in Sardis. Church history has largely walked around the church in Sardis. Some mention is made of one Melito, who was the bishop of Sardis in the second century, during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180). He was a prodigious writer and theologian, giving himself fully to the work of the Lord, and remaining single all of his life. He is credited with providing the first list of Old Testament canonical writings, in which he eliminated the Apocrypha writings.

This message accentuates the involvement of the Lord Jesus with His churches – whether anyone else recognizes them or not. We have no idea how large this assembly was. But for the condition in which they were found, they were too large – miserable representatives of the King of kings. Unfortunately, many churches have followed their example, and are altogether too prominent in our land.

The city of Sardis joined with Ephesus in abominable idolatry. They worshipped common goddesses. This condition made Ephesus’ abandonment of their “first love,” and the spiritually “dead” condition of Sardis, especially reprehensible. God’s people are the solitary source of light among heathen cultures. As it is written, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my

absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (Phil 2:12-16, NKJV). We will find the church in Sardis was NOT working out its salvation with “fear and trembling.” God was NOT working in them “to will and to do,” and they were NOT without fault in the midst of a corrupt generation. We should therefore expect our Lord’s analysis of this church to be stern, and with sharp tones and convicting.

Chapter 59

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #3

A NAME THAT YOU LIVE #1

“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (3:1b).

“You have the reputation of being alive, even though you are dead!” (NIV). What a tragic assessment! Those who object to candid words will be offended by this one – but this is the way the Lord Jesus speaks. He recognizes the reputation of the church in Sardis, but declares it to be a false one. Here was a church that had all of the marks of a thriving organization. Stated in contemporary terms, they probably met in an impressive structure, and had a complete “staff.” Imagine them with a “senior minister,” “youth minister,” “senior’s minister,” “counseling minister,” and “events coordinator.” Parallel them with a congregation supplying an abundance of activities for a wide variety of people: a weight loss program, ladies aide society, full range of athletics, and regular outings for retirees. They would be like a modern church that had youth programs, financial counseling, divorce recovery programs, and a multiplicity of training courses. Parallel them with a congregation having an upbeat “praise” service, and offering provisions for people of all persuasions.

Mind you, it is not that such things are inherently wrong – God forbid! It is that they can all be done without Jesus, without the Spirit, and without being alive to God! The church in Sardis wore the name of Christ in a manner approved by the world, and were probably viewed as religious innovators. They had “the reputation of being alive.” But the Lord Jesus denies the validity of this distinction. It was an erroneous one – they were not alive at all! They were “dead” – dead to God; dead to Christ; dead to the Spirit!

Think of these jarring words, and ponder them with great sobriety: “but you are dead!” It is alarming that this could be said to one of Christ’s own churches! Those who imagine you can lose nothing when once you come into Christ do well to consider these solemn words. This church was not always dead! It started out like all true churches begin, with spiritual life! “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but ALIVE to God in Christ Jesus . . . present yourselves to God as those ALIVE from the dead” (Rom 6:11,13, NASB). “But God . . . even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us ALIVE together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:5-6). There are no still-births in the Kingdom of God! Everyone begins the same way. “And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you ALIVE

together with Him” (Col 2:13). Everyone in Christ begins with sensitivity to God, a purged conscience, and a determination to please the Lord. God gives us that beginning, and we are strictly charged not to depart from it (Heb 3:14).

The church in Sardis did not maintain their status. They did not protect their affiliation with Deity! They had a name they were “alive,” but did a miserable job of fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). They did not continue to “walk in the Spirit” and “live by faith” (Gal 5:16,25; Rom 1:17; Heb 10:39). They did not quit doing things, but ceased to pursue “this ONE thing” (Phil 3:13). They had become like the Pharisees who provoked Jesus when He dwelt among us. Their pious looks and manners were deceiving, for they were “like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.” On the outside they seemed to be devout, but those looks were misleading. (Matt 23:27,28).

Of old time, before the coming of Christ, Israel also fell into this grievous transgression. The Lord indicted these people through Isaiah. “Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins” (Isa 58:1). There is no acceptable excuse for the church in Sardis, or any other church, becoming dead toward God. The examples of Israel as a nation, and the Pharisees as leaders, have been provided to show the possibility of going backward. The Lord has also clearly articulated the effect of such a condition upon Himself. There simply is no acceptable excuse for any professing church to be ignorant of such things.

Chapter 60

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #4

A NAME THAT YOU LIVE #2

“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev 3:1)

Having the reputation of being alive, yet being dead to God, is having a “form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5). It is, as the Spirit says of sensuous widows, “being dead while she lives” (1 Tim 5:6). This is a circumstance where an unacceptable contradiction exists between appearance and reality, between the outward and the inward man. Actually, every person is dead and alive at the same time. For those choosing to live by faith, they are “dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). For them, “the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness” (Rom 8:11, NASB). But the condition at Sardis was quite different. They had a name of being alive to God, but were actually dead to Him – two conditions that it are impossible to have simultaneously. When we were accepted by God in Christ Jesus, we were “made alive” to God, being delivered from a state of death toward Him (Rom 6:13; Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). In the new birth, individuals are delivered from the world, wherein they were “dead” (Eph 2:1-2), and transferred into the kingdom of God’s Son, wherein they are alive and sensitive to God (Col 1:13).

But Sardis had returned to their original alienated and dead state! Jesus does not say they are nearing death, but that they ARE dead! The chord of life between them and heaven had been severed, according to their own will. God no longer heard them, and they no longer heard Him! O Sardis! You have mothered many a church! Our generation is cluttered with the spiritual wreckage of dead churches – congregations who live oblivious of Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25). Their programs are all in place, and

the institutional machinery is well oiled and functioning impressively. Their names are in lights, so to speak, and their brotherhood looks up to them. But they are really “dead.” God is not using them, and they are not seeking Him. They are an institutional blotch on the canvas of Divine purpose, attempting to live apart from the Lord Jesus, though ignorantly doing so.

Jesus is speaking about appearance without spiritual reality. This is promise without performance, and an outward show of strength that lacks both vigilance and assurance. Our Lord spoke of this condition when He “dwelt among us.” His blistering words to the Pharisees provide insight into the effect such a state has upon the Lord of glory. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt 23:27-28, NASB). Luke’s Gospel states the condition in arresting words, showing that men did not detect the corruption of these pretended leaders. “Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it” (Lk 11:44, NASB).

The church in Sardis looked good, but was corrupt. It appeared to excel, but had lapsed into a state of spiritual death. It wore the name of Jesus, but had incurred His indignation. It existed outwardly, but was void of the life of God. It is particularly important that we consider this church because of the popularity of outward display in our time. Our Lord has spoken to this subject frequently, and with great clarity. First, things that rank high with men are an abomination with God. “That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15b, NASB). We must never forget that natural men, or those who are not born again, are alienated from God. They are not capable of making a proper assessment of things pertaining to God. Their thoughts are foolishness, and they cannot please God in their thoughts, words, or deeds (Rom 8:5-8). It is easy enough to gain a name for being “alive” before such people. They are too easily impressed, because they consider only what they see with their eyes. The solemn confession of those who live in the Spirit is quite different. “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:18, NASB).

Chapter 61

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #5

A NAME THAT YOU LIVE #3

“ . . . thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” (Rev 3:

Those who are “alive” are being transformed by their spiritual vision. As they “look to Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2), they are changed by the sight. This is the process described in Second Corinthians 4:6. “For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” A moral and spiritual change takes place as we focus upon the Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ. That transformation is accomplished by the Spirit. As it is written, “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (3 Cor 3:18). Those involved in this process are “alive” to God

(Rom 6:11). They are in communion with the Lord, and are being oriented for the world to come.

The church in Sardis, however, was “dead.” They were not concentrating on Christ, and were therefore not being “transformed by the renewing of their mind” (Rom 12:1-2). Like the swine, their eyes were slanted toward the earth, and thus they incurred the wrath of the Lamb. Jesus did not die, nor was He exalted, in order that a mere appearance of religiosity might be maintained by His people. He is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18). That task, however, cannot be accomplished in insensitive souls. Where individuals are anaesthetized toward God, the channel of Divine communication is broken. O that this were more fully known by the professing church. Legion is the name of those who are dull and obtuse concerning spiritual things, but have an acute awareness of “the world and the lust thereof!”

I am reminded of the word to some spiritually lethargic Ephesians. “Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light” (Eph 5:14, NKJV). Mind you, spiritual life begins by being quickened, or made alive, from the dead. As it is written, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins . . . even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:1-6, NKJV). I cannot conceive of a more serious condition than one which requires that the Savior, in consideration of one of His own churches, says, “YOU ARE DEAD!” The church in Sardis had lapsed back into the state from which they were once recovered! What a tragedy! There is nothing – absolutely nothing – about salvation that contributes to such retrogression. It is the result of neglect and slovenly spiritual manners. Those in such a condition are not given a lengthy period to recover. They must rise from the dead spiritually like Jairus’ daughter, the widow of Nain’s son, and Lazarus.

Men have grown accustomed to “dead” churches, but Jesus has not. Some theology would say the church in Sardis was “dead” because it was never really alive. But that is only a contrived explanation required by a flawed theology. This was a legitimate church, with a legitimate messenger. Jesus declares Himself to be walking “in the midst” of the churches, in which Sardis was found. They had “heard” and “received” the blessed Gospel, and were numbered among “the churches” to whom the Spirit spoke.

The word translated “dead” (nekros) is used 132 times from Matthew through Revelation. It consistently means a state of separation and inactivity, referring to the condition from which all men will be raised in the last day, the death of Jesus Himself, a state of spiritual alienation from God, and the spiritual relationship of the believer to sin (;Mat 8:22; 10:8; 11:5; 14:2; 17:9; 22:31,22,32; 23:27; 27:64; 28:4,7; Mk 6:14,16; 9:9,10,26; 12:25,26,27; Lk 7:15,22; 9:7,60; 15:24,32; 16:30,31; 20:35,37,38; 24:5,46; John 2:22; 5:21,25; 12:1,9,17; 20:9; 21:14; Acts 3:15; 4:2,10; 5:10; 10:41,42; 13:30,34; 17:3,31,32; 20:9; 23:6; 24:15,21; 26:8,23; 28:6; Rom 1:4; 4:17,24; 6:4,9,11,13; 7:4,8; 8:10,11; 10:7,9; 11:15; 14:9; 1 Cor 15:12,13,15,16,20,21,29,32,35,42,52; 2 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20, 2:1,5; 5:14; Phil 3:11; Col 1:18; 2:12,13; 1 Th 1:10; 4:16; 2 Tim 2:8; 4:1; Heb 6:1,2; 9:14,17; 11:19,35; 13:20; James 2:17,20,26; 1 Pet 1:3,21; 4:5,6; Rev 1:5,17,18; 2:8; 3:1; 11:18; 14:13; 16:3; 20:5,12,13).

I have taken the time to list these references to underscore the seriousness of the condition in Sardis. Recovery was imperative, else they would forever be cast away from the “presence of the Lord and the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:9). There is not a single

optimistic word in all of Scripture given to those who are spiritually dead – who are unresponsive to the Lord. Those who imagine a departure from the Lord will only bring the loss of a few rewards are in the grip of Satanic delusion. To a measurable degree, their very position has been produced by the spiritual death they presume to analyze.

Was a revivification of this church possible? Indeed it was! That is why this message is sent. They still had some vestiges of spiritual life. Although those traces were “ready to die,” they could again be brought forward. They could once again “hold fast” and “repent,” if only they would do so. Jesus sends no message to those who cannot be recovered! There is no word of exhortation or hopeful message for the devil and his angels. They are unrecoverable! When Jesus delivers a word to a person or a church, it is accompanied by Divine power. Remember, He said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63, NKJV). That word only needs to be embraced to become effective in the recipient. This is a Kingdom principle that opens a “door of hope” (Hos 2:15) in the most grievous of circumstances.

Chapter 62

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #6

THE EXHORTATION

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” (Rev 3:2)

Long ago, the Divine nature was revealed in the Lord’s attitude toward recalcitrant Israel. “Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD” (Jer 31:20, NKJV). Now, with stirring words, the Lord Jesus calls this “dead” church to rise from the ash-heap of spiritual demise. He speaks in the capacity of the searching and empowering One, Who holds the messengers in His hand, and determines the destiny of the churches.

BE WATCHFUL

“Be watchful . . . (“Wake up,” NASB), (3:2a, NKJV). Because of our “adversary the devil,” who “\pard *walks about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8), watchfulness and alertness are imperative. It is not possible to survive the attacks of the evil one in a state of slumber, to say nothing of death. The church in Sardis was not doing well. It had fallen into the “sleep of death” (Psalm 13:3). Unless they recovered from this disgraceful condition, they would be pruned from the Vine (John 15:1-8). They had to awaken, get the “eyes of their heart” (Eph 1:18) opened, and recover themselves from the snare of the devil (1 Tim 3:7; 2 Tim 2:26). No one will dwell forever with the Lord who dwells outside of the circumference of hearing. Already, they had drifted into treacherous waters, making recovery extremely difficult. Many a soul, and church as well, has lingered in a state of spiritual obtuseness and lethargy too long!

The Word of God speaks to this situation, sounding the alarm before professed believers

digress into an unrecoverable state. “And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:11-12). This admonition equates to “Be watchful!” or “Wake up!” The alarm sounded to the Romans is much like the one given to the church in Sardis. Watchfulness is required because of the imminent coming of the Lord! Already, they had succumbed to the artifices of the devil. They had been lulled into a state of spiritual insensitivity, where the return of the Lord was no longer prominent in their thinking! They must recover from this condition!

Watchfulness is frequently linked to the subject of Christ’s return. “WATCH therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matt 24:42). “WATCH therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matt 25:13). Because of the events that will accompany our Lord’s return, faith “looks” intently for it to occur. “LOOKING for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). The posture that must be found in all believers is that of “awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7, NASB). Jesus has apprized humanity that those who are not watching for Him will have their possessions plundered when He returns. They MUST be ready and watching. “But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (Matt 24:43-44, NASB).

Salvation is calculated to prepare the individual for the return of Christ! The Gospel proclamation produces and maintains an environment of spiritual illumination. Those who walk in that light will not be caught unawares by the return of their Lord. As it is written, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then LET US NOT SLEEP as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are awake (living in the body) or asleep (have died), we may live together with Him” (1 Thess 5:4-10, NASB).

The church in Sardis had digressed into a condition that would condemn them if they did not recover. By Christ’s own assessment they were “dead,” even though they had a reputation for being “alive.” One, and only one, alternative was open to them. The name, or reputation, they had among men was not recognized in heaven. They MUST recover, and rise from their spiritually dead state. As it is written, “Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you” (Eph 5:14, NASB). They did not need to develop a strategy for recovery, but to wake up and be watchful! The Lord was approaching, and they were not aware of it. Their assembly, whatever may be said of it, was not marked by an acute awareness of the Lord Jesus Christ. They stood like the man with the withered hand before the Lord’s Christ. For them, waking up was equivalent to that man stretching out his withered hand at the command of the Lord.

Chapter 63

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #7

STRENGTHEN WHAT IS ABOUT TO DIE

“ . . . strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die . . . ” (3:2b, NASB).

There is a remarkable resilience to life given by God. This is prefigured in the effects of the tree of life, even after men were excluded from it. Adam lived 930 years, Seth 912 years, Enos 905 years, Cainan 910 years, Jared 962 years, Methuselah 969 years, and Noah 950 years (Gen 5:5,8,11,14,20,27; 9:29). There is also a remarkable durability to spiritual life. The nature of life in Christ demands that this be the case. This stamina enables the believer to withstand fierce assaults by the evil one. Extended persecution has been remarkably endured by the faithful in Christ Jesus. This resilience, however, also makes recovery from severe setbacks possible, like that of Sardis. The “smoking flax” can flame again, and the “bruised reed” can once be strengthened (Isa 42:3; Matt 12:20). The “great salvation” in Christ Jesus enables its recipients to make awesome recoveries. Thus it is written of the day of salvation, “Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations” (Isa 61:4, NASB).

What are “things that remain?” They are “things that accompany salvation” (Heb 6:9). The fear of God, a tender conscience, the joy of the Lord, the remission of sin, and access to God, are a few (2 Cor 7:1; Heb 9:14; 10:22; Luke 1:77; Eph 3:123). In a remarkable reference to regeneration, the Spirit speaks of “those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:4-5). Is it possible that such things could die within the very people receiving them? We may be sure that such a demise is not necessary. There is nothing about salvation that would cause or encourage such a dissolution. The death of such things would certainly dishonor the Lord Jesus and prove offensive to all who walk in the light as He is in the light. No valid reason can be adduced for the things in reference to be “ready to die.” The situation in Sardis was much like that of a dreadful disease that had attacked the last remnant of hope, and was threatening to destroy it all. Their condition of being “dead” was a very real; one! Recovery was, indeed, possible, but was not guaranteed. That is the reason for our Lord’s exhortation to them.

There is a strain of teaching that denies such things CAN “die.” Whether the church in Sardis had formally adopted the doctrine or not, it had embraced it in practice. This church was conducting itself as though the Lord Jesus was not needed. Their affiliation with Christ was in name only. The doctrine denying the possibility of losing these things is referred to in various ways. “Perseverance of the saints,” “once in grace always in grace,” “once saved always saved,” and “eternal security,” to name the more prominent terms. Others like to speak of “carnal Christians,” another expression conspicuously absent from the Word of God. All of them, whether intentional or not, assume that Christ remains associated with those who are “dead” to Him – a condition from which He saved them in the first place. Neither, indeed, can it be countered that the church in Sardis was really no church at all. It was recognized by Christ as a church – one of the churches in which He stood, and whose messenger was in His hand.

How can dying virtues and graces be strengthened. First, it will require the interposition

of Jesus Himself. It is He who will not “quench a smoking flax” or “break a bruised reed.” The church must avail itself of His fellowship, into which it has been called. He must be the heart and soul of their message and the single objective of their quest. It took an immediate association with Jesus to save them in the first place, and it will take the same thing to restore them. That close posture must be maintained if they are to “strengthen the things that remain.” There is no salvation at a distance from Jesus! The Spirit states the case this way, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (Col 2:6-7).

