
DIMINISHING
SPIRITUALITY
IN
LOCAL
CHURCHES

Studies in Revelation 2 & 3

W.E. BEST

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by
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

After further study, the author has come to the conclusion that the preferred translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* is “assembly” rather than “church”. We recommend the pamphlet NO PROPER NAME GIVEN TO CHRIST'S ASSEMBLY and the book CHRIST'S KINGDOM IS FUTURE—VOL. III (FORMATION OF THE KING'S BRIDE). These two publications will reflect the later studies of the author on the subject of Christ's assembly.

INTRODUCTION

The salutation of Revelation 1:4-6 was to the churches in Asia. The seven churches represent local churches of every age. The disclosure of Christ was given to the churches. Overcomers in each of the churches were comforted by the triune God. They were comforted because of their position in Christ. Churches other than the seven named were in Asia, but these were chosen as representative of all. Seven, a number denoting completion, were chosen because the number is in keeping with the disclosure of Christ given in the book of Revelation: There are seven spirits (1:4), seven golden candlesticks—interpreted as seven churches (1:12, 13, 20), the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (5:6), seven angels to whom were given seven trumpets (8:2), seven thunders (10:3, 4), the beast with seven heads (13:1), seven last plagues (15:1), seven golden vials or bowls (15:7), and seven kings (17:10). Since the number seven expresses completion, it signifies dispensational fullness. Seven is divided into three and four. Three represents the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Four represents the material world—east, west, north, and south. There are four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The age of man has four stages—infancy, youth, manhood, and old age. In the addition of three and four, the Divine and human are brought into contact with each other. Thus, the creature by grace is brought into intimate connection with the Divine Creator and Redeemer.

Seven personages are referred to in Revelation 1:1-3—(1) God gave the Revelation of Jesus Christ unto Him. (2) Jesus Christ, the second Person in the Godhead, is the One to whom God gave the Revelation. As God absolutely considered, He can receive nothing because everything is His. He received as the God-Man. (3) The Revelation was signified by a special angel. (4) Things which must shortly come to pass are shown to Christ's servants—the elect. (5) The message was given to John, a servant in a particular sense. John was a chosen apostle. (6) The reader, the lector, who was the public reader, was called blessed. The context going from the singular pronoun “he” to the plural “they” of verse 3 signifies a public reader. The masculine pronoun excludes women from publicly reading the word of God. (7) “They” are a plurality who are blessed for hearing the word read.

God is the Author, Jesus Christ is the medium, and messengers are the communicating agencies of the Revelation. This Revelation is embodied in signs and symbols, forming one compact whole. It is “the” book of Revelation.

There are seven beatitudes in Revelation: (1) Blessed is the person who reads (1:3). (2) Blessed are those who die in the Lord (14:13). (3) Blessed is he that watcheth (16:15). (4) Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9). (5) Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection (20:6). (6) Blessed is he who keeps the saying of the prophecy of this book (22:7). (7) Blessed are they who do His commandments (22:14).

Revelation is interpreted in a variety of ways: (1) The preterist view sees the book as arising out of the situation of first century Christians. Those who hold this view believe the Roman empire dominates the scene. Hence, they say the seer was wholly preoccupied with the church of his day. Therefore, it is meaningless for subsequent readers. (2) The historicist view claims that it is

an inspired forecast of the whole of human history. This view does not make the Revelation meaningful for this generation. (3) The idealist view states that the book is concerned with ideas and principles. It is not concerned with the latter days or the end time. (4) The realized view states that we are in the kingdom and do not realize it. (5) Another view is that all of Revelation relates to and was fulfilled in the fall of the Jewish commonwealth in 70 A.D. (6) The futurist view sees the book as prophecy. It is called that. It prefigures those events which usher in the second coming of our blessed Lord and the establishment of His kingdom.

Many say the book of Revelation is vague, complex, and obscure. But this cannot be true for God's elect. It is an unveiling message concerning Jesus Christ. The very first word, "Revelation," means it has been unveiled for our benefit. It is called the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and this prophecy. The events of Revelation will come to pass with great swiftness once the things contained therein begin. God is longsuffering and not willing that any for whom Christ died should perish. But the curtain is ready to be drawn for the last act of human history.

The Revelation can be understood and consistently interpreted only through the doctrine of the kingdom. The apocalypse is the revelation of Christ to the churches pertaining to His resurrected, translated, and glorified saints. This is not the apocalypse of the apocalypse. It is the apocalypse of Jesus Christ. Christ's judgments, triumph, kingdom, reign, power, glory, and His bestowal of a perfected redemption are contained in the book of Revelation.

The Greek for "Revelation" (*apokalupsis*) means a disclosure or revelation (Rev. 1:1), a manifestation or appearance (Rom. 8:19; I Cor 1:7; II Thess. 1:7; I Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13). It is used metaphorically of spiritual enlightenment (Luke 2:32). The verb form means to reveal. Used passively it signifies to be disclosed (Eph. 3:4; Rom. 1:17, 18). It means to be manifested or to appear (Rom. 8:18; II Thess. 2:3, 6, 8). The context proves that the word is subjective. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ "which God gave unto him."

The Revelation is not merely messages and information concerning Jesus Christ. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto "Him" (Rev. 1:1). That makes it subjective. It is a revelation concerning Christ that God gave to Christ. One might ask, Since Jesus Christ is God, is not He the revealer? How can God give God a message? God the Father gave the message to the God-Man, not to God absolutely considered. The strange statement of Mark 13:32, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father," answers the question. The human nature of Jesus Christ was not the residential subject of omniscience. God gave to His Son Jesus Christ a message, a prophecy, concerning Himself of events related to Him when He comes again the second time in triumph to judge the world and establish His kingdom.

God giving something to His Son is illustrated in Psalm 2:7-8—"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." In Revelation 1:1, Jesus Christ was viewed as the God-Man and not as God absolutely considered. Therefore, the gift does not mean to make known, but it has the meaning of Psalm 2:7. This is what God gave Jesus Christ in promise. The Psalm reference is a great prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ reigning as King. The substance of both promise and earnest constitute the book of Revelation. Conclusively, this Revelation was given to the God-Man.

The design of the disclosure is the unveiling. The Revelation that God gave to Christ of Himself and events related to His second advent was to be shown to His servants. It was to be declared to us. The things given to Christ to show to His servants “must shortly come to pass.” The Greek word for “shortly” (*tachei*) means with speed, soon, or shortly. Some say this proves that Revelation is the history of the church and has nothing for the future. But this word is also used to speak of something that has not yet been fulfilled (Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 1:1; 22:6). Romans 16:20 states, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” This will not take place until Jesus Christ comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. Paul wrote this in the first century after Christ’s death, and now for more than nineteen hundred years that prophecy has not been fulfilled. Nevertheless, Satan shall be bruised under His feet shortly.

The Revelation God gave to Jesus Christ was given Him to show things which must shortly come to pass. The Greek verb for “shew” (*deiknumi*) means to show, to point out, to make known, to teach, to declare, to announce, or to make manifest what was before concealed. Some say it does not mean to lift the veil that hides the future from our view, but it means we see Jesus Christ in the events of the present world and the church in that world. The following are some ways devised by men to meet and interpret the expectations of a near advent: (1) Review them as truth. (2) Designate them as Jewish fables. (3) Pronounce them as merely human utterances. (4) Define them as an accommodation to a transition period. (5) Hold them as longings inspired by enthusiasms and love for Christ. (6) Explain them as a spiritual rather than a personal coming. (7) Say they refer to an anticipated providential coming in judgment. These expectations are to be received as truth because they portray the personal, visible coming of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

There are those who say the “things which must shortly come to pass” does not mean the events follow each other in rapid succession. They believe it is to be viewed historically, not futuristically. It must be understood that God’s word is not man’s. Therefore, God and not man informs us of His own view of the word “shortly.” A Biblical example is the Babylonian captivity of the children of Israel. That period of time is called “a small moment” (Is. 54:7). However, the seventy years did not seem like a small moment to the Israelites (Lam. 5:20). God does not reckon time as man does. Prophetic time, either as to its beginning or ending, is reserved by God as pertaining to Himself. God used the terminology of one day being with Himself as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day to explain to us how He reckons time in contrast to the way man reckons it (II Pet. 3:8). A predetermined number must be saved before the second advent (II Pet. 3:9). This expectation is expressed by all the apostles in terms which admit no other interpretation.

The estimate of nearness given by God Himself in measuring prophetic periods envelops the second advent of Jesus Christ with a purposed indefiniteness, a sufficiency of uncertainty as to time, and an impression that it may be near and is conducive to watchfulness and piety. It also surrounds the second advent of Jesus Christ with an excitement of vigilance, energy, and labor to impart wisdom, prudence, and character, to incite patience, diligence, and faithfulness in the study of all of Holy Scripture, including the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Reading and keeping the truths recorded in Revelation are necessary to watchfulness by the churches. Christians are not confined to this world in their enjoyment of life because they have not only the things of time but the things of eternity. There are exhortations to watchfulness from

the time of Christ to His second coming. After Christ's ascension, the statement "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" is not found. The epistles state that the Lord is at hand and the coming of Christ draweth nigh (II Thess. 2:2; James 5:8). He is the One who will establish the kingdom. Hence, you will notice how closely the Holy Spirit guarded the words used to portray this truth: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep" (I Thess. 4:15). The apostle was speaking to fellow believers. In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, he spoke of the coming of Jesus Christ and our being gathered together unto Him (II Thess. 2:1).

The churches are the recipients of the disclosure or the unveiling of Jesus Christ. The churches, if faithful, will be like John the writer of the Revelation. Instead of expanding by worldly methods, they will become more and more circumscribed. That does not mean we can take consolation in passivity. The churches have responsibilities. If the churches of Jesus Christ are faithful to God, they will become more and more isolated. The apostle John was banished to the isle of Patmos for the testimony of God. He was confined because of his faithfulness to God. Spiritual progress will never make true churches of Jesus Christ popular with the world.

The call to each of the seven churches is to hear. The call to hear in relation to the promise to the overcomer differs between the first three and the last four church epistles. In the first three, the call to hear follows the promise to the overcomer; and in the last four, it precedes the promise. The call is not to hear the "church." The call here is for persons who have hearing ears to hear the Lord Jesus Christ. How can the institution that is on trial and threatened with judgment be the source of authority? Christians are under no obligation to hear any denomination or any local church. They are to hear the testimony of Holy Scripture. Every institutional church is on trial, and Jesus Christ is its Judge.

Notice the plural word "churches." It is unscriptural to speak of the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Church of Rome, etc. Each individual church is responsible to God, but all churches are dependent on God. The church in Smyrna was not responsible for the sins of the church in Ephesus. The church in Ephesus was not responsible for the sins of the church in Thyatira. The church in Thyatira was not responsible for the sins of the church in Laodicea. This can be said of each of the churches named.

There are three basic views of the letters to the seven churches in Asia. One is that these seven letters give the history of the church. A view that is popular among premillennialists is that in these seven churches are seven different ages through which the local churches go. The Scriptural view is that the seven churches represent seven conditions of the local aspect of the church. John was writing about things already existing (Rev. 1:19, 20). The seven epistles describe the conditions that existed at the time John wrote. These seven conditions will continue in every age during the dispensation of grace but spiritual declension in them will intensify until the second advent of Jesus Christ. Hence, Ephesus leaving her first love will become more aggravated. Thyatira harboring false doctrine will intensify. The suffering of Smyrna will become more acute. The love exemplified by Philadelphia will grow. Laodicea's boasting of being increased with goods and having need of nothing will intensify.

As the nation of Israel failed God as a true witness, the local churches will diminish in their testimony until the time of the coming of the Lord. These seven churches were not seven successive stages of the church, but they were simply specimens of things that are. That is the

testimony of the first chapter of Revelation. Grace continues to spare the churches of Jesus Christ, but they have not continued in God's goodness. Hence, the churches, like Israel, will be cut off from the standpoint of testimony. God's people in all ages have felt the possibility—on their part—of losing ground in the Christian life. Christians today do not differ from the Israelites who were bent on backsliding (Hos. 11:7).

God commanded, condemned, warned, rebuked, and gave promises to the seven churches. The universality of appeal in reference to condemning, commanding, rebuking, threatening, and promising are for all who have ears to hear. Seven lessons should be learned from the seven churches. (1) Intense love to Jesus Christ may be left for the love of other things. (2) Zeal may become apathetic because of discouragement. (3) Faith may loosen its grip by self-occupation. (4) The testimony of the church may become tarnished by compromise. (5) Progress in sanctification may become hindered by inconsistency. (6) Prayer may be obstructed by disobedience. (7) Unity may become disrupted by disunity.

