

CHRIST SPEAKS TO THE CHURCHES (REV 1-3)

by Theodore Epp

Epp's exposition of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 1-3, examining Christ's commendations, warnings, and promises to each congregation and their application to the modern church.

10 Chapters

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Foreword

In a day when evil men and impostors go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13), GOD's people should be moved to a deeper consecration and reverence in their daily conduct (2 Peter 3:11). The more wicked the hour, the holier should be the aspirations and conduct of the Christian. Many years ago an old Puritan preacher wrote: "To keep in a spirit of holiness in an adulterous generation is a Christian honor."

Such is the call of GOD in these troublous times. The letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor take on new force as we listen to the Son of Man speaking through them to the church of the present day. The fact that what our Lord said comprises nearly one-eighth of the Book of the Revelation serves to emphasize the importance GOD places on these encouragements and warnings.

The materials appearing in these chapters were gathered from messages given over the special network of the Back to the Bible Broadcast.

- John I. Paton Literature Editor

01 - Who is Christ?

Who Is This Christ

Chapter One

The Person who addresses Himself to the seven churches in the Book of the Revelation carefully scrutinizes their various records, looking not only at their outward actions, but probing to the very heart of the motives prompting their actions. He commands, encourages, instructs, warns, and condemns wherever necessary. The question naturally arises, Who is He? Has He the right to speak as He does? Has He the ability to carry out His promises and warnings? This is no light matter to consider, because the position and character of the one who speaks in such a situation as this establishes the weight to be attached to his words.

In the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation John described this Person as the "Son of Man." (Revelation 1:13) He is seen standing in the midst of the lampstands, knowing to the last detail what is transpiring among the churches.

His name, the Son of Man, is the one most used by CHRIST during His public ministry. The name portrays Him as the representative man and designates Him as the last Adam in contrast to the first man, Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45).

He is the Eternal Son of GOD, Creator, and Sustainer of the universe. But His other name, Son of Man, serves to identify him as the One who gave Himself as the sacrifice to save men.

CHRIST is herein set forth as Judge. However, He is the High Priestly Judge who takes disciplinary measures with His people as He lovingly seeks to guide them in paths of truth. This is in contrast to His position as Kingly Judge in the twentieth chapter of the Revelation where He administers punitive justice to those who have rejected all efforts to reconcile them to GOD.

As High Priestly Judge He exposes the sins and wretched condition of His people through revealing His own perfection and beauty and holiness. And it is also as High Priestly Judge that He can say, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Revelation 1:18). As a Kingly Judge in Revelation 20:1-15 He does not offer redemption to those who appear before Him at the Great White Throne Judgment. The time of probation will then have been ended.

As the High Priestly Judge He walks in the midst of the churches; but as the Kingly Judge He will sit on His throne and pronounce final sentence against all who have rejected GOD's offer of mercy.

It is with the High Priestly Judge, then, that we are concerned as we seek to discover what the Scriptures say concerning Him who speaks to the church.

The apostle tells us that he turned to see the voice that spoke with him and found "in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle" (Revelation 1:13). What CHRIST had to say was not a

matter of hearsay on His part, for He stood in the midst of the churches. There was nothing that escaped Him.

Righteous

We notice in this description, first of all, that He was fully clothed. This speaks of His absolute holiness. This is in contrast to Adam who, when he sinned, found himself naked. It is also in contrast to the time when CHRIST came to die for men and was disrobed and crucified on the cross because of the spiritual nakedness of man. But now that is all changed. He is pictured here as the Sinless One, the One who is perfect, absolutely holy. There are no fig leaves here such as our first parents wore but clothing that reaches to His feet. He is the one before whom every human being will one day have to stand. They will see Him as He is here, perfect and glorious in His righteousness.

Divine Authority

In the second place we find Him girded with a golden girdle which is a symbol of absolute divine authority. He expressed this to His disciples just before His ascension when He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20).

His authority is such that no one can successfully challenge it. This is fully confirmed in Scripture where we learn that GOD has raised Him from the dead and put Him far above all principalities and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in that which is to come. And GOD has put all things under His feet and has given Him to be head over all things to the church. There is none other like Him.

We read in Philippians, chapter two: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Php 2:9-11). So great, then, and absolute is His power, that none can gainsay Him. He has myriads of angels to call upon to enforce His commands if the need should arise; but so great is His inherent power that His own Word is sufficient. This is the Son of Man who speaks to the church.

Respect

He is next described as having His head and hairs white like wool, as white as snow. One cannot help but compare this with Daniel 7:9: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool." The Son of Man is to be respected. The wisdom of the ages is in Him. He is the Eternal One who is all wise. He is the Eternal One who was before all things and without Whose power and presence in the universe nothing would hold together.

Paul describes CHRIST in these words: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were

created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:15-18). It is an exceedingly serious matter for any human being to lightly cast aside the words of CHRIST to whom GOD has given the preeminent place in the universe.

All-Seeing

As John continues his description of the Son of Man He tells us that "his eyes were as a flame of fire" (Revelation 1:14). His penetrating gaze sees the very thoughts and intents of men's hearts. There is nothing hid from Him.

An illustration might help here, though it is but a poor illustration of the remarkable powers our Lord has. The X-ray machine is widely used today both in industry and medicine. Where the human eye could easily be misled with regard to precious gems such as diamonds, the X-ray is not. To the man who knows how to use it, the X-ray machine discloses whether a stone is a genuine diamond or an imitation.

The eyes of the Lord see far more than any machine ever made by man. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." (Jeremiah 17:10) The Lord sees the motives back of all the actions. Not only does He know what is done on the outside but He knows the motivating principles on the inside. We do well to listen to Him who speaks to the Church.

Judge

In verse 15 of Revelation 1:1-20 we find that the feet of the Son of Man are likened as "unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." Brass speaks of judgment. He, who once was judged for man's sin, now is revealed as the rightful Judge (Php 2:5-11).

His countenance is described as the sun shining in his strength. His face reflects the glory of GOD. There will be no question in that day as to His identity.

Nothing can stand before the brightness of His presence: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it (this is the Lord JESUS), from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." (Revelation 20:10-11)

When He came the first time, He came in all meekness and lowliness. He was not recognized to be the glorious Son of GOD, and men crucified Him. His face was so marred, Isaiah tells us, that it did not look like the face of a man. But when He comes the second time, He will not have a marred face but a face of glory that will outshine the sun. It will be a face from which the heavens and the earth will flee. They will not be able to stand its brightness. Neither will you nor I be able to stand in His presence unless we are united to Him now. He is One to be respected.

His Word Is Final

We are next told that His voice is like the sound of many waters. Those who have had the experience of listening to the thunder of the water as it pours over Niagara Falls have a slight indication of what this means. But more than sound is included here, for His voice is one of power. We learn from Genesis 1:1-31 that GOD spake and it was so. Everything obeys His voice. Men have and even yet, rebel against Him, but that is only for a time. They may even send missiles into the sky and boast that there is no GOD because scientists have not been able to find Him with their instruments. GOD will allow man to reach the end of his resources and will then step in and reveal Himself. He will speak with a voice that sounds like that of many waters, and man will tremble before Him.

When our Lord JESUS walked this earth, He came to the grave of Lazarus and called: "Lazarus, come forth." (John 11:43) Someone has wisely said that if our Lord JESUS had not designated who was to come forth the whole graveyard would have come forth.

When He comes again, the dead shall hear His voice and believing saints shall be raised into His presence and living saints shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

Another day will come when the rest of the dead will live, those who have not trusted in CHRIST as Saviour, and they shall stand before His Great White Throne (Revelation 20:12). His Word is final. The law was given that every mouth might be stopped. His Word we are told is forever settled in heaven. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His Word shall never pass away.

In this connection we learn that out of His mouth proceeds a two-edged sword. The significance of this is suggested in Isaiah 55:11 : "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." GOD's Word not only proceeds from Him but returns to Him having accomplished its purpose.

In speaking to the Pharisees our Saviour said, "Ye have the word, and the words that I have spoken, they will judge you." Words that are words of mercy today will be words of judgment at a future date.

As we have said, His words are final. There will be no earthly court to interpret or misinterpret what He says.

This is the Person who speaks to the Church

We learn that all things are to be put under His feet. This will be a final judgment. When Joshua was in process of subduing Canaan, five kings who had opposed him were brought before him, and he put his foot on their necks. This signified his authority and right of judgment over them. We read of our Lord in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 that all enemies shall be put under His feet. The One who was judged for our sins on the cross will then stand forth as the rightful Judge of all the earth (Php 2:5-11).

He is described as the First and the Last. It was by His word that all things came to have being. It is by His word that all things will be consummated. Men in their foolishness and wickedness are trying desperately to deny that CHRIST is Creator, thereby hoping to escape the final judgment He has told us will fall upon unregenerate men. Their wicked imaginations, however, will never substitute for the facts of GOD; and though men try with all their might, they cannot escape the

penalty of their wrongdoing.

He stands as victor over all the earth. He was dead and is alive forevermore. Not even death could hold him. Such power does not belong to men in this world. In spite of the remarkable advances made in medical science in our day, the most men can do is at times to prolong life, but they cannot banish death. All men die, and after death is the judgment.

Having risen from the dead, CHRIST now holds the keys to hell (Hades) and death. He speaks to us as never man spoke. He must be listened to as He speaks to the Church.

02 - CHRIST Speaks to Ephesus

Christ Speaks To Ephesus

Chapter Two

Some of GOD's people seem to think in their study of the Bible that if a certain book or section of a book is prophetic, the only message they will find there has to do with facts concerning the future. Such is not the case, however, for Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16 : "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." A passage of Scripture then, may be prophetic, but the message concerning the future is not all that is to be found in it.

GOD has so constructed His Word that it carries a practical aspect of truth all the way through in order that His people may be instructed and encouraged, their lives made purer, and their ministry more effective by the eternal, spiritual principles embedded in its pages.

The letters to the seven churches found in the second and third chapters in the Book of the Revelation are a case in point. These may be considered from several different viewpoints.

First of all, they were local historical churches in the day when John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote the Book of the Revelation. The conditions described and the admonitions given related to those local situations toward the close of the Apostolic age.

In the second place there is also in these seven letters a survey of church history from apostolic times through to the rapture of the Church.

Thirdly, presented in these letters are standards by which churches may evaluate their true worth in the sight of GOD at any period during this church age.

Fourthly, and this is the area of emphasis which will be given in these studies, there is the personal message from CHRIST to each of GOD's children in the Church today. This includes warnings and exhortations and promises designed to make the child of GOD what he should be, both as to his personal life and to the quality of service he should render.

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, 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: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. 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 tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:1-7).

The Person who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks is described in (Revelation 1:13) as "one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot." It is the Lord JESUS CHRIST Himself who first of all tells this church that He knows the quality of their service, and their obedience to the faith. Then He speaks of the one major flaw in their character: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Revelation 2:4)

This is in reality a very strong statement. If you look closely at your Bible, you will see that "somewhat" is printed in italics, meaning that it was not in the Greek language. The emphasis is actually very strong. If He were speaking these words today we would hear them as the voice of many waters or delivered in a voice like thunder. It would be said in love, but it would be said with a firmness and vigor no one could mistake.

"Left" not "Lost"

These in the Ephesian church had "left" their first love. They did not lose it. They abandoned it. This was a purposeful leaving of the first love on their part. This love was not lost by them, and they were not seeking it. They left it, and GOD admonished them to go right back to where they left it, for it was there they would find it. Furthermore, He called it the "first" love. They had left what should have been the foremost love in their lives.

That love is devotion to CHRIST. This is not merely a show of religion but a heart devotion to the Saviour, a love which has no thought for self but only for Him. This is the love which Paul says in Romans 5:5 "is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." It goes far beyond filial love for which men have a natural capacity. It is not merely human friendship or liking or personal heart emotion. In fact, it is not emotion at all, but something that springs from a sense of value placed on that which one loves.

It is not a selfish desire, but a love that empties itself for the sake of the person loved. GOD so loved the world that He gave Jesus, His beloved Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but should have everlasting life.

This love is illustrated again in Philippians chapter two, beginning with verse five: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Php 2:5-8). This is the love we are speaking of, a love that comes from GOD, a love man cannot produce.

As we have already seen, it is a love that has been shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY SPIRIT. There is no need for the Christian to ask how he may get that love, for he already has it. This love, however, needs to be released; and according to 1 Thessalonians 3:12, the Lord will increase it if we desire more of it.

He will work in and through us to produce this love. As we learn to wait on Him and meditate in His precious Word, this love will grow, and its self-denying qualities will be more in evidence as the

days go by. It is a quality of love difficult to analyze but wonderful in its expression, because it is the love that drew salvation's plan. It is a love with singleness of motive, and a love that sees, as only GOD can see, a value in persons who are unlovable by human standards.

What is CHRIST to you? Merely your Saviour from sin? Is He the One who is preparing a home for you, providing a free ticket to heaven and an insurance policy against the lake of fire? Or is He more than that? Is He your all? Is He your life?

Think of a home for a moment. What constitutes a home? What does a family mean to a person? What does a wife mean? Is she one who merely cooks and washes the clothes and keeps a tidy house? Or is she more than that? Is she not one who loves and is loved in return? Whether we live in a cottage or a mansion does not matter so much just so there is real love in the home.

What does CHRIST mean to us today? Do we have that strong, firm, intimate love for Him? Or have we left that first love? It is easy to become occupied with past accomplishments, present works, and future plans more than with CHRIST. That is what happened at Ephesus. Service displaced the Son. The works of the Christians were outstanding, and they showed remarkable patience under trial; nevertheless, their program had endangered their spiritual power. Their Christian activity displaced their spiritual fellowship. They were very much like Martha who became so occupied with serving JESUS that she forgot the real thing, that of sitting at His feet and learning His truth.

The account is found in the tenth chapter of Luke beginning with verse 38: "Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).

Spiritual pride will displace spiritual life. There has never been a genuine servant of GOD who departed from the faith and has gone into liberalism without first having left his private devotional life and having severed fellowship with the Lord JESUS CHRIST. Christian activity that robs one of personal fellowship, robs that one of usefulness. Thus Christian activity can become a weapon in the hand of Satan. Our service should grow out of our love; only in that way can we avoid this danger.

A Test of Love

Remember our Saviour said to us, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) He did not say we ought to keep them, or that we should keep them, but insisted that if we really loved Him we would keep them.

We show how little love we have for GOD when we would rather listen to what men say about GOD than listen to what GOD has to say about Himself. This was true in Israel's experience. They came to Moses and said to him in so many words, "Don't let God speak to us. You speak to us, Moses." They reasoned that if GOD spoke to them either they would have to do as He

commanded or something would happen to them. But if it were a man who spoke to them, they could soon quiet their conscience with regard to what he said.

There is no escaping the fact that we show how we love Him by our respect or disrespect for what He says. Love was a compelling thing to Paul. It constrained him.

Our Saviour said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26) Does such a strong Scripture passage mean anything to us? If we love Him, it will. We will search the Scriptures to see what is meant by such an unusual statement. We will find as we search that the word "hate" does not mean "to be angry with," but that we love our relatives less than we love CHRIST. Without Him being in first place in our hearts, we cannot be His disciples.

Many of us who talk about being His disciples and servants do not follow His teaching. It is doubtful if we even listen to Him to hear what He has to say. But when we do not, it is a sign that we do not love Him.

What hinders us from hearing? In many cases today the reason lies in the fact that we are taken up with so many things. We are more concerned about how we are going to live, what kind of car we are going to drive, where we are going to go for our recreation periods, or what we are going to choose for our meals, rather than putting CHRIST first. It is possible to become so devoted to things, and to service, and even to our convictions that we do not hear what GOD has to say to us.

We need to come back to where Samuel was when, as a boy, he said, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." (1 Samuel 3:9)

A Striking Comparison

There is a striking comparison between the church at Thessalonica and the church at Ephesus.