Second, the seven-fold Spirit must work to enliven and bring spiritual productivity. They must cease looking on things that “are seen” (2 Cor 4:17-18), thereby “grieving” and “quenching” the Spirit. They were being dominated by the “carnal mind,” which is “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). What few things that “remained” in Sardis would wither and die if they were not “strengthened.” As it is used here, the word “strengthen” means make firm, or establish, primarily by resolution. Just as it takes a decision to “neglect so great salvation” (Heb 2:3) by a preference for other things, so determination is required to strengthen dying spiritual qualities. The church in Sardis began its spiritual life “in heavenly places,” along with all other saints (Eph 2:6). That is the realm where the necessary strength will be acquired. The gifts of God flourish in the heavenlies, they die when men are dominated by the world and things that are seen.

Spiritual recovery can only be realized in the light of the Divine countenance. As we choose to live in the consideration and fellowship of God and Christ, unacceptable manners of life not only are apparent, they become repulsive. This results from walking in the light. “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7, NKJV). The church in Sardis will need Divine assistance to strengthen the things that remain. With strong intention, they must abandon religious life that does not require conscious involvement with their Lord. As it is written, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8, NKJV).

Jesus has not asked an impossible thing of this church. There still remained a mustard-seed-life, capable of redirecting their entire focus. This was their last opportunity to recover, and they must do so with zeal! This requirement is wonderfully expressed elsewhere by the Spirit. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:1-2, NKJV).

Suffice it to say, the Spirit cannot dominate in the periphery of spiritual life. The less aware we are of Christ, the weaker we become. The more we are controlled by the things of this world, the less responsive we are to God. When anyone attempts to live in a manner that does not necessitate constant recourse to the throne of grace, what was received from Christ begins to die. It makes little difference what kind of theology is developed to allow for such conduct, God will not allow spiritual life to continue where there is no interest in or commitment to it.

Chapter 64

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #8

IMPERFECT WORKS

“ . . . for I have not found your deeds completed (“perfect,” KJV) in the sight of My God” (3:2c, NASB).

The Christian community has given a lot of consideration to “works.” Much of its formalized thought, however, has been more reactive than productive. Knowing that we are not justified by works (Rom 4:2-7; Gal 2:16), some view them as completely inconsequential in salvation. Others, reacting to that perversion, have placed in inordinate emphasis upon them, even neglecting the grace of God.

It is incumbent that we see “works” as the Lord Jesus sees them. It is not enough to adopt a theological position on the subject. The church in Sardis had “works,” but they were not adequate. The Lord Jesus reveals that His God did not consider them “complete.” This means that “works” are more a process than simple deeds or actions. They are the result of our involvement with the Lord. How wonderfully this is seen in the word of the Lord to the Philippians. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). The phrase “work out” reveals our participation in the process. The phrase “It is God who works,” shows “works” are not ours alone. The “work” of God is to our “works” what the spirit is to the body. Our works without God’s work are like a dead carcass.

“Works,” or deeds, that are “not complete” are works in which God Himself is no longer active. They are the result of digression, not progression. Regardless of their number or the fervency with which they are produced, “works” wrought apart from faith are incomplete and imperfect. These are the kind of works Jesus exposed in Matthew 7:22-23. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Their works were “not perfect” – “not complete.” They came short of Divine expectation! Those who consider works completely inconsequential must reckon with this assessment.

A principle of the Kingdom is seen in this judgment. The Revelation reveals Jesus as “the First and the Last” (1:11,17; 2:8,19; 22:13). He is the Initiator of every aspect of “the salvation of God” (Acts 28:28). The experience of salvation itself, as well as every expression of it within the believer, finds its Source in Christ. But He is also “the Last,” and everything in between. At no point does Jesus lose His absolute essentiality. From this viewpoint, works that are incomplete are those in which the Lord Jesus no longer participates. They lack Divine objective, and therefore are wrought without Christ. Legitimate works are not automatic, they require the effort of men and the influence of Christ. The church in Sardis performed duties of all kinds, but no duty was fulfilled completely. They were constantly beginning, but never brought anything to a proper conclusion. Their resolutions were languid, their strength feeble, and their light dim. They probably maintained their reputation before men, but their works were not perfect before God. Their works were their own expression, not that of Christ. It is not that they did not DO enough, they did not do it within the provision of Divine fellowship. Works wrought apart from Christ obtain no value or recognition by the Living Christ.

Chapter 65

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #9

REMEMBER

“Remember therefore . . .” (Rev 3:3a, NASB).

Remember! — those in a fallen state must reach back to the commencement of their life in Christ. The consideration of future glory alone will prove too challenging, for they have become insensitive to heavenly realities. Now, though they are “dead,” they must recall their tender beginnings with Jesus. This recollection will provide an environment in which the Lord can work, and recovery can be realized.

HOW YOU RECEIVED AND HEARD

“Remember therefore what (“how,” KJV) you have received and heard . . .” (3:3b, NASB). There is a slight difference in the translations of this verse. Contemporary versions read “Remember . . . WHAT . . .,” while the older versions read “Remember . . . HOW you have . . .” In the former, the teaching heard and received is emphasized, while the MANNER in which it was received is the thrust of the latter. There is a sense in which both views are correct. The message itself is “the power of God unto salvation,” and duly considered, it will provoke a return to the Lord. In another way, recalling the effectiveness of a whole-hearted embrace of the Gospel will provide an resourceful contrast with the deadness now engulfing them. In my judgment, the latter consideration more accurately portrays the “mind of the Spirit.” Lexically, the word “how” (“what,” NASB, NiV) comes from a word that means, to determine how something happens: how? in what way? by what means?

This “dead” church is admonished to remember how they “received and heard” the word of their salvation. Here is a church like the shallow and rocky soil on which the Word fell. “These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble” (Mark 4:16-17, NKJV). Competing interests finally overtook them, even though they maintained a religious appearance. The “gladness” with which they once received the Word was no longer present. Now, they were not seizing the Kingdom with violence, as a prize to be grasped (Matt 11:12). Once, like the Thessalonians, they had heard and received the Gospel in a commendable and effective manner. With joy, they had “received the word of . . . as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thess 1:6, 2:13). Now Jesus calls upon them to ponder those precious beginnings.

Notice the order of the words: “received and heard,” NOT “heard and received.” This emphasizes the quality of their hearts when they heard. The Gospel cannot be heard discerningly by those whose hearts are unprepared. In His parable of the Sower, Jesus described “the good ground” as “those . . . with a noble (“honest,” KJV) and good heart” (Luke 8:15). When, therefore, Jesus exhorts this church to remember “HOW” they heard, He is calling them to a consideration of their hearts at that time. They were more honest, and more open, to the Word of the Lord. Now, their religion had cast them into a deep sleep, and their hearts were neither honest nor good. They had to get back to the point where they COULD receive the Word of the Lord. The recollection of their beginning would provide an climate in which Jesus would assist them in making a

recovery.

Chapter 66

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #10

HOLD FAST AND REPENT!

“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.”

“Remember therefore . . . and keep it and repent. . . ” (3:3c, NASB).

Not only are those in Sardis to recall how they received and heard, they are to hold on to that reflection, retaining it in their hearts. They are to dwell upon it, and not allow it to escape their minds again. They had apparently been caught up in the mechanisms of lifeless religion, and therefore broke loose from their spiritual moorings. They were adrift on the Black Sea, and headed for sure destruction.

Many souls could have recovered from spiritual death itself, if only they would have dwelt upon the times when their hearts were sensitive to the Lord! Such memories, strengthened by the convicting Spirit (John 16:8-10) and interceding Christ (Heb 7:25), will provoke repentance. When the heart makes a comparison between the blessings of our entrance into life with Christ, and the deadness of religion without Him, repentance is possible. There must be a reason to return to Christ – a moral requirement is not enough! Jesus does not just urge them to repent, He provides them with an effective inducement to do so.

All of this presumes nothing has been altered in the heavenly places, into which we are initially raised with Christ (Eph 2:6). Nothing has changed in that realm! The same power that brought us from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-3) can recover us from spiritual decline. But woe to that person who seeks to come out of a spiritually “dead” state by any other means. If only the fallen can look up, and find their way back to an acute consciousness of Christ, their light will flame again! However, when one is in the grip of a surface religion that is sorely lacking in spiritual substance, all of this is highly unlikely, if not altogether impossible. Further, those who subscribe to contrived spiritual disciplines, such as recovery programs and the likes, forfeit Divine help, for the Lord does not work through systems devised by the wisdom of men – not even if they use Scripture. God has declared the wisdom of this world to be “foolish” (1 Cor 1:20; 3:19), and it is imperative that it be so viewed. The Word of God is the Spirit’s sword (Eph 6:17), and the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). The attempt to use any other approach to the obtaining of spiritual life is nothing more than an exercise in vanity.

Tender soul, you do well to ponder often the effectiveness of your persuasion of Christ Jesus and His “great salvation.” Such memories have a sanctifying influence because of their association with Divine workings. Then – when we “received and heard” – the Holy Spirit was convicting and enlightening us. The Lord Jesus Himself was appealing to our hearts, and the purposes of God the Father were being realized. Such sacred contemplation is like standing on holy ground! Naught but good can come from it. To attempt to employ any other means to spiritual recovery is a transgression of the greatest magnitude. It involves the neglecting of Jesus Christ, the quenching of the Holy Spirit, the ignoring of the Word of God, and trusting in men.

Chapter 67

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #11

THE THREAT

“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” Rev 3:3)

Jesus does not take a lack of response to Himself lightly. A serious condition requires stern Divine measures. Because contemporary religion has managed to obscure this aspect of Christ’s character, it is particularly important that we give ear to His words. “If therefore you will not wake up (“watch, KJV), I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you . . .” (3:3e, NASB). Jesus has appealed to the will of those whom He assessed as “dead.” A theology, therefore, that assumes the inability of those in the grip of death to respond to Christ, is a gross misrepresentation of the case. When Jesus says, “If therefore you WILL NOT watch” (KJV), He means, If you do not fervently want to watch, or awaken from the sleep of death . . . To say it another way, If you REFUSE to watch and be alert. The underlying supposition is that failure to awaken would be owing to their own stubborn and calloused will. Yet, at the time Jesus addressed this “dead” church, it was possible for them to awake – to respond to the Divine summons.

If the uninformed argue that the “dead” cannot awaken, due to their debilitated state, they must enter the throne room and readjust their reasoning. God commissioned Ezekiel to command a valley of bleached and dry bones to “hear the Word of the Lord” (Ezek 37). Jesus commanded dead Lazarus to come out of the tomb (John 11:43). He also commanded a man with a withered hand to stretch it forth (Matt 12:13), a lame man to take up his bed and go to his house (Matt 9:6), and summoned Peter to walk on water (Matt 14:29). Were any of these possible from an earthly point of view? The factor that makes obedience to the word of Christ possible is the power that accompanies His word. As He said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). When Divine power meshes with the human will, nothing is impossible! For this reason, a refusal to respond to Christ’s words will not be overlooked or excused!

Christ threatens decisive and destructive action! “I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.” That coming will not be to bless, rescue, or strengthen. It will be an hour of judgment and condemnation. It can be fulfilled in a judgment like that which fell upon Jerusalem because of its rejection of Christ (Luke 13:35), with dreadful disruption and consequences in the flesh. Ultimately, it will occur when the Lord Jesus “is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:8-9, NKJV).

Those who walk at a distance from Christ are lingering on the precipice of disaster. They are sure to encounter “the wrath of the Lamb” at an unexpected time. If the church in Sardis does not take Jesus seriously, giving heed to His words, they will not be able to recover from their condition! This is the circumstance to which Jesus referred when He said, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,” and “He who believes in the

Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:18-19, 36, NKJV). There is nothing more fearful than facing an angry Christ! Yet, that is precisely what will happen to those who refuse to respond to His warning.

Some churches glory in their name, their position in the community, and the soundness of their doctrine. They have a name that they are alive, but their works are not the result of Divine fellowship! Others boast about their Scriptural order and pattern, yet are not noted for their sensitivity to Christ Jesus. Spiritual life is more important than all religious activity, regardless of the precision with which it is executed. Dead churches, if they do not recover in the strength of the Lord, will eventually sink into the mire of Divine forgetfulness. The epitaph over their tomb will be, “A dead church that had a name it was alive.” I fear there are more such churches in our land and time than we dare to imagine.

Chapter 68

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #12

A FEW NAMES – A REMNANT

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. (Rev 3:4)

There is always a “remnant” – a group of people who have not sold out to the devil. In Elijah’s day, a remnant of 7,000 had kept the faith, though undetected by the prophet himself (1 Kgs 19:18). They were kept by God because of their faith. During a serious decline in Israel, when prophets prophesied falsely, priests ruled by their means, and the people robbed God, a remnant continued to gather and speak with one another about the Lord (Mal 3:16-17). Even in Babylon, where the people of God has been carried captive, a “remnant” of four young men maintained their walk with God (Dan 3:16-18; 6:13).

Wicked environments do not necessarily neutralize the faith of God’s people. Paul kept the faith in a prison in heathen Rome. Joseph and Moses kept it in the idolatrous culture of Egypt, in which they were foreigners. Noah kept the faith when the entire world did not, as Enoch did before him. The land of Uz was noted for a single individual who stood strong for God when viciously attacked by the devil – and he did so with “friends” who proved to be “miserable comforters” (Job 16:12). This has always been the manner of the remnant.

In Sardis, there were “a few names” who did not succumb to the wave of death that had swept over that congregation. They probably were not popular with men, but they were with Jesus! He did not forget them, even though there were not many of them. They had kept the faith because of Him! But notice how Jesus refers to this faithful remnant. He tells the dead people about the living ones: “YOU have a few names . . .” Dead churches need to know about the people of God who are within them! They are not the ones invited to the conventions, nor are their names in the brotherhood journals. But their names are written in heaven, and some day they will judge the dead congregations in which they survived by God’s grace. I must confess that, due to Divine enablement, I have also survived some dead environs. It took extraordinary effort to do so, but the labor was not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). Think of it, those “few names” in Sardis had to overcome the church with which they were affiliated.

Too, this was not merely a group, but were referred to as “a few names.” This is a more precise translation than “people,” as found in modern versions. These were noted as

specific individuals, not merely a group. Jesus said the “good Shepherd” called His own sheep “by name” (John 10:3), and elsewhere the Spirit testifies, “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim 2:19). These were not sustained as a group, but as individuals. The value of their association was found in their individual faith and commitment.

The Lord’s temple is made up of persons who are alive to God. Thus it is written, “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house . . .” (1 Pet 2:5). This cannot be said of a religious institution! The value of an individual in an institution is found in their association with the organization. But that is not the case with the remnant. The “few names” in Sardis obtained value in spite of the institution! In God’s kingdom, the worth of the group is determined by the spiritual condition of the individuals in it. That is how heaven assesses the matter.

These “few names” were noted for keeping their “garments” undefiled, or uncontaminated. They evidently “hated even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23). They had not allowed the deadness of the church in Sardis – the one with which they were identified – to effect them. That was a remarkable achievement! Jesus does not commend them for trying to straiten out the church, but for keeping themselves from being contaminated by it! The remnant had maintained “pure religion” in a dead religious environment. They accepted and obeyed the solemn commission to “keep” themselves “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). O, that such fervor were more evident in our time! All about us are religious people with the taint of the world upon them. We cannot get away from them, but we had better not allow them to contaminate our lives.

The “garments” of which He speaks are “the garments of salvation” and “the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10). It is a way of speaking of our thorough acceptance with God (Eph 1:6). That acceptance MUST be maintained. How frequently this is urged upon us by the Spirit. “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21) – that is keeping your garments undefiled. “Abide in Me, and I in you” (John 15:4) – that is keeping your garments undefiled. “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you” (John 15:7) – that is keeping your garments undefiled. The remnant refuses to allow worldly manners and thoughts to interrupt their fellowship with the Son. The “garments of salvation” have been given to them, and they are to keep them pure and clean! Jesus will not overlook them being soiled, nor will He overlook diligent ones who keep them clean, not allowing the “fashion of this world” (1 Cor 7:31) to corrupt their thinking.

Chapter 69

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #13

THEY SHALL WALK WITH ME IN WHITE

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” (Revelation 3:4)

And what will the Lord do for those maintaining separateness from the defiling world order? “They shall walk with Me in white!” That is, their purity will become as evident to everyone as His own impeccable holiness! When Jesus returns, He will be “glorified IN His saints” (2 Thess 1:10). The vital association He has had with them will become evident to an assembled universe! This is involved in the glorious affirmation, “When Christ who is our life appears, then YOU ALSO WILL APPEAR with Him in glory” (Col 3:4, NKJV). Centuries before Jesus, David expressed his anticipation of this condition.

“As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Psa 17:15). It is then, in our revealed identity “with” Christ, that the saying will be fulfilled, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isa 25:9).

To “walk with” Christ “in white” is equivalent to, “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). It is the fulfillment of, “If we endure, We shall also reign with Him,” (2 Tim 2:12), and being “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). This is the grand culmination of faith, and that for which God’s “great salvation” prepares us. How refreshing it must have been for the Sardis-remnant to hear these words!

THEY ARE WORTHY

Whatever you may think of being “worthy,” you had best make provision in your thinking for the Divine vocabulary! Jesus affirms the “few names” who had kept themselves clean “ARE worthy.” It is not necessary to attempt to step over or around these arresting words. They come from the King Himself, and strictly conform with the truth. Elsewhere, Jesus spoke of “they which shall be ACCOUNTED WORTHY to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead” (Luke 20:35). When speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem and a snare that would come upon everyone dwelling upon the earth, the Master said, “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be COUNTED WORTHY to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). The Colossians were urged to “walk worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:10), and the Thessalonians were admonished to “walk WORTHY of God” (1 Thess 2:12).

The Spirit also declared persecutions to be a Divinely appointed means of being “COUNTED WORTHY of the kingdom of God” (2 Thess 1:5). Paul even prayed God would “count you WORTHY of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess 1:11). This is a worthiness undergirded by grace, but which also involves the perseverance of the saints under the pressures of this world. It is a precious promise indeed, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have THE RIGHT to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev 22:14, NKJV).

While it is certainly true that we are not worthy of God’s great salvation (Eph 2:5-8), the abundance of grace we have received (Rom 5:17), and the great outpouring of His Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5), there is a worthiness that can, yes, must be attained in Christ Jesus.