The candlesticks represent the churches in their relation to Jesus Christ. The candlesticks were not the light itself but bearers of the light. The light from the candlestick in the tabernacle must never go out. The priesthood was responsible to keep the light burning (Num. 18). Likewise, believers are responsible to keep the light of their testimony shining. Jesus Christ's absence from the world necessitates the lampstands.

Jesus Christ is Priest, but He is not represented as such in Revelation 1-3. He is represented as the Judge, and that judgment is now in progress. It has been for nearly 2,000 years because judgment begins at the house of God (I Pet. 4:17). God does not begin His judgment with the ungodly world but with His own people. He judges us now so we will not be judged with the world (I Cor. 11:32). Christ is walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands judging the churches for failure to exhibit the glory of His grace.

The Godhead unites in a message of grace and peace to the seven churches. Not a seal can be broken and not a bowl of wrath can be poured out in the judgments to come upon the world until the Godhead has given comfort and consolation to His people. Grace is the source of spiritual blessings, and the peace we have is our state before the righteous and holy God.

The order of the Godhead is presented differently in Revelation 1:4-5—The Father is first named, then the Holy Spirit, and lastly the Son. The three clauses which make up the Father's title here, besides indicating His self-existence as we are told in Exodus 3:14, refer to the dispensation of the law, the dispensation of grace, and the dispensation that is yet to come—the kingdom. Why does "Him who is" precede "who was"? The salutation is to the churches existing as "things that are", so "who is" implies independent, unchangeable existence. "Who was" intimates His relation to the past. "Who is to come" shows His relation to the future. The Greek text omits the title "who is to come" from Revelation 11:17 and Revelation 16:5. The reason is that in the first chapter, John was writing concerning things in existence now, during this church age. However, in Revelation 11:17 and Revelation 16:5, this age will have passed.

The governmental character of the Holy Spirit places Him before Jesus Christ in the salutation. The seven Spirits are before the throne, not in the character of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven as He is to be with us now. The Holy Spirit is named, but not in the unity of His being—one Spirit (Eph. 4:5). The "seven Spirits" refer to the fullness of the spiritual activity of the work

of the Holy Spirit (Is. 11:2). He is sevenfold in His operations. The manifold gifts, operations, and energies of the Holy Spirit are here represented under the number seven. Here, that activity is in relation to the seven churches in Asia. As the seven churches express the condition of the one church age from its local aspect, the seven Spirits express the complete characteristics of the Holy Spirit of God.

John represented Jesus Christ to the churches as the faithful Witness (Rev. 1:5). He was the faithful Witness while here on earth. This is in contrast to the path of human testimony which is strewn with error and ruin. We are unfaithful in our faithfulness, but Jesus Christ is perfectly faithful. He never erred. His being the firstborn of the dead represents Him as the Priest before God. His being Ruler of the kings of the earth refers to His coming again. He was the faithful Witness. He is our high Priest. He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords. Hence, He is represented to the churches as Prophet, Priest, and King. He was Prophet as He walked among the sons of men. He is now our Priest. He will be King when He comes again. Christ is never called the King of the church. He will be King of the kingdom.

The churches are reminded of what Jesus Christ has done and continues to do for the elect (Rev. 1:5, 6). The Greek word for “loved” of verse 5 is the present participle of *agapao*. He loves the elect. He continues to love them. There has never been a time when He did not love them. The word for “washing” in the Greek is an aorist participle of *luo*, which means having loosed or released. His making us a kingdom is also past tense in the sense of Romans 8:29-30 (aorist indicative of *poieo*, to make). Predestination, calling, justification, and glorification are all in the past tense. As Jesus Christ is represented as Prophet, Priest, and King, saints are represented in their corporeal capacity. Each will rise from the dead, and as Jesus Christ was the faithful Witness, we are to be faithful witnesses. The lampstand must reflect the light of Jesus Christ. As He rose out from among the dead, we too shall rise out from among the dead. As He is the Ruler, we are constituted a kingdom. We are heirs of the kingdom.

PROPHETIC ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST'S COMING

The churches must be told that Christ is coming: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:7, 8). There are those who believe Revelation is strictly historical. Some believe we can get many lessons from it that are applicable for us today. Others believe it is prophetic. Although historical things are within the context of the book and we can get many lessons applicable for us today, the primary purpose of Revelation is prophetic.

The second coming of Jesus Christ was prophetically announced (Rev. 1:7). His coming is future. The second coming of Jesus Christ is the supreme hope of the church. His first advent was slow and progressive. He was conceived in the womb of Mary and spent nine months there. He was born like any other baby. He grew up, and some time elapsed before He declared Himself as the Messiah. On the other hand, the second coming will be instantaneous—"Behold, he cometh." He will come as a thief in the night. He will come eminently and instantly. Hence, there is a vast difference between the two advents. He who has come will come. Few believe in the Biblical view of the second advent, and still fewer live as though they believe it.

There is a difference between the invisible presence of Jesus Christ in this age and His visible presence at His second advent. His invisible presence makes unseen things seen by faith: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Pet. 1:8). "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). When He comes the second time, unseen things will be seen by sight. There will be no place for faith when we see Jesus Christ as He is. In human experience, presence and absence are mutually exclusive. Let us analyze this. The Lord Jesus Christ is absent from the earth, yet He is present. Some think this is a riddle. Jesus Christ appeared on earth after His resurrection, communed with His disciples, and ate with them. Forty days after His resurrection He ascended back to heaven. He is now absent from the earth. He had told His disciples He would go away and send the Comforter to abide with them forever. Many references in the gospel of John speak of His leaving the disciples after a little time. Nevertheless, the same Lord Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in His name agreeing, He is in the midst of them (Matt. 18:19, 20). He also promised to never leave nor forsake His own. These statements are not controversial. What is the mode of His presence during the time of His absence from the earth? He is with us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. The presence of Christ now by His Spirit is confessed by faith. His presence at the second coming of Jesus Christ will be confessed by sight and not by faith. His presence now is not an "as if"; it is a reality. This reality cannot be grasped unless it is also kept in mind that the nearness involved is that of Christ who is not here, although He is coming. He who shall come has already come.

Christ's second coming is a fact. This coming is not historical but prophetic. The Spirit of God led John to write of this blessed event to comfort the saints. John had written of many mansions

in the Father's house and of Jesus Christ saying, "...I will come again..." (John 14:2, 3). He was inspired to give the prophecies concerning the second advent that the children of God might follow the Lord Jesus in consecration. When Peter asked what John should do, the Lord replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (John 21:22). John was inspired to give these prophetic statements concerning the Lord Jesus for personal cleansing. The hope of Christ's return is purifying: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:2, 3). Christians desire orderly lives that they might not be ashamed before the Lord at His coming (I John 2:28).

The fact of Christ's coming is expressed in the words, "Behold, he cometh" (Rev. 1:7). He closed it with "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). The fact of the coming of Jesus Christ is essential for doctrine, building Christian character, and Christian duty. The Biblical fact of the second coming of Jesus Christ encourages faithfulness, avoids deception, urges watchfulness, excites expectation, imparts comfort, inspires hope, stimulates patience under trials and suffering, encourages obedience, and is connected with prayer. Therefore, it is an eschatological event of the future, not a historical event of the past.

The fact of the second coming of Christ issues from the character, faithfulness, and glory of God. There has never been an event outside the incarnation that could compare with the second advent of Jesus Christ. The demonstrative particle "behold" (*idou*) is used to call attention. It is used 26 times in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. This should be vividly realized by the churches. It is worthy of our admiration and should be zealously proclaimed by us.

The second coming of Revelation 1:7 will be in power to establish the kingdom. This harmonizes with the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24. This verse is the central theme of the entire book. Some say the kingdom is already established. They believe a fleshly concept of Christ's second coming is contrary to the nature, need, and purpose of His coming which is to declare His eternal Lordship. Their theory is easily refuted. The kingdom will be established at Christ's second advent: "I CHARGE thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (II Tim. 4:1). His second coming and kingdom must not be disconnected. Therefore, the kingdom was not established at the first coming of Jesus Christ. He did not come for that purpose the first time. He came to prepare His own for that future event. The kingdom is associated not with Christ's coming in flesh and blood, but it is associated with His coming in flesh and bones—His glorified body. The second advent of Jesus Christ will be to complete His work. It is the hope of the church. Jesus Christ is the heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). Therefore, He is the heir of the kingdom. The fact that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom (I Cor. 15:50) also applies to Jesus Christ. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ could not come into His inheritance as long as He was in flesh and blood. He is as the nobleman who has gone into a far country to receive the kingdom from the Father and to return (Luke 19:12).

Revelation 1:6 portrays those whom the Lord has redeemed and cleansed by His own precious blood. He gives them comfort in verses 5 and 6. Following this, Christ is viewed coming in power and great glory to establish His kingdom, not His coming for the church (Rev. 1:7). Revelation 19:1-12 is a Biblical interpretation of verse 7. "Those who pierced the Lord Jesus Christ" refers to the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews condemned Him and turned Him over to

the Gentiles, and the Romans nailed Him to the cross. "Every eye that shall see Him" does not apply to every individual without exception. It speaks of those who will be on the earth when Jesus Christ comes. Truly the church will see Him, but this is not what this verse is talking about. The "kindreds of the earth" (*phulai tes ges*) could be translated "tribes of the land" which speaks of the Jews who shall wail. (See Is. 65; 66; Rom. 11; etc., which teach the future of the nation of Israel.) The combination of the Greek "even so" and the Hebrew "Amen" is a certification to both Jews and Gentiles in their own native tongues or languages. All the perfections of God will be openly displayed when this takes place. God's character will be glorified. God's law will be honored. His government will be vindicated. His counsel will be unfolded, and His prophecies will all be verified.

The "manner" of Christ's coming will be with clouds. His second coming will be personal, certain, and sudden. The Amillennialists object to the mingling of Christ and His glorified saints with people still in the flesh on the earth. This has been called a "mongrel mixture." In answer to their objection, consider the post-resurrection ministry of Jesus Christ among His disciples for forty days. He was in a glorified body. Was that a mongrel mixture when Jesus Christ in His glorified body communed with His disciples while they were in flesh and blood? They say it is a come-down for Christ and the church to come back to the earth. There will be a come-down, but not in the sense of the objectors to the literal reign of Christ and the church on the earth. The new Jerusalem will come down from God out of heaven and will be here on earth. We shall reign with Jesus Christ on the earth (Rev. 5:10).

The manner of Christ's coming with clouds proves His coming is for the purpose of establishing His kingdom. Clouds are mentioned in I Thessalonians 4 when Christ gathers His own unto Himself, but we are caught up to meet Him in the clouds. Clouds are a symbol of God's presence. Various Greek prepositions are used in connection with Christ's coming in clouds—"on" (*epi*, Matt. 24:30), "in" (*en*, Mark 13:26), and "with" (*meta*, Rev. 1:7). Clouds symbolize power and glory. They signify the presence of God Himself (Ex. 19:9). He came in the past to Israel on a thick cloud. He will come in the future in, on, and with clouds.

The twofold effect of Christ's second coming will be wailing and assent. Every eye that shall see Him refers to those who do not want to see Him as well as those who do. The ungodly will see Him and flee to the mountains and beg the rocks and mountains to fall upon them. Others will desire to see Him. They will behold Him and accept Him. They will give assent. All the tribes of the land shall wail. This is future. The righteous will say, "Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7). This is the assent of the righteous. The Divine declaration is "I am Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1:8). Jehovah and Elohim must both be used. Elohim alone is used in the first chapter of Genesis, but Jehovah Elohim is used in the second chapter. Elohim is used in connection with the Creator. Both words, Alpha and the Omega—the Lord God—were used because John was addressing the church. Jesus Christ is not only the self-existent One but He was connected with the past in a covenant relationship which reaches into the future—"which is to come." He was in the bosom of the Father before the foundation of the world. He was the Man of sorrows while walking among the sons of men. He was our sacrifice for sin. That is all past. He is glorified. He is no longer in a body of flesh and blood but a body of flesh and bones, a glorified body. He is the head and judge of the church. He will come for the final confirmation of all things to establish His kingdom.

GOD'S MESSAGE SHOULD BE SENT TO THE CHURCHES

The message God gave Jesus Christ to give to John was to be written and sent to the seven churches in Asia. The name Asia means “slime pit.” The names of the churches mentioned in Revelation 1:4 and named in verse 11 are significant. Ephesus means “desired.” There were desirable and undesirable things about the church in Ephesus. Smyrna means “myrrh” which is connected with suffering. This could be classified as the suffering church. Pergamum means “much marriage.” She was united with many things. Thyatira means “odor of affliction.” Sardis means “escaping ones.” Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” Laodicea means “people’s rights or the people’s judgment.” Here is democracy in a local church.