In chapter one of I Thessalonians Paul wrote that he knew of their "work of faith" and "labour of love" and "patience of hope." (1 Thessalonians 1:3) But John in writing to this church in Ephesus says of them, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience." What a difference! When the first love is gone all that is left is works, but not works of faith. When the first love is gone labor becomes toil or drudgery. When the first love is gone there is patience but no real hope; it is just a matter of endurance. The externalities of work and labor and patience are still there, but the faith which produces works is missing. Love which motivates labor is missing so that it becomes hard toil. Hope which produces patience is gone and mere endurance remains.

We ought to read the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians asking ourselves this question: "Do I still love Jesus?" The outward appearance may say one thing, but inwardly there may be a lack of real spiritual life. There are some who have a zeal for orthodoxy which is very unorthodox. For proof of this read carefully the third chapter of Romans.

Others again may contend for the faith in such a way as to conflict with the life of faith. There may be a zeal for denunciation of sin and for the proclamation of the truth, but it is a zeal that is not motivated by love. When love is missing, it is easy for hate to take over. Remember how Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, loved GOD and GOD's people, Israel. We would do well to seek to pattern our love after his.

We read in 1 John 2:15 that we are to "love not the world." Here again the word for love carries the meaning of putting a high value on something.

In this case we are told on what we are not to place a high value. We are not to love the things of the world. When we fully obey this Scripture, matters around us will not upset us. If we place CHRIST first, there is nothing around us that will destroy the inward serenity of our lives. If we are inclined to get upset over things or people, this standard will prove to be a good test for us. When we think people do not understand us, or if we are in the ministry and we think Christians do not appreciate our sermons, it is very possible that we have put too high a value on the wrong things instead of on CHRIST.

The Remedy

Not only did our Lord tell the church at Ephesus what their basic spiritual problem was, but He also showed them how to remedy it. They had left their first love, now how could they return to it? The solution is given in these words:

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Revelation 2:5). The remedy presented here is threefold, and we must be careful not to let this word from GOD make no more impression on us than water running off a duck's back, for then we will be faced with real trouble indeed.

First of all, we are called on to "remember."

The prodigal son had to come to the end of himself before he remembered. It was when he was sitting in the hog yard eating with the hogs, cold possibly, and ill-clad with no spot in that country to call home, he came to himself and remembered his father's house. And we know from the parable that his father was still waiting for him. The prodigal son could have remembered sooner, but he did not. Let us not wait so long that He has to bring us completely to the end of ourselves before we remember.

The next word to note is the word "repent."

It means to turn back first in heart and then in purpose. We are to turn back to the love we have left. We left it somewhere, the question is where? The prodigal had left his first love at home. He went to the far country loving himself. It may take us a little time to check on our own spiritual condition, but if we are careful before GOD and honestly search our hearts, He will show us where we left that first love. Then there follows the about face. The prodigal not only said, "I will arise and go," (Luke 15:18) but he got up and went home. Repentance is not something in words only, it is not merely a matter of intention - it includes action. It is not only, "I will," but, "I do."

We might well ask ourselves the question, Why do I serve GOD today? Some may answer, "I have been elected to my church to perform a certain service for the Lord." Another may say, "I have a certain gift and that gift is useful in the Lord's service." So far as GOD is concerned, these are not basic reasons for our serving Him. They may be incidentals along the way, but there is only one real reason for true service to GOD, one that He endorses. It is our love for Him and for a lost world, a love for souls that GOD loved and gave His Son for.

The third word is suggested by the phrase, "And do the first works."

This means that something has to be repeated. The first works are the result of the first love. This love will be repeated in our hearts only as we diligently seek it. And there is only one place to find it - right here in His own love letters to us - the Bible, and by spiritual communication with Him on the basis of what He has revealed to us.

Israel's experience in connection with the manna in the wilderness illustrates this truth for us most clearly. The Israelites had to go out each morning before the sun came up and melted the manna, and gather enough for one day. In the case of the Israelites, of course, this precious food was for their physical bodies, but it has a spiritual or typical meaning for us. Each one had to gather for himself.

That is the way it is in the spiritual realm. We will not be restored to our first love by listening to better sermons, going to a better church, or determining to do better in the future. We will find it only as we get alone with GOD and confess to Him that we have left that love some place, but we want it restored again. We want to place CHRIST first in our hearts.

Be honest with GOD in this. There is nothing we can hide from Him in any case, but it is necessary for us to be honest and open before Him as we confess these matters. Then we can put ourselves at His disposal so that once again He will be able to love through us. After all, this love with which we are dealing is not a man-made love. It is not natural to man at all. It is not a love of sentiment or feeling or of mere human compassion in any form. It far transcends human love.

A Warning

Following the statement of the remedy is this warning: "Else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:5)

The coming of the Lord spoken here is not His second coming. What is meant is a personal, supervised judgment, one not left to others, but something the Lord will have to do Himself to bring the believer back to his original walk with Him.

The method He uses is to remove the lampstand. Now this lampstand is not a candle but a lamp holder. Each local church was to be a light revealer. Each congregation held up the light, which is JESUS CHRIST. So the warning is that CHRIST is going to remove that which holds up the light unless there is repentance. He will not allow those to be light bearers who are not themselves bearing a good testimony to Him.

The HOLY SPIRIT has been sent to us in order that through us He might present CHRIST to the world. It is only the power and the life of the Spirit within us that enables us to lift up CHRIST, the Light. What is signified here, then, is that the Spirit of GOD will leave the unrepentant believers to a powerless witness for CHRIST. He will not leave them so far as salvation is concerned, but their ability to present CHRIST as He really is will be gone. The power for witnessing will be removed.

CHRIST sent the HOLY SPIRIT, and the HOLY SPIRIT endued certain men with spiritual gifts. Then these gifted men were given to the church by CHRIST. Through the Spirit, these Spirit-filled men in the church witness to the living CHRIST and in this sense are the lampstand. When the lampstand is removed, the organization as such may continue, but it will be without a life-giving testimony.

The order of that removal is seen here also.

First, the operation of the Spirit through that particular church will cease. This will also apply to the individuals in the church. The gifted men GOD has given to the church, men who remain Spirit-filled, will be removed. The organization, as we have said, will remain, but their power for witnessing will be gone. Much activity may be in evidence but no real convicting message.

At first this removal will be unnoticed by most of the persons involved. And with the active work of the HOLY SPIRIT absent from their midst the ability to discern spiritual things will also be gone. There will be no real knowledge of the fact that spiritual power has left them.

In the sight of GOD, there will be no more an assembly of believers in that place, simply a group of religious people. With the love of CHRIST gone, the light will be gone. What remains will be merely sounding brass, empty testimony, mere religion, activity of no value.

We can apply this to ourselves and to the churches with which we are affiliated. We can look around and see Christian schools and even mission societies and see how they stand in relation to this matter. Is the real witness gone? Is there a social gospel in place of the real gospel? Is it all activity with no power? Thank GOD for those in whom the true light is still shining!

This is a serious matter. We must hearken to the voice of GOD. This warning should cause us to work for the Lord in fear and trembling (Php 2:12). What a tragedy it would be to have GOD remove the lampstand from any of us, either as individuals or with regard to the organizations through which we serve!

03 - CHRIST Speaks to Smyrna

Christ Speaks To Smyrna

Chapter Three

This was a local church which suffered great persecution. It also represents in the prophetic picture that period of the Church's history when during the early centuries, particularly the second and third, there was wave after wave of persecution. Some Christians may not realize it, but in the last generation or two in our day some of the worst persecutions against the Church of JESUS CHRIST have been suffered in various lands. The end is not yet, and we are reminded that they who live Godly in CHRIST JESUS will suffer persecution. The principles laid down here are guides for us today, showing what the attitude of the Christian should be when persecution comes.

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Revelation 2:8-11).

The Lord JESUS introduces Himself as "the First and the Last." This is both revealing and comforting to a church suffering opposition, or to a Christian under severe trial. When all the persecutors are gone, the One who is the First and the Last will still be with us. Moreover, the persecutors will have to stand before Him and answer for their evil deeds.

There is a phase of persecution today that should never be. It is a persecution of Christians by Christians in which the most shameful kind of character assassination often takes place. Today is a day of easy, widespread communication so that the opportunities to smear a man's character and to spread that smear far and wide is simple compared to what it was some years ago.

Often the only reason for such attacks by one Christian against another can be traced to inadequate knowledge. One believer does not understand what work another is seeking to do or clearly know what principles he is following. It may even be that the critical party does not approve of the places to which the other goes, or the kind of people to whom he preaches. We seemingly have forgotten that GOD's people are His servants and they must answer as individuals to Him. We have no right to malign or to molest another person's servant. We, too, must give an account for things we do with regard to GOD's children.

All of this will come out at the Judgment Seat of CHRIST as far as Christians are concerned.

Our Lord is also described as the One who was dead and is alive.

He too was persecuted, even unto death, but He arose again from the grave. He has unlimited authority to deal with the persecutors and to vindicate the persecuted. He suffered a horrible death, upon the cross where he assumed our guilt. But though He died, He also rose again, which brings great assurance for all who are persecuted. Because He lives His people will live also. We may lose our physical lives, we may lose all our property, everything we have in this world, but we cannot lose Him. Nothing can separate us from the love of GOD which is in CHRIST JESUS, our Lord.

There is no condemnation listed against this church. This in itself is commendation without need of elaboration on the subject. GOD's silence or seeming silence, if we suffer long, does not mean that He is not concerned. It may be the evidence of His approval, and we by faith accept it as such.

If it is necessary for Him to make much over us, pat us on the back, carry us along, and feed us some soothing potion all the time, it could be a sign that we are not living under persecution in the way He wants us to live.

Three Things

There are three things in this section that CHRIST says He knows. He is the All-Knowing One, who sees the end from the beginning. Nothing ever escapes Him. He says here in effect: "I know your tribulation; I know your poverty; and I know the blasphemy of certain ones who claim to be something they are not."

The word translated "tribulation" in this passage fits the description of some of the persecution we see in our day under godless, atheistic governments. Men have been tortured to death in concentration camps by all kinds of means and methods - the most horrible that could possibly be thought up. The word for tribulation is a strong one, speaking of great pressure rather than small tests of faith. Possibly a good illustration of the word would be found in the old flour mills which used stones to grind the grain until it is crushed very fine. Such is the kind of persecution spoken of here.

JESUS was crushed like that. He said "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people (Psalms 22:6); in essence, "I am not a man, I am like a worm that has been crushed."

Most of us have never suffered to this degree. And we may never do so. However, if times continue as they are, this could possibly be the lot of many of us, unless our Saviour comes and takes His Church home to be with Himself.

Without a doubt, the whole world will see things it has never seen before in the realm of persecution and hatred as the groundwork for the Antichrist and his evil reign is laid.

We have a large number of forerunners of the Antichrist today, men who, though not the actual person himself, have many of his characteristics, particularly their hatred against the Christian and CHRIST.

The Lord also says here, "I know thy... poverty."

The word literally means "beggary." They had suffered the loss of all things. This is the same word that describes our Saviour who was rich and became poor, according to 2 Corinthians 8:9. Just how poor did He become? He left the glories of heaven with its myriads of angels serving Him and came to earth where He had little or nothing. He has shared our poverty in order that through His wealth we might be made rich. This was His message to Smyrna, and it is the same to us.

In the third place, He knew those who were of the synagogue of Satan, who claimed to be Jews but were not. And there are many like them today. Some claim to be the one hundred and forty-four thousand. Others claim that their church organization is the only true church. Unless a person joins their particular group he cannot be saved. GOD classifies all such as the "synagogue of Satan." That is not a pleasing classification to make, but it is one GOD has made, not us.

A Word of Comfort

Now a word of comfort is given. Those at Smyrna were told to "fear none of those things" which they would suffer. There are believers who suffer just because they are Christians and not because they have done anything wrong. This, of course, is proof of the righteous quality of their character.

Here again we must be on our guard. In most unexpected ways our enemy can trip us up. To feel sorry for ourselves could be a temptation when persecuted. We might well ask ourselves if we are being built up in the Word today so that if suffering for the faith should come our way we would be able to stand up under it, rejoice in it, and not be filled with self-pity.

Take our Saviour for an example. He suffered without opening His mouth in complaint or even to defend Himself. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb, dumb before its shearers, He opened not His mouth. He did not seek to vindicate Himself. There are godly men today who have been maligned and attacked but have refused to vindicate themselves, leaving it to GOD to do it for them.

Moses was a meek man, possibly the meekest who ever lived, according to the Scriptures, but he suffered. One reason he is called meek is that he did not defend himself when severely criticized. It is true that toward the end of his life he spoke some words in a fit of anger that brought discipline upon him. He was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. And the reason GOD made such an example in Moses' case was due to his position. The main point, however, is that Moses suffered criticism and persecution from men, particularly from his own nation and family, and yet he did not seek to vindicate himself. He let GOD take care of that.

Attitude in Trials

The admonition GOD gave to the church of Smyrna was, "Fear none of these things." He did not promise them relief. In fact, there was the prospect of further persecution ahead of them. This is contrary to what people today think GOD should do. Some of them are saying, "If GOD is a GOD of love why doesn't He stop such persecution?" There is a very good reason why GOD allows it, for out of persecution comes the true person. If we as Christians live godly in CHRIST JESUS, we will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Why? In order that we might know CHRIST better and be more like Him.

Job suffered great hardships and persecution at the hands of Satan. But at the end of his afflictions Job was able to say, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6) And in another place he said, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10)

There are other portions of Scripture which tell us what our attitude should be towards trials. Peter wrote, "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13). We are not to be despondent under persecution, but to rejoice, because there will be added glory for us in the day when CHRIST appears.

Again Peter tells us: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of GOD resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" (1 Peter 4:14). There is no need to feel ashamed but rather to rejoice when faced with such circumstances.

A word of warning follows these admonitions

Peter says, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify GOD on this behalf." (1 Peter 4:15) The day is coming when GOD will glorify His name through us in a way that we have no concept of as yet.

In the last verse of this fourth chapter, Peter writes: "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." (1 Peter 4:19)

Our GOD is faithful, and when we are convinced of this we will never question what He permits us to pass through. He is always right; this we must remember and be settled upon. He knows what He is doing and has promised that if we are faithful, He will give us the crown of life. This is not eternal life for we received that the moment we trusted in CHRIST. It is something added to the believer's salvation.

A crown speaks of royalty and of victory. We will be more than conquerors through Him. The one who overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death. What a great assurance this is for the saint, but what a solemn warning and condemnation for one who does not know CHRIST as Saviour.

04 - CHRIST Speaks to Pergamos

Christ Speaks To Pergamos

Chapter Four

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 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. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 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" (Revelation 2:12-17).

The church of Pergamos was located in a great center of idol worship. The idolatry practiced in that locality was largely the worship of nature. Outstanding among the creatures worshipped was the serpent. This may help explain some of the references in the letter.

The Saviour describes Himself here as the One who has the sharp sword with two edges. This is a symbol speaking of discernment and executive power. According to the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation the sword was not in His hands but in His mouth. Thus it has to do with His Word - rather than execution. CHRIST words to Pergamos were: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest." GOD knew where they lived and He knows where we live. Today, we are living in a world of wealth and fashion. Mammon has become our GOD. Our emphasis is upon the material things of life rather than the spiritual. It would seem as though many of us serve GOD only when it is convenient. This is true even of many who are in full-time service for the Lord.

Here in the United States we have what we call separation of church and state. We have no state church. According to this principle, the church cannot dictate to the government neither can the government dictate to the church. On the other hand, real Christianity should permeate our government through the men who serve in it. But we find that today the doctrine of the separation of church and state has come to mean to some that Christianity is to be kept out of everything except the church.

Our schools, which were once founded on Christian principles, are more and more barring the Bible. Our government, which also was founded in a large measure on Christian principles, is trying to make an unnatural separation between Christian thought and government.

Separation of church and state does not mean that CHRIST should have no place in the lives of our people in government and that His principles should not direct them in their decisions. When

there was respect in all elements of our society for the Word of GOD and the belief was general that JESUS CHRIST was the eternal Son of GOD, there was a different atmosphere in the country. But that is all changing fast.

Satan is winning over, and the Bible is being kept out of our public life wherever possible.

Power to Convict and to Convert

We also see that this One who has the sword going out of His mouth has, through His Word and His Spirit, the power to convict and also to convert. This is why we are to preach the Word.