It is a remarkable achievement to survive a surrounding of spiritual death. When the children of God engage in hearty efforts to keep their garments clean, and to be undefiled, their activity is logged in heaven. They will receive due recognition in the world to come! The cognition of this reality will provoke sustained godly effort, something that is imperative for safe arrival at the appointed goal.

Chapter 70

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #14

THE PROMISE

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” (Rev 3:5)

As is our Lord’s manner, a declining spiritual condition becomes the occasion for lofty

promises. Remember, it is through the “exceeding great and precious promises of God” that we become “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet1:4). These provide the greatest and most effective incentive for recovery and spiritual stability. Again, the promise is only given to “He who overcomes . . .” (3:5a, NASB). No defiled or spiritually dead person can lay claim to this promise. It is only for the survivors – those who stand fast under attack, and refuse to again be identified with the world.

CLOTHED IN WHITE RAIMENT

“He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments . . .” (3:5b, NASB). This is the promise of spotlessness in the presence of the Lord. It denotes the thorough acceptance of God, and the complete absence of moral and spiritual contamination. It is the declared objective of Christ’s redemptive work. “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:15b-27). The people of God are admonished to fervently seek this condition.

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Pet 3:14). Every vestige of sin will be removed in that day—both personally and collectively. There will be no deficiency of any sort. The effects of transgression, so evident now, will forever be gone. Praise the Lord.

If this seems too far from you, do not lose heart! Salvation makes provision for this to happen! Hear the word of the Lord. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).

The church in Sardis must once again become conscious of Jesus! Even though dead, recovery in this world was possible, as well as eternal life in the world to come. Hear the promise of the Spirit. “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev 19:8, NKJV). A powerful incentive, indeed!

Chapter 71

THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS #15

NAME NOT BLOTTED OUT

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” (Rev 3:5)

These are hard words for those believing names cannot be blotted out of the book of life! “. . . and I will not erase “ (blot out,” KJV) his name from the book of life . . .” (3:5c, NASB). The “book of life” speaks of those who are recognized and received by God, through Christ Jesus. It is, so to speak, the heavenly log of those who are “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11). If those in Sardis, who had “received and heard” the good word of God, could not have their names “blotted out of the book of life,” this is an absurd threat, and is to be ignored. Later, Jesus will tell the churches of the importance of this book. Those whose names are “not written in the book of life” will succumb to the deceiver, being unprotected by the Lord (13:8).

This “book” will eventually be opened, and its contents made known (Rev 20:12). The

dreadful fate of anyone and everyone unlisted in this book has been revealed. “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). We are told that “only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life” will enter into the Presence and glory of the Lord (21:27). Not to be written in “the book of life,” therefore, equates to being condemned, or being cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

First of all, every person is to give diligence to have their name inscribed in this book. Second, every effort is to be expended to ensure it is not blotted out. Names are written there when people are made alive in Christ Jesus. They are removed when they become dead – and the church in Sardis was told it was “dead.” Jesus does not say their names could NOT be blotted out. Nor, indeed, does He say if they are lost in the end, that their names never were in the book. Those views are only the contrivances of men. Those who concocted them will answer to Christ for their wicked invention, and those who subscribed to them will answer for choosing to believe men over the “Author and Finisher” of their faith.

This book of life is being updated as long as the world stands. Names are being written in it, and names can be blotted out of it. At the very close of this book, Jesus sounds a solemn warning to anyone presuming to tamper with this very book. “If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev 22:17). Notice, “HIS PART” in the book of life, the holy city, and the things (promises) written in this book would be taken away. It is possible to have a “part” in this book, and to lose it all – to be alive to God, and to become dead! Sardis was in a most ominous situation!

NAME CONFESSED BEFORE THE FATHER AND HIS ANGELS

But Jesus will do more for the overcomer than keep His name in the Book! “. . . and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels . . .” (3:5d, NASB). Here is a promise with great power. To be acknowledged by Christ before His Father and all of the holy angels is worthy of your extended consideration. Jesus mentioned this confession during His earthly ministry. “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32, NKJV). Again He said, “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8). It is as though Jesus said, “I will publically acknowledge to be a citizen of heaven – and that before Judge. Overcomers will be recognized openly in that day, even though they were obscure and unacknowledged in this world.

Overcoming the world involves crucifying the desire for its recognition. Much of corrupted religion is the direct effect of seeking this world’s approbation in some way. The preeminent consideration for every believer is the approval of Christ! On one occasion, Paul emphasized this requirement to Timothy. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15, NKJV). If you commit yourself being identified with Him here, you do not need to be concerned about Christ’s acknowledgment of you there.

The significance of being confessed to the angels is marvelous. As with God, this confession will not be for the mere conveyance of information. All along, God knew those who were His. The angels also knew, because they are the appointed ministers for

those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). The confession is for our sakes – a reward for fighting a good fight and keeping the faith. It is God’s manner to give recognition to those who overcome the world. It is revealed in Scripture by the records of holy people. Think of the names that have been confessed by God in the Bible. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, the prophets, John the Baptist, the Apostles, Timothy, Titus, Philemon . . . etc. And what is the effect of that Divine acknowledgment upon the household of faith? It brings a profound appreciation for them, as well as great glory to God. It reveals the effectiveness of Divine workings, and the sustaining power of God.

And what shall the confession of overcomers yield in that day? Great and extended praise of and glory to God. A swell of rejoicing shall rise among the triumphant ones that will reverberate throughout eternity. Too, a full confidence of Divine acceptance, and a sense of belonging will dominate that was never before realized. Make it your business to obtain this promise.

CONCLUSION

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:6, NASB). No church or person can afford to ignore this word! The Spirit is saying this to the churches, not to the world; to the saved, not to the lost. The presence of this message in Scripture confirms we are still in the battle-zone – still in the realm of danger. Our adversary stalks us with remarkable tenacity and craftiness. In his arsenal are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. He uses the world, with all of its allurements, and energetically seeks to divert our attention to the seen. In his employ are demons, who disseminate doctrines that will condemn those embracing them (1 Tim 4:1). He uses wicked teachers who are disguised as “ministers of righteousness,” and he himself comes to us as “an angel of light” (1 John 2:15-17; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Cor 11:14-15). Aside from this, we have the treasure of God in an “earthen vessel,” and contend with “the law of sin” that dwells “in our members” (2 Cor 4:7; Rom 7:14-25). Anyone imagining they can navigate through those treacherous waters while they are spiritually asleep, or out of touch with the King, has already been deceived.

We are not to be intimidated by this condition, but rather seek to avail ourselves of Divine provisions by fighting the good fight of faith. Salvation brings supplies adapted for our very condition. The Holy Spirit has been sent into our hearts to fortify us for the battle, and provide needed resources. The Lord Jesus is seated on the right hand of God, mediating the New Covenant, which is orienting us for glory. Even the holy angels are engaged in ministering to us. There is no reason for any one to come short of the rest prepared for us. But it is all accomplished while close to the Son – nothing is accomplished at a distance, or in a state of spiritual slumber. May this message sensitize your spirit to the jeopardy of being insensitive to your King!

Chapter 72

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #1

INTRODUCTION

As we near conclusion of the personal word to the “seven churches which are in Asia,” several things are becoming clearer. First, the Lord Jesus has a preeminent interest in the condition of His churches. Before He begins to open the future, He speaks to them of their situation, exhorting them to actions appropriate for those who have been “washed

from their sins,” and constituted “kings and priests unto God” (1:5-6). There is a good reason for our Lord’s approach. A weak and debilitated church will not profit from “the Revelation.” If the church has left its “first love” like EPHESUS, it will not be able to receive the Master’s word. If it is under severe persecution like SMYRNA, it must be encouraged and strengthened in order to take hold of the Word with hope. A church that has become sloppy in the doctrine it holds, like PERGAMUM, must have its spirit sharpened, else “the Revelation” will only be a theological novelty. When a church becomes tolerant of the dissemination of reprehensible doctrines, like THYATIRA, allowing false teachers to propagate, and its members to hold, teachings Jesus hates, its ears have become “dull.” It must be awakened to the nature of life in Christ, else they will despise “the Revelation.” If a church has become so meshed with the world that it is dead to God, though retaining a name of being vibrant, like SARDIS, that condition must be corrected before it can profit from the word of the Lord – now, or in the world to come. Now we will see that a church fighting the good fight of faith, like PHILADELPHIA, must be strengthened by Divine commitment to be ready for what is to come.

The opening of the future is of no value unless the churches are spiritually alert, walking in the Spirit, and living by faith. Jesus does not first divulge the future, then exhort the churches to get ready for it. He first addresses the churches, judging their deficiencies, and commending their virtues, in order to increase His fellowship with them. That is the Divine manner! We have been “called into the fellowship” of God’s “Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). If that fellowship is weakened, or even ruptured, a condition exists that cannot possibly be productive. It makes little difference what apparently marvelous works have been done, or what impact has been registered upon the religious or non-religious communities. If the churches are not walking in the light of Christ’s countenance, they are wandering and staggering about on the precipice of eternal ruin.

KINGDOM CLARITY

Here, in Asia, was a cluster of churches – a “brotherhood,” so to speak. They all had a good start, and were all recognized by heaven. But all were not recognized in the same manner, nor were all loved, as they say, “unconditionally.” Ephesus was threatened with removal (2:5). Smyrna was assured their tribulation would be brief (2:10). Pergamum was told Jesus was about to come and fight against them (2:16). Thyatira was told Jesus was about to kill some of its members with death (2:22-23). Sardis was warned Jesus was about to come on them like a thief, and they would not know the hour (3:3). Now Jesus is going to tell Philadelphia of an unprecedented opportunity He is going to open to them (3:8).

Anyone imagining that Jesus treats all of the churches the same, needs to sit at His feet and learn. There is a Kingdom standard by which all churches are measured. It is NOT the standard of a purported pattern or governmental structure. It is not the size of the congregation, or the aggression with which it has entered into missions. A good name, as fine as that may be, is not the standard by which the churches are measured. Nor, indeed, are they evaluated upon the basis of their community outreach, and their role in meeting the needs of those about them. Their relationship to Christ Jesus is the point! Their fellowship with both the Father and the Son is the issue! Whether or not they are standing within the circumference of hearing is critical. A church that does not have “the mind of Christ,” is not enjoying the “communion of the Holy Spirit,” and is out of touch with the

Lord, is a blotch on the canvas of Divine intent. There is no place in the heavenly kingdom for such churches.

That is precisely why Jesus aggressively speaks to them. He seeks to correct their waywardness and strengthen their virtues. He speaks to bring them close to Himself, where they will be protected from the fiery trials He foretells. He calls them close to His bosom, where they can quickly hear and respond to gracious words. The Lord Jesus is bringing His churches away from the realm of danger, and into the spiritual safety zone of heavenly places. It will do not good to hear about a fierce enemy of the church if we insist on dwelling in spiritually far-off places. But, if our lives are consciously and joyously “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), we will emerge from every trial, and stand at last in the presence of the Lord with exceeding joy.

Now, Jesus speaks to a commendable church. As you might expect, He speaks in a special way, giving special promises, and granting special assurances. We will find that those who maintain their faith are always commended by Jesus. It will also be confirmed that Jesus will grant unusual opportunities to work with Him to those who take advantage of the “things that accompany salvation” (Heb 6:9). Faithfulness is always rewarded! It is never vain to serve the Lord with zeal.

Chapter 73

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #2

WHO IS SPEAKING

“He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this” (Rev 3: 7).

Here again is an aspect of the glorified Christ that is not directly mentioned in the account of John’s initial vision of Him (1:12-16). His HOLINESS is depicted by His “head and hair” which were “white as wool,” and His feet which were as like “FINE BRASS.” His TRUTHFULNESS is seen in the “golden band” around His waist, His eyes, which were “like a flame of fire,” and the “sharp two-edged sword” that came from His mouth.

JESUS SPEAKS TO THE CHURCHES IN HIS GLORIFIED CAPACITY. They are to hear Him as the glorified, exalted, and reigning Christ. No longer may they know Him “according to the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16).

Later, those who were martyred for their faith cried out to the glorified Lord, “O Lord, holy and true . . .” (6:10). In keeping with His exaltation, the people of God are always to consider Jesus from a spiritually elevated point of view. He is not to be beheld as our peer, but as our Savior. The purpose of God is not to further identify Him with men, but to conform men to the image of His Son. The church will not be helped on its way by a mundane view of Jesus.

HE WHO IS HOLY

Notice, Jesus does not say He is true, then holy. He is holy, then true. The truth of Christ may only be comprehended within the context of His holiness. Jesus WAS dead (1:18), but He IS holy! God affirmed this quality to Israel, saying “I AM holy” (Lev 11:44-45). Peter adduces this to be an appointed incentive for us being holy (1 Pet 1:16). This is the trait ascribed to the Lord seated upon His throne. “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev 3:7; 4:8). The six-winged seraphim of Isaiah’s vision also cried out “holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:3), as they encircled the heavenly throne. This Divine quality is so prominent that the tabernacle, where service to God was

rendered, was divided into two dedicated sections. They were called “the HOLY place,” and “the most HOLY place” (Ex 26:33-34). With rare insight for his times, David confessed, “But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel” (Psa 22:3, NKJV).

The Lord Jesus, from the day of His entrance into this world until now, has been noted for being “holy.” Even in the womb of Mary, He was known as “that Holy One who is to be born” (Lk 1:35). The demons recognized Him, confessing Him to be “the Holy One” (Mark 1:24). On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared Jesus to be God’s “Holy One” (Acts 2:28). He later declared Him again to be “the Holy One” (Acts 3:15). The early church, persuaded of His nature, prayed to God concerning “thy Holy Child Jesus” (Acts 4:27,30). No one has ever seen Jesus insightfully without being impressed with His holiness. It is a quality that becomes evident to all perceiving His Person. What is the meaning of “holy,” and why is such an emphasis placed upon this Divine attribute? Holiness is like a multifaceted jewel.

MORALLY – Morally, it means free from any and all contamination – pure. There never has been, is not now, nor will there ever be, any deviation from uprightness in the Lord Jesus. While we have been “made partakers of His holiness” (Heb 6:4), Jesus has always been holy. He “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet 2:22). Although “tempted in all points” as we are, He was, in every sense of the word, “without sin” (Heb 4:15). How marvelously His moral purity is proclaimed in Hebrews 7:26. “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.” He Who is holy speaks to the church in Philadelphia. What He has to say to them is associated with that spotlessness, and is to be comprehended as apart from sin.

Christ’s holiness is considered within the context of His redemptive work. He is “holy” after having passed through a defiled world, been assaulted by a corrupt enemy, and been “tempted in all points like as we are” (Heb 4:15). In view of this circumstance, He is able to make us holy, even though we have no holiness of our own. This is involved in the expression, “But by His (God’s) doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).

PURPOSE – From the standpoint of purpose, HOLY means sanctified, or set apart for Divine service – dedicated. In redemption, Jesus Christ has been Divinely appointed to effect the salvation of all who believe. He is “THE Christ,” anointed by God as the exclusive Captain of our salvation” (Heb 2:10). His holiness and truthfulness are directly related to the fulfillment of God’s purpose, as revealed in our salvation. This means that holiness and truth are brought within our reach in Christ Jesus. These are indispensable resources for recovery and stability in the faith – and they are available in abundance in the Lord Jesus Christ. When He examines the churches, He is functioning in His appointed role, for He Who saves is also He Who judges. His assessment of the churches will be precise, and with a keen interest in keeping them in the heart of God’s will. Jesus is “holy and true!”

What remarkable attributes! Both are absolute and eternal. Everything the Lord Jesus says and does is holy and truthful, because He is holy and true. His word can never be questioned, nor can His actions. His government is meticulously righteous, and strictly adheres to the “eternal purpose” of God. This is particularly important to grasp in a day when professed believers question His government, and some even declare they are “angry” with the Lord. Such foolhardy expressions must be repented of. They are

evidences of unbelief, and contradict what the Lord has said about Himself. Regardless of the circumstances in which individuals or churches find themselves, they must subordinate the flesh and confess “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments” (Rev 16:7). Even the souls of those who were slain for their testimony cried out, “. . . O Lord, holy and true . . .” They did not question why they died at the hand of their enemies, but when their lives would be avenged (Rev 6:9-11).

The church in Philadelphia had been opposed, and unjustly so — but the Lord was still “holy and true!” They had confronted members of “the synagogue of Satan,” and yet the Lord, Who governs all things, remained “holy and true.” Jesus does not call them to ponder the wickedness of their adversaries, but the holiness and truthfulness of their Lord.

Chapter 74

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #3

HE WHO HAS THE KEY OF DAVID

“ . . . who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this.”

Here, Jesus refers to one of the most precise messianic prophecies of Scripture. Though veiled at the time it was written, its meaning has been opened up in the Person of Christ. A brief consideration of that prophecy will assist us in seeing the power of the message to the church in Philadelphia.

“Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your tunic, And tie your sash securely about him, I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. And I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house. So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken” (Isa 22:20-25, NASB).

Here, God divulged the nature of His great salvation, to be accomplished between seven and eight centuries after Isaiah’s prophecy. The Messiah would be invested with total authority; i.e., “I will entrust him with your authority.” Everything pertaining to the eternal purpose of God would be placed into His hands. The authority would be His. Like a Father, He would care for and feed those under Him; i.e., “He will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.” He would also be given power to open opportunities and to close them – a decision that would not be able to be effectively opposed; i.e., “Then I will set the key of the house of David on His shoulder, When He opens no one will shut, When He shuts no one will open.” The coming Savior would be established in the Presence of the Lord, invested with all the glory God; i.e., “And he will become a throne of glory to His Father's house. So they will hang on Him all the glory of His Father's house.” He would take the full responsibility for all that offended the Father, absorbing the shock of Divine judgment for those things. The Messiah would, for a season, be “cut off” out of the holy place. At that time, the offences laid upon Him would be removed from the presence of the Lord; i.e., “In that day," declares the LORD of

hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken."

When, therefore, the Lord Jesus speaks to the church in Philadelphia, He speaks as the Anointed One of God – the One Who is governing the world in the interest of His people. He alone is recognized by the Father as worthy of all honor. His is a righteous reign, "holy and true" in all aspects.