Many say the book of Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D., which was a time of great persecution upon the churches. The word “tribulation” (*thlipsei*) of verse 9 means affliction or sorrow. It does not in this instance refer to the great tribulation. Affliction is common to all saints. However, the extent of affliction can vary from person to person, from place to place, and from time to time. Much tribulation—affliction—precedes the kingdom (I Thess. 1:5, 6; Acts 14:22, 23).

The location of these seven churches in Asia is interesting. Only a few miles separated them. Ephesus was about sixty miles from Patmos where the apostle John had been banished for his allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ and the testimony of His word. Smyrna was about thirty-five miles from Ephesus. Pergamum was about fifty-four miles from Smyrna. Thyatira was about forty miles from Pergamum. Sardis was thirty miles from Thyatira. Philadelphia was about twenty-eight miles from Sardis. Laodicea was forty miles from Philadelphia. The Lord chose these seven to illustrate the conditions of the churches of Jesus Christ throughout this dispensation.

The Lord’s method of address to the churches in chapter 3 differs from chapter 2. Commendation preceded condemnation in the letters to the churches of chapter 2. A reversal occurs in chapter 3. Condemnation there precedes commendation. Evil had not been the habit but the exception in the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. There had been such an erosion of evil in the churches of chapter 3, with the exception of Philadelphia, that evil was the habit rather than the exception.

All seven churches recorded in Revelation 2 and 3 existed at the time these letters were written. The seven were independent of each other. The only bond of union required among them was that they derive life from the same Spirit and be dependent on the same Head. These seven portray the whole period of Christendom. Churches possessing the characteristics of each exist somewhere in the world today. The same problems with them continue, and they will intensify as the coming of the Lord draws near.

Although John was confined to Patmos, his spirit was not confined. He was a companion in tribulation with the churches. Solitude for Christ is not the worst condition in the world. Visions

came to Ezekiel when he was in affliction. The visions of Daniel's prophecy came to him while he was in bondage. Isaiah was in affliction when he saw the Lord high and lifted up. John wrote to the churches as a co-partner. He suffered what the churches suffered. He approached them on the basis of brotherhood. Sympathy among Christians today is little known. Too many nonconducting materials are preventing communication between Christians. The fine nerves that carry spiritual feeling have become insensible. Worldliness, false church members, selfishness, the spirit of preeminence, noncooperation, and nonrecognition of the headship of Jesus Christ are hindering the flow of Christian sympathy. There is also nonsubmission to proper authority delegated by the Head of the churches. We may have to be content with a Patmos, but we shall be happy if, like John, we have a clear vision of all that is about to come to pass.

John was a co-partner with the churches and an heir of the kingdom. Future blessings are often presented as present (Rom. 8:30; Heb. 12:22, 23). The present tense is frequently put for the future to show that the things spoken of shall as certainly happen as if they were already present. To Christians the future has, by faith, already become the present, although the present has a necessary bearing on a perfect consummation of the future. We are heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5). That inheritance will be bestowed at the second advent of Jesus Christ. Local churches now live under various forms of government in different nations (Rom. 13:1-7). In the kingdom all the redeemed will live under one form of government. It will be a theocracy, that is, government under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ.

John addressed the churches in Asia. He was not talking about the perfected church but about imperfect churches. Every local church has a twofold responsibility—to God and to man. Where the law of man takes precedence over the law of God, the local church must be faithful to God and suffer the consequences that come from man (Acts 4:19, 20). The churches are not now in the kingdom. The knowledge of the Lord is not covering the earth as the waters cover the sea (Is. 11:9). Men are not beating their instruments of warfare into instruments of peace (Is. 2:4). Furthermore, the local church is sustained by the hope of the kingdom. There will be no place for hope or faith in the kingdom, but love will continue to exist. Jesus Christ presently reflects His light through the churches—lampstands. The fullness of His glory will be manifested in the kingdom. There will be no place for lampstands then. Suffering precedes the kingdom: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him..." (II Tim. 2:12). Those who are ruled "by" Jesus Christ in this life in the local aspect of the church will rule "with" Christ in the kingdom.

John was co-partner with the churches in patience or endurance. Christians persevere because Jesus Christ preserves (I Pet. 1:3-7). The final test of Christianity is endurance. Human faith in a Divine Savior does not give one assurance. However, faith that God gives in regeneration both perseveres and assures. This truth guards against the idea of security irrespective of the extent of sin and the length of time that one might remain in sin.

John was "in the Spirit" (*en pneumati*) (Rev. 1:10). The correct translation is "I came to be in the Spirit." He came into a particular state. This was not his normal spiritual condition. This condition was brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit. He was under the complete control of the Holy Spirit that he might receive the prophecy of the book of Revelation concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Ezekiel had a similar experience (Ezek. 11:24). Paul also experienced the same thing (II Cor. 12:1-4). Paul was not allowed to record or tell what he saw while in his ecstatic state. On the other hand, John was commanded not only to record but to tell what he saw. The time John was in the Spirit was on the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). Although he

was separated from the churches, he kept the day of Christ's resurrection with them. The Lord's day refers to the first day of the week. The word for "Lord" (*kuriakos*) is not the ordinary word used for Lord in the New Testament. It is used only twice in all the New Testament (Rev. 1:10; I Cor. 11:20). This was the day that belonged to the Lord.

There are two views of the Lord's day. Does it refer to that judicial period that will come upon the whole world, or to the first day of the week observed by Christians during this dispensation of grace? Those who hold the view that it refers to the judicial period say there is no difference between the Lord's day and the day of the Lord. Those who teach this regard the Lord's day and the day of the Lord as two forms for signifying the same relations to the same things. They connect the "house of God" of Genesis 28:17 with "God's house" of Genesis 28:22 to prove their view. Other proof texts are used: (1) God's law and the law of the Lord (Ex. 13:9; II Chron. 12:1), (2) The Lord's people and the people of the Lord (I Sam. 2:24; Judg. 5:11), (3) Christ's gospel and the gospel of Christ (II Cor. 2:12; 10:14), and (4) Christ's sufferings and the sufferings of Christ (I Pet. 4:13; 5:1). Their conclusion is that John was transported by means of the Holy Spirit of God in his vision into the day of the Lord, which is the prophetic day.

The true meaning of "the Lord's day" is that it refers to the first day of the week. The Greek word *kuriakos* means something belonging to the Lord. It is used with reference to the Lord's supper (I Cor. 11:20) and to the first day of the week (Rev. 1:10). As the supper is no ordinary supper, the Lord's day is no ordinary day. The first day of the week should be honored by honoring the Lord Jesus Christ, spending that time worshipping Him, studying the Scriptures, and meditating on those things that the Lord has committed to His people.

John heard behind him a great voice as of a trumpet. The trumpet was used to call the Israelites together when God had something to impart to them (Num. 10:2; Joel 2:1, 15). This voice like a trumpet did not give an uncertain sound (I Cor. 14:8). The voice told John to write and send what he saw to the seven churches. "Write" and "send" are both in the same aorist tense. The time element is absent since the imperative mode is used. The aorist tense renders the commands more authoritative. Christ sustains a common relationship to all the churches by authority, oversight, and discipline. John was commanded to write and send instantaneously. There is no trace of indifference here. He must record what he saw, not merely those things that were most interesting. Heavenly visions are not the fancies of fiction or the vagaries of human philosophies. John turned to see the voice that spoke. His back was toward the churches, and his face was toward the King. This illustrates that ecclesiastical ruin had already begun. It had already begun during Paul's ministry. The apostle Paul spoke of grievous wolves entering the churches not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29, 30). John was cognizant of the same fact and wrote about the antichrist and antichrists (I John 2:18).

The things John was to write included more than he had then seen. He had not yet seen anything. He had only heard, until verse 10. According to verse 19, he should write the things he had seen, the things which are, and the things that shall be hereafter. The past, present, and future are mentioned: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (Rev. 1:19). The things John saw are past. "The things which are" has reference to church things. "The things which shall be hereafter" refers to the things after church things. John saw the seven golden candlesticks (churches) on the first day of the week, not at the time of Christ's judicial judgment. The apostle was in the Spirit on the first day of the week. He had been brought to this place as one who was already saved. He was controlled by the Spirit

during the time God revealed to him past things (Rev. 1), present things (Rev. 2; 3), and future things (Rev. 4-22).

The book of Revelation is not a description of God's government in the churches of Jesus Christ, as Amillennialists teach. The kingdom is not the church. Kingdom and church are not synonymous terms. The word "church" comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which refers to the elect having been effectually called out by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This work of Jesus Christ is done by the agency of the Holy Spirit. The word used for "kingdom" is *basileia*. It refers to what Jesus Christ Himself will do. Therefore, the two cannot be equated. The church is the fruit of Christ's first advent, and the kingdom will be the result of His second advent. The church, as the body of Christ, is the heir of the kingdom. Heirship does not indicate that the inheritance has already been given. If church and kingdom refer to the same thing, Is the church the heir of the church, or is the church the heir of the kingdom? Since Jesus Christ gave Himself for the church (Eph. 5:25) that He might reign with her in the kingdom, how can the church and the kingdom be one and the same?

The local aspect of the church is weak and imperfect. The weakness of the local aspect of the church is seen in the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia. The church at her inception lacked one of the essentials of a kingdom—a constituted form of government (Acts 6:1-6; 14:23; Eph. 4:11-16). Elders are needed in the church, but there will be no need for elders in the kingdom. We will all reign together with Jesus Christ in the kingdom. The church is called "unto" the kingdom (I Thess. 2:12). Through much tribulation the saints shall enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22). Would it be the same to say the church enters the church or the kingdom enters the kingdom?

Confusion would abound if the church and the kingdom were synonymous. Various views are taught: (1) The church/kingdom is ruled by the Pope. (2) It is ruled by the State. (3) Local churches are ruled by the conference. Others oppose all these forms of government. Few believe that Jesus Christ alone should rule. There is a variety to suit all inclinations. The kingdom is not a preparatory stage for the church or the kingdom, but the church is a preparatory stage for the kingdom.

Amillennialists claim the kingdom of God is the spiritual reign of God in the heart. If the kingdom is the spiritual reign of God in the heart, the correct interpretation of Matthew 3:2 would have to be "Repent ye (plural): for the creation of spiritual reigns (plural) of the heavens in the hearts of all who believe are at hand." How could these spiritual reigns be merely at hand since repentance is the fruit of regeneration? John the Baptist went out into the wilderness of Judea preaching, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." If the kingdom and the church are the same, how could he say the kingdom, the church, or the spiritual reign of God in the heart is at hand when the persons to whom he spoke had not even manifested repentance—the fruit of regeneration? John required that his hearers show fruits meet for repentance before he would baptize them (Matt. 3:8). If the kingdom is symbolical, repentance must also be symbolical.

The word "church" could be substituted for the word "kingdom" and the word "kingdom" could be substituted for the word "church" in all of Scripture if they are the same. Matthew 3:2 would have to read, "Repent ye: for the church is at hand." Matthew 6:10 would read, "Thy church come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." How can we pray for the church to come

today when all believers are her subjects? Matthew 8:12 would read, "But the children of the church shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Out of which aspect of the church are they cast? Are they cast out of the local or the universal aspect of the church? Matthew 16:18-19 would read, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my kingdom...and I will give unto thee the keys of the church of heaven." Matthew 25:34 would read, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the church prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Luke 17:20-21 would read, "The church of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the church of God is within you." To whom was our Lord speaking? He was speaking to the religious Jews. Was the kingdom or the church in them? No! It was among them in the Person of Jesus Christ the King. Who would be so foolish as to say that the kingdom was in the hearts of those religious Pharisees? This would have to be the invisible aspect of the church if it comes not with observation. Evidently many religionists believe the church is only within. The church is neither here nor there to them. I Corinthians 15:50 would read, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the church of God."

There are twelve references to the kingdom in the church epistles. Substitute the word "kingdom" for the word "church" or vice versa in a few verses: "all the kingdoms of the Gentiles" (Rom. 16:4); "so ordain I in all the kingdoms" (I Cor. 7:17); "he that prophesieth edifieth the kingdom" (I Cor. 14:4); "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15:9); "unto the kingdom of the Thessalonians" (I Thess. 1:1); "God, who hath called you unto his church and glory" (I Thess. 2:12). These should suffice to prove that the kingdom and the church are not synonymous. They do not mean the same, and they are not used in the same sense. There will be no need for edification in the kingdom because the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Paul did not persecute the kingdom because it was not in existence. He persecuted the church.

John saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the churches (Rev. 1:13). He saw Him now in His glorified condition, walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. In John's vision, Jesus Christ was "girt about the paps with a golden girdle" (Rev. 1:13). Gold signifies Divine righteousness. The preciousness of all that belongs to the church is indicated by the predominant employment of this metal in the Revelation: (1) golden girdle, (2) golden crowns (4:4), (3) golden vials (5:8), (4) golden censer (8:3), (5) golden altar (8:3), (6) golden reed (21:15), (7) city of pure gold (21:18), and (8) street of the city is pure gold (21:21). Unlike the lampstand in the holy place in the tabernacle, each of these seven lampstands stood on its own base. The lampstand (singular) in the holy place in the tabernacle had seven parts, but there was only one stand upon which all seven lights were connected. Therefore, these seven are not like that one. Since each lampstand stood on its own base, each was responsible to God and not to one another. When the church in Ephesus faltered, it could not blame the church in Smyrna, the church in Laodicea, or some other church. She could blame only herself because of her own personal failure. The number seven signifies completion; hence, the seven independent assemblies represent all the assemblies of Jesus Christ during the church age.

The lampstand in Israel was a symbol of the light of God shining through Israel in a dark world. It represented the one nation. The lampstand in the tabernacle contained seven branches on one stem, but each of the lampstands in Revelation 2 and 3 was independent of the others. The

difference is between the light of God which shone through one nation in the Old Testament and His light shining through the Jews and the Gentiles in the churches in the New Testament.

The lampstand in the tabernacle has been removed. This occurred before God completely turned His back on the nation of Israel. There is no need for a lampstand today because Israel in her condition before God cannot reflect light. God turned from the nation of Israel. He is now visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. When the fullness of the Gentiles has come, He will turn once again and deal with the nation of Israel. As the lampstand has been removed from Israel, the lampstands have been removed from the seven churches in Asia. None of these churches are in existence today. As Israel as a nation failed, the institutional churches of Jesus Christ will fail. The time will come when God will no longer deal with the Gentiles. He will turn from them back to Israel (Rom. 11). Man contaminates everything with which he comes in contact. This does not mean the purpose of God will fail. We are not referring to the body of Christ but to the institutional churches. The local aspect of the church will fail because its people are imperfect.

Lampstands without the light of Jesus Christ are like the tabernacle without the presence of God's glory. Many religious institutions today should have "Ichabod" written over their doors (I Sam. 4:21, 22). The glory was a symbol of God's presence. History is repeating itself. Israel's sins are being repeated inside the churches of Jesus Christ. Israel acted on human impulse instead of on Divine command. God's command was that the ark remain in His appointed place, but Israel disobeyed God's command. The ark must not be brought to the people, but the people were to come to the ark. The so-called institutional churches today are not keeping God's glory where it should be. They are taking His glory into forbidden places. Israel wanted to have something at which to look, like the surrounding nations with their idols. She substituted the symbol for the spiritual. The ark was simply a symbol of God's presence. Many today have a form of godliness, but they know nothing of the power of Christianity. Christians are warned against this sin (II Tim. 3:5). Christians today are failing to perceive personal sin in their lives. The principle of Christianity is being substituted for a religion swayed by emotional impulses.

John saw not only the lampstands but one like the Son of Man. The apostle saw Jesus Christ in a different character than he had known Him as He walked among the sons of men. He did not now see Him as the Lamb of God, the One from whom blessings flowed profusely and who was full of grace and truth. John did not see Him stooping to wash the feet of the disciples. He now saw Him walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks in the character of Judge.

Ten things concerning Jesus Christ in the character of Judge were seen by John: (1) He saw Him as one like unto a Son of Man. The Greek word for "like" (*homoios*) indicates one resembling a Son of Man. This is different from John's description of Him in his gospel. John described Him there as "the Son of God." The prophecy is based on the prophecy of Daniel 7:13. As the Son of God, Jesus Christ quickens the dead (John 5:25). As the Son of Man, He judges and executes judgment (John 5:22, 27). Here, John saw Him not as the quickener but as the Judge. All judgment has been committed to Jesus Christ as the Son of Man (John 5:22, 27). (2) John saw Jesus Christ clothed with a garment reaching to His feet. The garment seen is an allusion to the ephod of the high priest (Ex. 28:31). The garment was neither girded about the loins as in Luke 12:35 nor laid aside as in John 13:4-5. Therefore, it expresses dignified priestly judgment. (3) John saw Jesus Christ girt about the paps with a golden girdle. Unlike the girdle of the high priest of Israel, it was one wholly of gold. This signifies Divine righteousness. The angels of

judgment were girded the same way (Rev. 15:6). Gold symbolizes righteousness, and He is righteous in all of His judgments. (4) John saw Christ's head and hair white like wool, as white as snow. Jesus Christ is the Ancient of days (Dan. 7:9). This refers to the glorified person of the Redeemer. His transfiguration is so great that it reaches the extremities. The Person before John at this time is identified as the Son of Man and the Son of God. He was after John the Baptist, yet was before John the Baptist. He was also the offspring of David and David's root. (5) John saw that Christ's eyes were as a flame of fire. This speaks of penetrating judgment. His eyes penetrate our every thought and deed. Nothing escapes His discernment (Heb. 4:13). (6) John saw that Christ's feet were as fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace. This speaks of judgment. Everything is tested as He walks among the lampstands. (7) John said Christ's voice was as the sound of many waters (Ps. 93:4; Ezek. 43:2). His voice is supreme over all waves of human passion, circumstances, and failing churches. (8) The One John saw had seven stars in His right hand. The stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. These are the messengers of the churches. The letters were addressed to them. They were not addressed to the church. These angels represent the responsible element of each local church. (9) John saw a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of Christ's mouth. This represents the execution of Divine judgment by the force of Christ's word. He speaks and it is done. He speaks through His word. What He said is a matter of record. (10) John saw that Christ's countenance was as the sun shining in its strength. This is a great contrast from Isaiah's description of Jesus Christ as the suffering Savior. John had a glorious vision of Jesus Christ. His vision was unlike the one of Christ in the gospels. Humiliation and suffering were seen in the gospels, but He is clothed with majesty and power in Revelation.

There is nothing but failure for the churches in the future. As the lampstands have been removed from the seven churches in Asia, they will be removed from institutional churches before the Lord Jesus Christ comes to receive His own unto Himself. John's vision of Jesus Christ sustained him. Christians today must be weaned away from decaying institutionalism and see only Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

John fell as dead at the feet of the Lord Jesus in His character as Judge (v. 17). John who had laid His head upon the breast of the Son of God, had outrun Peter to the sepulchre, had worshipped the risen Christ, and had witnessed the ascension now fell at His feet as dead. Some say this was the effect of a physical prostration resulting from his vision of Christ. Others say it was the manifestation of reverence which is the sincere recognition of greatness. The highest greatness, the greatness from which all other greatness proceeds, is entitled to the deepest reverence. The person without reverence is the person who can see in God's universe no greatness transcending. The vision of Christ which John saw will be the vision by the church when she stands before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. There will be a sense of reverence we have never experienced when we behold Him as the One who will judge our works (II Cor. 5:9-11). Christians are already accepted "in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Paul was not talking about our acceptance "in" Christ in the Corinthian reference but our acceptance "of" (by) Christ. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. There is nothing wrong with warning sinners, but this verse was written to the church at Corinth. It applies to Christians. It has no application whatsoever to unsaved people. The terror of the Lord of II Corinthians 5:11 is what the apostle John felt when he saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the character of Judge and fell at His feet as dead.

John's reaction to the vision he saw was partly voluntary and partly involuntary. It was voluntary because of reverence. Reverence is a test which is the manifestation of one's faith. We must be

careful how we address the Lord Jesus Christ, lest we address Him in an irreverent manner. Reverence begins within. It is not learned by a code of morals presented to us objectively. It is compatible with love. One can continue to love only the person for whom he has the greatest respect. The passion lavished for a short time on an object that does not deserve respect is unworthy of the name of love. John's reaction was also involuntary. The glory of the ascended Lord is more than mortal man can endure because Christ is viewed in His majestic character as Judge in the midst of the churches. John's physical strength actually fled when he saw the Lord Jesus Christ in His priestly character, including His character as Judge.

The Lord comforted John by telling him to "fear not." The Greek word *phobos*, used for fear, is one of the several words for fear in the New Testament. It means astonishment, amazement, reverential fear, awe, respect, or terror. John was stricken with terror, but at the same time he had deep reverence. He was amazed at what he saw. His imperfection caused his fear. The thing that is unknown experientially by us, but known to be, will always cause consternation. We do not know death experientially. Therefore, there is a certain fear in all of us in the face of death. Our imperfection is the cause of that fear. Had John been as close to the Lord Jesus in spirit as he had been in the flesh, he would have fallen at Christ's feet, but not as dead. The Christian in his imperfect state has to learn death to all that is of ourselves that Christ may be all in all. Nothing humbles the Christian more than standing in the presence of infinite purity, infinite greatness, and infinite majesty. John was standing in the presence of such infiniteness when he fell as dead. John's prostration before the vision of Jesus Christ was one of finiteness and unworthiness. He recognized that he stood before the greatest of all greatness.

Understanding of Divine revelation comes by degrees. If we could see the last from the first, we would become impatient with all that lies between. Life is a continual revelation but not in the sense of revelation that God has given to man. God reveals the new birth to the heart of the recipient of grace. It cannot be communicated from one individual to another. It is a revelation to each individual who experiences the grace of God. We learn about ourselves and prophecy little by little through studying the completed revelation of God.

The occasion of John's prostration was the vision of Christ. The reason for his prostration was his known imperfection. The extent of his prostration was that he fell before the Lord "as dead." One is blessed to be emptied and slain before the Lord. That blessing is in proportion as Christ perceives that our weakness and imperfection are manifest to us. In that degree, He will display His tenderness. The reason He is not displaying His tenderness toward us as we would like is because of the degree of our prostration and recognition of Him as our Judge. When our strength departs, Christ's power fills the vacuum. The Lord reminded Paul, when the apostle prayed for the removal of his thorn in the flesh, that when he was weak he was strong (II Cor. 12:6-10).

John was comforted by Jesus Christ. The Lord laid His right hand upon John. This is symbolical language. It signifies that Jesus Christ has His messengers under His authority. The Lord told John to "Fear not." An example of this is our Lord exhorting the disciples not to fear when fear came upon them at the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ on the mount of transfiguration.

"First and last" were titles used by the Lord to affirm His Deity and humanity. Isaiah used the same expression with reference to Jehovah God (Is. 44:6). Being the first means He is before anything. Everything is the result of Him, and He is the last. The "I am" of "I am he that liveth" is omitted from the Greek text. In the Greek, only three words (*kai ho dzon*) are used to mean

“and living one.” “Was dead” (*egenomen nekros*) should be translated “I became dead.” This speaks of Christ’s humanity. God absolutely considered cannot die. Hence, the titles “first,” “last,” and “the living one” speak of Christ’s Deity.

Revelation carries us forward from the past and the present into the future. The Lord has the keys of death and hell. The Greek word for keys *kleis* used here is found only six times in the New Testament (Matt. 16:19; Luke 11:52; Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1). Keys denote power and authority to open and close. Christ having the keys of death (*thanatos*) means He presides over death. Therefore, death never comes at random. It comes at God’s appointed time. There is a time to be born, and there is a time to die (Eccl. 3:2). The sovereign Lord uses these keys with determination and judgment. He employs various means and instruments of death, but they are all under His control and work out His perfect will. No one dies an untimely death. None can die until God’s appointed time.

Jesus Christ also has the keys of hell. The Greek word for “hell” is *hades* which means the invisible abode of the dead. Jesus Christ, the living One, was subject to death because He came into this world as the God-Man. As the living One, He passed through death and obtained eternal redemption for the elect. Jesus Christ went through death and entered hades. Death and hell, or hades, could not hold Jesus Christ (Ps. 16:10). The living One in His human nature passed through death, the death we deserved to die, that He might be the sacrifice for our sins. As death could not hold the body of Jesus Christ, *hades* could not keep His soul from being reunited to His body (Acts 2:27). The Lord Jesus has complete mastery over bodies and souls of all mankind because He has the keys, undisputed authority, of death and *hades*. Hence, the right to open and close is exercised by the pleasure of Jesus Christ.