This same Word will also condemn a man. If you who read this do not have JESUS CHRIST as your personal Saviour, the Word of GOD will convict you of this neglect if you will read it; or - and this is something to consider - it will condemn you whether you read it or not.

The Word of GOD is described as a sword in Hebrews 4:12-13 where we read: "For the word of God is quick" (living and operative). It is different from any other word. I may read some great author like Shakespeare or some other secular writer, and I may enjoy what I read or I may reject what I read, but such reading is entirely different from that of the Word of GOD itself.

That Word meant something to my soul when I was a young Christian, a babe in CHRIST. Today that same Word is still living and working in me in a more profound way than ever before. It has the power to divide asunder soul and spirit.

The Word of GOD clearly distinguishes between the soulish life and the spiritual life. The soul has to do primarily with life in the flesh, whereas the spirit has to do with that which concerns GOD. When CHRIST comes into our hearts, He takes up His position in the spirit of man and from there He begins to control the soul and the body. All three of them are represented here in the Word of GOD. Nothing is hid from the searching of that Word. It passes judgment on the thoughts and the intents of the heart. No creature can hide from Him. All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The Word of GOD penetrates the heart as nothing else will, that is why we must preach the Word.

Cults of the present day take a little part of the Word here and a little there, using only what they want and leave the rest. By this method they have built up many false systems and doctrines and have even brought division among believers as a result.

Satan's Throne

Another factor to consider here is that GOD not only knows where we dwell but He also knows where Satan's throne is. It would appear from this that there are certain locations or localities where Satan will establish himself, at least for a time. It is evident then, that Christians in such places will be under greater stress and strain from Satanic attack than perhaps some others farther removed from Satan's main place of operation.

This leads us to this further thought: some of us are exposed to temptations to which others are not.

There are allurements of sin around some that are not around others. For this reason, if any of us are going to judge the character of another Christian brother, we should be sure we know where

he lives in the Bible meaning of that term. In reality, since we may not know where any certain individual lives in respect to these things we have been dealing with, it is best for us not to judge his character too severely. GOD says, "I know the intents and purposes of your heart. I know your heart motives. I know under what circumstances you have to work."

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians, expressed this matter in very clear terms. He said, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

That fifth verse is very important in this matter of judging motives. Paul is saying in effect that the Corinthians did not know the motives back of his actions; therefore, it was not possible for them to form right conclusions with respect to his over-all service.

It is so easy to criticize harshly a fellow Christian when he falls. And we do this so readily even though we do not know what was in the person's heart, and know little about the circumstances leading up to the fall. It is much easier to live a godly life under some circumstances than it is under some others. It will take the omniscient CHRIST to determine the credit or blame due any of us.

We would need to know how much a person had to resist before we could rightly judge his character. We would also need to know how easy or difficult it might be for someone to run the race. Some persons, as we have said, do not have problems that others have. So in the light of these facts, let us be careful in our estimations of other people's lives. We may judge harshly in a case where our Saviour would not do so since He is all-knowing. We may, on the other hand, commend another person when in reality there is nothing that our Saviour would commend him for.

This does not mean that we are not to show discernment with regard to what people may do. The Saviour has given another principle, namely that by their fruits we shall know certain ones. It is one thing to recognize an action on the part of a Christian as being wrong, it is quite another for us to sit as judge, assuming the prerogative that belongs only to CHRIST. This does not mean we will condone sin and not condemn it, but it does mean we will be very restrained in our treatment of the offender, and use great caution in ascribing motives to him. The exhortation by Paul in Galatians 6:1-18 to restore one who falls is to those who are spiritual, and they are to be careful to take into account the fact that they themselves are prone to fall into the same kind of sin.

Circumstances under which we labor may all be on the surface, easy for all to see. On the other hand, they may be felt only in the inner recesses of a person's heart, and only GOD can know that. And let us not think that because someone can face the world and his fellow believers with a joyful testimony and let that joy be reflected in the happiness of his face that he is without trials. He has them, but has possibly learned how to rejoice in the Lord in spite of them.

We can thank GOD that at the Judgment Seat of CHRIST all these matters will be made plain. And some who have been highly lauded here on earth may not be so highly commended there. Some who are first here may be last there.

Satan has his throne, his base of operations, his headquarters at different places at different times. He is not omnipresent like GOD. Since he is an angelic being, however, Satan is able to move quickly from one locality to another, but he is not all-powerful and all-knowing. And so far as the Christian is concerned, he is to remember that Satan is a defeated foe. His power is beyond that of any of us as human beings, but it is not beyond that of any of us who walk in the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. (See James 4:7.) Satan's kingdom is apparently well organized.

Daniel at one time had the answer to one of his prayers delayed because of the action of one of Satan's prince leaders. But eventually the message from GOD reached the prophet in spite of all that Satan and his cohorts could do.

Satan uses various strategies, depending on the circumstances he finds Christians in. At Smyrna he set up a "synagogue" opposing the work of the Lord through a religious system. At Pergamos he used persecution even unto death against believers. GOD knows all these things and all else beside, so we can confidently rest our faith in Him who is our faithful Creator and Redeemer. He knows as no one else does whether our service is in the power of the Spirit or in the flesh.

A Difference in Methods

GOD's method is to work through the spirit of man, whereas Satan approaches him from the standpoint of his soulish life. Satan starts from the outside and tries to work in, but GOD starts from the inside and works out.

The Word of GOD describes itself as being "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." (Hebrews 4:12) A great many people have never learned this difference, but it is a vital one. We read in Philippians that the believer is to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. The meaning of the passage, as far as I can understand it, is that GOD comes in and takes possession of the inner core of man's being, the spirit, and rules his life both soul and body from that source. We speak of the body having five senses, namely sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. And certainly there are properties in the soul such as conscience, emotion, mentality, will, and consciousness. These can all respond either to Satan or to GOD.

So skillful is the enemy that he can deceive us into thinking we are actually being blessed of GOD in our own hearts when in reality we are doing nothing more than responding on a purely human level to certain things that interest and please us.

For example let us say that we attend a musical concert. The music is delightful, and the words seem to contain a message for us. We listen and find ourselves lifted higher and higher in our emotional response. Then, after the concert is over we leave the place saying, "What a blessing I received from that music."

There may have been something there that might have caused us to think seriously on some aspect of life, but perhaps one of our companions made light of it and all of us together laughed it off. We went home, still appreciative of the music, but there was nothing in the experience that drove us to our knees. There was nothing in the concert that really brought us face to face with a decision that must be made for the Lord. Music, of course, may not be able in itself to bring us to such a place; but on the other hand, there are those who believe that because they have been emotionally stirred they have been brought closer to GOD through such means. Now that is a

serious mistake. Soulsh response is not the same as a spiritual response.

Over against such an experience as has just been described we may have heard a sermon which drove home truth to our hearts so that when we went home we had to go to a private place and get alone with the Lord. Just what is the difference between the two? One has merely attached itself to our emotions and made us feel good. But the impression left on us did not go beyond our feelings; whereas the message with its spiritual power got down into the spiritual part of our being, and we settled things with GOD. This is the result of CHRIST having complete control of the spirit which in turn influences the soul and this influence is expressed in and through the body.

On the other hand, when we start with the body then go to the soul, we become self-centered. Our whole life is centered around our own interests. We ask ourselves, "What am I getting out of this? Am I going to be lifted up?" Our thoughts are always on self in a case like that.

Holding His Name

A number of commendations are given the church of Pergamos, the first of these is, "thou holdest fast my name." The name in this case has to do with the person of JESUS CHRIST. An infidel may use the name of our Lord in a wrong way. Others may use the name of JESUS and talk of Him as a great teacher and a great example but still come short of holding fast His name.

He is the great GOD, the First and the Last, the One who created all things. The unscriptural teaching that JESUS CHRIST was the first created being is an old one and has taken on new vigor in the present day. The Bible does not teach that JESUS was the first created being, but that He Himself is eternal and is the Creator of all things.

There is a great mystery and also great miracles in connection with the coming of the Lord JESUS CHRIST into this world as the Babe of Bethlehem. The miracle of the virgin birth was accomplished through the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. And the fact that the eternal GOD came in the form of a human being is one of the outstanding tests used in connection with a teacher or a prophet, showing whether he is true or false. John wrote in his general Epistle: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of GOD: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:1-3).

Now we know from 1 Corinthians 12:3 that a person cannot say that JESUS is the eternal GOD except as that one is illuminated by the HOLY SPIRIT. Consequently, the man who believes and openly confesses with his mouth that JESUS CHRIST is the eternal GOD is a true teacher. It is not enough for a man to say, "I believe that JESUS is eternally GOD, but I don't speak about it."

The true man of GOD not only believes it, he confesses it. And according to this Scripture in I John it is not necessary for a man to openly deny that CHRIST is eternally GOD in order to be identified with the spirit of Antichrist. The very fact that he does not confess that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh marks him as belonging to the enemy. This other fact is also true: When a religious teacher denies the virgin birth of the Lord JESUS, we know that teacher is not of GOD, but of the spirit of Antichrist. From such we are to turn away.

We consider the X-ray machine to be a remarkable invention. But how much more remarkable is the power of GOD who can tell our thoughts even afar off, as the psalmist said. The Lord knows our works, and where we dwell, and what we are doing for His Name's sake, and what we are failing to do. There is nothing hid from GOD.

Holding to the Faith

Another commendation given to this church is that they had not denied "my faith." This faith is not something that can be identified as "our faith" in the sense of our denominational creed. Men may speak of their different kinds of faiths, but there is only one true faith and that is described here by the Lord as "my faith." This is the faith that we have in JESUS CHRIST; and according to Galatians 2:20 it is the "faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

In this connection there is a verse which has puzzled many of GOD's people. It is Colossians 1:23 where we read: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister."

The phrase, "if ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled," is the root of the problem. Many Christians on reading this wonder how thin the thread is on which their salvation hangs. In order to find out the real meaning, we must see this phrase in its context, and this will help us with the expression "my faith" in the Book of the Revelation.

Beginning with Colossians 1:21 we have these words: "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled."

There are two distinct phases of salvation referred to here, yet the two are so closely knit together that they should not be separated in our thinking. They are not independent of each other, but this is where so many Christians make mistakes in connection with them.

The first subject is our reconciliation to GOD. Before we were saved, we were enemies, alienated from GOD, and dead in trespasses and sins. But through His death, CHRIST took away the penalty and guilt of our sin making it possible for us to be reconciled to GOD. This is confirmed in Romans 5:10 which reads: "We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

That is the first phase of salvation, and we received it by faith. We are saved by grace through faith.

The second phase has to do with our life as believers. We live by His life or as Galatians 2:20 says, we live "by the faith of the Son of God." Our Saviour made the promise in the tenth chapter of John that He came not only to give us life, but that we might have it more abundantly. The giving of life has to do with our being reconciled to GOD. The second part has to do with this same life being expressed through us by the living CHRIST who lives in us. These, as we have pointed out, are two distinct phases of salvation, but the one follows the other. They are both part of the same life that GOD gives us when we trust in CHRIST. The purpose of the Lord JESUS, once we are reconciled, is to live through us and to present us holy, unblameable, and unreprouable in His sight.

It is His constant aim in our lives to bring us to maturity. And we reach maturity by the same method of appropriating life as we did when we first believed. It is a walk of faith. But this is where so many make a grave mistake. Their thinking seems to be that they are saved initially by faith, but they are kept saved by works.

The Bible teaches us that we are saved by faith and we are kept by faith. But there is more than that in the teaching of the Scripture. We grow to maturity only as we daily appropriate the fact that CHRIST is living in us. If we will continue on in this faith we will mature to where we can be presented by our Saviour holy and unblameable. Otherwise, we will have to meet Him at the Judgment Seat of CHRIST where our works will be tested; and if they are merely our works, they will be wood, hay, and stubble and will burn. If they are His, produced by His faith in us, they will be gold, silver, precious stones and will remain.

It is no wonder, then, that we are told to continue in the faith. We are not to jump from faith for salvation to something else in order to reach perfection. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" is Paul's admonition in Colossians 2:6.

We must not allow anyone to unsettle us with the traditions of men or vain philosophies, for these will keep us from being built up in the things of CHRIST. We are not brought to maturity in the Christian life by keeping the Law of Moses, as some thought in the early church and as some teach us even now. The things enjoined upon us are not given in order that we might keep on being Christians; but now that we are Christians they become the expression of the living CHRIST in and through us. He will automatically produce in us the kind of life that pleases Him.

The reason some Christians live in a miserable life is that they have failed to continue believing GOD for their daily victory. That is why they lose their tempers and do other things contrary to the new life of CHRIST within them. This takes place within us when we do not trust GOD for our daily life. After having finished His atoning work in us, He then proceeds to perfect the new life in us.

The Doctrine of Balaam

All that was said to Pergamos was not by way of commendation. Not all was right among them, and there are several counts against them.

In the first place there were those who held the doctrine of Balaam. The charge was not that all members of that church adhered to this doctrine but there were some in their midst who did. And the fact that some did was a clear indication that the others were not practicing church discipline. The church was loyal in the faith, but it was tolerating false views.

What is this doctrine of Balaam? We need to know, for it is a kind of teaching that Satan has used against the work of GOD on several occasions.

The historical background concerning this doctrine is found in Numbers chapters 22 through 25. (Numbers 22:1-41; Numbers 23:1-30; Numbers 24:1-25; Numbers 25:1-18) There we learn that Balaam was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the people of Israel when they passed through the land of Moab on their way to Canaan. Balak was afraid of them and wanted them destroyed. He knew his armies were not strong enough to do the job, so he hired Balaam, a heathen diviner, who strangely enough also knew something of the true GOD, to bring down a curse upon Israel. Balaam tried to earn his ill-gotten wages, but found that instead of cursing Israel he blessed them.

GOD would not allow this evil prophet to curse the nation GOD had blessed.

Balaam found that Israel, as a nation, was secure in GOD's hand. This security rested on GOD's sovereign will, grace and mercy, which was first revealed to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-20. The record is, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee." This was an unconditional promise GOD gave His servant. From one standpoint, then, Israel was immune to Satan's attacks. They were invulnerable to the enemy's stroke. The final purposes of GOD in that nation could not be permanently ruined.

But this is only one side of the matter. We must not stop here or we will not see the terribleness of the sin of the doctrine of Balaam. This is the divine record of what transpired when Balaam, instead of cursing Israel, blessed them saying, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:8-9). Again in the same chapter we read, "Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them" (Numbers 23:18-21).

In this fashion GOD declared Israel's position as a nation before Him and the ultimate purpose He had for them. Balaam and Balak were the emissaries of Satan in this incident, and in dealing with such enemies GOD declares His ultimate purpose with regard to His people.

In chapter 24 Balaam reiterates the fact that he cannot curse Israel but must bless them and at the same time speak against Moab in so doing. The future glory of Israel's place in the kingdoms of the world is seen in verse 17: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." (Numbers 24:17)

This, as we have said, is one side of the question. This relates to GOD's eternal and sovereign purpose for Israel. He will eventually establish them in their land, and make them His own people, and put His love and commandments into their hearts. No enemy can curse them to where this sovereign purpose of God will be permanently thwarted. His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 will be literally fulfilled.

Over against this, we find that the nation of Israel suffered for its sins, and individuals in the nation suffered for their sins. The fourth chapter of Deuteronomy contains severe warnings relating to the committing of sin by the Israelites and chapter 28 gives a prophetic picture of their world-wide dispersion due to their national sins.

It is into this phase of Israel's life that the doctrine of Balaam is introduced. Balaam showed Balak how Israel could be temporarily stopped from achieving GOD's goal. Balak and his people were advised to fraternize with Israel, and to intermarry with them, thus making them ineffective for GOD's service.

This doctrine of Balaam led to many of the Israelites becoming idolaters and to thinking that because as a nation they were secure in GOD's sovereign plan, they could do as they pleased without any adverse effect upon them. This was a false security.

Balaamism's Results Today

Let us apply this lesson to ourselves today.