Now He mentions "the key of David," a term denoting His government of circumstance. He provides opportunities and removes opportunities in strict consonance with God's eternal purpose. Open doors are opportunities to be involved in that purpose. Closed doors are the removal of opportunities that are out of harmony with the Divine agenda. An example of this aspect of Christ's reign is when the Spirit did not allow Paul and his companions to go into Bithynia, but rather directed them to Macedonia (Acts 16:7-10). Jesus was using the keys!

Chapter 75

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #4

THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write . . ." (Rev 3:7)

Geographically, Philadelphia was located 30 miles south-east of Sardis, on the road to Laodicea. Spiritually, it bore little or no resemblance to the churches in those cities. If there is one thing we should learn from the message to the seven churches, it is this: all churches are not alike, nor do they receive the same appraisal by Christ Jesus!

History confirms this city suffered frequently from earthquakes. Along with Sardis, it was destroyed in a catastrophic earthquake in A.D. 17. Because of the richness of the soil, however, the inhabitants rebuilt this city, refusing to leave.

Again, this is the only place in Scripture where this church is mentioned. Although men tend to evaluate churches within the context of their prominence among men, Jesus will have nothing to do with such assessments. He encourages churches that are often unknown to the world, and chides those who may be well known. Every "unknown" congregation that is holding fast the word of Jesus, and refusing to deny His name, will be comforted by this message.

JESUS KNOWS!

"I know your deeds . . ." (Verse 8a).

Once again, the Lord alerts the church to His knowledge of what they are doing (2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15). The church is to function within an acute awareness of the Lord's perception of it. As His "body," the church is to "hold fast" to its "Head," never losing its sensitivity to Him. If the voice of Jesus can penetrate the hearts of those in the churches, it will awaken a spiritual sensitivity that will revolutionize their activities. Much of what is done today in name of Christ is a mere performance, lacking the spiritual awareness of the Lord, which is imperative to acceptable service.

AN OPEN DOOR

"Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut . . ." (Verse 8b).

What a marvelous circumstance! It reveals that Jesus is pleased with this church. The church in Philadelphia will be afforded the opportunity of working together with Him and obtaining a great reward. There can be no doubt what the expression "open door" means.

It is a figure of speech used by Paul, and based upon Isaiah's revelation of the authority of the Messiah. At Ephesus "a great door and effectual was opened" to Paul (1 Cor 16:9). At Troas also "a door was opened" for him (2 Cor 2:12). He asked the Colossians to pray "that God may open unto us a door for the word to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col 4:3). In these three expressions, it is clear Paul refers to opportunities to spread the good news of the Gospel – to work in the Lord's harvest (Matt 9:38).

This "open door" was a special gift and privilege vouchsafed to the church in Philadelphia. None of the other churches received such a blessing! It is as though He said, "I am opening an opportunity for you to work together with Me, and no one will be able to take the opportunity from you." Special blessings are for special servants. Those who expend meager efforts for Christ need not expect "open doors" to be set before them. The preeminent requirement for stewards is that they be "faithful" (1 Cor 4:2). Faithful stewards will find their stewardship expanded by means of open doors.

Many churches function year after year without any apparent awareness of the Lord's ability to open doors to them. They think of themselves as a society of friends rather than the body of Christ, and thus have no real Kingdom distinctions. It is imperative that we see the governmental aspect of Christ's present role. The government of God, which is over everything in heaven, earth, and under the earth (Phil 2:10), has been placed upon Jesus (Isa 9:6-7; 22:21-22; Psa 2:6-12; 110:1-4; Jer 23:5-6; Zech 6:12-13). With faithfulness and timeliness, He is managing the affairs of the world in the interest of the salvation of God and the deliverance of His people. Involved in that government is the participation of the saints. Think of the historical incidents where godly people were used to fulfill the purpose of God. Noah was used to prepare an ark to the saving of his house (Heb 11:7), thereby preserving a remnant through which the Messiah would come. Abraham was called into the Divine purpose, to have a son through whom the Messiah would come and the world be blessed (Gen 12:1-3). Joseph was raised up to preserve a people alive during a great famine, even being placed on the throne of Egypt (Gen 50:20). Moses was chosen to lead the people of God out of bondage, deliver the Law, and provide the beginning books of Scripture (Ex 3:1-11; John 1:17). David was given opportunity to defeat a giant foe, record prophetic utterances, and be a type of King Jesus (1 Sam 17:1-23; 2 Sam 7:27). The holy prophets were raised up to show forth the "sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" (1 Pet 1:10-11). All of these were open doors – opportunities to come along side of the Living God, participating in the fulfillment of His purpose.

As soon as Jesus entered His ministry, He began opening doors. Calling His disciples to Him, He sent them forth to invade the kingdom of darkness, and preach the Kingdom of God (Matt 10:5-20). Later He sent out 70 to again assault Satan's domain and bring deliverance to the captives (Luke 10:1-10). Stephen and Phillip, early deacons, were used to do great works, bring people into the Kingdom, and expose the wickedness of the religious elite of the day (Acts 7-8). Paul was singled out, and given a staggering commission to preach the Gospel to the heathen nations of the world (Acts 22:21; 26:18). In the case of the Revelation, John the beloved was given opportunity to see and record key events of the future (Rev 1:1-9).

All of these are accounts of Jesus using the keys of Kingdom authority. They were open doors, into which the humblest of men entered, shaking the powers of darkness, liberating those who were long bound by sin, and strengthening the souls of those who embraced

the Son of God by faith. Open doors! Every church can experience open doors if they will “cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart” (Acts 11:23)! I recall with joy the experience our congregation in Indiana had in this regard. Though unrecognized in official religious circles, the Lord Jesus opened doors of remarkable effectiveness to us. Both the Banner of Truth (formerly edited by my father, Fred O. Blakely, and now by brother Albert Stoner) and The Word of Truth (edited by myself) were birthed in our assembly. They were distributed to thousands on a global scale, working staggering effects for God – and they continue to this day. Jesus opened a door for radio ministry to us. The Word of Truth radio broadcast was national in scope, a fifteen minute broadcast of powerful preaching. Later, a one-hour call-in program, The Word of Truth Radio Forum, was instituted for the Chicago area. I was given an opportunity to hold two crusades in India in 1980 and 1985. The first was attended by 15,000 people, and the second by 20,000 – each attending four sessions a day for two weeks. A tract ministry was also opened to us, with millions of tracts being distributed throughout the world. In addition, a video ministry was opened to us at Good News Productions, where I recorded five series of lessons consisting of a total of 65 half-hour tapes. Since moving to Joplin, open doors have continued to open through our website, video postings (over 2,000) on the web, extensive ministries and visits to Burkina Faso West Africa, Pakistan, Kenya, and India, etc. These are just a few of the doors opened to us. They involved no other religious institution. We did not launch any aggressive campaign to discover these opportunities. They were simply opened to us by the King.

Jesus affirms He will open a door to the church in Philadelphia. He does not identify what the opportunity will be, and it is not necessary that we know. Because of their faithfulness, they would be given the privilege of more extensive involvement with Jesus. The promise is recorded to alert us to this Kingdom manner! It is important to note that Jesus NEVER commended or condemned a church because of its size. It is what they DID that was the issue! With the church at Philadelphia, their spiritual posture afforded them additional opportunities to invest in eternity. A congregation wholly submitted to the Lord will be used by Him. They will have doors opened to them that would otherwise be impossible. O, how this aspect of spiritual life needs to be more fully known!

Chapter 76

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #5

YOU HAVE A LITTLE STRENGTH

“ . . . because you have a little strength . . . ” (Rev 3:8c).

Jesus tells this church why a door will be opened to them. It is not because they are large. It is not because they have made a name for themselves, or achieved great things, as defined by men. It is not because of their helpful ministry in the community, or the offering of their facility (if they had one) for the use of the various groups in the city. Rather, it was because they kept His Word and did not deny His name, even when their strength was small! To put it another way, “Because you have but a little power, and have made good use of it, I will open an opportunity to you that no one will be able to take from you.”

While I have no desire to major on this, it should be apparent to all that this contradicts an institutional emphasis which constrains people to despise smallness and little strength. But there has been more wrought for God with little, than there ever has with much!! A

rod in Moses' hand, a jawbone in Samson's hand, and a sling in David's hand, did more than massive armies with impressive arsenals! I fear that the minds of those in the nominal church have been polluted with distorted and polluted definitions of ministry and religious activity.

Jesus is not speaking of spiritual strength, but of strength, or ability, from the earthly perspective. They had nothing, from an earthly point of view, to recommend them for an "open door." Like the Apostles, they were "weak" while others, like Sardis, appeared strong (1 Cor 4:10; 2 Cor 13:9). Like saints before them, they had been made strong "out of weakness" (Heb 11:34). They could say with Paul, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4:8-9). Like the churches of Macedonia, the church in Philadelphia functioned "beyond their ability" (2 Cor 8:3). Like Paul, when they were weak, then they were strong (2 Cor 12:10).

In all probability, this was not a "large congregation," whatever that wholly humanistic term may connote. Its smallness, despised by the world, did not deter it from having an "open door" placed before it by Jesus the King – an opportunity to serve His interests, and work along side the King of kings!

All through Divine history, this has been the manner of the Kingdom. The Law was not given to Egypt or to Babylon, but to Israel, who "were the least of all peoples" (Deut 7:7). And when our blessed Lord chose men to be Apostles, He did not go to the Jewish Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees, or Lawyers – much less to the governmental halls of the Roman senate, the higher schools of learning, or the business community. Those classes would have been considered "strong" by the worldly mind-set! Instead, He went to, what would be considered, the weak – fisherman (Matt 4:18-22), tax collectors (Matt 9:9), and even a Canaanite (Mark 3:19)!

We must not allow Babylonish religion to cause us to look with contempt upon smallness, lack of reputation, or the absence of worldly credentials. God has NEVER made selections on this basis, and the tendency to do so now does not come from Him!

Chapter 77

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #6

YOU HAVE KEPT MY WORD AND NOT DENIED MY NAME

" . . . and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." . . ." (Rev 3: 8d).

In a heathen culture, where following Christ was not in vogue in any sense of the word, the church in Philadelphia maintained its hold on Christ's word. They did not allow the recollection of Divine utterance to be displaced by worldly considerations. This is equivalent to keeping the "affection" set on "things above, and not on things on the earth" (Col 3:1-2).

Although highly unusual in the Western church, this is a Kingdom trait that is an absolute requirement for Divine acceptance. Salvation depends upon hearing Christ's word and believing on the God it affirms: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). However, salvation is not only initiated by means of Christ's Word, it is also maintained through that means. "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

The position of Christ's Word in the Divine economy is made clear in Scripture. He is God's exclusive Spokesman in these last days. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Heb 1:1). God has nothing to say to us that does not come through Christ Jesus! What the Son has said sheds light on all revelation before Him. All inspired utterances after Him have been given by His authority and commission. Christ's words, as "spirit and life" (John 6:63), bring the Divine perspective within our grasp. That is why, when He sent out the Apostles, He said, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-15, NKJV). Again He said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26, NKJV).

When, therefore, the Lord Jesus commends the church in Philadelphia for keeping His Word, He confirms they have lived in the light of what He has made known. They have kept the perspective His words provide, and not allowed the world to dominate their thinking. The matters accentuated by Christ were emphasized by them. The priorities He revealed were their priorities also! All of that is involved in keeping Christ's words.

To refuse to deny Christ's name is refusing to deny association with His Person in any sense. When the world put pressure on them to minimize their identity with Christ and emphasize their identity with the world, they refused to do so. An example of denying Christ's name is found in Peter's denial of Jesus the night of His betrayal. When confronted about his association with Jesus, He denied that he had any (Matt 26:69-74, NKJV). When asked if he was with Jesus, He replied "I do not know what you are saying." When another maid challenged him by saying "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth," he replied, "I do not know the Man!" When at last someone said, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you," Peter "began to curse and swear, saying, 'I do not know the Man!'" That bitter night, over which Peter ultimately gained the victory, became the occasion when he denied Christ's name! He did recover from this the same night he denied Jesus.

There were pressures brought to bear upon the church in Philadelphia also. It was an idolatrous city, given over to the propagation of the Grecian culture and language, which gave no value to Jesus. But this despised assembly refused to let go of its identity with the Son of God. It would not diminish its emphasis of the Lord's Christ, and turn its commitment elsewhere. It knew nothing of distracting fads and momentary bursts of religious novelty. That is something of what is involved in not denying Christ's name.

Chapter 78

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #7

WHAT JESUS WILL DO

The Lord Jesus has commended these brethren for what they have done. Now He will tell them what He will do in their behalf. The Lord WILL "show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him," aggressively seeking an opportunity to do so (2 Chron 16:9). There is a Divine reciprocation that answers every conscientious Kingdom

endeavor. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you . . .” (Psa 50:15). “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32). This, then, is a Divine characteristic upon which believers may rely. Now the Master specifies the marvelous things He will do for His faithful church in Philadelphia.

IN REGARDS TO THEIR ENEMIES

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee” (Verse 9).

Here is one of the most arresting promises in Scripture. It is not given to a gigantic and prosperous congregation, but to one “with a little strength.” It is not given to a church that has been written up in the Philadelphia Journal for its contribution to the community, but to an assembly that has kept Christ’s word and has refused to deny its association with Him.

The Philadelphian assembly was opposed by other gatherings – in particular aggressive Jews who continued to deny Jesus Christ. Paul well said of these people, “. . . who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess 2:15). The opposition of these people had been oppressive to the brethren in Philadelphia, and thus their strength had been weakened. These enemies said they were Jews, but Jesus affirms they were not. He was not speaking of their ethnic origin, but of their spiritual condition. As it is written elsewhere, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Rom 2:28-29). The Son of God goes even further, declaring these wicked people to be “the synagogue of Satan” – a gathering through which Satan worked, and in which he was dominant. Think of it! It could be said of this opposing religious assembly, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (John 8:44). The Lord makes clear that whatever claim to godly identity was made by these people, they LIED in so designating themselves.

The Lord will not ignore the enemy! He will make them do something that will be against their will, and contrary to their preference – but He will make them do it anyway! “I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” Three things the powerful Christ will MAKE happen! He will MAKE these pretenders COME to the church in Philadelphia. He will MAKE them WORSHIP at their feet. And, He will MAKE them know He loved the church in Philadelphia! Those who are extreme in their exaltation of the free will of man do well to consider this passage! God can MAKE Nebuchadnezzar live in a field and eat grass, whether he wants to or not (Dan 4:33). He will not impose salvation on any soul, but ultimately, He will impose condemnation on all who reject the Son! In the case of the oppressors of the church in Philadelphia, He will MAKE them acknowledge the truth of what His people confessed all along – identity with Himself.

The fulfillment of this promise can be in at least three different ways. First, it could be fulfilled in the conversion of their enemies. Thus, like Saul of Tarsus, they would acknowledge the validity of the faith they once opposed. Second, in their enemies seeking their aid and assistance in the time of trouble. How many times I have seen this

happen, when scoffers come, pleading for prayers in the time of crisis and sorrow. Third, and most probably the primary way, they would acknowledge Christ's love of His people in the day of judgment. The day of reckoning is coming! Not only will Jesus confess all who have confessed Him, all of the enemies of His people will also acknowledge His love was set upon the very ones they hated and opposed. Like Haman had to acknowledge the preference of the king for Mordecai (Esther 6:11), so will all who have opposed the saints confess their preferred status! The Sanhedrin will have to admit Jesus loved Stephen, whom they stoned. Nero will have to bow at the feet of Paul and Peter, whom he had killed. Cain will bow at the feet of Abel, and Herod will bow at the feet of John the Baptist!

Our labor is not vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58)! Like the church in Philadelphia, if we hold fast to Christ's word, and refuse to deny His name in any way, our enemies will be brought to confess to the truth of our faith! They will have to admit to an assembled universe that they were wrong, and we were right in cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. They will have to admit Jesus loved us, and we were right in abiding in that love and refusing to leave it.

Chapter 79

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #8

KEPT FROM THE HOUR OF TESTING

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” (Rev 3:10)

What is “the word of My “patience”? It is the teaching that exposes us to the hostilities of the world, and requires great effort to maintain! It is the word that, when embraced, sets us against the course of this world. Because this church kept that word, refusing to let it go that temporary relief might be obtained, Christ would grant them a special blessing. He would keep them from “the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.”

First, we learn from this text that Christ's blessings are often discriminating. He does not give the same things to all people. Often people represent Hebrews 13:8 as though this was true: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” However, that expression does not mean Jesus treats everyone the same. Extraordinary effort will bring extraordinary blessing! Those who extend themselves for Christ will experience Him extending Himself for them! That may contradict some forms of theology, but it is nevertheless true. Those who walk close to Christ will receive more than those who walk at a distance.

What was “the hour of testing?” First, it was a time of TESTING, or TRIAL – a time when the fabric of human endurance and character would be put to the test. From the standpoint of Satanic initiative, it would be “the evil day,” when a barrage of distracting influences, both physical and spiritual, are hurled at the believer (Eph 6:13). Second, it is a time allowed by God when the fabric and strength of faith is tested. Our text informs us this was not, however, a provincial testing, but a global one: “that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.”

This word contradicts great bodies of theology – and it has proceeded from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. Some deny that such an “hour” is possible, while Jesus declares to the

church in Philadelphia that it is coming. There is an immediate and future perspective to this word. There was something imminent from which these brethren would be delivered. Many conceive this to be the fierce persecution initiated by Trajan and continued by Adrian, his successor. It was greater and more extensive than that of Nero and Domitian. This bloody persecution began in 108 A.D., a few years after the Revelation was written. It lasted a full 30 years, and was marked by such atrocities the heart of man is scarcely capable of dwelling upon it. Pliny the Second, not a Christian himself, was so moved by the heartless slaughter of Christians, that he wrote a letter of appeal to Trajan. It fell on deaf ears. In it he certified that “many thousands were daily put to death.” included in that letter were these words. “The whole account they gave of their crime or error (whichever it is to be called) amounted only to this — viz.. that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight, and to repeat together a form of prayer to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves by an obligation — not indeed to commit wickedness; but, on the contrary — never to commit theft, robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, never to defraud any man: after which it was their custom to separate, and reassemble to partake in common of a harmless meal.” Ignatius, a great man of God, died in this persecution. His words prior to his martyrdom are noteworthy. “Now I begin to be a disciple. I care for nothing, of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!” And even when he was sentenced to be thrown to the beast such was the burning desire that he had to suffer, that he spake, what time he heard the lions roaring, saying. “I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread.”