After comforting and consoling John, the Lord commissioned him to write the things he had seen, the things present, and the things to come. Revelation carries us forward from the past and the present into the future. Based upon the authority of Revelation 1:19, there is a threefold division to the Revelation of Jesus Christ—past, present, and future. The three divisions furnish the key for its proper interpretation. Any person who changes the relative position of the events misinterprets the Scriptures. Present things, things pertaining to the church age, are recorded in chapters two and three. Anyone who takes the events of the church age and tries to put them in the future misapplies the Scriptures. There is no reference to the church after chapter three, except in the concluding statement of Revelation 22, which speaks of the churches. Conclusively, each vision has its own events. Future things are recorded in Revelation 4-22. To change the events of the future and place them in the church age is to misconstrue the Scriptures. Prophecy is the distinguishing feature of the third division of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Hence, prophecy is the key word of the book as a whole. The person who reads and the one who hears the words of this “prophecy” is blessed.

SALUTATIONS TO THE CHURCHES

The Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself differently in the salutations to the churches. The description is always significant in view of the condition of each of the seven churches. (1) To the church in Ephesus, Christ was the one “that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (Rev. 2:1). The chief characteristic of this church was she had left her first love. (2) Christ presented Himself to the church in Smyrna as “the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive” (Rev. 2:8). Her chief characteristic was suffering. (3) To the church in Pergamum, He was the one “which hath the sharp sword with two edges” (Rev. 2:12). This was a lax church, the seat of Satan’s authority. (4) Christ made Himself known to the church in Thyatira as “the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass” (Rev. 2:18). Thyatira’s chief characteristic was tolerating Jezebel, a false teacher. (5) He revealed Himself to the church in Sardis as “he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars” (Rev. 3:1). Her chief characteristic was a reputation that she was alive, but she was in a dead state. (6) The Lord Jesus spoke to the church in Philadelphia as “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” (Rev. 3:7). She was loyal to Christ’s word and refused to deny His name. (7) Christ revealed Himself to the church in Laodicea as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14). This church had the characteristics of lukewarmness and self-complacency.

EPHESUS

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. (Rev. 2:1)

The church in Ephesus had a great beginning. Her history is recorded in Acts 19. The epistle written by Paul to the Ephesians is a great doctrinal treatise. It records doctrine, practice, and warfare. Paul unfolded the deeper things of God to them. He warned the elders in Ephesus that after he was gone wolves would come in not sparing the flock (Acts 20). Trouble was anticipated not only without but within. This was the church to which John wrote the letter of Revelation 2:1-7. Although some of the greatest recorded doctrinal truths given to any local congregation were given by our Lord to the church in Ephesus, this was not a perfect church. As there are no perfect Christians, there are no perfect churches. The closer a church gets to the Lord the more she sees herself in the light of the revelation of God’s mind.

The letter to the Ephesian church, like the letter to each of the other churches, was addressed to the messenger of the church. Whereas, the epistle was written to the saints in Ephesus. The church’s spirituality had declined so that the Lord addressed their presiding elder who in turn should deliver His message to the church. Although the Bible teaches a plurality of elders, they are not mentioned here because one among them must be the presiding officer of the church. The messenger, who is called the angel of the church, stands between the Lord and the church.

The Greek word for “angel” is *aggelos*, which means one sent, messenger, or angel. The verb form would be *aggello*, which means to tell or to announce. This word is used in the Old Testament to denote a prophet (Hag. 1:13). It is also used to speak of the priest (Mal. 2:7). The same word is used as a name of office and is given to the ministering servants of God. The angel of the church was not a literal angel, a heavenly creature. A letter would not be written to such a creature. It was not addressed to a bishop, in the sense of a bishop in the Methodist, Catholic, or Episcopalian churches. The Bible does not endorse bishops in that sense. It was not by but to the minister or presiding elder of the local congregation.

In the introduction to each of these seven letters, the Lord presented Himself in a different manner, a manner that will supply the need lacking in each particular church. All the different statements made about Jesus Christ are found in the first chapter. He presented Himself to Ephesus as the one who holds the messengers in His right hand, and He is walking in the midst of the golden lampstands.

Jesus Christ is holding the stars—angels or messengers—in His right hand. These messengers are called stars (Rev. 1:16, 20; 2:1). The light reflected from the messenger does not originate with the messenger. The stars, or the messengers, are in the protecting and controlling hand of Him who calls and ordains. The right hand denotes one who is on the offense. Christ is on the offense (Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:25, 33, 34; 5:31; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; etc.). The left hand in the Scriptures denotes defense (II Cor. 6:7). God is not on the defense.

The two words “holdeth” (holding), *kraton*, and “walketh” (walking), *peripaton*, are present active participles. The Lord is presently calling, ordaining, and holding the true messenger of each particular church in His hand. No weapon that is formed against God’s true servant will ever prosper (Is. 54:17).

Christ is walking in the midst of the lampstands. Walking must be distinguished from sitting. After finishing the work the Father sent Him to perform, Jesus Christ sat down at the Father’s right hand. Sitting denotes intercession on behalf of His people. Walking denotes judgment.

The coming kingdom is in full view with Christ’s present judgment of the churches. Believers must be judged to qualify for judgment in the kingdom. There is a twofold judgment of Christians. The first is presently in progress in the church age. The second will take place before the judgment seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10). Christ’s coming to remove the lampstand from Ephesus for their failure to repent was a “providential” coming. Jesus Christ is presently providentially judging His people. There is order in the twofold judgment of the righteous. Christ’s present judgment is described in Revelation two and three. This judgment is related to the removal of the lampstand or candlestick. The future judgment determines the position of rulership in the kingdom. There will be a graduation of rank among the saints of God in the kingdom (Luke 19:12-19; I Cor. 15:41). Every Christian must give an account of himself to God when he stands before the judgment seat of Christ. Some Christians will be rewarded, and others will suffer loss (I Cor. 3:10-15).

Many Bible students fail to make the proper distinction between the judgment of the wicked and the judgment of the righteous. These judgments will not be simultaneous as far as time is concerned. The judgment of the righteous will precede the judgment of the wicked. The righteous will participate in the judgment of the wicked: “Do ye not know that the saints shall

judge the world?" (I Cor. 6:2). The righteous and the wicked will both be judged but at different times and for different purposes.

SMYRNA

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. (Rev. 2:8)

Jesus Christ was presented to the church in Smyrna as the One who is the first and the last, who was dead and is alive forevermore (Rev. 2:8). His suffering comforted the suffering saints in Smyrna. Christ's assertion that He is the first and the last taught His eternal existence to those saints.

Smyrna is the Greek form of the Hebrew word *myrrh*, that sweet fragrant spice so largely used in connection with burials. The sweet fragrance of these saints was pressed out by their affliction. Myrrh was one of the spices brought by the wise men to the baby Jesus Christ. They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gold spoke of His deity, frankincense of His impeccable humanity, and myrrh of His death. Thus, the hypostatic union of the Person who came for the purpose of dying was symbolized. Myrrh was also used to prepare the body of our Lord for burial. This pertains to the Lord's first advent. Isaiah spoke of gold and sweet spices in connection with Christ's second advent, but he made no reference to myrrh (Is. 60:6). Jesus Christ came the first time to die for the elect. He will come the second time to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The salutation disarmed the fears of the suffering saints in Smyrna. Reference is made to Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus Christ assured them that He is the first and the last, the one who became dead and lives. As suffering and death could not annihilate the Captain of the saints in Smyrna, it could not annihilate other members of the body of Christ. The salutation takes us back to Revelation 1:11-18. Christ is the first and the last. He is the first and last of creation, history, Scripture, and the church. The Lord Jesus Christ meets the strongest aspirations of Christians. On the last page of life's book, we do not write finis. There is more to come. The Lord Jesus told the disciples, "LET not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Christ's declaration that He is the first is a most direct assertion of deity. This was comforting to these suffering saints. The self-existent and independent Christ must necessarily be the Author and Upholder of all created existence. Thus, He assured the suffering saints in Smyrna that they were in His hands and the Devil could not try them any more than their blessed Captain allowed. Every circumstance to which Christians are subjected is in the will of Jesus Christ, the Captain of their salvation. The suffering saints did not know what the future held for them, but they knew who held the future. Jesus Christ's assertion that He is last assured the suffering saints that as no one preceded Him, no one can outlive Him who is the eternal Son of God. There is nothing too minute for Christ's care, and there is nothing too great for His power.

“The first” (*protos*) in this text goes beyond “first” in the letter to the church in Ephesus. In the Ephesian letter, it refers to quality love. Whereas, it refers to first in existence in the letter to Smyrna. The letter is not discussing the believer turning back to his first love and affection.

“The last” (*eschatos*) is not last in a term of temporal succession, as the last trumpet (I Cor. 15:52), the last one who came to work in the vineyard (Matt. 20:8, 12), or the last in this world which shall be first in the kingdom (Matt. 20:16). It is the last in the sense of being the eternal One.

“Which was dead” uses the aorist middle (deponent) indicative of “become” (*ginomai*), which means “who became dead.” This speaks of Jesus Christ’s humanity. The eternal Son took upon Himself the form of a Servant that He might suffer and die for the elect. How could He who said of Himself that He is “the first and the last” (Rev. 1:11) die? He died in the flesh, but He was quickened by the Spirit: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (I Pet. 3:18).

“Is alive” is an aorist active indicative of *dzao*. It is used ingressively—came to life. Since death could not hold Jesus Christ, it cannot hold the children of God. This was comforting to the suffering saints in Smyrna.

PERGAMUM

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges. (Rev. 2:12)

The Lord Jesus is described as the One who has the sharp two-edged sword in the salutation to the church in Pergamum. This description has already been mentioned in Revelation 1:16. The One who has the sharp two-edged sword was an appropriate description in view of Christ’s complaint against the church in Pergamum. Christ is described as the Word of God: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). This refers to the Person of Jesus Christ Himself and not the word He spoke. The written or spoken word is called the sword of the Spirit: “...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). The sword of the Lord cuts two ways. It is capable of both direct and back strokes. The former is for conviction, and the latter is for punishment. The sword of the Spirit of Revelation 1:16 is described as being in Christ’s mouth. This is the first mention of the sword in Revelation. Whereas, the sword of Revelation 2:12 is drawn and ready for use. Jesus Christ is walking in the midst of the churches judging them during this dispensation of grace when Satan’s throne is on the earth.

THYATIRA

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

Thyatira was situated between Sardis and Pergamum on the Lycus River. Its inhabitants gained their living by marketing and the art of dyeing in purple. Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened that she might give attention to the things Paul preached, was a seller of purple from Thyatira.

Certain attributes of the Savior were appropriate to the message needed by this church. Her need was different from that of Ephesus and Smyrna. The Lord presented Himself in the salutation to the church in Thyatira in a threefold way (Rev. 2:18).

1. The Lord Jesus first presented Himself as the Son of God. Something had intruded in this church that called for this emphasis. The Lord had represented Himself as one like unto the Son of Man (Rev. 1:12-20). His claims had evidently been forgotten because the church tolerated Jezebel with her false doctrine. The false prophetess was usurping the place of Jesus Christ. This is the only instance where the name of the speaker was used in the seven letters. Attributes are used in the others, but Christ's name is used here. Christ identified Himself as "Son of Man" in Revelation 1:13. He is the God-Man, Son to both God and man. The title "Son of Man" does not mean that Jesus Christ was born of man. The title "Son" often carries the thought of being identified with. "Sons of the kingdom" of Matthew 13:38 does not mean they were born of the kingdom, but they were identified with the kingdom. "Sons of the bridechamber" of Mark 2:19 does not mean they were born of the bridechamber, but they were identified with the bridechamber. "Sons of thunder" of Mark 3:17 does not mean they were born of thunder, but they were identified with thunder. Therefore, the title "Son of Man" does not mean that Jesus Christ was born of Joseph, but the eternal Son of God was identified with man. Jesus Christ said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). As the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ had no day, but as the Son of Man He would be revealed at God's appointed day. He came into the world at God's appointed time.

"Son of God" is the title chosen for the salutation of this letter. Jesus Christ had revealed Himself as the Son of Man (Rev. 1:13), but that was not a part of the letter to the church in Thyatira. The church was to know the rank and authority of Him who spoke. She was tolerating Jezebel who said she was a prophetess and was teaching damnable doctrine. She was usurping the place of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ reminded the church of the rank and authority of Him who spoke, commanded, judged, and promised.

2. The second of the threefold ways the Lord presented Himself to the church in Thyatira was that His eyes were like a flame of fire. This speaks of judgment. All things are open to Christ's eyes: "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). This truth is further emphasized in verse 23. Jesus Christ searches the depths of the heart and gives to each Christian according to his works because He knows him. His eyes are as a flame of fire as He presently judges His own, knowing our innermost being (Jer. 17:9, 10).