There are some professing Christians among us who talk about their security in CHRIST and declare that it makes no difference how they live. Their salvation is not a restraint on their sinning but becomes an excuse for it. They declare that if one's creed is correct, he need not be concerned about his conduct.

This has produced a conflict among believers due to the extreme teaching of some with reference to the sovereign grace of GOD and their lack of conscience toward sin.

With the true Christian there are two sides to this question just as we have seen in the case of Israel. GOD's side is given in John 10:28 where we read, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Some persons unthinkingly have said, "Well, but I can jump out of His hand." Such a statement, however, ignores the clear teaching of the passage. The promise is, "They shall never perish" and the verse continues, "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Neither we ourselves nor anyone else can remove us from the hand of God once we are in it through faith in CHRIST. Now, that is GOD's side. That states our position in CHRIST. This is something the enemy cannot destroy.

Another reassuring verse is John 6:37 where our Saviour promised: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." No one can pluck us out, and the Saviour will not cast us out. That is one side of this whole subject.

Now look at the other side. In describing His sheep the Saviour said in John 10:27 : "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish." This shows us that it is His sheep who receive eternal life, those who know Him, hear His voice, and follow Him. They follow Him because they are His. It is not a question of those who ought to be following or who may follow. His sheep are those who do follow Him.

A further elaboration on this is given in 1 John 3:9 : "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

There are two very significant statements made here. "Whosoever," we are told, "is born of God does not commit sin," which means, "does not practice sin." Then it goes on to say, "for his seed remaineth in him and he cannot sin." CHRIST is the seed in us and He cannot sin. The consequence of this is that with CHRIST indwelling the believer the believer can no longer continue practicing sin in the way he did before he was saved.

We must remember that even in the apostolic church there were those who made a profession of faith in CHRIST who in reality had no possession of Him. Again we read in I John these words: "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 2:19).

We recognize fully that not all who fall into sin in the church are false professors. The doctrine of Balaam is being practiced in our midst as it was in Israel's early history and as was seen in apostolic days. There are those who use the grace of God as a license to sin. Israel has been suffering for nearly four millenniums for that teaching she embraced as taught by Balaam. Likewise, there are Christians today who have become friends of the world and for that reason have come under GOD's disciplinary judgments. James said, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). When the true Christian steps aside from the path of righteousness, he has to answer to GOD for his disobedience.

Without a doubt, there are persons in our midst today who have been attracted by the doctrine of the security of the believer but have no real faith in their own hearts concerning CHRIST, and use their fancied security as a license to sin.

Remember that in writing to the church at Pergamos, the Lord said that they must repent and do their good works quickly or He would come and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. GOD will not tolerate sin in any of His children.

On the other hand some of GOD's own people may have rejected the truth of the believer's security in CHRIST because of the loose living on the part of some who hold that doctrine. None of us should allow ourselves to be robbed of the assurance of salvation in CHRIST. Let us stick to the Word of God and live according to it.

The doctrine of Balaam as it applies to our churches today leads Christians into the sin of spiritual fornication where they become friendly with the world and cease to live for CHRIST. Worldliness, we must remember, is an attitude of heart. It places great value on temporary things and neglects eternal things. Some have tried to pinpoint worldliness as wearing certain types of clothing or driving certain types of cars or many other things of the same nature. Worldliness has to do basically with wrong motives and attitudes. When our motives and attitudes are right, the outward expression of the life will be right.

The Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes

The second matter the Lord found wrong with the church at Pergamos is expressed in these words: "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate" (Revelation 2:15). There is little help from the commentaries in regard to what the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes actually was. The best answer to the problem is found in the Word itself. The word Nicolaitanes is actually two Greek words combined, the first being "nikao" meaning "to conquer"; the second is "laos" meaning people or "laity." From the prophetic and historical angle this church represents the age which saw the beginning of the rise of the priesthood and the authority of such men over the souls of others.

It is nothing new for men to lust after religious power, but it is always sad when they do, and the consequences are always evil. Such overlook the Lord's admonition when He said, "Whosoever will be great among you... shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:43-44)

GOD says He hates this doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. When the organized church reached the place where the clergy were put on a high pedestal and given absolute control over the laity GOD was grieved and angered. The evil consequences of this system have been to place in the hands of men the prerogatives that belong only to CHRIST. He it was who came and provided salvation for us, given on the basis of faith in Him. It is not dispensed by men at their will but applied to human hearts through faith by the HOLY SPIRIT.

GOD gave gifted men to the church according to Ephesians 4:11-12 : "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." His purpose in so doing is expressed in the next words: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

These men were given to the church to build it up, to teach the saints, to train them, and to unite them in the work of the ministry.

But what has happened down through the years is that the work of the ministry has come to mean the work of the ministers. A few men known as the "clergy" and often called "ministers" are given the responsibility which actually belongs to all the Body of CHRIST. GOD did not put this matter to a vote and ask His people what their desire was with regard to it. Here is what He says to those who have been reconciled to Him and which includes all of us who have trusted in Christ: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). This is a task for the entire body of CHRIST, not for a chosen few.

GOD does not do away with human organizations. Such are endorsed in His Word. And it is also true, that there are some whom He has called to spend all their time in His work. One may be a teacher, another an evangelist, and another a preacher and pastor. But the reason for such leaders is not that they might dominate and control the other believers, but that they might train these believers for the work of the ministry. That is part of the function of this Broadcast which GOD has raised up in these days. It is not only our responsibility to seek to win others for CHRIST but also to teach Christians in such a way that they, too, can help spread the gospel of our Lord.

A Twofold Sin

The modern sin of Nicolaitanism is twofold as I see it. There are those who lord it over GOD's heritage. There are others again who shelve their responsibility that is theirs as believers in CHRIST and say that they hire the clergy to do that work for them.

How far this all is from the program of GOD!

You recall that our Saviour said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In this He gave His followers both a local and a world-wide program.

The tendency is, as it always has been, for people to confine the witnessing to a small sector or to their own group. So it was with the early church. When we reach the eighth chapter of Acts we find the work of GOD confined largely to Jerusalem and Judaea. A little had penetrated into Samaria, but the uttermost part of the earth was far from hearing the gospel. It had been totally neglected up

to this point.

GOD permitted persecution to fall upon the Church, and its members "were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." (Acts 8:1; Acts 8:4)

The "clergy," if we may use that term in connection with the apostles, stayed in Jerusalem while the "laity" spread the gospel out from Judaea and Samaria and into other parts. This is the program that has been followed on many occasions. GOD has had to permit persecution to come upon His people before they were willing to go abroad with the message of life.

After a while in the early church, the clergy not only had authority to run the church organization, but soon they became the only interpreters of Scriptures. There came a day when they even took the Bible away from the common people, saying that they could not understand it. Only the priesthood could interpret the Scriptures. And finally that became limited to a few leaders in the organized church. Such then, was the sin of the Nicolaitanes, and its evil fruit.

GOD's warning to Pergamos was, "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Revelation 2:16). The word "repent" means to turn about, to turn away from something, and it involves a change of attitude, a change of heart, and a change of mind.

The "coming" of the Lord in this warning is not the second coming, as we have noted before; it has to do with disciplinary judgment on those of GOD's children who disobey Him at any particular time.

For some reason or another, the Word of GOD is not entering into hearts today with the piercing quality that it should be. There is too much indifference even among the people of GOD. It is not the wish of the Father to have to discipline in the sense spoken of in this verse. He would rather that we would obey and gladly fulfill our responsibilities. So we learn from the Scriptures that if we would hear His voice, we should not harden our hearts but come to Him.

Pergamos was blamed for tolerating the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Are we in anywise guilty of tolerating similar things in our lives and hearts today? Then we can in no wise expect to escape His personal judgment as stated here to this church.

05 - CHRIST Speaks to Thyatira

Christ Speaks To Thyatira

Chapter Five

"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; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent her fornication; and she repented not. 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 everyone of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him I will 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:18-29).

How little most of us seem to realize Who it is that speaks to us in these letters! Men in general are listening less and less to what GOD has to say.

At this very time there is a controversy among the nations of the earth as to who speaks with authority. The free world looks to America to speak for them. This is contested by Russia who would like to speak for all the world. But all of us need to listen to CHRIST. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He began all things and He will bring all things to their consummation. His word is final, and men should learn to serve Him with fear and trembling.

In the passage before us CHRIST is described as having eyes like a flame of fire. He has absolute and intimate knowledge of all our hearts. He knows the profoundest secrets among us. There is nothing hidden from Him, our faults, our motives, or anything else about us.

We can take comfort in this, for He will give proper recognition to all who faithfully serve Him. Full recognition does not come to us necessarily in this world; and in many cases none at all is given in this world to many of GOD's servants. But GOD knows these things, and keeps a record of all our heart's devotion and service to Him. One day He will reward us for our faithfulness.

His feet, we are told, are like fine brass; this speaks to us of coming judgment. For some conditions there is no remedy save judgment. Apostasy, for example, which is a deliberate denying of and falling away from the truth, ends only in judgment. Those referred to in Romans chapter one

who "hold [down] the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18) will be judged. In Hebrews we learn that "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26-27).

In the Book of the Revelation CHRIST is revealed as the One who brings judgment. Yet how lightly men treat this matter. There is "no fear of God before their eyes." And this irreverence toward GOD even characterizes many Christians.

We dare not overlook the spiritual law expressed in the sixth chapter of Galatians where we learn that GOD is not mocked, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7) If men sow to the flesh, they will reap of the flesh; if they sow to the Spirit, they will reap of the Spirit. The final evaluation of whether we have served in the flesh or in the Spirit lies with GOD, and we will be rewarded or lose rewards accordingly.

GOD knows our works as this passage in the Book of the Revelation shows. Nothing is overlooked. This is given us by way of encouragement to preserve in meekness and humility in service for Him. GOD is righteous and will not overlook the good in the things that we do. He will commend us for even the small things we have done right.

If men, on the other hand, see one or two things being done wrong by someone, they are inclined to condemn the man's whole life. This is a sad state of affairs. We see a man whom GOD may be using, and he makes a mistake perhaps only of judgment, but right away many of his fellow believers condemn and repudiate him. Because he errs in one phase of his life, they seem to think that nothing he does counts for GOD.

Paul had to face this difficulty with the Corinthian believers. He acknowledged himself to be a mere man and liable to error and sin, and rested his case in GOD's hands. He knew that one day GOD will bring to light all the secret things of men's hearts and show outward actions in their true light.

In judging Sodom, GOD did not overlook the fact that Lot and members of his household needed to be saved from the destruction about to fall upon the cities of the plains. And though there were hundreds of thousands of people, possibly millions, who were unrighteous, ungodly, and unholy before the flood, GOD did not forget the one man and his family who, in spite of their environment, pleased GOD with their lives.

Judas, who denied and betrayed the Lord JESUS CHRIST, was given room to repent. He even brought back the betrayal money and cast it at the feet of the priests. I am sure in my own mind that the Lord would have forgiven Judas if he had come with a repentant heart. He was filled with remorse for his evil deed, but apparently he did not seek the forgiveness GOD would gladly have provided.

Thyatira's Love

Thyatira had, at least, a measure of love for the Lord. The word translated "charity" means love. Thyatira had what Ephesus had left. Here was a church that was serving CHRIST out of a love for Him, possibly having heeded the warning given to the Ephesian church.

Faithfulness also characterized this group. They were diligent in service and did not hesitate to give a cup of cold water in the Saviour's name. Some people are ready to spread a large banquet feast but slow to do the smaller things that really indicate their love for CHRIST. It is sometimes easier to preach to a crowd than it is to minister to an individual soul.

The emphasis today among us is on the large crowds and the showy programs. But GOD sees the little things and gives commendation accordingly. The church at Thyatira, had been laboring for the Lord a long time. They had not left their first love; but rather, that love was growing and increasing as the days went by. So should it be with us in our service. We should not be satisfied with what we did for the Lord yesterday, but seek today to be faithful and, if possible, do an even better job. We should work and walk and live with the Lord and grow in the knowledge of Him continuously and consistently.

However, the church at Thyatira was not faultless. It had settled down in the world, and in settling down in the world, it settled down in sin. The spiritual condition of Thyatira reminds us of the parable our Saviour spoke concerning the woman who put leaven in the meal. There was sin in this church. The current attitude of the world and the atmosphere in church circles today is for all of us to be tolerant toward sin. But this must never be allowed, for if we allow a little leaven to enter in, it will leaven the whole lump. We who are GOD's people must be constantly on the alert against the coming in of evil. Soon it will permeate the whole, causing disunity and making our service ineffective.

The Woman Jezebel

The believers in Thyatira also permitted a prophetess by the name of Jezebel to flourish in their midst and to teach and lead GOD's people astray. This evil woman introduced idolatry which GOD called "fornication," evidently spiritual fornication, and so He said, "I will cast her in 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) These are strong words, yet they were spoken to an organized church. There were unbelievers in the midst, certainly, Jezebel was one; yet the Christians allowed her, without protest on their part, to teach her wicked doctrines.

We see a similar attitude in many churches today. We are cautioned to be more "tolerant" towards people who do not see eye to eye with us. Evidently "love" to such persons means tolerance of sin. It is true that GOD has never endorsed nor advocated persecution of those who do not hold to the true faith.

Those who take up the sword, our Lord tells us, will die by the sword. On the other hand He has made it very clear that Christians are not to allow false teachers into the fellowship of the churches. Moreover, compromising with the world will not win the world. The people in the world are so disillusioned with the compromises they see among their own crowd that they have no respect for a Christian who would compromise his vital message in an effort to win those opposed to him.

Still, it is a common thing to see membership drives in churches geared to multiply members but not members who are born again. The New Testament teaches that those who are saved should

associate themselves with Bible-believing churches. In that way believers can unite in service and worship together; but we go against the directions of the Lord when we take unbelievers into our midst and hope thereby that we can reach them for CHRIST. Almost invariably they will do as Jezebel did and corrupt our fellowships.

The instructions in the Word of GOD are very explicit. We read, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

The Historic Jezebel

For a comprehensive picture of Jezebel's character and conduct and her violent end read from 1 Kings 16:28 through to the end of the book and then the latter part of the ninth chapter of II Kings. Jezebel, we find, was an idolater, a follower of the false god Baal. She made a twofold attack upon the spiritual leaders of the true GOD in Israel. She first of all tried to get them to compromise their testimony. Then, those she could not persuade to compromise their faith, she persecuted to the death.

Now, in Ahab's household was one named Obadiah who had the responsibility of taking care of Ahab's personal business affairs. Obadiah was a man who "feared the Lord greatly," (1 Kings 18:3) and when Jezebel was seeking to kill GOD's prophets, Obadiah saved a hundred of them "and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water" (1 Kings 18:4). From this we learn that Jezebel was not entirely successful in stamping out the worship of the true GOD. Nevertheless, all through Israel at this time, idolatry flourished, and all because of the evil mixture of religions introduced by Jezebel.

It is not hard to see a similar condition in our churches today. So many church groups feel that they must make their program attractive to the world by compromising with worldly standards. The great emphasis in the world is on entertainment; consequently, many churches have tried to put on a program that will entertain rather than convict of sin and lead people to CHRIST and establish them in the faith.

The world is far better able to provide the kind of entertainment worldly people want. The church, when it seeks to compete with the world on this plane, is entirely out of place and unable to produce. It is not wrong for Christians to have a certain amount of entertainment depending on what is meant by entertainment. If it is simply a matter of killing time, as people say, the Christian has no time to kill. Every time we kill time we are killing souls. We are not taking steps to arrest their downward journey. It is sad to think that once again the program Jezebel inaugurated so many years ago is finding success in the midst of GOD's people today.

She also corrupted government and used it to uphold her false teaching. However, it is the part of poetic justice that it was finally government that got rid of her because of the corruptions she introduced into the life of Israel. She was given "space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not." (Revelation 2:21)

A very startling fact is that many false religions of the present day were begun by women. This is no indictment of women, for without godly women the work of GOD would be greatly hindered. In many mission fields there are five women missionaries for every man missionary. And in our own

country there are more women who attend church than men. At the same time many of the false religions of the present day have been originated by women who have gone off into "special revelations." We need to be careful of those who come to us with special helps, special keys, new discoveries, and new hidden philosophies which are not the deep things of GOD but the deep things of Satan.