In my opinion, this was the immediate testing to which Jesus referred. He promises to keep this church from that time because of their faithfulness. Here is an aspect of Kingdom life that is much needed in our time. The Lord Jesus Himself taught us to pray, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt 6:13). There are pressing and unusual trials most difficult to endure, and Jesus instructs us to seek deliverance from them. That deliverance is not guaranteed, and those who teach that it is, are in serious error.

The church in Philadelphia would be excluded from an unusual hour of testing for two reasons. First, it had already endured severe testing, and had only a little strength left. Second, it had faithfully kept Christ’s Word, refusing to deny His name. Those with great strength are not promised exemption from the coming trial, nor are those who have lived at a distance from Christ, not retaining His Word, or holding fast to their confession.

Jesus also spoke of an hour of testing that would precede His return. The words He uses are most sobering, and help to identify our generation with that of the Philadelphian brethren. “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Luke 21:25-26). Language fails to adequately paint the dread of such a time! Those who dare to neutralize these words with fanciful explanations involving metaphors of speech and confinement to the destruction of Jerusalem do no favor for the saints, and offer them no advantage. In our Lord’s words (Matthew 24), the hour was coming “on the earth,” not merely Jerusalem. The distress

involved “nations,” not merely Israel. Jesus spoke of international conflict, and “famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” (Matt 24:7). A TIME OF TESTING, as it were!

Some fear going through such a time, even though we are assured by religious sophists that the church will not go through anything of this magnitude. The sophists have not spoken for Jesus! Jesus did not tell the church in Philadelphia the churches would not go through a fierce hour of testing. Rather, He told them He would keep them from going through it – and He told them why! They only had a little strength, and yet had kept His word, refusing to deny His name!

The people of God must know that Jesus will act no differently in our time. Those who are unable to endure great tests, and have kept Christ’s word and their identity with Him, will not be pushed beyond their limitations. We can trust to this without wavering. Those who do go through fiery tests, like Ignatius and the millions slain in that time, will have the strength to do so. How blessed we are to have an exalted Lord Who is thoroughly capable of managing the affairs of men!

Chapter 80

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #9

JESUS IS ON THE WAY!

“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown” (Rev 3:11).

Four times in the book of the Revelation Jesus Himself says, “I come quickly” (3:11; 22:7,12,20). The word “quickly” describes a circumstance that cannot be predicted, postponed, or hastened. The word means shortly, i.e. without delay, soon, or (by surprise) suddenly. The idea is, I am coming, and you do not know when! His coming could be a time of deliverance or of judgment; of blessing or of cursing – but He is coming!

One of the cries of the early church was “MARANTHA!” – “Our Lord comes!,” or “Come O Lord!” (1 Cor 16:22). O, that such a consciousness were prevalent in the Christian community today! This perspective is conspicuous because of its near-total absence in the churches! Those who do not live in the awareness of the imminent return of Christ will not be ready! We have been called to “wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess 1:10), and it simply is not acceptable to lack that longing and anticipation!

Some of the company of the unlearned have stated that this saying actually referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the early church mistakenly looked for the Lord to return in their generation. All such talk is nothing more than infantile babbling. The grace of God teaches all believers to be “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). That is the proper stance of faith! The promise “I come quickly” is not one relating to time, and they who think so greatly error. It is rather a statement made to faith, which transcends time. This is the next grand event we are to anticipate, doing so with joy. So far as God’s view of things is concerned, the coming of the Lord is just around the corner.

The knowledge of the Lord’s coming is to provoke sanctified activity among His people. “Hold fast what you have!” If it is not possible to lose what we have, this would be a foolish word. However, this is King Jesus speaking, and He ALWAYS speaks truth in perspective of God’s “eternal purpose.” If His word does not blend with certain theologies, it is because they are false, and are therefore to be abandoned. To “hold fast”

is to seize with a firm grip, and refuse to let go! This admonition assumes there are forces attempting to take what we have from us. Jesus does NOT say, Do not worry, what I have given to you cannot be taken from you. The things which Christ gives CANNOT be kept without the effort of the receiver. Mark it well, that effort is not sufficient of itself. It must be undergirded by Divine power. But that power will not keep within our grasp the things we despise, forget, and neglect. Many a backslidden soul can testify to the truth of this.

“HOLD FAST what you have!” How often this exhortation is sounded in Scripture. “Test all things; HOLD FAST what is good” (1 Thess 5:21). “HOLD FAST the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:13). “Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we HOLD FAST the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Heb 3:6). “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us HOLD FAST our confession” (Heb 4:14). “Let us HOLD FAST the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). No backward stance is permitted! Get a firm grip on the blessings you have received by grace, and do not let them go. Do not allow them to become vague in your perception, secondary in their importance, or powerless in their effect. Jesus is coming, and you must have in your possession the things He has given to you when He returns!

Jesus divulges WHY the church with a “little strength” must hold fast what they have. It is “in order that no one take your crown.” Once again, some affirm that such a thing is not possible. Whom will you believe? Jesus or those who contradict Him? If it were not possible to have your crown taken from you, the Lord would never have said these words. One of the great promises of Jesus is, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10). But here Jesus speaks of having the crown taken from us. Elsewhere, Paul reminds us we are endeavoring to obtain an “incorruptible” crown (1 Cor 9:25). Paul reminded Timothy that the reception of a crown required “striving lawfully” (2 Tim 2:5). We are speaking of a “crown of righteousness” that will be given to “all they who love His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). This is a depiction of the successful completion of our lives, and an entrance into an everlasting reign with Christ Jesus. It is a “crown of life,” portraying a reign in life, that will be given to all who “love Him” (James 1:12). Its eternity is shown in the description, “the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet 5:4). How is it that anyone could take our crown from us? It is by diverting our attention to matters that do not require intimate involvement with Christ Jesus. No crown will be given to those who forsook fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), and the approval of the Father (2 Cor 6:16-18) for lesser things! This cannot be overemphasized!

There is an enormous amount of religion – even Christian religion – that does not require involvement with Deity. Such approaches provoke people to loosen their hold on eternal things. The only way to effectively avoid losing your crown, is to tenaciously hold to the things of God! Hold to them when they are not popular! Hold to them when you are derided for doing so! Hold to them when you are persecuted for doing so! Never let go of what Christ has given to you. You will be required to give it back to your Lord, together with an account of how you handled it! There is no way to escape this procedure.

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #10

THE GLORIOUS PROMISE

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.” (Rev 3:12)

As Christ has done with all of the other churches, He now draws this congregation into deeper involvement with Himself through a promise. Remember, it is “through” the “exceeding great and precious promises” that we become “participators in the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

ONLY THE OVERCOMER!

“ . . . He who overcomes . . . ” (Verse 12a). We must ever remember that only the overcomer will receive the promises! Those who are overcome by evil (Rom 12:21), have, by virtue of that condition, forfeited the promise! Being overcome brings us into bondage to the one, or thing, that overcame us. As it is written, “by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage” (2 Pet 2:19). The overcomer, lest we forget, is the one who is still standing after the Satanic assault has ended! It is the one who holds on to what he has received, and is found with it when Jesus comes. It is the one who keeps the faith until his exit from this world.

THE PROMISE OF SOLIDITY

“ . . . I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God . . . ” (Verse 12b). This has a sweet sound to those with “little strength.” The world drains us of strength – spiritual strength. Salvation addresses this situation by providing the “renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5). Even our minds can be “renewed,” refurbished and strengthened (Rom 12:2). As long as you are in the world, you will require constant recourse to this renewal. The world is a robber, taking from us, and never giving to us! In this world, we will wrestle elements of uncertainty – it is part and parcel of the good fight of faith. A marvelous expression of this circumstance is found in Second Corinthians. “But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (6:4-10). Such afflictions attack spiritual solidity! On one occasion Paul confessed he even “despaired even of life” (2 Cor 1:8). The power of God, he confessed, was manifested in Him through pressure, perplexity, persecution, and being struck down – as well as NOT being crushed, NOT in despair, NOT being forsaken, and NOT being destroyed (2 Cor 4:7-9).

But this will not be the case in the world to come! Each overcomer will be made a “pillar in the temple of” Christ’s “God!” Solomon’s magnificent temple had only two pillars (2 Kgs 25:16). They were even named, “Jachin” and “Boaz” (1 Kgs 7:21). The heavenly Temple, however shall have a God-glorifying multiplicity of pillars. Every overcomer will be a “pillar,” noted for solidity, strength, and durability! No more vacillation, erratic

experience, or moments of weakness! Hallelujah! An indication of the significance of this promise is found in God's commitment to Jeremiah. He was going to prophesy under adverse conditions – but God would make him equal to the occasion. “For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar, And bronze walls against the whole land; Against the kings of Judah, Against its princes, Against its priests, And against the people of the land. They will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you” (Jer 1:18-19). There is a picture of solidity in the midst of fierce conflict. James, Peter, and John, you will recall, were “pillars” in the church in Jerusalem. They stood tall when the church was assaulted.

But solidity in the presence of God is greater than solidity in this world. To stand in the midst of adversity is essential, but it is not to be compared with standing solid in the presence of the Almighty God! To be a pillar “in the temple of My God” means we will stand firm through the judgment, in our accountability, and in our coming stewardship. We will be noted for being strong and stable in the presence of God and the Lamb!

Chapter 82

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #11

NO MORE DEPARTURES

“ . . . and he will not go out from it anymore . . . ” (Verse 12c).

In this world, the best of blessings are often followed by the greatest of trials and the most bitter experiences. Moses talked with God face to face on Mount Sinai, but had to descend to the tumult at the foot of the mountain. Samson slew a thousand with but a jawbone of an ass, but also pushed the grinding stone at the Philistine mill, in humiliation and disgrace. Peter defended Jesus with a sword in the garden, only to deny him before some maidens. In this world, there are valleys as well as mountains, weakness as well as strengths, and defeats as well as victories. In all of heaven, there will not be an apostasy like that of Judas, a denial like that of Peter, or a forsaking like that of Demas!

But there is another sense of this. Now we experientially leave the presence of the Lord, often deprived of the sweetness of Divine communion. The cry of languish evoked from the heart and mouth of the Psalmist has often been my own. “O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory” (Psa 63:1-2). In such times, a sense of the need of Divine fellowship grips the heart in the midst of an acute awareness of the depravity of our surroundings. A depiction of this state is expressed by David. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa 42:1-2). A sense of desperation fastens on the soul like a leech, draining it of its vitality. The experience has provoked fasting, prayers, and even abstinence from marital intimacy among sensitive hearts (Psa 35:13; 1 Cor 7:5). This is “going out.”

But it shall not be so in the glory! There, we will “go out no more.” Never again will we experience spiritual decline. No more descending into lower occupations, leaving holy realms to keep the faith in profane environments! No more diminishing glow, like that on Moses' face (2 Cor 3:13). Never again will Scripture shine with a glow of clarity, only to fade from our understanding. We will “go no more out!” What a blessed prospect, and it is for all who overcome!

A SENSE OF BELONGING

“ . . . and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name” (Verse 12d).

This is a marvelous promise of belonging – of knowing we are in the right place, and of having no part of our persons that does not belong. In this world, we are “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 13:14). We do not fit in. Rather than receiving us, the world “hates” us, because it can only love “its own” – and we are not in that number (John 15:19). There is a sense in which this is a weight to the soul. Faith enables us to bear up under it, but it is there. Some have thrown the faith overboard in order to gain the world’s acceptance. Countless people have modified their lives to accommodate the world’s applause. There is undeniable temptation associated with NOT being received by the environment in which you dwell.

In the world to come, this tension will not be experienced in any form. Every aspect of our persons will fit into the eternal realm, and no part of us will be in friction with it. Jesus provides insight into this condition in this promise. By writing upon the overcomer “the name of My God,” an obvious affiliation with God Himself is announced. The connection will be obvious. It will also be glorifying to God, as well as satisfying to us. No one will ask of our identity! In this world, we are often asked to “give a reason for the hope” within us. We will never be asked to do this in the coming glory. We will not only be “heirs of God” (Rom 8:17), that heirship will be apparent to both ourselves and those about us.

By writing on us “the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God” our citizenship in that realm will become apparent. Now, by faith, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). It is not, however, readily apparent to all about us. Only fellow citizens recognize that reality. But it will not be so in heaven! We will not be misfits, like Abraham in Canaan (Heb 11:13-14), nor will we “seek a better country.” We will be satisfied with the “new Jerusalem” – the glorified church – and it will be satisfied with us! We read of this city later, and of John beholding it coming down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:2). Of that city it is written, she was “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” This is the glorified church! When John was told, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife,” what He saw was this very city. Here is what the record says. “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Rev 21:9-11). This is the society of the redeemed, and it will be obvious to everyone there that the overcomer is a rightful citizen, and belongs! Hallelujah to the Lamb! Never again will we be part of something that chaffs against our natures.

Jesus will also write upon the overcomer His own “new Name.” This is not a name already mentioned. It is not the name “Jesus,” or “Wonderful Counselor,” or “Mighty God.” Those are all true names, and depict aspects of His Person – but they are not His “new Name.” The name to which He refers has not yet been divulged. It is a name that reveals more of Him than is possible for us to now receive. Reference is made to this name in Revelation 19:12. “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and

makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. HE HAD A NAME WRITTEN THAT NO ONE KNEW EXCEPT HIMSELF” (verses 11-12). There is more to Jesus than we have yet seen – more to be comprehended than we have yet pondered. The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily, but it has not yet been fully discerned. The time is coming, however, when His fulness will be revealed. Scripture speaks of that time as “When the Son of Man comes in His glory,” and “when He comes in His own glory” (Matt 25:31; Luke 9:26).

Let us state this glorious reality in another way. This is speaking of our complete conformity to the image of God’s Son – something God has predestinated (Rom 8:29). What Jesus has promised in our text will be fulfilled in these words. “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:4). “We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). That is involved in what Jesus meant when He promised, “. . . and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”

Chapter 83

THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA #12

CONCLUSION

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Verse 13).

What Jesus has said to the church in Philadelphia is for all of the churches having its traits! Every church that has stood strong, yet been viewed as weak and insignificant, needs to take heart! Every church is to hold fast what they have received. Every church is to diligently avoid any person taking its crown!

Let no man be confused about this! Churches with “a little strength” (Rev 3:8) is not necessarily a reference to small churches, country churches, or one lacking institutional organization – with a small “staff,” and no youth ministry or official outreach in the community. As used in Jesus’ words to the church in Philadelphia, it is a church with “a little strength” – one that has been worn out by persecution, opposition, and initiatives by assemblies described as “synagogues of Satan” (Phil 3:9). It is a church that, in spite of defiled surroundings and oppositions, has kept Christ’s word, and has not denied His name (Rev 3:8).

Actually, although it is sad to acknowledge it, it is most difficult to find such a church in our day. In fact, it is strange in the minds of many to think of a church – people in the aggregate – who are noted for anything of spiritual value. Some “churches” are noted for their facility, which is a haven for the homeless, and a gathering place for various community activities. It is not unusual for whole congregations to be fundamentally unacquainted with the people attending that assembly. For some, there are even gaming and playing areas provided for the children and teenagers, where they can get off of the streets and have some “fun.” It is not that these things are all necessarily wrong – but for “the churches” to be noted for such involvements is, to say the least, questionable. The purpose of “the churches” is not to provide a place where the world can meet peacefully to facilitate their interests. It is rather to dispense light in society that apprises men of the reality of God, Christ, sin, and salvation.

As used in this text, churches with “a little strength” are those who have been shining

brightly as “lights in the world” (Phil 2:15), and have been met with opposition and rebuffs because of it. Their witness has intensified the good fight of faith. It has aroused the enemies of God, and moved them to launch initiatives against the churches – whether by means of persecution, reproaches, or even laws designed to curtail their activities. Such “churches” are exceedingly difficult for us to find – but Jesus finds them and comforts them.

Every church and every person who overcomes will be given glorious and unending solidity in the presence of God Himself. For the faithful of all ages, a promise of never again departing is given. The revealed objective of conformity to the image of Christ will be realized by all who overcome. This message is for the churches. It is also for every individual who “has an ear” –

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev 3:6).

Chapter 84

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #1

INTRODUCTION

We come now to the last of the seven churches. Messages have been delivered to real historical congregations, with real spiritual conditions. Many have seen in these churches as ages of history, during which the people of God have obtained the characteristics mentioned in the seven churches of Asia. That this may be so, I cannot deny. It does, however, require a studied effort to identify the periods. Too, they are not always found in the strict chronological sequence of the messages. That is indication that a more fundamental reality can be seen in these messages. Our teaching should always accentuate primary matters, making provision for valid subsidiary applications. It is on the part of wisdom to avoid developing novel explanations of Scripture that have a strong appeal to flesh. If our view of Revelation attracts the interest of those disinterested in God and His salvation, it is probably not true.

A BRIEF REVIEW

The messages to the churches underscore the nature of Satan’s attack upon the people of God. That assault remains consistent throughout the ages, making Christ’s word to these seven churches relevant during all ages of history. A brief review of his assault tactics should serve to alert us to the nature of our warfare.

SATAN’S ATTACK

Our adversary aggressively promotes a religion with doctrinal precision, that lacks a primary love for the Son of God (example: Ephesus--2:1-7). He also attacks the faithful through devout religious advocates, who are intimidated by the truth of God, and among whom Satan freely works (example: Smyrna--2:8-11). With remarkable tenacity, the devil encourages the tolerance of false teaching and immorality within the church (example: Pergamum--2:12-17). Satan also incites the church to allow false teaches to promote his cause in the assembly, without restraint (example: Thyatira--2:18-29). With great perseverance, the enemy of our souls advances dead religion – form without power (example: Sardis--3:1-6). Through oppression and opposition, the devil also seeks to deplete the strength of the church, wearing it down so it has but a little strength (example: Philadelphia (3:7-12)). Now, in the church in Laodicea, we witness the old serpent’s tactic of compromise. He advances the type of religion that takes no solid stance on anything – one that is lukewarm and unassertive: a religion that is bereft of anything from God, yet

possesses everything from the world. Wherever these characteristics are found, the devil is at work! This is HOW he seeks to bring down the people of God!