3. The third of the threefold ways the Lord presented Himself to the church in Thyatira was with feet like brass. Brass is associated with judgment. This denotes judgment as Christ walks among the churches. The judgment is seen to be a reality (vv. 22, 23). This is not the judicial judgment of the future, but it is providential judgment in the great tribulation period. Our Lord was speaking of judgment upon those who were tolerating Jezebel in Thyatira.

SARDIS

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. (Rev. 3:1a)

The church in Sardis was luxurious. The city of Sardis was the capital of Lydia, one of the provinces of Asia Minor. It is now an obscure village with extensive ruins. Sardis was near Thyatira. The state of the church is represented by her messenger. The letter was addressed to the messenger, and the messenger was to give it to the church. Therefore, the messenger was responsible for the state of the church.

Jesus Christ was presented to the church in Sardis as the One with the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars because the church had a name that she lived but was dead (Rev. 3:1). The number seven does not indicate seven different spirits or persons. The Holy Spirit is the third Person in the Godhead. He is one, not seven. The Spirit is one thought efficaciously various. Isaiah names a variety of the Spirit's characteristics (Is. 11:2-5). As the seven churches expressed the condition of the one church age in which we live, the seven spirits are the complete characteristics of the one Holy Spirit of God. The seven Spirits are described as being before the throne of God (Rev. 1:4) and held by Jesus Christ (Rev. 3:1). The seven Spirits are represented as seven lamps of fire burning before the throne (Rev. 4:5). The Lamb stood as it had been slain having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth (Rev. 5:6). The perfection of administration in government is taught in the number seven used in conjunction with the Spirit. The Son of Man, who possessed the Spirit without measure is capable of executing holy judgment on either the church or the world. Hence, perfect discernment with a view to holy judgment is suggested by the seven Spirits. The seven horns demonstrate perfect power. The seven eyes represent perfect discernment. Power in judgment by the Son of Man will be exercised universally and publicly in the future. However, the judgment exercised on the church is secret. The world neither knows nor understands Christ's secret judgment on the churches. Light is both single and sevenfold. But let that ray be broken by the prism of a raindrop and there are seven beauties and perfections seen, and each is a light. The seven lights are one light. Exactly so here. The seven Spirits are the seven perfections or prophets of the Holy Spirit of God. As the Lord Jesus Christ took a subordinate position to the Father, the Holy Spirit takes a subordinate position to the Son.

The seven stars represent the messengers to the seven churches in Asia. This is a reminder that Jesus Christ not only orders but controls His messengers. God gives and removes His messengers. God gave Moses, and God removed him. The condition in Sardis was due to her messenger. He was in a dead state. A living minister is zealous in his work. He devotes himself wholeheartedly to the study and ministry of the word of God. He is doubly careful to be an example to the flock. A dead minister and a dead church go hand in hand. The antidote for a dead preacher and a dead church is the living Spirit in the sevenfold perfection of His operations.

PHILADELPHIA

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. (Rev. 3:7)

The letter to the Philadelphian church is located between the letters to the churches in Sardis and Laodicea. The city of Philadelphia was called the gateway of the east because it was located at the junction of the approaches to Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia, not far from Sardis. The church was small but not because she did not think big. She had thoughts of God. Similarities between the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia are evident. Both suffered from those who said they were Jews and were not. The difference between the opposition to them was that it came from without in Philadelphia and from within in Smyrna. Both were assured that the opposition was Satanic. Both were promised a crown.

The meaning of Philadelphia is "let brotherly love continue." Christ commanded the disciples to love one another (John 13:34). At first thought, one would think Christians automatically love one another, and there is no need for a command to do so. Selfish love is manifested by those who love those who love them. The grace of God enables one to love fellow Christians. He may not love the actions of some, but there is love of one Christian for the other. Brotherly love has God's approval.

Three attributes of God are emphasized in the salutation—holy, true, and having the keys. Holiness is God's chief attribute. The Greek renders it *ho hagios*—the holy. God is called "the Holy One"—"To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" (Is. 40:25). The holiness of God is Himself. It is the beauty of all of God's other attributes. He is holy in His omnipotence, omniscience, power, love, grace, and justice. One simple definition of holiness is self-affirming purity. It is the peculiar glory of God's nature. As there is none absolutely good but God (Mark 10:18), there is none absolutely holy but God. A Christian's holiness is not holiness of equality but of similitude. Holiness has more than a negative quality. It is positive virtue. Holiness of equality and holiness of similitude is a twofold holiness.

Jesus Christ is "true." Again, a definite article appears before the Greek word, *ho alethinos*—"the truth." It means that which has not only the name and semblance but the real nature corresponding with the name—real, true, or genuine. One Greek scholar said the word *alethinos* is seldom applied to people. There are only two references where this adjective is used in connection with man, one referring to worship and the other to drawing near to God (John 4:23; Heb. 10:22). The noun form *aletheia* is used in John 14:6—"...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jesus Christ is the truth as a personal excellence free from pretense, simulation, falsehood, and deceit. Hence, the adjective is seldom used in connection with man.

Jesus Christ has the key of David. The Lord Jesus is the keeper of the key. This is clearly an allusion to Isaiah 22:22, where under the figures of Shebna, whose name means "who built," and Eliakim, whose name means "God will establish," is set forth God's utter rejection of man after the flesh and His causing all that is glorious to be found in connection with Jesus Christ Himself. The key of David has a wider application than simply the coming kingdom. The Lord Jesus is now using the key on behalf of His people. No man or group of men hold the key of

Christian service. Since God is absolutely sovereign and holds the key in His hand, He opens and closes doors. When He opens a door, no man can close it. Those who have the Philadelphian characteristics will not be stopped in their service or testimony for Christ, although they have no human influence or support and no human organization to promote success. God's man is not dependent on any religious talent scouts. A man's ministry cannot be evaluated by materialistic standards. The Lord opens doors that none can close to those who spend their time showing themselves approved unto God. (See Acts 16:6-10; 18:9, 10; 19:18-20; I Cor. 16:8, 9; II Cor. 2:12.) The faithful have the prospect of being used of the Lord.

The prospect of the open door was the result of the Philadelphian saints' little strength, keeping Christ's word, and refusing to deny His name. The salutation does not identify what Christ opens and closes, but whatever it is, it is opposite to caprice. Some think it is salvation, and others think it is service. The context bears out the latter. However, the Lord is also the opener and closer of the door to salvation. God opened the door to Noah's ark, which is a type of salvation. He closed the door when Noah and his family entered the ark. It seems feasible that the opener and closer of verse 7 refers to salvation, and the addition of the word "door" in verse 8 harmonizes with all the list of verses given from Acts and Corinthians. God opens and closes the door for service as he opened the Red Sea for the Israelites and closed it behind them. God's man does not have to worry about an open door. Beware of the individual who tries to make a place for himself.

LAODICEA

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. (Rev. 3:14)

The last view of the churches on earth is not the most glorious (Rev. 3:14-22). The church in Laodicea was worse than the church in Corinth. There were divisions among the Corinthians, for which they were rebuked (I Cor. 1). They were preferring one apostle above another (I Cor. 3). Each thought he was an instructor (I Cor. 4). Gross immorality was tolerated by the Corinthian church, and they were puffed up about it (I Cor. 5). Some of the Corinthians were going to law against their brothers, and Paul rebuked them for letting heathen people judge a matter that should be judged by Christians (I Cor. 6). The problem of marriage, divorce, and remarriage existed among them (I Cor. 7). The strong were not properly recognizing the weak (I Cor. 8). They failed to show proper respect for Paul and his leadership; therefore, the apostle refused financial remuneration from them (I Cor. 9). They were on the verge of falling, like the Israelites, because of unbelief (I Cor. 10). Through failure to properly discern the Lord's body, some of them had died (I Cor. 11). They misunderstood spiritual gifts and their manifestation (I Cor. 12). They were lacking in love (I Cor. 13). There were those who were emphasizing what is known today as speaking in tongues, and their women were out of their places (I Cor. 14). Instruction in the resurrection was necessary (I Cor. 15). A number of exhortations were given them (I Cor. 16). Conclusively, the Corinthian church failed in many areas, but the Laodicean church was far worse.

The apostle Paul had great concern for the Laodicean church twenty-five years before the letter of Revelation 3 was written to them: "FOR I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (Col. 2:1). Therefore, corruption had already set in years before the letter of Revelation 3. Paul spoke of Epaphras' zeal for the Colossians and the Laodiceans (Col. 4:12, 13). He requested that the

Colossian letter be read to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16). The church epistles are to be read by God's people of all ages. The Thessalonian letter is to be read by all the holy brethren (I Thess. 5:27). Therefore, the letter to the Laodiceans was not only for them but for us. There is similarity between the last words of Moses, the leader of Israel to the nation of Israel, and what our Lord said to the church in Laodicea: "Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands. And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended" (Deut. 31:28-30).

Laodicea means the rights or the judgments of the people. If one's rights do not harmonize with God's, he has none. Speaking of one's own opinion, rights, and feelings is a manifestation of the Laodicean spirit. Retrogression from Nicolaitanism to Laodiceanism is seen in the letters to the seven churches. The spirit of Laodicea is prevalent in governments and institutional churches. Personal and collective judgments or opinions are valueless when they contradict the truth of God's word. Politicians are crying that we are fighting for democracy around the world. Individuals in institutional churches are claiming their rights. Governments and institutional churches are being influenced by "the will of the people." Preachers are afraid to contradict the will of the people. The opinions of men take precedence over the will of God. Most churches are no longer directed by Jesus Christ their Head but from the will of the people on earth.

The church in Laodicea needed the lessons taught in the three characteristics in which the Lord presented Himself to her in the salutation: (1) As to the eternal, He is the Amen. He is the One in whom the purpose of God is fulfilled. (2) As to the external, He is the faithful and true witness. This has to do with the objective revelation of the mind of God given to His people. Jesus Christ is not only the Son of the eternal Father but He is the revealer of the Father to the elect (John 1:18). He is the witness of the Father. (3) As to the internal, He is the source of the very creation of God (II Cor. 5:17). He is the source of our creation—the new birth. These three fundamental truths were lacking among the Laodiceans. They did not take Jesus Christ as the last Word. They were not believing He was the faithful and true witness.

To the corrupt Laodicean church, Christ first established the truth that He is the Amen. The word "Amen" speaks of assent. It is the confirmation of something. An "affirmative" amen is illustrated by Israel's response to Ezra's reading from the word of God (Neh. 8:6). Another illustration of the affirmative amen is the Israelites' response to each of the curses pronounced upon them for various sins (Deut. 27:14-26). An "optative" amen is illustrated by the response of the wife guilty of adultery to the priest's charge against her (Num. 5:21, 22). Although the word "amen" does not occur in Matthew 16:28, it is translated "verily" in this verse. It is used here at the beginning of a momentous statement. The "substantive" amen is illustrated by Jesus Christ being the Amen. It is used in the place of a noun in Revelation 3:14.

(1) As to the eternal, Jesus Christ is superlatively God's Amen for and in the elect. He is the elect's Amen in Himself. As the Amen, He is the Redeemer of the elect. He is the last Word. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him..." (Col. 2:9, 10).

(2) As to the external, Jesus Christ is the faithful and true witness. The word “external” is appropriate to cause one to think about the objective revelation that the Lord Jesus has given to us. Christ is the messenger, and He is the revealer of the Father. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ would be given for a witness to the people: “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people” (Is. 55:4). Christ emphasized this characteristic to the Laodicean church because He was what they were not. Jesus Christ the faithful witness manifested the Father’s name to those the Father gave Him (John 17:6). He will fulfill the eternal covenant.

God’s witness must have personal knowledge of that which he reports. Jesus Christ qualified because He was in the bosom of the Father before the foundation of the world (John 1:18). Since He had personal knowledge of the Father, He revealed the very character of the holy Father unto all the Father had given Him—the anointed One, the Son of the living God. Christians are responsible to witness for Christ, but none can be a witness of Jesus Christ without a personal knowledge of Him. Furthermore, God’s witnesses must have personal knowledge of every doctrine they teach and preach in order to be effective.

As the Creator of all things, Jesus Christ is the Author of general revelation: “THE heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Ps. 19:1). “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). Jesus Christ is the Object of special revelation, but He is not the object of general revelation. General revelation renders every person under the sun inexcusable before God because it bears witness to the power of God and to the Godhead. Special revelation of which Jesus Christ is the Author is necessary to portray to us mercy and grace. Special, not general, revelation was revealed to the two men on the road to Emmaus: “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). General revelation, the witness of God in nature, does not tell God’s purpose. It explains nothing about His mercy. There is no reference to grace in general revelation. It does tell of God’s wisdom, power, and Godhead. Therefore, all men are inexcusable in the presence of general revelation. The witness of God in Scripture tells us about His grace, mercy, and salvation. Both revelations are objective.