The church and Christians today need to get back to what the Bible teaches

One of the greatest enemies of the gospel, however, is higher criticism, which was originated by men, not some woman. Higher criticism has rejected the miracles of the Word, always having some plausible explanation for them that appeals to unbelieving hearts.

In a small church in Oklahoma near to where I was reared there came a preacher who was ensnared in Modernism. He wanted to pass along his "new learning" to the congregation not knowing that the particular group he was speaking to had many Bible believers in it.

One day in seeking to explain away the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, he stated that CHRIST was such a dynamic teacher and personality that the people sat and listened to Him for hours without realizing the passage of time and the fact that they were hungry. He so fed them with intellectual and spiritual food that they did not need any physical food.

When this preacher was through giving this explanation a little girl, six or seven years of age, stood up and said, "Pastor, I'd like to ask you a question. If that's the way JESUS fed those people, where did He get the twelve baskets full that were left over?" It took a little girl to show the absurdity of the teaching of the higher critics.

But this is common today, this matter of seeking to explain the Bible on a purely human level. Men overlook the fact that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Biblical things are biblically discerned. It is only as the Spirit of GOD illumines our hearts that we can understand the things of GOD. Men by nature cannot understand the infinite and the eternal. Who could explain that GOD never had a beginning and never will have an end? We have a beginning, but we will never have an end. We will either spend eternity in hell or in heaven. That depends upon the preparation and choice we make concerning CHRIST here upon this earth.

We must examine ourselves to see if we are giving our money and our time to organizations and enterprises that are compromising the truth of GOD, instead of declaring fully the whole counsel of GOD. We will find that this mixture of Christianity and the world with its human philosophies is not pleasing to GOD. We must turn back to CHRIST and His truth.

Whose Yoke Do We Wear?

The word "yoke" in 2 Corinthians 6:1-18 is sometimes misunderstood. The Lord does not intend us to become hermits and withdraw ourselves from other people even though we are to be separate in our fellowship from the world and from unbelievers. Instead, we are to take Christ's yoke upon us and go back into the harvest fields to reach the unsaved with the gospel.

A yoke signifies the binding of ourselves with someone or something. If it is the wrong person or the wrong program, then we are unequally yoked. For a Christian man to seek an unbeliever as his wife or a Christian woman to seek an unbeliever as her husband, is to be unequally yoked. For

a Christian to seek a partner in business who is an unbeliever, will spell trouble for both of them. The same is true with regard to church relationships. If a Bible-believing Christian joins himself to an unbelieving church that would create an unequal yoke. In any of these cases the Christian would be putting himself under obligation to do things against his own conscience and faith; and, which would be equally bad, he would not be able to do things that he knows he ought to do.

Over against this unequal yoke we are invited to take Christ's yoke upon us. It is an easy yoke, as He said. In this yoke with CHRIST, we do not do the things the flesh wants but the things the HOLY SPIRIT wants. We are yoked together with CHRIST and He as our Head directs us and tells us what to do and where to go. Just as my hand is part of my body and cannot act independently of the rest of the body, particularly of the head, just so is the Christian yoked to CHRIST under the direction of CHRIST.

In the unequal yoke, one will pull one way and one the other. This will result in compromise or in frustration or both; but in the end it would mean that GOD would be the real loser. Righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness. Light has no place of compromise with darkness. It is no wonder, then, that we read: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18; 2 Corinthians 7:1).

We are in the world but we are not to be of the world. When our Saviour was here upon the earth He ate with sinners. He even ate with some of the Pharisees who were the Modernists of that day. There are many Christian circles today where our Lord would be criticized for doing what He did; but we must remember that in none of these actions did He yoke Himself or compromise His message with unbelievers.

We can see the same truth in the case of Elijah. He called upon Ahab to bring the people of Israel together to Mount Carmel to find out just who the true GOD really was. Elijah was yoked to GOD, not to Ahab, in this contest. Ahab was a means to an end, for it was through him that a crowd was gathered. Elijah was responsible for the spiritual lesson. Remember that in all of these matters GOD ponders the motives of the heart, and sometimes what may seem like a compromising yoke on the part of some servant of GOD may be no yoke at all but simply a legitimate method of reaching certain ones for CHRIST.

Judgment on Jezebel

A severe judgment was declared against Jezebel. The Lord said, "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds." (Revelation 2:22) When people are asleep on a bed they are unconscious of the things around them. They are relaxed and unconcerned about the course of events. In the light of this context such false teachers and leaders will be in a kind of spiritual sluggishness and will not only deceive others but will be deceived themselves. The record is that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

Those who commit adultery with Jezebel are to be cast into great tribulation except they repent. These, without doubt, are the unregenerate. Over against this is the promise in the third chapter of

Revelation to believers: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation (great tribulation), which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10). This should help settle one of the controversies that are so rife among Bible believers of the present time. These two Scriptures tell us very plainly who will go into the tribulation and who will not. The unregenerate, those who are not born again, will be cast into tribulation. Those who are born again, according to our Saviour's own promise, will not pass through the great tribulation.

So severe will be this judgment that the unregenerate members of the organized churches will have no question about what is happening to them. GOD who searches the reins and the hearts knows the true spiritual status of every individual, and each will receive according to his or her works. This does not mean salvation by works, but believers will be rewarded according to their works, and unbelievers will suffer degrees of punishment according to their works.

However, there was a remnant in Thyatira who did not have the doctrine of Jezebel and who did not know the depths of Satan. No other burden was to be placed upon them. They are appealed to, however, to hold fast until JESUS comes.

This is a message for us today, for Thyatira's conditions are being re-enacted once more in our midst. These are times of lethargy and of coldness and of compromise. Many of GOD's people are losing out with Him, but let us determine to hold fast that which we have. GOD wants to be able to give us the crown He has planned for us. We must listen to what He says. GOD hates neutrality. He wants us to take sides - His side - and be out and out for Him.

Spiritual Retrogression

In a number of places in the Scriptures GOD gives us a record of spiritual declension on the part of men or groups. In the case of Achan, the record of whose sin is given in Joshua 7:1-26, we learn that he first looked at the spoils, coveted them, took them, and finally hid them in the earth. Sin works in that way. First there is the appeal through the eye gate, then covetousness arises in the heart to where we take what we want. Finally, conscience smites us, and we try to cover up the evil thing we have done.

In the first Psalm we notice a progression in sin also. We find there that the blessed man is the one who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of the sinner, and does not sit in the seat of the scornful. By telling us what the godly man does not do, we learn what the ungodly man does do; and in this progressive decline we find him first walking, then standing, and finally sitting among the unbelievers.

The ungodly man first of all discusses the wrong things, for he walks in the counsel of the ungodly. Then he begins to stand in the way of sinners, and finally he is given a permanent seat in the place of sin. This is not only a warning to unbelievers but shows what can happen in the life of a Christian who gives way to wrong desires and wrong company.

Retrogression in the Churches

In these letters to the seven churches, we find that five of them were censured for evil conduct. Two of them were not.

In the case of the first, we found that it left its first love. They did not lose it but deliberately left it. The service, which was plentiful, was done as a matter of duty rather than arising out of love. The motive was wrong.

Love is a constraining power which is necessary in the cause of the Lord and is also necessary in the making of a home. It takes love on the part of the wife to cook day after day to take care of her family and her husband and keep up with the everyday chores of homemaking. Where such love is present, home life is enjoyable; and what under other circumstances might be drudgery becomes pleasure, because of the love back of it. Obedient children who find obedience a pleasure are those who have love motivating them.

When married life, however, becomes a duty because love is gone, very soon the home is in danger. And so it is in the work of the Lord. If our service springs from our daily fellowship with Him through the Word and through prayer then our service will be a joy and a delight.

To the church of Pergamos our Lord spoke against loose living. When the first love is gone, and those responsible are stubborn in their rebellion, very soon pure standards disappear and evil practices take over.

The same can be seen in a home. Where it is merely duty that calls very soon looseness of living can show itself in either the husband or the wife. They get their eyes on someone else. Where the motive is wrong in the Christian life, self creeps in and CHRIST is shut out. Then we seek for self-honor, and power for self, and self-glory, and the whole life centers around what we want and what we enjoy. With love for CHRIST gone, it is no surprise that doctrines such as the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes creeps in.

In the fourth church, Thyatira, we find the spirit of compromise which leads to "spiritual fornication" becomes prominent. When we come to Sardis we discover the spiritual life is so deteriorated that Christianity is merely a name with the life-giving principle gone. We read, "thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." (Revelation 3:1) Religious form and admiration of CHRIST as a good man, are substituted for the living Son of GOD, but the mystery of the gospel which Paul was given to preach to the world is completely forgotten.

The end is reached when we read of the church of Laodicea, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16) That which began with the leaving of the first love ends in active apostasy. The church that began to preach the message of life becomes the church that is opposed to the CHRIST of the Bible. It is not an anti-religious movement but an anti-Christian movement. It opposes the things of GOD and leaves CHRIST on the outside knocking, asking permission to enter.

In keeping with these progressive stages of sin leading to apostasy, we have GOD's statement of progressive judgment. To the first church the warning was given that GOD would come and remove the "candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:5) This speaks of the removal of the work of the HOLY SPIRIT from their midst. Then follows judgment by the Word in which the Lord declares that He would come and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. The third judgment is that sinners would be cast into a bed with the false prophetess and also into great tribulation. Nevertheless, in all of this, GOD gives such persons opportunity to repent.

Then in the third chapter we are faced with this warning: " I will come on thee as a thief." (Revelation 3:3) This is certain judgment with no further warning to be given. Finally will come absolute eternal separation from GOD. Rejection of Him when persisted in will lead to the second death.

It may be that CHRIST is outside your heart's door today knocking, asking to come in. Will you not say "Yes" to Him today? What you need is CHRIST, not religion. Let Him in.

06 - CHRIST Speaks to Sardis

Christ Speaks To Sardis

Chaper Six

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 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. 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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:1-6).

Here was a church with a good reputation among men. They had a name that they lived, yet in GOD's sight they were dead. It reminds us of our own day here in America where to belong to a church is very popular. Church membership stands at an all-time high, but what is the quality of life in evidence among us?

GOD in examining the church at Sardis said, "Thou... art dead." They showed much activity as though they were alive, but they were actually spiritually dead. Their activities had people believing that the Sardis church was alive; GOD, however, did not find its works perfect before Him. They had not presented their bodies as living sacrifices to GOD and thereby expressed in their lives that which was holy and acceptable to Him (Romans 12:1-2).

In other words, they were not meeting GOD's requirements. They had set up their own standards and discarded GOD's.

Searching Questions

Let us be honest with ourselves. Is this a picture of the church we belong to? Or a picture of our own hearts? When we come to break bread at the Lord's Supper, do we genuinely appreciate the spiritual content of that supper? Or is it merely an emotional experience in which we feel that if we are sincere enough we are pleasing GOD?

Is our church form of worship true worship?

Do we really honor CHRIST in it? Is our Bible reading leading us to a deeper knowledge of Him and greater obedience to His Word? We feed on the flesh and blood of the Son of GOD, as the figure is used in John chapter 6, when we read and meditate on the Word and commune with GOD through it. Someone has said that we can tell how popular a church is by how many people attend it on a Sunday morning. The popularity of the preacher is indicated by those who attend the

church on Sunday night. And the popularity of the Lord is known by those who are at prayer meeting during the week.

Are our gifts for the Lord's service gifts of duty or gifts of love?

Are they the expression of our heart's adoration? Do we give a portion of our income in the hope that GOD will love us for it? Remember GOD loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). A gift to GOD presented on the basis of duty may not even be registered in heaven.

Do we so love the Lord that we work hard for Him and sacrifice in order to provide more for His work? Remember, real service is service that comes from the heart. The church at Sardis, no doubt, had stated times for prayer. But did these prayers reach heaven? Or were they merely a gathering together of fine words and smooth sounding sentences? Prayer is much more than asking GOD for something. Prayer at its best is a fellowship, a meditating on the things of GOD, speaking to Him and allowing Him to speak to us, and then letting our requests flow from the burdens He lays upon our hearts.

We need to think of our music and what it really amounts to. A church may be very particular about the rendition of the songs. It may have a well-trained choir able to sing some of the more intricate religious and Christian music, but does that choir exalt CHRIST?

It is possible to speak of being blessed with music that has nothing to do with the Word of GOD at all. It may soothe us; it may arouse us; it may make us feel pleasant on the inside; but that is not what music at its best is for. It is so easy to enjoy singing and to enjoy certain songs without ever entering into the real meaning of the message.

It is easy to sing "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying" in a missionary service when our hearts have been touched, but do we really respond to these things? Do we have a name that we live and are dead?

In our church business meetings fine-sounding resolutions are passed, and the progress of the church looks good on paper. There are so many new members and so much has been given for this work and that work. But how much real fruitage is there for GOD? Numbers do not always tell the story.

How much more like CHRIST are the members of your group now than they were a year ago? Is there compassion for souls among them? We want to say with Paul, "That I may know him (Christ) and the power of his resurrection," (Php 3:10) but how many of us want to join in with him when he speaks of the fellowship of CHRIST's sufferings?

We need to look beyond the immediate earthly contacts and environment and realize that we have responsibilities before GOD. What kind of reputation do we have in heaven? Will the Head of the Church, the Lord JESUS CHRIST, compliment us for the work we are doing? Is our profession genuine? Remember that GOD said to the church at Sardis: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." GOD forbid that that should be said of any of us.

Is it really possible to be alive and dead at the same time? The church at Sardis was. A graphic picture of their condition is given in Matthew:

"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation" (Matthew 12:43-45).

This description fits much of so-called Christendom today. A great deal that bears the outward semblance of Christianity is something garnished by human reformation but empty of Divine life.

"Strengthen What Remains"

Sardis was warned to strengthen the things that remained. We too might well heed what was said to that church. GOD told them, and He is telling us, to hear His Word, and to be fully awake and alert to what He says. We are the children of the day, not of the night; consequently, we should be up and going for the Lord.

If there is anything that is more apparent than another with regard to Satan's present attack on the Church, it is his success in lulling a great part of it to sleep with regard to the second coming of CHRIST. Yet things around us are happening so fast, world events of such stupendous magnitude taking place before our very eyes, that JESUS could come and take His Church away at any moment.

GOD is not misled nor impressed by any outward show any of us may make. He knows the heart and knows that a great many so-called Christian activities today are empty and meaningless. When the people of Sardis were warned to strengthen the things that remained, GOD intended them to understand that they were to allow Him to put life back again into the empty forms they were using.

- If they prayed, they were to pray in the Spirit.
- If they sang, they were to sing in the Spirit.
- If they worshipped, they were to worship in the Spirit, and not make it a time of mockery.

So it is with us. Let us see that our church activities and our expressions of worship are genuine. Let our singing and our giving all spring from the motive of love for CHRIST.

For those who are ministering through song, it is not enough for them to have good voices, to articulate well, and to seek to interpret properly the message in the song, though these things are good and desirable in themselves.

The central aim should be to glorify CHRIST

In our church organizations we are not to neglect our committees and study groups, and the making of plans and programs. There is nothing wrong with these things in themselves. They are not forbidden, but they should all be carried on in the strength and wisdom of the HOLY SPIRIT.

There are three such short Scripture verses which I have found to provide a safe guide for all earthly questions.

The first is 1 Corinthians 10:31 : "Do all to the glory of God." Then in (Ephesians 5:20) we read, "Giving thanks always for all things." Finally, in Colossians 3:17 the admonition is: "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Let us then give glory to GOD in all things, give thanks in everything and do everything in His name.

GOD recognizes the outward symbols of service and the conduct of affairs of our organized Christian groups. But He does not want us to be satisfied with mere externals. If the external expresses the spiritual strength and glory of the internal quality of life, it is good. If the sermon contains a living message that makes it a sermon, GOD will use it. If the song conveys a message, then sing it.