COMMENDABLE QUALITIES

We also behold in these churches commendable qualities – things approved and applauded by Jesus. Among these are, an insistence on proper teaching (Ephesus), continuance in good works in spite of tribulation and poverty (Smyrna), and holding fast to Christ's name and not denying His faith, even while dwelling in Satan's seat (Pergamum). Think of how Jesus commends loving service, faith, and the growth of good deeds (Thyatira). Even in deteriorating assemblies, Jesus recognizes the existence of things about to die, and encourages their renewal (Sardis). It is also His manner to open effective doors of opportunity to the faithful, even though they have but a little strength (Philadelphia). The Lord Jesus always looks for things to commend and encourage. Now, for the first time, we will confront a church in which nothing good can be found.

GREAT PROMISES

Think of the faithfulness of our Lord, clearly seen in His words to these seven churches. He always commends what is good. You can count on Him to rebuke what is wrong. He will also provide a twofold incentive to recover from sin: threats of judgment, and promises to be obtained. The deeper the sin, the greater the promise, and the more severe the threat of judgment. The Lord always points to the END – to the grand consummation, when the warfare will be completed, and we will reign forever with Him. Stand and marvel at the magnitude of these expressions. (1) Eating from the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God (Ephesus, 2:7). (2) A crown of life, and not being hurt by the second death (Smyrna, 2:10-11). (3) Eating of the hidden manna, and receiving a new name (Pergamum, 2:17). (4) Receiving power over the nations, and ruling them with a rod of iron (Thyatira, 2:26-27). (5) Being clothed in white raiment, not being blotted out of the book of life, and being confessed before the Father and the angels (Sardis, 3:5). (6) Being made a pillar in the temple of God, going no more out, and having the name of God, the holy city, and Christ's new name, written upon them (Philadelphia, 3:12). (7) Sitting with Jesus in His throne (Laodicea, 3:21).

THE LESSON TO BE LEARNED

You must not fail to see the manner of the heavenly Kingdom in these messages! The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the object of Satan's attack – a message often repeated in this book (9:1-11; 12:3-15; 13:1-7; 16:13; 19:20). It is also the subject of the King's scrutiny, the object of Divine love, and the focus of great promises. Jesus is the focus of heaven, and the church is the focus on earth. Because Satan has no access to heaven, having been expelled from it, he has focused upon the body of the redeemed. But He is not the only one giving heed to this holy band! The Lord Jesus Himself, Who is over Satan and his hierarchy of evil, also pays close heed to the church. If the churches will reciprocate by giving their undivided attention to Him, He will carry them through the attacks of the evil one. That is the overriding message of this grand book!

Any form of religion, regardless of its popularity, that leaves the church vulnerable to the devices of the wicked one (as described in this book) is of the devil himself. It is to be zealously avoided and opposed. A valid spiritual ministry is one which promotes the virtues that Jesus commends. It is one where the promises of Christ are affirmed with consistency, being held out before the people as a strong incentive to participation with

Christ. Wherever an aggressive effort is being made to obtain the promises, Jesus is at work, and victory is on the way. It will be startling to many to view the churches in this manner. There will be no place found for fleshly assessments, worldly acclaim, or glorying in appearance.

Chapter 85

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #2

THE FINAL CHURCH IS ASSESSED

Now we come to the final assessment of the seven churches in Asia. The Lord Jesus is zealous to have this church ready for what is to come. He wants it to survive the onslaught of the wicked one, and obtain the promises He has procured for them. Although nothing of merit is found in this church, it can still be recovered if it will hear “what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” Too, this is a message for individuals, who also can possess the handicaps or advantages ascribed to these churches. Our spiritual hearing must be keen and perceptive as we hear this final message! This is the Savior speaking, and He speaks in strict harmony with His nature, and with the “eternal purpose” of God Almighty. He is NOT assessing the church in view of Grecian culture, but in view of the purpose for which He has purchased it. The acclaim it has received in the world is of little consequence to Jesus. The entire worldly order has been rejected and repudiated by God. It is not salvageable! To be accepted by God, there must be regeneration – a birth into a new realm! The church begins its life in this realm, and it must never leave it. Like a fish dies when it is removed from the water, so the church dies when it is removed from heavenly places. It is not possible to over-emphasize the seriousness of the message of this book! It is appropriate – yea, imperative – for our time.

WHO IS SPEAKING?

“ . . . The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this . . . ” (NASB).

THE AMEN

The word “Amen” means trustworthy, surely, or so be it. It speaks of accuracy and finality, stability and assuredness. The word is used 151 times from Matthew through Revelation, and 30 times from Numbers through Jeremiah. This is a Kingdom word, denoting the sureness of Divine commitment. Under the Law, the people were required to say “Amen” at the reading of the curses of God (Deut 27:15-26). Three times the expression “Amen and Amen” is used in the Psalms (41:13; 72:19; 89:52). The Lord Jesus used this word 106 times in the Gospels (frequently translated “Verily”--KJV, or “Truly”--NASB, or “assuredly”--NKJV). showing the nature of the words He communicated. They were firm, unchangeable, and trustworthy.

When Jesus declares He is “The Amen,” He means He is God’s final Word – a sure and steadfast Foundation upon which faith is firmly established. Firmness, constancy and immutability are in the name, “AMEN!” Everything about Jesus is characterized by these qualities – His Person, His words, His works, His power, blood, and righteousness. There is nothing about Him or His work that does not have the Name “AMEN!” written over it.

FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS

In speaking to this church as “the AMEN!” Jesus is saying His assessment is the true and final one. He speaks in the capacity of “the faithful and true Witness.” He is not only the One through Whom God is speaking in these “last days” (Heb 1:1-2), He is the One

through Whom the churches are evaluated, commended, rebuked, and admonished. He is faithful to make assessments, and true in the conveyance of what He finds. He is faithful to God's "eternal purpose" in His evaluations, and absolutely true in His assessments. He is also faithful to judge when judgment is required, and faithful to communicate when communication is required. He is the "Witness," telling what He has beheld, and withholding nothing that is profitable. He is not providing a pointless, but a truthful witness.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CREATION OF GOD

But Jesus also declares Himself to be "the Beginning of the creation of God." Here is a most unique designation, and it has been subjected to the abuse of the enemies of Christ. Of old time, the Arians used this expression to attempt to disprove the Deity of Christ. They declared it means Jesus was the first One created. This same view is aggressively entertained and taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

This phrase is to be understood to mean Jesus is the Beginning, the Author, or Source of everything God has created – and He has created "all things." It is another way of saying the creation of all things was through Him. As it is written, ". . . God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:9). Elsewhere the Spirit elaborates on the title to which Christ refers to Himself. ". . . the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (or, are held together)" (Col 1:13-17). In the next chapter of Revelation (Chapter 4), this aspect of Jesus is again mentioned. "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created" (4:11).

Chapter 86

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #2

THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write . . ." (NASB).

This city was located about 50 miles south-east of Philadelphia. Spiritually, as we will see, it was much further than that! Hierapolis and Colossae were about eight miles from Laodicea. It received its name from Antiochus II, in honor of his wife Laodice. Commercially, this was a wealthy city, trading in woolen materials. The indifferent spirit which it possessed unfortunately crept into the church there, requiring a stern word from the King.

Here is a classic example of the effects a culture can have upon a church. Unless the people of God set themselves to be separate from the world, they will assimilate its manners, and incur the judgment of Christ Jesus. This is a particularly needful word in our day, when the church can scarcely be distinguished from the world, and appears to have little concern about that circumstance. It has absorbed the world's language, manners, and philosophy, and has thus become spiritually impotent. The spirit of accommodation has descended like a plague upon the Western church. From its attire to its music, and from its education to its methods, it has been wedded to this world, and "The World" is its wedded name. Much of this is being done in the name of evangelism,

purporting to be an effort to reach the world for Jesus. But it has not been effective to alter the course of society. Rather, the taint of the world has splashed upon the professed church. Like the church in Laodicea, it has been contaminated with the society around it. History confirms there was no violent break in Laodicea between the Grecian and Christian cultures. Their condition was very much like that of our place and time. The word must continue to be sounded, “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty” (2 Cor 6:17-18, NKJV). The life of faith is difficult enough while obeying this requirement; it is impossible to live in concert with God apart from it.

Paul had great inner conflict for this church. “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col 2:1-2).

Epaphras had a great zeal for this church. “For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea” (Col 4:13). The Colossians were told to salute this church. “Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea” (Col 4:15). The Colossian letter was to be read to the church in Laodicea, who had also received an epistle from Paul. “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col 4:16).

It is difficult to conceive of a church being given greater advantage! The heart and prayers of the most prodigious Apostle who ever lived were for it. One of the premier Kingdom-men of the first century had a great zeal for this church, seeking its spiritual betterment and maturity. They shared Scripture with a sister congregation, being exposed to the very Word of God – a stirring proclamation of the nature and effectiveness of New Covenant life.

We learn from this that spiritual advantages do not necessarily bring a better spiritual condition. The state of the heart determines whether or not we profit from exposure to the good things of God. A classic example of this is also found in Israel’s rejection of the very Son of God – “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16). Their house, Jesus declared, was “left desolate” because of that inexcusable rejection (Matt 23:38; Luke 13:35). In a blistering rebuke of the condition of the Jews, Jesus lamented, “you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:44). A knowledge of spiritually decadent conditions must not in any way deter us from zealously and powerfully declaring the Word of the King. We must be tireless in our efforts to edify the people of God.

If a church like Laodicea can deteriorate to the point where it becomes obnoxious to Christ, AFTER it has been exposed to much truth, and has been cared for by godly men, what can happen to a church that lacks such spiritual advantages! No one should be surprised at the state of deterioration in churches all around us. With a remarkable decline in Scriptural preaching and spiritual perspective, churches that please Jesus will be exceeding rare. This is a perception that must be gained before any measurable improvement can occur in our churches. We do not need programs, strategies, and contemporary methods. If Laodicea could drift with the advantages of Apostolic teaching, concern, and prayers, what must we expect in our time – when spiritual shallowness,

brevity, and fleshly accommodations dominate the church?

It is true, some call upon us to turn our eyes from this condition, but we must not allow such indifference to grip our hearts. We are living in a generation that is being subjected to preaching and teaching with little, if any, eternal relevance. It is altogether too common for entire churches to function year after year without any acute awareness of the “Amen – the Faithful and True Witness.” Those with a heart for God cannot overlook this condition!

Chapter 87

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #3

THE WRETCHED CONDITION

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot” (NASB).

When Jesus turned water into wine, it is said the “good wine” was served last (John 2:10). This is the nature of the heavenly Kingdom – in Christ we progress from worse to better, from death to life, from the inferior to the superior. We are being oriented for glory – for the presence of the Lord, and for eternal involvements with Him. We were raised from death to life, and there is no room in Jesus for deterioration, decline, or backward motion! The best is always last in Jesus! The best realm is last! The best responsibility is last! The best body is last! The best commendation is last!

This manner is not reflected, however, in some of the messages to the seven churches in Asia. In this case, the worst church is confronted last. In spite of the investments of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the church, “perilous times” shall descend upon it in the latter times. It would be assaulted with a “form of godliness that denies the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:1-7). The church at Laodicea provides a prelude to those times. The peril of their condition was not violence, or aggression for the wrong thing. They were not “hot,” and they were not “cold.” There was a spiritual tepidness about them that could settle down in any environment. Saints were not helped by them, and Satan was not hindered. Righteousness was not advanced, and unrighteousness was not suppressed.

Other ways of saying “neither cold nor hot” are lukewarm halfhearted, indifferent, unenthusiastic, perfunctory, spiritless, apathetic, lackadaisical, and uninterested. Here was salt that was, at the very least, losing its “savor” or flavor. If this occurred, the Laodiceans would be “good for nothing,” having no Divine utility at all (Matt 5:13). Men have learned to live with this spiritual condition, but Jesus has not. We will find from His words that it will NOT be tolerated.

There is more hope for a persecutor of the church, than for an indifferent and disinterested soul (Gal 1:13)! A woman of the street, steeped in sin, can be touched by Jesus sooner than someone who remains unaffected by either truth or the lie (Matt 26:7-10). You can more easily convert a tax collector who may have unjustly taken from people, than turn a heart to God that is overcome by the sleep of disinterest (Luke 19:8-10). Those who aggressively opposed and crucified the Lord of glory can be brought to repentance more readily than a sluggardly and halfhearted soul (Acts 2:37).

It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of the Laodicean condition! There is more hope for a cold and calculating sinner than for one who has been awakened by the glorious Gospel, only to lapse into self-contentment and inattentiveness. Unless this condition is corrected, there is no hope of salvation. Only condemnation awaits the indifferent soul!

They may have avoided what is perceived to be the deeper sins, but they will not be able to avoid the wrath of God.

Over the years I have noted that those who are zealous in their embrace of error are easier to reach with the truth than those who are indifferent and apathetic. Yet, I know of countless religious people who choose to company with the spiritually nonchalant and unconcerned. They suppose that the absence of controversy equates to fellowship, and the soul who listens but yields no response is not so bad, after all. However, we will find the words of the Lord Jesus to be completely intolerant of this condition.

Chapter 88

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #4

THE DIVINE RESPONSE

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” (Rev 3:16).

The KJV uses the word “spue” or “spew,” while the NKJV uses the stronger word “vomit.” The word used here (em-eh'-o), does, indeed, mean “vomit.” The technical meaning of this word is “to vomit, to reject with extreme disgust,” and is here alone in Scripture. It speaks of something causing nausea, that is repulsive, and highly offensive! Here is an aspect of the Divine character that is apparently little known. There are some things with which the Lord is completely intolerant. He will simply not endure their presence, and woe be to the person or church that insists on keeping them!

God revealed His impatience with perfunctory, or superficial and half-hearted, religion under the Law. Give heed to the vivid language spoken through Isaiah the prophet. “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I AM FULL OF the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I DELIGHT NOT in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is AN ABOMINATION unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; IT IS INIQUITY, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts MY SOUL HATETH: THEY ARE A TROUBLE UNTO ME unto me; I AM WEARY to bear them” (Isa 1:11-14).

Hear the words of Amos, as he thunders the sentiments of the Lord. “I HATE, I DESPISE your feast days, and I WILL NOT SMELL in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I WILL NOT ACCEPT THEM: NEITHER WILL I REGARD the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me THE NOISE of thy songs; for I WILL NOT HEAR the melody of thy viols.” (Amos 5:21-23).

Jeremiah also voiced this perspective of the Divine character. “To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are NOT ACCEPTABLE, nor your sacrifices sweet unto Me” (Jer 6:20). Hosea spoke of God’s people offering sacrifices as commanded, only for them to be rejected by the Lord (Hos 8:13). Solomon declared the “sacrifice of the wicked” to be an “abomination to the Lord” (Prov 15:8). There is no greater wickedness than being indifferent to the Lord of glory, yet claiming affiliation with Him!

The “lukewarm” are people who, like Israel in Elijah’s day, “halt between two opinions” (1 Kgs 18:21). They cannot decide whether to fight against the Lord, or to fight with Him! They linger in what they imagine to be a neutral state, where the truth is set

aside for a time of emergency. They do not take it into their heart, nor do they aggressively thrust it from them. The lukewarm do not throw stones at those choosing to walk on the highway to glory, but neither do they walk with them. How despicable they are to Jesus!

Yes! There are some religious activities, performed by people who wear the name of Christ, that are rejected by the Lord. They are not acceptable. What is more, they are offensive to the Lord, repugnant and obnoxious to Him because they come from disinterested hearts. Those who insist on remaining in this dangerous place must hear the voice of the Lord: "I will vomit you out of My mouth" (NKJV). Jesus is not jesting about this! The church in Laodicea was in serious jeopardy, and yet were remarkably religious!

Do not suppose for a fleeting moment that this condition does not exist all about us. There are myriads within this very area who regularly are subjected to the Word of God in some form, yet remain totally indifferent to it. They do not oppose the Word, nor do they heartily embrace it. They do not object to its propagation, nor do they insist upon it being declared. They are quite willing to settle for limited exposure to the word of their salvation, but do not hide it in their hearts. They are simplify indifferent, and not moved to be for or against what has been spoken in the name of the Lord.. Such individuals, be they cultured or not, are obnoxious to Jesus. He will not forbear them for long. O, that the church were more sensitive to the word of the Lord!

Chapter 89

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #5

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

"So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev 3:16)

What does it mean to be spued, or "vomited," out of the mouth of the Lord? For some, it simply means a loss of reward, or the receiving of a lesser station in heaven, so to speak. Such sophists imagine that it is not possible to fall way or forfeit your salvation, and thus they have no recourse but to wrest the words of Jesus. But their theology will not alter this expression. It will stand throughout the history of the world, and face all who opposed it in the day of the Lord (John 12:48).

Jesus is speaking of disassociating this church from Himself – of unchurching them, so to speak. He would not allow them to maintain identity with Himself, for they were at variance with Him. He has wrought a great salvation, entering into it with great zeal (Psa 69:9; John 2:17). Our Lord will not tolerate an attitude toward Himself and His great salvation that is so unlike His own. Although the Laodiceans were close to Christ's heart – close enough for Him to send this solemn warning – if they did not recover from lukewarmness, He would tear them from His heart, refusing affiliation with them. They could have not part with Him in this matter!

To be vomited from the mouth of the Lord equates to being rejected by Him, cast from His presence, and disinherited. If one imagines being disinherited is an impossibility in God's kingdom, let him think more soberly. Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24). Esau lost his inheritance because he failed to be aggressive to keep it (Heb 12:16-17). Israel was cast out of Canaan (Lev 18:26; Jer 9:19). There were some angels who did not keep their "first estate" (Jude 6). The kingdom was taken from Saul (1 Sam 28:17). Judas lost his bishopric (Acts 1:20). All of these incidents contradict great

bodies of erroneous theology.