(3) As to the internal, the Lord Jesus is the source of the creation of God. Russellites and Unitarians are heretical in saying this proves that Jesus Christ was the first creature God created. He is not the first creature God created. Jesus Christ is the originating source of all creation: “IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3). “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” (Col. 1:15-17). Jesus Christ is the uncaused cause of all things. The statement “the beginning of the creation of God” does not mean that Jesus Christ is the first of all created beings. If He were the first of God’s creation, it would have to be understood in a passive sense. But this statement is to be understood in the active sense. He is the originating cause of all things. Christ is not only the efficient cause of natural creation but He is the efficient cause of the new creation. He is the originating cause of the elect’s relationship with God.

The Laodicean church needed to understand that Jesus Christ is the Amen of God's eternal purpose, that Jesus Christ is the faithful Witness, and that Jesus Christ is the originating cause of every new birth.

This letter to the Laodicean church, like the letters to each of the other churches, was addressed to the messenger of the church. It was not addressed to a plurality of elders. The word *aggelia* refers to a message, a doctrine, or a precept delivered in the name, and in this case, it would be in the name of Jesus Christ. Christ was speaking. He had a message for Laodicea. The use of singular pronouns prove this letter was addressed to one messenger (vv. 15-18). Our Lord was addressing these words primarily to the teacher/preacher, the one who was in charge and not to a plurality of elders. The pastor was responsible for Laodicea's condition before God. Although Moses and Aaron worked together to lead the Israelites, Moses, not Aaron, was responsible. The governing elder must not be influenced by the rights and judgments of the people to whom he ministers. Democracy must never rule in a local church. A democratic rule would indicate that church members living in sin could participate in governing the church.

There is no doubt the members of the church in Laodicea influenced their pastor with demands for their rights and judgments. However, he should have refused to listen to them because he had God's word committed to his trust. The minister is responsible to receive his decisions from the word of God, not from the opinions of church members. He must not fail to exercise proper authority. His authority is comprised of the principles of Jesus Christ and must be exerted only ministerially. Church members following an unauthorized authority sin against the proper authority of the New Testament church. Authority must be recognized. Divisions caused in a local church are actually the result of the Laodicean spirit.

The person in the place of proper authority is responsible for those who follow him. Paul exhorted Timothy to commit the word to faithful men who would be able to teach others also (II Tim. 2:2). There is no place for sentimentality or feelings when it comes to the Lord, His truth, and the ministry. Paul regarded Timothy as being at a crisis in which he must make definite resolves concerning positive actions pertaining to the commitment of truth to faithful and qualified men and to the preaching of the word of God, although men might not listen.

The message which the messenger and the church in Laodicea needed consisted of three characteristic features of the Lord Jesus Christ—eternal, external, and internal. The characteristics of Jesus Christ mentioned here were greatly needed by Laodicea because she was an apostate church. The Lord had been driven outside by the spirit of the Laodiceans. The city of Laodicea was the wealthiest in the world at that time, and some of those distinctives were carried into the church herself. Nevertheless, our Lord called some from Laodicea. Leaving of the first love in Ephesus diminished to leaving the Lord of love for self-love. The Laodiceans were absorbed in themselves. Self-love is one of the signs of the perilous times in which we live (II Tim 3:1). The word for "perilous" comes from the Greek *chalepos* which means hard, rugged, furious, or ferocious. There is progress in evil. This does not mean that the signs of II Timothy 3 are restricted to the last days. Perilous times are intentional, to provide watchfulness by the saints of God in every age. Although the times of the Gentiles—the people's power—is seen growing, it has not yet come to its final conclusion in fulfillment. Every man doing that which is right in his own eyes was true of Laodicea. It is also true in the average church today. Every man doing that which is right in his own eyes soon becomes equivalent with doing wrong in the eyes of

others. The most dominant has his way, and what he does is disapproved by the others. When there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

COMMENDATIONS OF THE CHURCHES

Six of the seven churches were commended by the Lord. (1) The church in Ephesus was commended for refusing to endure evil men and for testing false apostles and finding them to be false. They had endured for Christ's sake and had grown weary. These saints hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans which the Lord also hates (Rev. 2:2, 3, 6). (2) The Lord commended the church in Smyrna for enduring tribulation, poverty, and blasphemy by those who said they were Jews but were a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9). (3) Although the church in Pergamum was situated near the center of pagan abominations, it was commended for holding fast Christ's name and refusing to deny the faith of Christ even though their messenger—Antipas—was killed (Rev. 2:13). (4) The church in Thyatira was commended for its works, charity, service, faith, patience, and progressive works (Rev. 2:19). (5) Although rebuke preceded commendation for the church in Sardis, a few among them were commended for not defiling their garments (Rev. 3:4). (6) The Philadelphian church was commended for her little strength, keeping Christ's word, refusing to deny Christ's name, and keeping the word of Christ's patience (Rev. 3:8, 10). (7) The Lord had no commendation for the Laodicean church.

EPHESUS

I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted....But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev. 2:2, 3, 6)

The Ephesians' works, labor, perseverance, nontoleration of evil ones, trying of so-called apostles, endurance, laboring without fainting, etc., were known by the Lord. The messenger of the church has minute knowledge of the services of his people. But the Lord has complete knowledge. The Greek word for "know" of verse 2 is *oida*. It is a stronger word than that which is ordinarily used. It means to perceive, to discern, to pay attention to, to observe, or to notice. This is what our Lord is doing as He walks among the lampstands. This word better emphasizes the absolute clearness of mental vision which photographs all the facts of life as life passes. Everything is open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:13). The things discerned by Jesus Christ were the works of the Ephesian saints. They were commended for their doctrinal soundness and stability. They did not take the line of least resistance. These Christians contended for the faith once delivered to the saints. Trouble and toil were united with their labor.

The Ephesians were intolerant with evil men. They disciplined the morally and mentally corrupt. Ministerial courtesy had no place in Ephesus. They tested people, because they were doctrinally strong. The Ephesian saints hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6). Many pious church members say you should hate no one. However, the Psalmist said he hated with perfect hatred those who hate the Lord (Ps. 139:19-24). The Lord commended the Ephesians for hating evil and the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The word "Nicolaitans" is made up of two Greek words, *nikao* and *laos*. The former means to conquer, overcome, to come off superior, or to get the upper hand of.

The latter means a body of people. There is no contradiction between David's hatred for the enemies of the Lord of Psalm 139:19-24 and the Lord's exhortation to love our enemies of Matthew 5:43-48. David spoke of those who hated the Lord; whereas, Jesus Christ spoke of response to personal injury. Christians should hate false teachers who hate the things of God. Perfect love and perfect hatred are two sides of the same coin.

SMYRNA

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. (Rev. 2:9, 10)

The church in Smyrna differed from the church in Ephesus in respect to suffering. The outward condition seemed to be more hostile than in Ephesus. This proves that outward as well as inward conditions vary from place to place, time to time, and church to church. One church may suffer more than another. One Christian may suffer more than another. The suffering of one Christian at one time does not mean that he may not suffer to a greater degree at another time.

The church in Smyrna had social difficulty. This same adversity is characteristic of any true church in any time in history. What does this say for churches that have social standing in the community or in the world? Any church that has social standing in the world is not a true church of Jesus Christ in practice. Great numbers assemble in so-called churches for the advantages of family centers, gymnasiums, sports programs, counseling centers, etc. However, churches that really stand for the truth are not socially acceptable. Truths revealed in the letter to the church in Smyrna are not readily acceptable in this day of quick prosperity and give-away shows.

Tribulation is the outstanding characteristic feature of the church in Smyrna. The word *thlipsis* is the word for suffering or persecution. The Lord Jesus knew the tribulation and poverty of the saints in Smyrna. These two characteristics accompany one another in the life of the Christian. The noun form of the Greek word for poverty, *ptocheia*, is used only three times in the New Testament (II Cor. 8:2, 9; Rev 2:9). The Christians in the church in Macedonia rejoiced while enduring tribulation because they knew they were in the will of God: "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (II Cor. 8:2). Jesus Christ was rich but became poor that through His poverty the elect ones might be rich (II Cor. 8:9). The noun and verb forms of the word for poverty are both recorded in this latter reference. The noun form is found in Revelation 2:9, with reference to the church in Smyrna. The adjective form is used thirty-four times in the New Testament.

Smyrna was the poorest of the seven churches, but she was the purest. The tribulation brought upon them made them poor. Affliction brings poverty to Christians. The affliction to which David was subjected made him purer in the eyes of God: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. 119:67). Affliction polishes character (Rom. 5:3-5). It is a pledge of coming glory: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17). Although the Christians were in poverty, they had treasure in heaven. There is no real economic security, but Christians have

security in Jesus Christ. They are in the hands of the sovereign God to do with them as He pleases.

The poverty of this church may be contrasted with the wealth of the Laodicean church. Laodicea was a rich-poor church; whereas, Smyrna was a poor-rich church. The latter was rich spiritually. The language of Laodicea is the vernacular of our day. God's standard is that a person prosper as his soul prospers (III John 2). The average church member is not interested in what it costs to be a Christian. He is interested only in what he can get out of being one. The saints in Smyrna had not been given a pep talk on how my faith made me mayor of Smyrna. They had not heard preachers on television talk of what their faith had gotten them. They had not been exposed to the sociologists and psychologists of our day. They had not been addicted to the statistical method which describes as "normal" whatever is widespread. Sociology and psychology tend to deprive the individual of responsibility for his own behavior. Toleration or indifference to evil is no virtue at all. Many churches today have diplomats instead of soldiers, and they socialize in liaison rather than loyalty.

The saints' affliction was spearheaded by religionists: "...I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). These Jews caused their affliction. A Jew, strictly speaking, is not a Jew outwardly (Rom. 2:28, 29). A true Jew is one who is a Jew inwardly. He is not merely a natural descendant of Abraham, but he is a spiritual descendant of Abraham. These Jews had not been regenerated. As the Jews who were persecuting the saints of God in Smyrna were proud of their national heritage, religionists today who are not the children of God are usually proud of their denominational connection or their church affiliation. This world has many religious groups, and their devotees are as zealous for their empty religious heritage as the Jews were for their empty national heritage.

The Lord knew the blasphemy of those religious Jews. The Greek word *blasphemia*, for blasphemy, means railing, reviling, slander, detraction, impious, or reproachful speech injurious to the Divine Majesty. The true people of God have always been slandered and branded as impostors if they do not follow certain established religions. There is profit in religion. Before his salvation, Paul profited in the Jews' religion (Gal. 1:13, 14). Many profit financially in religion, but there is no such profit in Christianity. The Lord called the religious Jews who were persecuting the saints the "synagogue of Satan." This signifies an assembly or gathering under the leadership of Satan himself. There is no salvation for Satan; hence, he is trying to destroy everything he cannot have. He has his synagogues (Rev. 2:9), his gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), and his spirit (II Cor. 11:4). The worst enemies of the saints are religionists—unsaved church members.

The suffering saints were encouraged (Rev. 2:10). The Lord Jesus exhorted the saints not to fear what they were about to suffer. Their past affliction had prepared them for future suffering. Christ's "fear nots" include everything. The world is always fearful of disease, disaster, death, etc. However, Christians do not fear as those who have no hope (I Thess. 4:13). God's grace is sufficient. The Christian should be fearless of everything and everybody except God. God has put His fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Him (Jer. 32:40). This is reverential fear of God which is a permanent principle in the life of every born-again person. Reverential fear is the means of perseverance.

Christ prepared the saints in Smyrna for future suffering. The Devil was the instigator of their sufferings. Some of them were about to be placed in prison. The Greek word *phulake*, for

“prison,” means an enclosure or confinement for the purpose of being tried or tested. The testing would continue ten days. Some say ten days refers to the ten persecutions under Roman emperors, beginning with Nero and concluding with Diocletian. Others believe the ten days refer to a fixed period of time. Others say that this statement refers to the number 10 in Scripture, such as the ten plagues, ten commandments, ten virgins, ten horns, etc. The number assures Christians that none will be afflicted beyond God’s appointed time for their affliction.

Exhortation was given the believers in Smyrna—“be thou faithful unto death.” Faithfulness is a chief virtue of Christians. It implies sincerity, diligence, courage, and perseverance. It includes everything consistent with the truth of God’s word. Faithfulness to the Christian is what the magnetism of the needle is to a compass. It guides them to usefulness. The saints were exhorted to be faithful unto death, to the point of martyrdom. We may never be called upon to become martyrs, but we are called to die unto self and this world system daily. The higher the degree of the Christian life the more likely it is to attract dislike and hostility, if circumstances permit.