A Warning

It is in line with this thought that the warning is given: "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." (Revelation 3:3) This is not the second coming of CHRIST. This is coming upon men suddenly and in secret to take away something that is valuable. A thief comes in the night to take away valuable things. The same type of warning was given in the second chapter as we have noted:

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:5) This is a serious business with GOD, and we must take it seriously. Unless we submit to GOD and give Him the glory, He will remove the power from our midst.

Secondly, the visitation refers to the removal of that which is valuable. To have the power of GOD given to us and then to fail Him is to sin against Him. He will not be mocked, and those who consistently fail Him will lose their power. There is too much playing church; GOD asks for reality.

Where is the power of protest in the church today? We once had it in our land. Sunday was a day we gave over completely to service and to worship. There were always some persons in the community, of course, who would not conform; but now the world has filled Sunday with its amusements, and the church is left far behind. Remember, the thief comes when we are least expecting him. He comes at a time we are ignorant of, and we do not realize that something precious is gone until it is too late.

One very common danger we must avoid is that of applying these truths to some church other than our own, or some heart other than our own. We must ask ourselves if there is not something here for us, that we might learn more correctly to walk with our Lord.

We can see symptoms in some churches noted for their orthodoxy of their drifting into dead orthodoxy. The spiritual deadness is marked by their criticisms of others, and their fault-finding with regard to fellow believers. To stress correctness of doctrine is good, but if there is no life to correspond with the doctrine, we have what is rightly called dead orthodoxy.

Neither must we measure spirituality in terms of large numbers of people attending meetings, great finances, and organizations, for the sentence of death may be written over the whole.

GOD's Remnant

There is another message here that we must not overlook.

All down through the ages, from the time of Adam's sin on, GOD has never left Himself without a remnant. Somewhere in the world, no matter how dark the age, and this is well illustrated in history from what we call the Dark Ages, GOD has had a people who honored Him. To Sardis the Lord said, "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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." (Revelation 3:4-6)

It may not be for us to say who these are in present-day Christian circles, but we know that GOD knows who His people are. He knows who are the faithful ones, those who have not soiled their garments. They may not be recognized by the world as being a church that is alive and serving GOD, but in His sight they are. And, after all, it is His commendation that counts.

A special reward is offered to the faithful remnant. "They shall walk with me in white" is GOD's promise.

We turn to the 19th chapter of Revelation, and read in verse 7: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Just what is meant here is made clear in the next words: "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness [righteous acts] of saints." (Revelation 19:7-8) There is a special garment of righteousness we receive through having believed in Him, but this wedding garment will be one which His Bride has formed through her own righteous acts.

Four Tests

There are four tests that we can make to show whether or not there is life in a church or in an individual Christian.

First there will be growth. That does not necessarily mean a growth in membership, for that can come from the church's being popular without its being alive. It is rather a spiritual growth on part of the individual Christians as well as the church. Of course, we will look for people to be born again as the result of the testimony of believers, but that will not be the first consideration in the matter of growth.

It might cause us to do some heart searching on our own if we were to note particularly the requests that are made in some of our prayer meetings. Some of them, in fact a great many of them, are of a personal nature, centering around the personal needs of those in the meeting. Sometimes I have found all the requests were for the physical health of persons and not a single prayer for a wayward soul. My heart has grieved as I have thought and wondered if that was the way I prayed too.

In the second place there will be compassion.

A living church is filled with the love of GOD because each believer has had the love of GOD shed abroad in his heart by the HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 5:5). This love will drive us to personal soul

winning. Or must GOD classify us among the dead? Are we looking to our pastor to do it all? When love is lacking, the love of souls will be lacking.

Where there is love there will also be the unity of the Spirit, as we read in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. The Spirit unites the people of GOD as one under CHRIST. Where there is strife, and quarreling and backbiting, there is loss of spiritual power, death instead of spiritual life.

In the fourth place, there will be wholesome emotions with regard to life and worship. There will be weeping with those who weep, and rejoicing with those who rejoice. Such wholesome and genuine emotion is not possible in an atmosphere of death. The Christian's joy will express itself in song on the one hand, and on the other with tears for the wayward and lost. There will be sorrow for failure, and mourning over neglect of the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

There can be, of course, unwholesome emotions, wild excitements of different kinds generated from the false belief that these are evidences of Christian joy and the Spirit's presence. These will not be found, however, where true spiritual power is.

We must go back to the Word for spiritual nourishment. I recall that our eldest daughter had whooping cough when she was eighteen months of age. She lost her appetite, and before we could get proper medical help, her weight had dropped to fourteen pounds. Our doctor said, "The girl is starving to death, you must feed her." We answered, "But she won't eat, and she won't keep anything down when she does eat." He gave us a prescription, telling us that she must eat if she would live. It took nearly a week of feeding her a few teaspoonfuls of food every hour before her appetite returned to where she wanted to eat.

We can no more grow in the Christian life than in the physical if we deny ourselves the proper food. GOD's Word is our food, so let us eat it that we might grow thereby.

07 - CHRIST Speaks to Philadelphia

Christ Speaks To Philadelphia

Chapter Seven

The church in Philadelphia is one of the two with which the Lord finds no particular fault. This does not mean that any of us should feel that there is no need for careful evaluation of our actions or motives. The previous letters we have studied would indicate that we must be constantly on the alert.

The message to Philadelphia reads: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 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. Because thou has 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. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:7-13).

Character of the Writer

It is always necessary that we check ourselves by the One who writes to these churches. He is the Holy One and True. Such is His character. His official position is indicated in that He is of the lineage of David, has the key of David, and will sit upon David's throne in the end times. CHRIST also has administrative power, for He opens and no man shuts; He shuts and no man is able to open.

This character has two sides to it. First He is holy, speaking of that which is within. This reminds us that our motives need to be checked as to their genuineness. We need to learn if they are a result of the new birth, and of the indwelling CHRIST. He is holy, and those who are members of His family will bear His resemblance.

He is also true, and this has to do with His outward actions. His outward actions conform to His inward character. What He does and says are consistent with what He is.

Does our outward life conform to the image of CHRIST within us? Or do we put on a show of holiness which is not holiness at all? What we are can speak so loud that the world cannot hear what we say. For us to be effective witnesses, we must not only have CHRIST indwelling us, but our conduct must express His righteousness.

The present laxity among Christians is due to a breakdown in character. We do not feed upon CHRIST as the Scriptures indicate; consequently, we lose out in our testimony. But when there is genuine loyalty to Him and real fellowship with Him, then our outward actions will attract people to Him.

A missionary friend in writing to me said, "To be, is more important than to do, for the doing comes from the being." We cannot be what we should be apart from the Word of GOD. Unless we take time to study it and assimilate it regularly, our lives will lack power and righteousness.

CHRIST is not only perfect in character, He is also perfect in authority. He has the right to the throne of David by virtue of the virgin birth which put Him in the lineage of David. Furthermore, through spiritual conquest on the cross He has rule over all principalities and powers. His throne will combine heavenly authority with earthly authority. When our Lord rules on this earth He will be GOD manifest in the flesh, making His habitation among men and ruling and reigning in righteousness. Now He speaks to men through His Word and through His Spirit and through the Church; but in the future kingdom He will speak to the world in Person.

Then notice also His power of administration. When He opens the door no man can shut it. When He shuts a door no man can open it. There is no veto over His authority. He not only has the right to act; He also has the power to act.

We would be much stronger Christians today if some of these truths became embedded in our hearts. Our Saviour is not only able to do, but He is active in fulfilling His plans and purposes.

Responsibility of the Open Door

Our responsibility, when He opens a door for us is to go through it. He can still open or close doors regardless of the activity of governments and the opposition of men, demon inspired though some of them undoubtedly are. Russia, for example, has built up what we call an iron curtain. Yet GOD uses radio and other means to get in behind that curtain.

In other lands, which for one reason or another make it difficult for the Christian missionary to enter, GOD still has His way of getting the message to needy souls. Gospel broadcasting has gotten behind the bamboo curtain to people in China. It has gotten behind the caste system and reached hearts in India. A missionary in India wrote to us some time back, "There is a certain caste which we cannot touch, but they are an educated group and understand English. They have radios, and your broadcast has been entering their homes. Now, by means of radio, more missionary work is being done among these people than has been possible before."

There are people deep in sin, some of them criminals fleeing from justice, who have been found by GOD by means of gospel radio. They have been convicted of their sins and brought to CHRIST. Then again there are religions whose followers are warned by their leaders not to listen to the gospel, but the people hunger for the things of GOD, and GOD is answering them through this open door of radio.

The People of Little Strength

The Lord in speaking to the church in Philadelphia said, "For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." (Revelation 3:8)

The world usually measures strength by numbers, but not so GOD. He said of the church in Philadelphia that they had a little strength, but they were not necessarily a large group. The Lord is actually speaking to those within the visible church who make up the real Body of JESUS CHRIST. He is addressing those who are truly born of GOD. Though their number is not great, He, nevertheless, does something for them that is very unusual.

We find in reading the first chapter of I Corinthians that there are not many among GOD's people who are wise as men reckon wisdom. There are not many who are influential, not many who are high born. GOD chose what the world counts foolish to put the wise men to shame. GOD chooses what the world counts weak in order to put strong things to shame. GOD chooses what the world considers to be poor and insignificant in order to bring its realities to nothing. And the purpose in all this is that no human being will have any reason to boast in GOD's presence.

Without this assurance I would long ago have stepped out of GOD's service. But in Him lies all our sufficiency. In Him is everything we need. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

There are some who by sheer strength of man power and will power have carved for themselves places of authority and established powerful governments. But it is to those who have little strength that GOD says He has opened the door of opportunity and service.

This small and weak group in Philadelphia is not right merely because it is a minority group. There are many minority groups in different activities and in different lands who are wrong in their aims and purposes and conduct. The size of the group, whether great or small, does not make the group right. The standard for correctness is based on qualifications other than numbers. Two qualifications are given in this letter which have to do with GOD's Word and the Person of CHRIST. The words are: "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." These believers were faithful to the message and faithful to the Person of CHRIST.

We have learned from other places in the Word who JESUS really is. And those who do not confess that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh are not of GOD, but are of the spirit of Antichrist. Today there are great numbers who have not accorded CHRIST His rightful place in their midst. They revere Him as a teacher and laud Him as a man, but in so doing they degrade Him, because He is in reality the eternal Son of GOD who came in human flesh to die for men and to rise again from the dead. He is the God-man.

The door has been opened by CHRIST, not for those to enter who do not confess His proper work and place, but to those who are true to His message and true to His Person.

We must recognize that CHRIST is all in all so far as our life is concerned. In Him alone is life, and He is our life as we read in 1 John 5:1-21 beginning with verse 10: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (1 John 5:10-12)

The assurance to each child of GOD is this: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Php 4:13). Victory in the Christian life is in CHRIST alone. Is He speaking to us? Do we qualify? Have we entered the door that He has opened and no man can shut it?

A Call to Action

An open door means opportunity. It is a call to action. It means that we will prove our faithfulness to Him through our obedience. Not many of GOD's servants are of the mighty of this earth though some of them are, as was Paul, for example. Moses was highly trained, a man of great intellectual power and physical force; but there were others again who were obscure and whom the world looked down upon. But an open door calls for action. GOD wants us to go through it. Today GOD has opened up before us the door for world evangelization through radio and we must not let Him down.

Many a pastor these days gets discouraged because it is hard to get the unbelievers to come to church. And often revival campaigns do not reach the unsaved in the way we would like them to. Believers often neglect opportunities to reach those on the outside, but GOD still has this open door of broadcasting through which He is reaching the masses. This is an effectual door which GOD in His grace has entrusted to us. Yet I tremble at the responsibility. GOD will close this door when the task is finished - or when Christians fail to enter into the opportunities presented.

There was a day in Israel's history when the people who had left Egypt stood on the edge of the promised land at Kadesh-barnea. But they refused to go into Canaan, and GOD closed that door until thirty-eight years later when a new generation believed Him and entered.

The greatest enemy of Communism today is the Word of GOD and the CHRIST of GOD. Before the Communist can dominate this world, he has to get rid of CHRIST and the Bible. It will be necessary for Communism to destroy the consciences of men, because through the conscience, GOD enters into men's hearts. This is the reason for Communism's brain-washing techniques. They are seeking to substitute a mass conscience fashioned by their diabolical leaders for the individual conscience.

Radio is one of the most effective means now of reaching the masses in their homes, in their shops, in their cars, or wherever they are; for radio enters behind every barrier that men might raise. It can reach the hungry soul in the formal and dead church, the person despairing of life, the disillusioned and desperate drunkard, the wayward son, the unchurched, the unreached areas - - whatever the situation, GOD can use radio to reach the hearts of men.

We need a spiritual revival if we are to be saved from the onslaughts and inroads of Communism. We love our freedoms, but they will be preserved to us only as we as a nation live in righteousness.

So much that has been said about radio evangelism can also be applied to other open doors. Literature is likewise one of GOD's effective methods. Then add to that the many tried and true methods of the past generations - GOD is never without a witness or an open door. Some doors once open are closed today, but new ones have been opened - even more effective ways and means than the previous ones.

***[BBB NOTE: What Doctor Epp says about radio can equally be said today about the internet - except that in the latter case, it doesn't cost a fortune to set up a broadcasting studio and apply for a license to enter the air waves - GOD has allowed us to open an ISP account and immediately begin to start "broadcasting" the Gospel. It is my experience that many from all over the world are

reading our threads to the glory of GOD and the salvation of precious souls that we will one day meet in Heaven.] ***

Organized Religious Deception

In contrast to those who have been faithful to CHRIST we have those who are described as "of the synagogue of Satan." The record is, "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" (Revelation 3:9).

The word "synagogue" means a gathering together or a bringing together of people. The reference was to some organization which claimed to be something it was not.

Information on this subject is not confined to this one verse. In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, a very strong statement is made with reference to those who follow Satan and are deceivers, professing to be one thing while they actually are something else. Paul wrote: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."

These are impostors, disguising their true intent and teaching, behind a false front.

The Apostle Paul dealt with this same organized deception when he wrote to the Galatians. His words are, "I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7).

The focal point of attack in this case is the gospel itself, so Paul continues: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

The strategy of Satan does not vary much from age to age. He attacks, if possible, the Person of CHRIST and also the gospel of CHRIST. At the present time we have religious organizations full of religious fervor whose teachers and preachers claims that everyone is a child of GOD. They do not qualify the statement as does the Word of GOD which says, "Ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26)

This shows that the children of GOD are limited to those who are trusting in CHRIST. Those who preach that all men are children of GOD are not true ministers of the gospel. The word "church" means "called out ones" and speaks of individuals called out from the mass of mankind. GOD's church does not include everybody in the world though His gospel made provision for all.

Only those who receive the gospel become part of His true Church. Those who pretend to be Christians belong to "the synagogue of Satan." Some day such persons will acknowledge that the true followers of CHRIST are loved by GOD.

Christ the Way

When CHRIST came to this world He did not come to show us the way to GOD. He, Himself, is that way. He stated in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." He is the Way, not merely the way shower.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul defined the gospel in these few words: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that CHRIST died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

A number of factors are outstanding in this passage. First of all, this was a message to be received by men. Certain persons at Corinth received it and were saved. The first fact they rested on was that CHRIST died for the sins of men according to the Scriptures. This speaks of His substitutionary death, the purpose of which was to reconcile us to GOD. The fact that He was buried indicates the taking away of our sin; and the fact that He rose again from the dead and is now alive shows that His sacrifice was acceptable before GOD. Through His death we are reconciled to GOD, and we are saved by His resurrection life.

This, in brief, is the gospel.

A Special Promise

A special promise is made to the church in Philadelphia: "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" (Revelation 3:10).

Two facts are noteworthy here.

- One is that an hour of trial is coming upon the earth.
- The second is that GOD has promised to keep the believers of the Philadelphia church so that they will not pass through that trial.

The believer is not to be preserved through water as was Noah but is to be taken out of the world as was Enoch.

Enoch was translated so that he should not see death.

The particular trial that is mentioned here is, without a doubt, the Tribulation spoken of in many parts of the Bible. In Jeremiah 30:7 we have the promise concerning Israel: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." A portion of Israel that shall be saved from the hatred of Satan and the hatred of the Antichrist will be removed into a desert place for safe keeping (Revelation 12:14).