In a telling parable concerning the nature of the Kingdom of God, Jesus spoke of a lukewarm person. The individual was allocated a portion of the master's goods to keep and manage until he returned. But the steward buried his stewardship in disinterest. He did not destroy it in hatred, nor possess it in thankfulness. The word of the Lord concerning him is this: “. . . from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (Matt 25:29). The person was a real steward, received a real stewardship, and was really expelled. To deny this requires a certain level of dishonesty.

Rest assured, those who are severed from Jesus when they leave this world, will not be united with Him in heaven. Those whom Jesus rejects here, will not be accepted there! As obvious as that may appear, some still insist on believing such cannot happen! Whatever you may think about this text, it is in your eternal interest to do whatever is necessary to NOT become repulsive and sickening to Jesus! You may have heard that Jesus will overlook indifference. See to it that you do not believe it. The condition of the church in Laodicea, like that of Israel of old, was “written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

AN IMPROPER AND A PROPER ASSESSMENT

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked . . .” (NASB).

The church at Laodicea had been taking about itself – and the Lord had heard it! This reminds me of a solemn warning in Ecclesiastes 10:20. “Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.” While, from, a heavenly perspective, this seems rather elementary, it is not so obvious to many churches today. In fact, it was not obvious to the church in Laodicea. They conducted their lives and provided self-assessments without regard to their King. Now, He will inform them of what they said, and of its validity.

Chapter 90

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #6

THEIR ASSESSMENT

How comfortably this church must have been sitting! Although nothing could have been further from the truth, they said, “I am rich, and have become wealthy.” If there would have been an Asian brotherhood journal, they would have been written up in it. Someone once observed that spiritual pride and lukewarmness are often united by worldly prosperity. Here was a church that was very pleased with itself. The city of Laodicea, we are told, was a very successful commercial city, fairly bulging in wealth. Apparently this lukewarm church had profited much from its environment. It probably had several influential and financially prosperous people in it. You might compare it to the First Church of the Frigidaire residing in the Beverly Hills section of Los Angeles – or a thriving congregation in Manhattan, New York. It is not that it is wrong for churches to exist in such places. But, in such environs, they are to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15-16). Where such a church exists, God is glorified, Jesus is honored, and hope is held out for the salvation of men. However, this

was not the status of the Laodicean church.

There is a wave of prosperity teaching today that is of great concern to me. People are being taught that poverty is a curse, and prosperity is a blessing. They are told that “the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov 13:22), and that they can expect the immediate, or at least soon, re-distribution of wealth. Notice, the wealth of the sinner is “STORED UP for the just, or righteous ones.” The distribution of that wealth, it is true, is at the discretion of our Lord. You may or may not experience some of it in this life, but the bulk of the dispersion will be in the world to come. That is when “the meek” will “inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5), “all things” (Rev 21:7), and an “inheritance incorruptible, that fadeth not away” (1 Pet 1:4). It is true, God has decreed that the sinner will not be able to keep his wealth – he must let go of it! Some do not let go until they die – like the rich man of Lazarus’ fame. Even in his case, Lazarus, who was “just,” did not receive wealth of the rich man in this world, but died a “beggar” still (Luke 16:20-26).

Even if the example of Laodicea were not in the Scriptures, we have sufficient warnings to dissuade us from placing confidence in wealth, supposing it gives us the advantage. Is it not written that some who hear the precious Word of the Kingdom “go out and are choked with . . . riches” (Luke 8:14)? And what of those who set their minds to be rich – to be financially secure and stable, imagining that to be a greater blessing than it really is? How poignantly the Spirit speaks to this subject. “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim 6:9-10). The vividness with which James, the brother of our Lord, spoke to oppressive rich men engages all the faculties of the mind. “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days” (James 5:1-3). Whatever you think about the distribution of the wealth of sinners, and the benefits of having an abundance of resources, you had better temper it with the assessments of the Holy Spirit and our blessed Lord.

I do not doubt that the church in Laodicea was highly respected by the city. Perhaps visiting merchants came to their gatherings, and significant contributions were made to religious causes. Whatever the case, we will find that Christ’s evaluation is the only one honored in heaven! It is true, as is written in Proverbs 27:2, “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.” A concentrated effort must be expended by the church – any church – to obtain a favorable appraisal from Jesus. I find it interesting that some consider such an effort an attempt to be saved by works. Rather, let us view the situation this way: without Christ’s approval and acceptance, eternal rejection is sure.

Christ’s assessment of this church was not a mere commentary on their external appearance or public words. It was an evaluation of their true spiritual condition. Although the church in Laodicea may actually have declared they did not need anything, I do not believe that is the burden of Christ’s reference. Whether or not they affirmed this in their speech, they confessed it in their manner. They were conducting themselves as though Jesus did not exist. They were not relying upon Divine resources, but were quite content with what they possessed in the flesh. Like the “fool” of Psalm 14:1 and 53:1,

they had said “in their heart, There is no God.” Their formal position may very well have acknowledged the existence of God, Christ, and “grace to help in time of need,” but they really did not rely upon what they formally acknowledged. In my judgment, our land is filled with churches that precisely conform to this wretched pattern.

Here was a church that supposed it was in a safe and secure position. They imagined that beginning the race was all there was to it. Here was some of the original “once saved, always saved” people. They had started the race, and had been placed on the proper foundation. Every advantage had been given to them that is given to every person that is born again. It could be said of them as it was said of Israel, “My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. And He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, And hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?” (Isa 5:1-4, NASB).

Let it be clear, there is no valid reason for a lukewarm and indifferent state. There is absolutely nothing about salvation that contributes to such a condition. Everything about life in Christ Jesus discourages indifference and indecision. Wherever a state like that of Laodicea is found, the Spirit has been quenched, the truth has been stifled, and the flesh is dominant. That is why Jesus is completely intolerant of the condition. It is evidence that a place has been made for the devil (Eph 4:27), the flesh has not been crucified (Gal 5:24, and the heart has concentrated on things that are seen (2 Cor 4:17-18). The affection has NOT been placed on things above (Col 3:1-2), people are NOT living by faith (Heb 10:38), and the Word of God has been “choked” (Matt 13:22). We are speaking of a most serious spiritual malady – one that is altogether too common in our day.

Chapter 91

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #7

CHRIST’S ASSESSMENT

“ . . . and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” (Rev 3:17)

Laodicea viewed themselves from the fleshly, or carnal, point of view – although they thought this was a proper assessment–i.e. “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.”

Christ views them as they really are. How different is His evaluation – and it is really the only valid one. “You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” Think of the gravity of this word! This is Jesus’ view of one of His churches. Concerning their condition, they were “WRETCHED,” like a filthy and fatigued abject slave. Concerning their actual state, they were “MISERABLE,” most deplorable, and to be pitied by everyone who saw them. Regarding the spiritual state they were “POOR,” bereft of spiritual graces, without holiness, and ready to die. From the standpoint of their spiritual perception, they were “BLIND,” the eyes of their understanding being darkened so they could not see the real things of God and Christ. Looking at them from the viewpoint of standing before the Lord, they were “NAKED,” stripped of the covering of mercy and grace. That was their real condition, but they were

so spiritually obtuse, they could not see it.

When they came into Christ, they were raised up with Him to sit in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). They were made “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:5-6). But now they had degenerated into a state of wretchedness! They once had access to all the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in Christ Jesus (Col 2:3), having been elevated to “the sons of God” (1 John 3:1-2). But now they had plummeted downward to a state of miserableness! Once their eyes had been opened to the glories of God and His salvation (Eph 1:18-20; Heb 10:32). But now they had reverted to a state of spiritual blindness! Once they had been made rich in Jesus, with “all things” belonging to them (1 Cor 3:20-23). But now they were again blinded to the things of God, unable to see what was once opened to them! Once they had been clothed with “the garments of salvation” (Isa 61:10, having “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). But now they fallen into a state of moral and spiritual nakedness, with nothing to cover them from the wrath of God!

It is difficult to conceive of the condition of a church being any worse. Here are FIVE CONTEMPTIBLE CONDITIONS, ascribed to a boasting and self-confident church! Forever blot from your mind the vain notion that once you are in Christ Jesus you are locked into a state of acceptance! This was a real church, with one of Christ’s messengers, who was in Christ’s hand (Rev 1:20). It was numbered among those in whose presence Jesus Himself dwelt (Rev 1:13,19). But they had become absorbed with the ways of the world, and had suffered remarkable loss. They lost their glory, becoming WRETCHED. They lost the privileges of sonship, becoming MISERABLE. No longer were they beholding the invisible God or the things of the Kingdom, but were BLIND. The incalculable riches had been willingly forfeited in preference of other things, and thus they had become POOR. Although they had once been clothed with the righteousness of Christ, they had cast it aside to become meshed with the world, and now stood NAKED before the Judge of all the earth. What a dreadful condition!

Do not imagine for one moment that at this present time there is not a staggering number of boasting churches that are being viewed from heaven precisely as the church in Laodicea was. It may not be fashionable to speak of such things, but the condition is very real, and , if not corrected, will result in being cast off from Christ. Under the leadership of the wicked one and his demons (1 Tim 4:1), false and damning doctrines (2 Pet 2:1) have been brought into the professing church. To ameliorate the situation, making it more tolerable, men heap teachers to themselves who say such things as, “God loves everyone alike,” “You cannot do a anything that will make Christ love you less,” “the church is a hospital for sinners,” “Christians are sinners like everyone else, it is just that they are forgiven” . . . etc., etc. However, although such sayings make sinners comfortable on earth, they do not change the way the Savior views the churches. It is best to seek to maintain Divine approval now rather than being dissociated with the Christ because of an unacceptable condition.

Chapter 92

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #8

THE ADVICE OF JESUS

“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see” (NASB).

Although the church in Laodicea was in a most serious condition, it was not beyond hope! The Savior from sin is also the Deliverer from setbacks! The same faith that saves the soul will also restore it. As the King, Jesus has the authority and resources to recover any fallen church who correctly sees its condition and will respond to His overtures. What a Gospel we have to preach! Care must be taken by every preacher and teacher to hold out the true remedy for sinful setbacks. It cannot be found in the libraries of men's wisdom, or the professed expertise of the world's counselors. While sin is to be vigorously opposed, and righteous judgments made, grace and mercy are to be extended for recovery. This is the manner of the Savior.

BUY FROM ME!

Just as it costs something to degenerate, so it costs something to recover. Some people imagine that nothing about salvation requires something from us. How wrong they are! Here is the Son of God, with a firm grasp on every aspect of the Kingdom, advising His people to "BUY" from Him! They sorely need what He has, but they will have to purchase it! It will require a personal investment and commitment to obtain what they need. Some theology would have Jesus saying, "There is nothing you can pay for this, just open your heart and I will give it to you." But that is not what Jesus says, and it must not be what we say! When we face those in spiritual decline, we must apprise them that recovery will cost them something.

This word — "buy" — is used several times in Scripture. It is used in reference to the foolish virgins who went to "buy" oil (Matt 25:9-10). The book of Revelation also speaks of a time when those refusing the "mark of the beast" will be unable to "buy" (Rev 13:17). Peter refers to false prophets who deny the Lord who "bought" them (2 Pet 2:1). Joseph of Arimathaea invested his personal resources to "buy" fine linen in which to wrap the crucified Christ (Mark 15:46). In every case, a personal investment was required.

Be sure, the purchase, from one point of view, will be made "without money" (Isa 55:1), but it will require giving up something — withdrawing from your resources. Solomon once said, "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Prov 23:23). It is absurd to think you could procure eternal treasure and benefits without any personal investment! Those who seek an easy way to glory — one which costs them nothing — will find no cause to follow Jesus!

One other thing to see here: the purchase can only be made from Jesus. Resources required for spiritual recovery are not obtainable anywhere else. The wisdom of this world cannot provide what believers sorely need! It cannot be found in pleasure, analysis, history, or scholarship! God condemned Israel for going down to Egypt for help. His words to them on this matter are blistering. "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of Me; and that cover with a covering, but not of My spirit, that they may add sin to sin: That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!" (Isa 30:1-2). What must be said of those who seek to obtain spiritual advantages from the course and fashion of this world? They must forsake such vain pursuits and "buy" directly from the Lord Jesus!

The backslidden, fallen, and those in the grip of the "sleep of death" (Psalm 13:3), must come to Jesus to buy what they need! Saints can assist them, but the goods must be received from Christ Himself! Jesus does not tell the church to go to the other churches and find resources, but to "buy" them from Him! His language is precise, and in strict

keeping with the nature of the Kingdom. If it does not blend with the theology you have adopted, then you must abandon your theology in preference for the words of Christ your King!

Chapter 93

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #9

BECOME TRULY RICH!

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich . . .”

Earthly riches do not bring spiritual advantage! It makes little difference how loud charlatans may shout on this point – riches “are corrupted” (James 5:2), i.e., they are destined to pass away--to “perish” (1 Pet 1:7). If we doubt this, Solomon will confirm this to be the case. Having possessed riches in abundance, by the blessing of God, he said “Riches profit not in the day of wrath” (Prov 11:4), “Labor not to be rich” (Prov 23:4), “For riches are not for ever” (Prov 27:24), and “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity” (Eccl 5:10). Whatever may be said of earthly riches, they are not to be the focus of our attention. Of themselves, they bring no eternal advantage. It is ONLY as they are approached as a stewardship from God that they can become a source of blessing. Although many do so today, no Word old God never encourages people to want riches, nor does it pointedly defend the right to have them. It does warn men about riches (1 Tim 6:9-10), and admonish those who are rich to use them properly (1 Tim 6:17-19).

Laodicea was a rich city, and the church there had been deluded into thinking they too had become rich, having need of nothing. However, as they sat in their wealth, heaven saw them as wretched and poor!

Jesus has gold that has passed the test of Divine judgment. It has been “tried in the fire.” Preeminently, this is faith. As it is written, “These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet 1:7, NIV).

The worth of a person, or a church, is measured by their faith. Little faith, little value. Much faith, much wealth and worth! Such richness is available from Jesus! Such faith is not distributed upon the basis of worldly possessions, and those who receive it may not receive much in this world – yet they will be “rich.” James, the brother of our Lord, affirmed a great Kingdom principle, or law, not often declared by religious opportunists. “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5). Those who are “poor in the eyes of the world” are not merely those who have no riches. It includes those who do not place a preeminent worth upon them – who do not set their minds on amassing the wealth of this world. Such insightful souls place a higher worth on riches that will transfer to the next world.

Those who “buy” this refined gold from Jesus must relinquish a corrupted sense of values. They are asked to “deny” themselves in preference of the glory of their Lord. To be rich before God, they must abandon the pursuit of temporal things, and “seek FIRST the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt 6:33). The riches of this world disappear when the Lord but blows upon them (Isa 40:24). The true riches stand the test of Divine scrutiny, and constitute one “rich” in the eyes of the Lord.

What a contrast we have here. The church in Smyrna was poor in this world, yet “rich” in God’s eyes (2:9). The church in Laodicea was rich in this world, yet “poor” in Christ’s eyes! The reason for this condition – they had NOT been receiving from Jesus!

Chapter 94

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #10

BE FULLY CLOTHED!

“I counsel thee to buy of me . . . white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed . . .”

Although this church declared it was “rich and increased in goods,” it stood “naked” before the Lord, like the guilty pair in Eden! It was not covered in the righteousness of Christ, but only held earthly distinction. Now Jesus counsels them to “buy” “white raiment” from Him so they can really be clothed. You will recall that God, before expelling Adam Eve from the Garden, made “coats of skins and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). Only then were they thrust out into the world, to live in preparation for the final confrontation. Those who imagine that Jesus does not care what we wear must consider this. God looks intently upon the attire, or lack thereof, of our souls. He looks for the “garments of salvation” and the “robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10). That alone can cover the nakedness of the soul!

The church in Laodicea had started their pilgrimage by “putting on Christ,” as do all believers (Gal 3:27). But somewhere along the way, they put Him off, choosing “all that is in the world” (1 John 2:15-17). They discarded the “robe of righteousness” and the clothing of “humility” for the “cloak of covetousness” (Isa 61:10; 1 Thess 2:5; 1 Pet 5:5). Now they must “buy” what they had once received, but had since abandoned. They would have to discard their present coverings to again obtain the “garments of salvation.” They would have to pay a price – to lose something they presently considered valuable – to obtain this required clothing.

Scripture makes clear that this “white raiment” refers to the holiness of the saints. “And to her (the church) was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev 19:8). Jesus promises such clothing to all who overcome (Rev 3:6). How is it, then, that He counsels the church in Laodicea to “buy” it now? Because salvation begins now – in this world. If we do not appropriate the righteousness of God by faith here, we will not enjoy the fulness of it there! Jesus referred to this principle when He said, “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev 19:8). Participation in the righteousness of God begins here; it will be consummated there.

Let it be clear, those who become defiled after they were once cleansed and made righteous, must “buy” “white raiment” from Jesus. They must again come to Christ, acknowledging their departure from Him, and give what they have to be clean in His sight. Surely you know, “Nothing impure will ever enter it (the glorified church), nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Rev 21:27). Too, if a longing for purity is not realized in this world, the reality of it will not be experienced in “the world to come.”

Many a congregation today is in the position of the church in Laodicea, yet has no messenger to sound the alarm. They stand naked before the Lord, covered only with moral fig leaves of their own making. Like Joshua the high priest, they stand before the

Almighty arrayed in “filthy garments” (Zech 3:3). Because Joshua chose to stand before the Lord, instead of glorying in himself, he experienced a change of raiment. The “filthy garments” were taken away, and he was given a “change of raiment.” This is what Jesus wants for all who wear His name – but they must stand before Him, to “buy” from Him “white raiment” that will stand the test of Divine scrutiny.

A quest for righteousness is not common in the Western churches. This is not a good condition, particularly since they are exporting their brand of religion to the rest of the world. The absence of a hunger and thirst for righteousness contradicts any profession of association with Christ Jesus. It betrays a condition Jesus calls “naked,” and must be remedied this side of our departure from this world. Again, I emphasize that this righteousness is procured only from Christ. The Apostle Paul expressed his driving compulsion to be clothed in righteousness in Philippians 3:8-11. “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” This is the activity to which Jesus is calling the church in Laodicea.