This, however, is not the same promise as is made to the Philadelphia church.

Another Scripture dealing with the time of Tribulation is Daniel 12:1. There we read: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same

time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book." Israel will be kept through this time of Tribulation just as Noah was kept through the time of the flood. But the church will be kept out of the Tribulation just as Enoch was translated from the earth.

Another word to describe this escape of the church from what is coming on the earth is given in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It is verse 17 which gives us the information: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (snatched away) together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Those believers who have died in CHRIST will return with CHRIST and receive their resurrection bodies; and those of us who are alive on the earth when the Lord comes will be translated or snatched away into His presence having been transformed.

So then, Israel, or at least a certain portion of Israel will be preserved in the midst of the Tribulation and its severe judgments and persecutions. The Church, on the other hand, is taken out of this world and thereby kept from that hour of world-wide testing.

The 18th verse in this section in 1 Thessalonians admonishes us to "comfort one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

There would be no comfort if there was a thought of going through the Tribulation and no promise of preservation in it. That preservation is promised for Israel but no such promise is given us. But none is needed, for we are to be kept out of it and will not see it. Many of us would be inclined to pray if we believed that we were to go through the Tribulation: "Oh, Lord JESUS, please don't come until after I have died for then I will not need to go into the tribulation and die a horrible death at the hands of those who will be working havoc among thy people at that time."

The coming of the Lord JESUS would be no comfort to the believers of this age if they were faced with a tribulation rather than His coming. Why pray, "Lord Jesus, come quickly," if preceding that coming must be this time of Jacob's trouble? We know GOD always gives His people grace for any trial they must face, but that is not the problem before us in this question. We are told to look not for a time of tribulation but for the coming of the Lord JESUS and to be comforted in the promise of His return.

The Lord promises, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Revelation 3:11)

08 - CHRIST Speaks to Laodicea

Christ Speaks to Laodicea

Chapter Eight

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:14-22).

The letter to this church should cause us to search our hearts. When we see history repeating itself in the church today with its lethargy and complacency, we might well ask ourselves if we are hot, cold, or lukewarm.

CHRIST the Amen

The Lord JESUS describes Himself to this church as the "Amen." This is not a new title. Paul referred to it when he wrote to the Corinthians: "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (1 Corinthians 1:20). The word "Amen" is an untranslated Hebrew word meaning something that is established, something sure, and positive. We use it at the conclusion of our prayers where it carries the meaning of "so be it."

In this passage in Revelation, however, it is a title given to the Lord JESUS CHRIST and means that He is the Final Word and the Truth. It does not mean merely that He teaches the word or that He explains the truth, but that He is the Word and the Truth. In Him the promises of GOD are fulfilled and through Him the judgments of GOD are to be exercised. He is the Truth from whom there can be no appeal. There will be no higher court than the one over which He presides. His word is final, and nothing can be added to it or subtracted from it when He speaks.

The finality of authority is His

It is only because of GOD's longsuffering that He does not strike men down now when they contradict the Lord who has spoken from heaven. GOD is not willing that any should perish, so, for the sake of that lost soul that may be reached with the gospel here in this land or in some heathen land, GOD withholds judgment. But if we read the signs of the times aright, the time of GOD's

longsuffering may soon be ended and judgment will come. Men can look at the sun and the sky and tell whether the day to come will be fair or stormy, but they do not read the signs of the times correctly unless they read them in the light of Bible prophecy.

The daily news forces upon us the fact that the time is drawing near when CHRIST will come. We are beginning to see the dim outlines of the confederation of nations which will mark the end times. We can see the formations of the northern powers in Russia and her satellite nations. In Europe the formation of the old Roman Empire is moving steadily ahead; and there are movements in the east that suggest the uniting of the kings of the east may not be far away.

These are warning signs, like the whistle of a train in the distance, but they should alert us as to what is coming.

CHRIST the Faithful and True Witness

CHRIST is not only described as the "Amen" but also as "the Faithful and True Witness." In Hebrews GOD tells us that He spoke at different times and in many different ways in days gone by unto the fathers by the prophets. In these last days He has spoken unto us by His Son whom He "hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds: Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

It is this exalted One who speaks and withholds no truth essential to our knowledge and direction in this world. He speaks absolute truth which cannot be successfully contradicted.

He strips the Laodicean church of all its false appearances and claims. They had a form of Christianity which apparently made a deep impression on the shallow thinkers of that age. But CHRIST saw through their whole deceptive front and described them for what they were. In describing this church CHRIST neither minimized nor exaggerated their sin.

Sardis could not hide itself from this One who knows all things; neither could Ephesus. He knew all their works just as He knows all our activities, plans, and motives.

CHRIST the Creator

He is also called the beginning of the creation of GOD. GOD began everything through Him. This does not mean He was the first one to be created but that He was the member of the Godhead through whom creation came into being. He is

"the image of the invisible GOD, the firstborn of every creature... All things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things and by Him all things consist (hold together)." (Colossians 1:15-17)

He speaks with authority above that of a prophet, priest, or king. He speaks as the direct spokesman of the Triune GOD. His authority is above all that the eye can see or the mind can imagine. He is the Creator of the landscape, of the flower that grows on the hillside, of the restless sea, of the song of the nightingale, of the sun which to us rises and sets in the heavens, of the Spring that supplants the Winter, and the Autumn that follows the Summer. They are all subject to

Him. He it is Who has unparalleled majesty and dignity, and Who speaks in solemn measured tones concerning the church of Laodicea.

A Self-deceived People

This letter was written to people who were living in spiritual ignorance of their own true condition. Their outward appearance looked good to them as it did to the world. But a family portrait posed for a special occasion does not tell all about the family. The heart condition is not caught by the camera.

The picture this church had of itself is disclosed in the words, "because thou sayest." But their true condition is revealed in our Saviour's words, "I know thy works." Their actual condition was in startling contrast to what they considered themselves to be. They were not cold nor hot, but lukewarm.

The progress of decline in the different churches is very revealing.

- To the church at Ephesus the Lord said, "Thou hast left thy first love." (Revelation 2:4) This shows their motive in service was wrong.
- The church at Pergamos had in it those who held to the doctrine of Balaam, but church discipline with regard to the false teachers was not exercised.
- Thyatira shows us a church lacking in conviction and that permitted a prophetess to introduce idolatry into their midst.
- Sardis had a name that it lived, but actually it was dead.
- But Laodicea was practically unreachable. They were not cold, which would mean utter indifference to the things of CHRIST on their part; but neither was there the hot, passionate zeal for the things of CHRIST. They were lukewarm.

Cold

This state of coldness, to which the Lord refers, is a negative condition implying the absence of heat, suggesting something untouched by the power of GOD's grace. It could mean those who, if they had heard the gospel, had made no profession of faith with regard to it. And there are many such today who make no pretense of favoring the gospel of CHRIST or of even so much as paying attention to it. Such persons stand aloof from the church and all Christian associations. The claims of GOD are disregarded and no attempt is made to comply with the offer of the gospel. GOD and His work are ignored, and the persons involved in this condition are dead in trespasses and sins with the wrath of GOD abiding on them.

Hot

In contrast is the state of being "hot." Just what is signified here can possibly be made clear by illustrations. For example, Zacchaeus at first was cold to spiritual things. He lived a sinful life and was hated by his fellow Jews because of his conduct and position as a tax gatherer. But when the love of CHRIST entered into his heart, breaking down his opposition and bringing him to salvation, Zacchaeus became a new man. The fervency of his new-found faith is seen in his making resti-

tution to those he had robbed.

Another outstanding example, possibly the most outstanding in all Scripture, is Saul of Tarsus. He was bitter in his animosity toward Christians, and cold toward the things of CHRIST. But once he met CHRIST on the road to Damascus, Paul turned from his hatred of Christians to love for them and to a devotion to CHRIST unparalleled in the history of the Christian church. He served CHRIST with a godly zeal and an earnestness that no set of circumstances could cause to become cold.

We see the same warmth of devotion in Moses who chose rather to suffer the afflictions of the people of GOD than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Then there are the prophets, and the apostles, the martyrs, yes indeed, thousands in every age who have forsaken wickedness for righteousness in CHRIST, and have burned in their own innermost beings with the desire to live to the glory and honor of the Saviour.

Lukewarmness

Between these two conditions, one which clearly depicts spiritual death and the other which clearly indicates spiritual life, there is an intermediate state described here as "lukewarm."

This describes those who had given a partial acceptance to the claims of the gospel. The grace of GOD had apparently made some impression on them. They may have taken on the name of Christian, and certainly they became members of a church, for they were members of the Laodicean church. They may have followed through with all the outward forms of church conformity; yet there is something lacking, something that indicates they do not belong to the Body of JESUS CHRIST.

- It may be that they lacked an understanding and belief in some of the vital doctrines relating to Christianity.
- Perhaps they were satisfied with the idea that if people were good, and virtuous, and kind, according to man's standards on these things, that such was sufficient.
- They were possibly indifferent to vital doctrines such as the atonement of JESUS CHRIST, His virgin birth, His deity, and others.
- Or it might even have been that they had a good grasp of doctrine and were sticklers for orthodoxy; but their type of living was such as to indicate that they have no real life within them. It could represent some who have been convinced of the truthfulness of the claims of Christianity but have never made a full surrender to CHRIST.
- It may include some who are divided between their living for GOD and living for self. They try to serve GOD and mammon at the same time. Their warmth of devotion is neutralized by the coldness of worldliness to where they are lukewarm.

Some will even tell us that they are evangelical but not evangelistic. That is not a valid distinction. An evangelical person is one who believes that man in his original state is ruined and that only through redemption in CHRIST can man be brought back to GOD. As a consequence, the person who is really evangelical believes he has a responsibility to lost men and women. To be otherwise

is to be a traitor to CHRIST, and will result in lukewarmness as it is presented here in Revelation 3:1-22.

An infidel lecturer once said, "If I believed what you Christians believe, I would never rest day or night until I had told all men about CHRIST."

In the lukewarm state, one does not have convictions that affect the conscience, the heart, or the will.

The doctrine of the cross is not necessarily denied, but it is not considered vital. A cross may even be worn as an ornament, but it means nothing to the wearer so far as its biblical meaning is concerned. Such an one has never been crucified with CHRIST. This person may easily admit that he is a sinner, but there is no hatred for sin. The gross sinner may be pitied by this person, but he makes no effort to reach the deep-dyed sinner for CHRIST.

Certain aspects of sin may be considered objectionable by those who are lukewarm, but sin is not seen in its true character as it is before GOD. And no attention is paid to the fact that judgment will fall upon the unrepentant sinner.

Lukewarmness is the worst state a person could be in. Something can be done for a cold person, but the indifference of the lukewarm is hard to shake and makes him hard to reach.

Saul of Tarsus was a great sinner, but honest in his wrong attitudes and actions, and something could be done for him once he was shown what the truth was. But when a man feels himself to be virtuous and right, the claims of GOD do not awaken him and convert him. He resents any suggestion that he needs repentance or regeneration. He may even be a leader in a church organization but unsaved.

For a person to be lukewarm is a strong indication that he is not saved, but also that he is self-satisfied and will be hard to move from his spiritual indifference. There is more hope for the salvation of an out-and-out atheist than for a conceited and self-deceived religionist. The publican and the harlot can be more readily brought into the kingdom than the sanctimonious and proud Pharisee.

There is possibly nothing so nauseating as that which is neither cold nor hot, whether it is food or drink, or a person's spiritual state. A self-satisfied person, just warm enough to be comfortable in his indifference to the things of GOD, and who considers lightly the warnings of the Lord, is lukewarm.

In the light of what we are considering with respect to this church, only the Lord JESUS CHRIST could be compassionate under such conditions. But He loves the Laodiceans just as He has loved all men. His words, though severe, come from a heart that was broken for them.

Laodiceans of Yesterday and Today

This church was self-satisfied because its people were rich and increased with goods and felt they had need of nothing. It was a church that felt secure in its abundance of possessions, a type of security which often causes people to forget GOD.

I heard a missionary statesman say at one time, "GOD, give us more of those who are poor in the goods of this world, rich in Thee, but not necessarily those who are merely rich in the matter of material things." Sometimes we are inclined to wish that there were many who would back Christian work with their millions, but somehow GOD has dealt with those who have little or just enough of this world's goods to take care of their own and their families' needs and to keep the work of the Lord going.

The church of Laodicea thought it had need of nothing. It was independent of Divine help. It took pride in its possessions, its property, its organization, its people, and imagined that all was well with it.

What a contrast to this is the church at Smyrna concerning which the Lord said: "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)." (Revelation 2:9) What greater commendation could one ask than this?

The Laodicean attitude is common today

There are people who tell us not to talk about the needs of the world - that such needs will take care of themselves. When we present an appeal for missions, such persons become irritated, not appreciating the great need in the world, because Lukewarmness is the worst state a person could be in. Something can be done for a cold person, but the indifference of the lukewarm is hard to shake and makes him hard to reach because they are not aware of their own spiritual lack.

Poor, Blind and Naked

Of such JESUS says, as He did to the church at Laodicea, thou "knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17) When the Lord said they were wretched He meant that they were not satisfied. Their riches could not provide satisfaction but became an oppressive burden to them. Instead of their wealth helping them, it hindered their spiritual life and degraded them. We often speak of a person being burdened by debts, but these were burdened by their riches.

They were miserable, which means that they were in a pitiful state. Their condition was such as to move the heart of our Saviour with compassion for them. Those who are so ignorant of their own spiritual condition that they see no need of life in CHRIST should be objects of our deep concern.

The word "poor" as used here by the Lord means that the Laodiceans were paupers who begged. They did not really have what they needed, and they would have to go out someplace to ask for it. They thought that material riches were genuine wealth, but they found from what the Saviour said that these riches only made them beggars. What they had in material wealth was not worth having in comparison to what they were rejecting in spiritual things.

The Lord characterized them finally as being "blind." They saw nothing clearly. They were near-sighted and could not get a clear picture of what they saw. There are those who tell us today that we must be broad-minded, believing that they themselves are broad-minded, while actually they are confined to very narrow limits in their outlook on life. Their concept of life is not broad enough to see that GOD has something good for them. Lacking discernment, lacking light and clear vision, they lack the very essence of life.

Our Saviour also characterized them as being naked, meaning that they were nude or stripped of clothing. Of course, from the material standpoint they, no doubt, were clothed lavishly and gorgeously, but spiritually they were destitute. They lacked the beauty of the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

It was after Adam and Eve had sinned that they saw they were naked. Prior to this they were apparently clothed in the Shekinah glory of GOD which covered them as with a garment of light. But the moment they sinned, that glory departed, for they had come short of the glory of GOD.

Our Lord's Appeal

The Saviour's attitude toward the Laodiceans was one of love for needy souls. It is the same today as we live in this Laodicean age. As our Lord counselled with that church some 2,000 years ago, He now counsels with those of our own day who are lukewarm, self-satisfied, contented with their own things, believing they are rich when actually they are poor, destitute of works that please GOD, despising the new birth, and disdain to come to CHRIST to receive life from His hands.

Come and "buy" is His admonition to the Laodiceans of any day and age. But if any such would receive what He offers, they must come having no money, and receive that which is without price. (See Isaiah 55:1) They must come as paupers and receive from His hand what cannot be purchased with the gold of this earth.

The Laodicean church was located in a rich community. That area was possibly the greatest commercial center for black wool in the world. The merchants also dealt in clothing and ointments and perfumes, so that many of the people were wealthy, and being wealthy expected to pay large sums for the luxuries of life.

But JESUS came to them and said, "I have business to do with you, a larger business than you are doing now. Take stock of yourselves, and see how you stand with reference to heavenly treasure. All you have so far is for this earth, and you have been satisfied with that, showing no concern for your future."

There is more hope for one outside the church who is cold toward the things of GOD than for those on the inside who lack spiritual life but are not aware of it and satisfied with their condition. Nevertheless, their case is not hopeless if they will but listen to what GOD has to say.

GOD says to buy of Him, but that is an invitation to come and receive a gift from Him. The salvation He provides is on the basis of a free gift which no man can merit or purchase.

Yet there is a price to be paid for one who wishes to receive such a salvation. There will be the renouncing of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, and the humbling of the heart to receive GOD's free gift. Such is a tremendous price to some who are rich in this world's goods, rich in self-righteousness and in self-satisfaction.

This is not only a message for those who may be satisfied with worldly things, but for those who may be trying to acquire worldly things even though they have very little of them. The poor in heart can come easily before GOD because he knows he has nothing to begin with. But the self-sufficient must pay the price of laying aside all pride. Then they are told to come to GOD and receive gold - heaven's gold, gold that has been tried in the fire, speaking of relationship and

fellowship with GOD. This gold has to do with that which is genuine and which will stand the test of eternity.

White raiment also is to be had for coming

This is something to cover the shame and nakedness of a sinful, self-satisfied life. Men who may appear well dressed before the world are naked spiritually before GOD, with nothing to cover the sin or the shame. But if they will turn to CHRIST they will receive His garment of righteousness to cover them completely.

Then the appeal is made to buy eyesalve. This is the kind of ointment which will open blind eyes, so that they will see what true riches are and what God considers essential. Such an ointment will clear up a sinner's spiritual vision to where he sees himself as he is and will see clearly the offer of redemption in CHRIST.

So here we have the picture of CHRIST's final appeal to the churches, and we find Him not on the inside, but on the outside knocking and asking admission.

CHRIST's Last Plea to the Church

This is one of the saddest pictures in all the Bible. CHRIST is on the outside of the professing church pleading for entrance. This passage says, in effect, "Behold, I have taken my stand at the door, and am knocking." This is an action going on today. He keeps on knocking, for organized Christendom is in many quarters animated with the same spirit that characterized the husbandmen in the parable of Luke 20:9-18. Once again we see where men have taken over what rightly belongs to GOD.

An equally heart-searching message is here also for the individual Christian. This tender plea is not uttered in the voice of the Judge of Revelation 20:1-15, but comes from our High Priest's heart of love for His blood-bought people. He wants to share the best of heaven's blessings with His own. The constancy of this love is evidenced by the fact, as we have noted before, that He keeps on knocking.

Are we among those who have received salvation from Him and yet have rebelled against surrendering our all to Him?

In place of His finding an open heart, is He confronted with a shut door? Having gladly accepted release from sin's guilt and embraced the assurance of heaven, are we yet refusing Him entrance to various areas of our everyday lives?

He wants to share with us glories far above anything we could ask or think; but the latch is on our side of the door; He will not force His benefits on any of us.

He promises to come in and sup with us. Of this Ottman has written: "A supper is an evening meal, it is the last taken before the morning breaks and the day dawns. It is long since the apostle said, 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand'; to sup with CHRIST before morning breaks is a foretaste of the coming glory . . . of heaven."

The time is growing short, and by keeping Him on the outside we are now missing the best He has for us. Let us make a full and glad surrender to Him. We will then find as John stated in his first

Epistle: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3)

09 - The Overcomer

The Overcomer

Chapter Nine

At the end of each letter appears a promise to the overcomer. The one who overcomes, according to the meaning of the word itself, is one who conquers, subdues, gains superiority, overthrows, defeats, crushes, prevails, outstrips, wins, gets the better of, becomes victorious, carries off the victory. We see from this that the word envisions a struggle or a race or even a warfare. We want to see this subject from three different aspects: first, CHRIST the Overcomer; second, Man the Overcomer; and third, the Rewards for Overcoming.

CHRIST, the Overcomer

At one time our Saviour said to His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Two things are promised here. One is that in CHRIST, men will find peace. The other is that in the world, the Christian will find tribulation.

In order to help us grasp the significance of our having tribulation in this world, we need to be reminded of certain things. First of all, we must remember that over the world system of men is Satan and his organized demonic forces. This evil being lost his battle with CHRIST but seeks now, in CHRIST's bodily absence from the earth, to control all men including Christians. This is where our struggle with the world comes in.

This need not dismay us, however, for we battle a defeated foe. We learn this from Hebrews 2:14-15 : "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Christ) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

In reading the various gospel accounts we cannot help but reach the conclusion that Satan sought the Lord's death. Little did the Evil One realize, however, that in dying on the cross the Lord JESUS was actually destroying his, Satan's, power. CHRIST nullified it, brought it to naught, and made it possible for believers in Him to defeat Satan in the everyday experiences of their lives.

A supporting passage is found in the first chapter of Ephesians. Satan would like to have had the Lord remain in the tomb. The enemy apparently harnessed all the powers of darkness to that end. Satan is no fool, for though the disciples were ignorant at the time of our Saviour's death of the teaching of the Bible concerning His resurrection, Satan knew it. He knew what the prophets had said.

But what Satan apparently did not realize was that his power was broken through CHRIST's death. GOD then brushed aside all the efforts of the forces of darkness and raised our Lord from the

dead.

Part of Paul's prayer in the first chapter of Ephesians concerns us who believe that we might know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:19-21). CHRIST overcame Satan through death and now rules at the right hand of GOD.

In Colossians we have the same truth where we are told: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). No wonder, then, the Lord JESUS, in anticipating His death and resurrection, could say, "I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) He overcame the forces of darkness and was set above them, given control over them by GOD.

The Overcomer in CHRIST JESUS

There are two factors that we must consider here.

First of all, we must see that the Christian is potentially an overcomer in CHRIST JESUS. In addition to that, however, we want to get hold of this truth in such a way that we will be able to demonstrate its reality in our everyday experience.

We have just noted that the Christian, the one who is born again, is a potential overcomer. By the word potential we mean that the provision for a Christian to be an overcomer has been made, it is simply a matter of his entering into his privileges and responsibilities in order to make overcoming a reality.

The subject of the believer's overcoming is related to the work of GOD within him.

Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Php 1:6) The Lord JESUS has come into our lives and lives in us and is our life. That good work has begun, then, and Paul is confident (assured), that GOD will continue this work in each believer until the day when CHRIST comes again.

This is confirmed by many Scripture passages.

In Colossians 1:13 we read that God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness." This means that He has "rescued us," showing that we have been released and delivered from the tyranny of darkness where Satan has had control. But not only have we been released from the power of darkness, GOD has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. We have been taken out of one kingdom and placed into another.

Suppose, for a moment, that I were a captive of Communism, and my government decided to use all the power and force necessary to rescue me from that captivity and bring me to this land where we have freedom.

That would illustrate only part of the Bible teaching on this point; our freedoms and privileges in this country fall short of what we have in CHRIST. In delivering us from the reign of darkness, GOD has translated us into the kingdom of His Son where that Son is in complete control and where each member of His kingdom is empowered by the King himself, to live the kind of a life that honors Him.

Or we could, perhaps, illustrate it this way.

Supposing there is a person who has been left ten million dollars in trust. He is not to receive the principal until he reaches the age of 65, but in the meantime he is to live on the interest. The interest on ten million dollars at five per cent would be a half million dollars. This person could have all the cars he wanted, and the yachts, and the homes - practically anything the heart could wish for. In addition, he would be able to help with different Christian enterprises, so that he would have a wide stewardship in the things of GOD.

Now look at this from the spiritual standpoint.

We learn from 1 Peter 1:4-5 that there is an inheritance reserved for us in heaven. This is an inheritance that cannot be destroyed or lost. It is not one of dollars and cents, but a spiritual one guarded and kept by GOD Himself and reserved for us until we get there. And, at the present time we are living on the interest from it. I like to look upon our inheritance as being described in the seven different statements made concerning the overcomer. Consequently, we need not be spiritual paupers but rich in our everyday experiences as we live on the interest of that great inheritance laid up for us in heaven.

What would we think of a man who had a material inheritance such as we saw in the previous illustration, having a half million dollars a year on which to live, and yet put on a poor mouth, as we say. He drove a horse and buggy rather than a car, lived in an old shack, existed as a miser rather than as a man of wealth. Perhaps we would consider such a man to be mentally ill, and we might be right.

But what can we think of ourselves who have been provided with everything for spiritual life and victory and yet live as though we were spiritual paupers? We have potential power for living godly lives so that people can look upon us and realize that JESUS CHRIST lives in us. Do the unsaved see in us those who are completely different from them and yet are attractive to them because we utilize the new life in CHRIST? Are we living up to the standard possible to us through the provision GOD made for us through salvation in CHRIST?

In his first general Epistle John wrote: "Love not the world" (1 John 2:15). Later on he said, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Then in the fifth chapter we find the words:

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

The salvation we receive from CHRIST is a complete salvation. It not only covers salvation from the guilt of sin but includes salvation from the power of sin. This does not mean that we will

overcome only in a few things, for the power is so great that we may be overcomers in all things.

Paul wrote to the Romans: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32) Later on in this same eighth chapter he says, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37) This tells us, then, that we are more than overcomers. This indicates the great potential of power that lies back of us. It is the power of the HOLY SPIRIT who forms CHRIST in us. The Christian life is a conquering life, an overcoming life.

It helps us to multiply promises and statements in connection with these great truths. In 1 John 5:5 we find: "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of GOD?"

Do you believe that? This is a definite statement as to what has already been accomplished for us in CHRIST. And that overcoming life of CHRIST is now ours because He lives in us.

It is true that we still live in our old bodies, and that they, as yet, are not changed. Nevertheless, GOD leaves us here for a little while so that we might learn to lay hold of the power of CHRIST and have the members of our bodies bring forth fruit unto righteousness instead of unto sin.

A Practical Key

In Colossians 2:6 we have a very practical key to this whole new life. The apostle says, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith (keeping in mind that in Him we are already overcomers)."

We build ourselves up in Him by having faith in Him. We believe in Him in order for the victorious, overcoming walk to be ours. Not only do we trust Him for salvation, but after the initial phase of salvation has been accomplished, which is by faith, then every step along the way is also by faith. The practical outworking of the overcoming life will be seen in our lives when we grasp the truth that He has already provided the overcoming life for us and will produce it in us as He lives through us.

Not to believe this is to continue in our sinful ways, the result of which is death. Now if a person who professes to be saved has no appetite for the overcoming life, if he has no longing for the deeper things of GOD, that one might well question if he is in the way of GOD. This is not my word but GOD's Word: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:10-12).

Again in this same letter John writes: "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. And we know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 5:18-20).

This means that CHRIST JESUS who does not sin, lives in us and makes it possible for us to live above sin. We are not saying here that every Christian does live above sin, but provision is made so that he may.

Rewards for the Overcomer

It is clearly evident from many of the statements made concerning the overcomer that he is a believer in CHRIST. But that is not all. The subject of rewards is indicated in some of the promises made to the overcomer so that we have a right to look upon the overcoming life as the outworking of the new life in CHRIST. This means, then, that we are overcomers or conquerors first of all because we are born again into the family of GOD. In the second place it means that if we allow this overcoming life to express itself in our everyday experience God will reward us.

This means that only believers can be overcomers, but it also means that only faithful believers can be overcomers in the fullest sense as revealed in these letters to the seven churches. There is abundant evidence in the Scriptures to show that the rewards which include sitting with CHRIST on His throne, the position of reigning, will be assigned on the basis of faithfulness on the part of the believer.

The Saviour made this clear when the disciples came to Him asking what their reward would be since they had left all to follow Him. His answer is recorded in Matthew 19:28-29 : "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Ever lasting life we know from other Scriptures is given as the result of believing in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, but the reward is clearly given for faithful service.

The parable of the pounds in Luke 19:1-48 gives a similar thought. The King who went into the far country in this parable is no doubt the Lord JESUS Himself. The words of this ruler were, "Occupy till I come." He left His servants with talents which speak of opportunities and open doors, suggesting the very thing we have seen in Revelation 3 where the Lord said, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." (Revelation 3:8) What have we done with the opportunities GOD has given us? Let us see what these men in the parable did with theirs.

When the nobleman returned, having received the kingdom, he called before him his servants to whom he had given the money so that he might learn how much each man had gained by trading. "Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds" (Luke 19:16). This man had used his opportunities to where he had tenfold what he had received. He was commended by his Lord who said, "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." (Luke 19:17)

Then another came who had received five pounds, and he had gained five more. As a reward he was given the rulership over five cities. The last one, the one who had received one pound, returned the one pound to the Lord, unused. This servant had kept it hidden away, and for that reason there was no increase for his master. The man had no further opportunity to use what the

Lord had given him. The open door placed before him was closed as far as he was concerned, and given to the man who had been faithful over ten pounds.

This truth of rewards is clearly indicated, as we have stated, with regard to the overcomer. In Revelation 2:26-27 we find the Lord saying, "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." This is clearly a matter of reward granted to those who not only are born again but are faithful in service.

In Revelation 3:5 we learn that the Lord will confess the names of those who are overcomers, before His heavenly Father. This, in the light of Matthew 10:32, would indicate a confession before the Father for the purpose of rewarding the faithful servant.

Then in the twelfth verse of Revelation 3:1-22 the promise is made to the overcomer that the Lord will make him a pillar in the temple of GOD and he shall no more go out. You recall that there were certain men who forsook all and followed David when he was an outcast in Israel and hunted for his life by King Saul. These men stood by him during that time of his rejection, and he rewarded them with high positions in the kingdom when he was elevated to the throne. They were made pillars in Israel. And such, we believe, is indicated for the believer who is faithful to his Lord. He will be elevated to a high position in the millennial kingdom of the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

There are certain benefits and privileges which belong to the overcomer which are his by right of the fact that he is born again. For example, we are told in Revelation 2:7 that to him that overcomes, the Lord will "give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The tree of life is that which gives continuous life. This could be true only of the person who has received CHRIST and in receiving Him has received eternal life.

The same truth is given in the eleventh verse where we are assured that the overcomer "shall not be hurt by the second death." (Revelation 2:11) The second death is passed upon those who reject CHRIST, but those who receive Him are saved from it.

The overcomer will be given the hidden manna to eat, we learn in 2:17. Now manna was for the sustenance of life, and we find through study of various Scriptures that JESUS CHRIST is the manna for the believer. He is that Bread which came down from heaven and which becomes the possession of all who trust in Him. CHRIST is the lifegiving power in the believer which is hidden from the world and is seen by the people in the world only in the changed conduct and outlook of the Christian.

Another statement bearing out this factor concerning the overcomer is the promise: "I will give him a white stone." (Revelation 2:17) At the time these words were written a white stone was given to a person when he was brought before a special tribunal. The white stone was the symbol of acquittal or approval.

In addition to this a new name was to be given to the overcomer. We are not told here what that new name will be, but there are indications in Scripture of the nature of it. For example, Saul of Tarsus had his name changed to Paul. Saul means a great one, whereas Paul means a little one. As long as Saul was a great one, GOD could not use him; but when he became Paul the little one, he became the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The one whom we know as Peter the Apostle was first known as Simon the son of Jona. The Lord JESUS said of him: "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42).

Again we find from Revelation 2:28 that CHRIST will give the overcomer "the morning star." This, we believe, is the promise of the rapture of the church before the tribulation breaks upon the world. When CHRIST comes to set up His kingdom, He comes as the Son of Righteousness, but His coming for the church is the Morning Star. The morning star precedes the rising of the sun. We believe the counterpart is seen in JESUS CHRIST coming into the air for His church preceding the time He will come in judgment on the world.

The overcomer, according to Revelation 3:5 is to be clothed in white raiment which has reference to the righteousness and the glory of GOD. In this same verse the promise is made to the overcomer: "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life."

It is very possible on the basis of certain Scriptures to understand that a person's name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life from the very foundation of the world. According to GOD's foreknowledge such could be the case. We know that the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:1-39 that whom God foreknew He did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. The believer, then, has the assurance that his name will remain in the Book of Life.

We do not imagine for a moment that we have exhausted the teaching concerning the overcomer in these two chapters in the Book of the Revelation. But it is surely evident that we must view these statements concerning the overcomer from the two standpoints already presented. First, there are certain things that belong to the overcomer because he is born again. Then, there are certain rewards that are promised him if he is faithful as a child of GOD. Let it be the desire of our hearts to be overcomers, more than conquerors, through CHRIST who loved us.

~ End of Book ~

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