Chapter 95

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #11

RECOVER YOUR SIGHT

“I counsel thee to buy of me . . . and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

Spiritual blindness is never justified! To be in a condition where the things of God cannot be seen – where there is a lack of “spiritual understanding” – is most serious. Jesus declared this church to be “blind” – a state from which they had once been recovered. Their current condition was the result of backward movement, as depicted most vividly by Peter. “But he that lacketh these things [virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, and love] is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet 1:9).

The idea is that of blindness to what is right before us, and the inability to see what is ahead. This is a two-fold condition created by neglect and the absorption with the ways of the world. More specifically, this condition is brought on by forgetting the purging “of his old sins.” That is what had happened in Laodicea. Even though Jesus instituted a feast of remembrance to ensure this did not happen, still Laodicea had forgotten. As a result, blindness set upon their soul.

This church must come to Jesus and “buy” salve for their eyes – a spiritual commodity that will remedy their blinded condition. To be sure, they will not pursue things they cannot see! During His earthly ministry, Jesus once “anointed” a blind man’s eyes “with clay,” telling him to go and wash that he might see (John 9:6-7). But there was a difference in that case – the man “was born blind” (John 9:2). This was not the case, however, with the Laodiceans. They were reborn seeing, not in a state of blindness. However, they had lost their vision, and required spiritual “eyesalve” to correct their condition – “eyesalve” that could only be bought from Jesus. A blind church is tottering

on the brink of eternal ruin. If they do not recover their vision, there is no hope for them. I cannot help but observe the circumstances of our time. Spiritual blindness hangs like a dark cloud over the churches of our land. When it comes to the things of the Kingdom, there is far too much groping. I hear too many sermons, lectures, and discussions that are like blind men groping in the dark. They are unable to handle eternal things, and flounder in the sea of Scripture in a state of disorientation. They have lost their bearings because they are “blind, and cannot see afar off.” Dulness and obtuseness concerning the things of God are inexcusable, especially among those professing to be teachers. Jesus called such teachers “blind guides” (Matt 23:16,24). Paul; said of them, “desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7). We are living in the midst of a great departure from the faith. The purported “great moves” of God that are occurring nearly all have to do with elementary advances in the Kingdom. They are not characterized by “seeing;” or strong spiritual vision. This is a time for buying “eyesalve” from the Lord Jesus! Let it be clear, we do not despise these “small beginnings,” counting them a token of hope. However, the darkness of the times makes it easy to overstate their greatness.

What is this “eyesalve?” What is the secret to restored vision? It is certainly not in a disciplined procedure, or a special way of studying the Bible. This is nothing less than the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In a marvelous depiction of the advantages given us in Christ Jesus, the writer of Revelation elsewhere said, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things . . . But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:20,27). Here is the heavenly Illuminator, Who pulls back the veil that nature has hung over “all things.” The Holy Spirit is the One Who “enlightens the eyes of our understanding” (Eph 1:18), bringing spiritual perspective. We began our walk with Christ by being “enlightened” (Heb 6:4) or “illuminated” (Heb 10:32), and we maintain our walk in the same way.

Without this enlightenment, the world will dominate us, for we have no other way of perceiving the things of God. They are too high for nature to grasp – even refined and educated nature. They extend beyond the reach of the “natural man” (1 Cor 2:14), and are antithetical to the “carnal mind” (Rom 8:7-8). Those unduly enamored of academic pursuits tend to ignore this truth. That is because academics, with all of their lower advantages, are closer to the earth than they are to heaven. They are too easily entered by those who are themselves alienated from God. For this reason, great care must be taken by the saints when in that realm. Like the Laodicea church was corrupted by the society in which it resided, so are many today adversely influenced by lower intellectual climes that tend to vaunt flesh and minimize Divine influences.

The marked tendency to think like the world is lethal. The soul must break through the darkness into the light, else it will be thrust away from Christ

Chapter 96

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #12

THOSE WHOM JESUS LOVES

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline (chasten, KJV); be zealous therefore, and repent” (NASB).

Jesus severely rebukes this church, but loves it still! He is not seeking to drive it away, but promote its recovery. Not a single believer or church will escape chastening! Thus it is written, “But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb 12:8). Chastening, or spiritual reprimanding, is an appointed means of conforming us to the image of Christ Jesus. Although our earthly fathers chastened and corrected us as it seemed best to them, the Lord does it “for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness” (Heb 12:10). There is a Divine objective being served that is most marvelous: “for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.” The real benefit does not occur while the discipline is being administered, but after it has taken effect. As it is written, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, AFTERWARD it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:11).

As of this year, I have preached the Gospel for fifty-nine years. During that time, I can recall very few occasions when a church acknowledged it perceived the chastening hand of Christ in its difficulties. In the circles in which I have traveled, there is such a low awareness of the Son of God that it is startling to the soul. It is as though, in our day, the church in Laodicea has been fully restored in its corrupted state. Still, even under those circumstances, I have witnessed sensitive souls who detected the hand of the Lord moving among them because of His great love. While I do not mean to harp on this point, it is most grievous to me that in the name of the Lord, people have been deprived of spiritual sensitivity – robbed, as it were, of a perception of Christ’s appeals to them.

The required reaction to Christ’s appeals is, “Be zealous therefore, and repent!” This is the only place in the Bible where zeal and repentance are joined together. It indicates the level of difficulty associated with recovery from lukewarmness. When indifference grips the soul, and the spirit of compromise fastens on it like a leech, it requires unusual strength and determination to recover. O, that the churches were more aware of this. Deborah rebuked the Reubenites for their indifference. They sat in their sheepfolds when a summons to war had been issued (Judges 5:16). In Nehemiah’s day, the Tekoites engaged in repairing the walls, but “did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord” (Neh 3:5). Jeremiah spoke of those who were “not valiant for the truth” (Jer 9:3), and Ezekiel confronted those who had NOT “gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the LORD” (Ezek 13:5). Hosea chided Israel for being like a “morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away,” and whose heart was “divided” (Hos 6:4; 10:2). Who can forget the words of Haggai who upbraided the people of God, declaring God had heard their foolish reasoning. “The time has not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built” (Hag 1:2-6). If you are familiar with those texts, you know the extreme difficulty associated with recovering from that state.

Those who are “lukewarm” must marshal all of their resources and repent! They must come away from distractions, and quit their vain and feeble efforts to do something for God. The work of the Lord will never be accomplished while in a state of practical alienation from Him. A fire goes before the Lord, “and burns up His enemies round about” (Psa97:3).

Zeal is like a fire that goes before us, burning up counterproductive influences. Repentance does not come easily for those who are indifferent and compromising. Indeed, it is difficult enough to repent while surrounded by heavenly influences, words of exhortation, and a convicted conscience. It is well nigh impossible for those who sleep as

though there were no danger. Like Samson, such must arise and “shake” themselves, bringing every sensitivity to its full potential. Repentance involves casting “off the works of darkness,” and putting “on the armor of light” (Rom 13:14). It also requires throwing down “imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Such repentance cannot be put off until a “more convenient season” (Acts 24:25). The soul must break through the darkness into light, else it will be thrust away from Christ.

Chapter 97

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #13

GRACIOUS INVITATION

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me” (NASB).

Given the condition of this church, one might imagine strong appeals would NOT be made to anyone in their number. But this is not at all the case. Although Jesus had been excluded from His own church, He eagerly seeks a receptive soul. Now He does not speak to the church itself. Rather He sends a lofty appeal among them, searching for “anyone” still possessing sensitivity in that quagmire of lukewarmness. Can it be that one exists in such a suppressive environment?

Do not venture a carnal assessment of the situation! Here, we learn something of the nature of Jesus, as well as the existence of spiritual tenderness in most unlikely places. Do not be quick to give up on the most loathsome environment!

See, Jesus does not tear the door down in a climactic act of Divine wrath! Such a deed would have slain everyone on the other side. The day of wrath has not yet come, so the Son of God will make strong appeals. But He will do so on the OUTSIDE not on the inside. Mark it well, the religion of the Laodiceans had put a door between them and Jesus. Whatever kind of religious activity was found among them, it proved a barrier to the Divine Presence.

I know of people who imagine such a condition to be impossible. Yet, all throughout this country there are assemblies that regularly meet with their door closed to Jesus. The early disciples met behind closed doors for “fear of the Jews.” On that occasion, the resurrected Jesus appeared in their midst, even though the doors were locked fast (John 20:19). But the church in Laodicea was not afforded this blessing. Their Lord, Who had bought them with His own blood, stood “at the door” and knocked, bidding entrance – NOT to their insipid gathering, but to any individual who had managed to survive their tepidness.

He does not call out to the leaders – not to the elders, or deacons, or men, or ladies. His call is not to a group. Above the din of carnality in that assembly, and over the lull of death that had settled upon them, the voice of the Son of God could be heard. The soul in whose heart the truth had found a resting place could hear it. It was one of those “whosoever will” calls that is lofty, yet can be heard by tender hearts. “If ANYONE hears my voice,” cries the Lord –on the outside of the door. No stilted theology here about men no longer hearing Jesus! He is still speaking (Heb 12:25), and people can still hear Him within the recesses of the heart (Eph 4:21). It makes no difference how dead and lifeless an assembly may be, if there is a sensitive soul there, Jesus stands at the door and knocks, calling out to those with an “ear to hear.” That voice can be heard in a text of Scripture,

though read in a lifeless liturgy, or declared by an apathetic speaker. It can be heard in a prayer that is read in routine, or a song that is sung without the heart – but it will be heard by the searching soul. “I stand at the door and knock,” cries Jesus! It is an aggressive knock! It is a persistent knock!

Listen! Can you hear it? It is accompanied by a word – a directed word: “If any one hears My voice and opens the door!” The qualification is twofold: hearing and opening! Those are things you can do if you have an ear to hear. It is as though Jesus said, “If any one is sensitive to my presence and will avail himself of it.” “If anyone is aware of Me, and will extend himself to receive Me!” And what will Jesus do for such a person? Whether anyone else opens the door, welcoming the Presence of Jesus, or not, the receptive individual will experience fellowship and communion with Christ. “I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me!” That is the same promise Jesus gave to His disciples on the eve of His betrayal (John 14:21,23).

The soul that desires Christ will experience Him! He will be taught by the Master and cared for by the Good Shepherd. Jesus will prepare a special spiritual diet for that person, and “dine with him.” It will be a reciprocal fellowship, providing release for the soul as well as nourishment for it: “and he [will dine] with Me.”

There is a tone of urgency in these words. These are not words to be casually pondered. They demand an immediate response. Toward the close of Christ’s earthly ministry, He also spoke of opening the door to Him. In that instance, His reference was to His second coming. His words are arresting. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may OPEN TO HIM IMMEDIATELY” (Luke 12:35-36). Christ’s message to Laodicea will, if heeded, prepare them for that coming.

If men will open the door to Jesus now, freely giving Him entrance into their conscious lives, they will be able to joyfully open the door to Him IMMEDIATELY when He comes for His own.

On an intensely personal level, the soul that hears the Voice and opens the door, will experience what the disciples did following Christ’s resurrection. Like many in the churches, those disciples had been trying to catch something for a long time, only to have empty nets. For some time they toiled in futility, like many church members do. But when Jesus came and “stood” on the shore, the circumstance changed. Do you remember the incident? He asked them if they had caught anything: “Children, have you any food?” Forlornly, they answered, “No!” They had heard His voice, now He gives them an opportunity to “open the door.” “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” Instantly, opening the door, they cast their nets, and were unable to draw them in because of the multitude of the fish! When finally they all got back to shore, it is written, “Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread.” Jesus was going to dine with them! In tender love, He had prepared a special meal for them! Hallelujah! But that is not all. “Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.” They would feed on what He had prepared, and He would eat what they had caught. Although 153 large fish was in their net, the net was not broken. Then Jesus said, “COME AND DINE!” (John 21:5-12).

This is what Jesus was calling from outside the Laodicean church! “COME AND DINE!”

He wanted to dine with someone – to share with them what He had procured for them! He also wanted them to share with Him the good things they had caught at His direction. He did not call out for a congregation, but for an individual – “anyone!” O, what a marvelous picture of Jesus – and He is calling still! How sweet the fellowship of Jesus into which we have been called – and into which He still calls us (1 Cor 1:9). There are more profound insights than you have yet seen, more nourishing delights for the soul than you have yet tasted! There is more joy and peace than you have yet apprehended, and greater strength and grace than you have yet grasped. It may be that you are in an assembly like that of Laodicea – I hope not. But if you are, whatever handicaps may be there, it cannot still the voice of Jesus, or stop you from opening the door to Him!

Chapter 98

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #14

A MARVELOUS PROMISE

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev 3:21)

As you might expect, one of the greatest promises is given to one of the most unworthy assemblies. Jesus does not give it to the assembly as such, but to anyone within that assembly – or the world – that has an “ear to hear.” There is no reason why it cannot be the entire assembly, but Jesus will not hold back the benefit because of a small number! If you are waiting for the rest of the people to join you, wait no longer. Take hold of the promise yourself! “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (NASB).

See with what consistency Jesus speaks: “He who overcomes!” He has thus spoken to all seven churches (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21), and He will again speak to them collectively in this manner (21:7). Overcoming is everything! It is the line of demarcation between the utterance of the promises and obtaining them! It is the acid-test of worthiness, the ultimate work of faith, and the final evidence of an “honest and good heart.” If we do not overcome, it makes no difference what else we may or may not have done.

And what kind of promise will Jesus make to this lukewarm assembly? How will He draw them into the area of blessing? To those who have vacillated, lingering between two opinions (1 Kgs 18:21) – those who have been unassertive in their profession, being neither hot nor cold – Jesus delivers a promise of staggering proportions. It is designed to awaken them to an aggressive and valiant fight of faith. Hear it again. “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (RSV).

This is being a “joint heir with Christ” and “reigning with Christ” (Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12). This transcends anything ever conceived by men. Once, the mother of James and John requested that her sons be seated, “one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom” (Matt 20:21, NKJV). Although the highest honor she could conceive, Jesus replied, “to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father” (Matt 20:23), thereby discouraging any such request. Jesus did promise the Apostles, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28). Although that is a

astonishing promise, Jesus rises still higher in His commitment to the one who overcomes. Up to this time, the reigning of the saints of God has generally been related to the judgment itself—i.e., judging men and angels (1 Cor 6:21-2), judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28), enemies falling at our feet to acknowledge Jesus loved us (Rev 3:9), and having “power over the nations” (Rev 2:26-27). Here, however, we project out into eternity—a reign of endless duration.

Now, Jesus is sitting with the Father in His throne – mediating the New Covenant, “bringing many sons to glory,” and waiting until His enemies “be made His footstool” (Heb 9:15; 2:10; 10:13). That throne is not shared by the redeemed. Having “destroyed” the devil (Heb 2:14), “spoiled principalities and powers” (Col 2:15), “put away sin” (Heb 9:28), and shattered the gates of death (Acts 2:24-27), Jesus returned to heaven to sit in His Father’s throne. From that station He is governing the affairs of this world in the interest of His elect. He is doing so because He “overcame” everything and everyone that sought to deter Him from His mission. All competing interests were subdued, and all enemies crushed. Now He dispenses “mercy and grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:15-16) to those making the pilgrimage from earth to glory.

A time is coming, however, when the Lord Jesus will have His own throne – when His enemies shall have been publically subdued. Here, we are on most holy ground, and must walk with caution, not allowing flesh to intrude with fanciful explanations. The Spirit pulls the curtain back, giving us a glimpse of this time, in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For He has put all things under His feet. But when He says all things are put under Him, it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (verses 24-28). We dare not venture opinions on this text, but receive it as it stands. Jesus will transfer the Kingdom back to God – the very God Who gave it to Him. When He returns it, it shall have been perfected, cleansed from all defilement, and readied for eternal responsibilities. “All things in heaven and in earth” will have been united together as God determined (Eph 1:9-11).

The Lord Jesus Himself “will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him.” His subjection will not be like that of a slave – that is not the intent of these words. The idea is that He will be identified with the redeemed, and together with them shall carry out the will of God. There is a purpose on the trestle board of eternity, that has not yet been fully divulged. There will be glorious enterprises in which the redeemed will participate. Here and there we receive a hint of them. “To Him (God) be glory in the church by Christ Jesus OTO ALL GENERATIONS, forever and ever (world without end, KJV).

Amen” (Eph 3:21). “ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in THE AGES TO COME He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7).

Who can forget some of the provocative promises regarding these things: “Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. . . .

You also be over five cities” (Luke 19:17-19). “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt 25:21)

There has been far too much minuscule thinking about “the world to come,” and the role of the redeemed in it. Our hearts and minds can be enlarged concerning these things. Here is a promise that will contribute to that enlargement. The Lord Jesus will share His throne with the redeemed of all ages. He will lead them forth in endeavors that require all of their ransomed powers, and for which they will be fully equal. Here, I will rest my case, although there is much more that could be said. I encourage you to contemplate the greatness your salvation and the exceeding great reward that awaits you.

Chapter 99

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA #15

CONCLUSION

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (NASB).

Thus concludes the diagnosis of the seven churches by their Head, and a series of marvelous promises delivered to those churches.

1. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” (Rev 2:7)
2. “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” (Rev 2:11)
3. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Rev 2:17)
4. “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.” (Rev 2:26-28)
5. “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” (Rev 3:5)
6. “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.” (Rev 3:12)
7. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev 3:21)

As marvelous as these promises are, they are of no avail if people do not listen to them and think upon them. The Word becomes effective as it resides within our hearts and minds. Our meditations will draw out its richness, for through them the Spirit effectively works within us. Too, the solemn warnings given to the churches – particularly the one to Laodicea – are to be taken most seriously. Men have learned to live with lukewarm churches, but Jesus has not! Lifelessness, indifference, and compromise are all abominable to Him, and He will not long tolerate them. What is more, He will not stay where He is not wanted!

The churches, both collectively and individually, need Christ within. His Presence is

NOT to be taken for granted, but fervently sought and maintained with zeal. Without the indwelling Christ (Eph 3:15-17), teaching, services, songs, and all forms of godliness are vain, pointless, and incapable of bringing us the victory. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches! If we keep Jesus out of our hearts, He will spew us out of His mouth! If we overcome, we will sit with Him in His throne, engaging in an eternal reign with Him.