The crown of life is promised to those who are faithful unto death (v. 10). The crown of life is not salvation. Eternal life is a present possession to those who are born again. Faithfulness unto death is not necessary to obtain it. Without eternal life, faithfulness unto death is impossible. This is a crown that will be given to the Christian who remains faithful to the point of martyrdom. Five different crowns (*stephanos* which means prize, ornament, or honor) are promised Christians for their faithfulness. But when they stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, they will cast them at the feet of the blessed Lord in worship and adoration of Him.

PERGAMUM

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

The Lord commended the Pergaminian saints. He knew where they lived, where they witnessed, and that they were faithful. The word “works” is not in the Greek text, but that does not mean that the Pergaminian saints did not do some works.

The outward circumstances in Pergamum were different from each of the other churches. It is said that at this time Pergamum had risen to be the first city in Asia Minor. We are told that both science and art were found in Pergamum at the time this letter was written. The city was famed for its learning. It was the birthplace of the physician Galen, the Greek who wrote on the subject of medicine. The Pergaminian saints dwelt in the very place of Satan’s seat. Satan works on the two lines of opposition of persecution and corruption. He used persecution against the church in Smyrna, and corruption was his chief weapon in Pergamum. Some say there were more idols in this city than in all Asia combined. Pergaminian saints dwelling where Satan’s seat was indicates that the church had lost her pilgrim character, which should characterize God’s people.

According to Revelation 1:19, these letters to the seven churches constitute the things that are in existence at the present time. During the church age, Satan’s throne, the place where he dwells, is magnified. Hence, Satan’s throne is on the earth during the time of the church age. This does not sound like the kingdom. Satan is the god of the age in which we live. He is the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). He has access to the throne of God. He is the accuser of mankind

(Rev. 12:10), the great antagonist (Job 1; 2). He presently dwells here, but when Jesus Christ reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, Satan's throne will not be on the earth. He will be cast into the bottomless pit.

The Lord commended the saints in Pergamum for their faithfulness. Antipas' name was mentioned as Christ's faithful witness. History reveals that Antipas was the pastor/teacher of this church preceding the one to whom this particular letter was addressed. Antipas' name means against all or one against many. It denotes strength of character. Antipas was a faithful witness. The Greek word for "witness" is *martus*, which means a witness. His faithfulness in witnessing resulted in his being slain for the cause of Christ. His name has not only been remembered in heaven but God has seen that it has long been remembered on earth, because it is found in Holy Scripture.

THYATIRA

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. (Rev. 2:19)

Jesus Christ had some words of commendation for the remnant in the church in Thyatira. He could not speak words of commendation for Jezebel, but there were some things in the church He could commend. God separates persons within the church. He found some marks of spiritual life in Thyatira. The commendable features known to Christ were their works, charity, service, faith, and patience. Their works refers to an act, deed or something done. Their charity—love—preceded faith in the order of this verse because it was more apparent. Unlike Ephesus, the remnant manifested love. Their faith, fidelity, and service refers to the ministration of those who render to others the offices of Christian affection. Their patience refers to perseverance. Their last works were greater than their first. Christianity is designed to be progressive. The "rest" of verse 24 denotes the remnant in Thyatira that made spiritual progress.

SARDIS

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

There were only a few faithful ones in the church in Sardis. Notice the regression from the remnant—rest—in Thyatira (Rev. 2:24) to a few faithful ones in Sardis. The faithful ones were few in number. Their purity is seen in that their garments were undefiled. Their prospect was that they shall walk with Christ in white.

A few in Sardis who had not spoiled their garments were the exception (v. 4). Only a few were undefiled. The Greek word *oligos* means little, small, or few in number. The following are some examples of its use in the New Testament: There is the broad way that leads to destruction which many enter by, and there is the narrow way with the strait gate by which "few" enter (Matt. 7:13, 14). Many are called, but "few" are chosen (Matt. 20:16). Out of the multitudes living during Noah's time, a "few"—eight souls—were saved by water (I Pet. 3:20). The same Greek word is used here in Revelation (2:14, 20; 3:4). The mass have a name in the world, but the few, though unknown to the world, are known by God. Saints mixed with the world do not sanctify the world. They are defiled by the world. Hence, in the midst of general decline in the church today, there

are a few who do not spoil their garments. Garments are to the body what habits are to the real person.

PHILADELPHIA

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....Because thou hast kept the word of my patience....(Rev. 3:8, 10a)

The church in Philadelphia was commended for its little strength, keeping Christ's word, and refusing to deny Christ's name (v. 8). This church was unimportant in the eyes of the world. Although unrecognized by men, she was loved by God. Her little strength reminds one of the Jews under Nehemiah's leadership rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem (Neh. 4). The Jews' enemies ridiculed them and called them "these feeble Jews." We must not despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10). Sometimes a wide door is suddenly closed, and at other times a narrow door is opened wide. The prosperity which attends the preaching in one place and the lack of visible success in another are not to be attributed to men but to the opener and closer of doors to salvation and service. The "little power" insures the open door. The church must not try to force fruit. God is the giver of fruit.

The Philadelphian church kept Christ's word. The Greek word for "kept" is *tereo*. It means to guard intellectually, affectionately, or practically. The church has no right trying to shorten God's counsel by bringing it within the bounds of others.

The church had not denied Christ's name. The name of Christ covers all that He is—Jesus Christ our Lord. In times of persecution, Christians were required to renounce Christ publicly. But the Philadelphian saints refused to comply. The church had experienced great trial and had remained faithful (v. 9).

The Philadelphian saints had kept the word of Christ's patience (Rev. 3:10). What is the meaning of "my patience"? Some say the meaning is an expression which was exemplified in Christ's steadfastness. They use II Thessalonians 3:5 and Hebrews 12:1 for proof texts, believing the gospel gives an account of the patience of Christ. Their explanation is that God is the efficient cause of patience and Christ is an example of patience. Jesus Christ endured the cross and despised the shame in view of the awaiting joy. Others say the word means Christ's command to endure, with emphasis on Christ's command. Some regard it as referring not to individual commandments to patience but to the entire gospel message to men. There are those who say the word "patience" does not refer to Christ's past humiliation but to His present attitude. These interpret it as Christ sitting at the Father's right hand patiently waiting until God makes His enemies His footstool in the kingdom. Hence, keeping the word of Christ's patience is looked upon by some as being an unusual statement.

The Greek word for "patience" used in Revelation 3:10 is *hupomone*, which means steadfastness, constancy, endurance, perseverance, a patient steadfast waiting for, a patient enduring, or sustaining. This word is used only three times in the New Testament with reference to God (Rom. 15:5; Rev. 1:9; 3:10). This same Greek word is used five times with reference to God's people (Rev. 2:2, 3, 19; 13:10; 14:12). Paul had confidence in the Thessalonian saints that they would patiently wait for Christ (II Thess. 3:5). The Christian race should be run with patience

(Heb. 12:1). The expression “my patience” was used with reference to Christ in Revelation 3:10. Therefore, it assures believers that they are on the winning side when appearance signifies otherwise. Like the Philadelphian saints, Christians are on the winning side because they are part of the body of Jesus Christ. Like a replay of a particular play already viewed in a football game, the outcome is known before it takes place.

Patience is one of the three things concerning Christ in this letter: (1) Christ’s name denotes authority—all that He is. (2) Christ’s patience signifies His constancy, perseverance, and endurance. (3) Christ’s God was His not by regeneration but by eternal generation. The Lord Jesus Himself made this distinction when He said to Mary, “...Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). He made a distinction between the sense in which God was His Father and God and in which He is Father and God to Christians. God and man can never be the same.

The local church today is to be militant, but she may not appear triumphant to either society or religion in general. The church militant and triumphant differ. Now is the time for endurance or perseverance. She keeps God’s commandments and the faith of Jesus Christ (Rev. 14:12). Her triumph is future (Rev. 15:1-4).

LAODICEA

The church in Laodicea was the only one of the seven churches for which the Lord had no commendation.

CONDEMNATIONS OF THE CHURCHES

Five of the seven churches had condemnation pronounced against them. (1) The church in Ephesus was condemned for leaving her first love (Rev. 2:4). (2) There was no rebuke or condemnation for the church in Smyrna. (3) Condemnation was pronounced upon the church in Pergamum because she had in her midst those who held 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” (Rev. 2:14). She also had in her midst some who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:15). (4) The church in Thyatira was condemned for tolerating the evil woman “Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Rev. 2:20). (5) The condemnation against Sardis was because she had a name that she lived but was dead, and her works were not found perfect before God (Rev. 3:1). (6) There was no condemnation for the church at Philadelphia. (7) The Laodicean church was condemned for being neither hot nor cold but lukewarm. Furthermore, she said, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” But she was “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:15-17).

EPHESUS

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. (Rev. 2:4, 5)

The Lord had reminded the Ephesian saints that He knew their works, labor, and patience (Rev. 2:2). These same words—work, labor, and patience were used by Paul in I Thessalonians 1:3—“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (I Thess. 1:3). In that passage they are qualified by faith, love, and hope. However, the virtues of faith, hope, and love are omitted from Revelation 2:2 because the Ephesian church had already left her first love. Formality was prevalent in this church. Her labor was no more than intestinal fortitude. It was not in love. Her patience was uninspired.

Departure from first love was the characteristic feature in Ephesus. The grip of faith may loosen its grasp by self-occupation. The brightness of testimony may be tarnished by the breath of this world. The bloom of consecration may be rubbed off by the hand of inconsistency. The voice of prayer may be hushed by the paralysis of doubt. The cord of unity may be snapped by the force of discord and neglect of the means of grace.

The Ephesian church was condemned for leaving her first love (Rev. 2:4). The word for “left” (*aphiemi*) is a strong word in the Greek. It means to leave, depart from, leave remaining, alone, or forsake. Two Biblical examples of this are the disciples “forsook their nets” (Mark 1:18) and “The woman then left her waterpot” (John 4:28). In spite of all their fidelity and endurance, Christ lamented the Ephesians’ departure from first love. Departure from first love is usually illustrated with the waning of love between a husband and wife who must return to their first

experiences of love. However, this is not the meaning of the Greek word used here. The Greek word for “first” is *protos*, which means to hold the first place or to have the preeminence. Some say it is first in time or place and in succession of things or of persons. The Lord was not speaking of first in point of time but first in quality. This word is used of the “best” robe placed on the returned prodigal son (Luke 15:22). It is sometimes translated “chief” (Acts 13:50; 17:4; 25:2).

The saint’s first love was when Jesus Christ was held in affection and the believers abiding in Him were engaged in the activities to which His love gave impulse. First love is not the brightness and zeal which may be found in young converts. The love of young Christians has not been matured by trials. Young converts are zealous, but their zeal is seldom based on knowledge. If love is genuine between a man and his wife, the number of trials through which they go strengthens their love for one another. Quality love is always motivated by the love of God which has been shed abroad in the heart (Rom. 5:5). It is not merely loyalty to the church or the pastor but loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Believers cannot fall away from the love of God which has been shed abroad in the heart by the regenerating Spirit. But they can and do depart from the enjoyment of the blessings they have in Jesus Christ. Coldness does not begin on God’s side. It begins on our side. Outward growth is possible while one becomes inwardly weak. A church can be as sound in doctrine, faithful in discipline, and active in deeds as Ephesus was without the motivating power of quality love. That which is true of the local aspect of the church is also true of the individual believer.

Christ threatened to remove the candlestick unless the Ephesians repented. This is written to the church. However, the principle will apply to the repentant sinner. There are three ingredients in repentance for the believer. He must “remember,” a present active imperative verb of *mnemoneuo* which means to keep on remembering. Hence, the call is to be mindful of, to fix one’s thoughts upon, or make mention of. The second ingredient in repentance for the believer is to “repent,” an aorist active imperative of *metanoeo*, which means an immediate change in one’s purpose of life which results in a change of life itself. The third ingredient in repentance for the believer is “do,” an aorist active imperative of *poieo* which means to produce the first works quickly. Quality love produces quality works. The admonition is addressed not to the unsaved but to the messenger called to watch over the church. Through him, Jesus Christ admonished the church.

God warned that He would come quickly to remove the lampstand if the Ephesian saints failed to repent. He who is coming is the expected Judge. Jesus Christ is presented as Judge walking in their midst. This is providential judgment. The true church of Jesus Christ is now judged providentially, but the false church will be judged providentially and judicially. This does not refer to Christ’s judgment of the quick and the dead of II Timothy 4:1. The main difference between the present judgment of Jesus Christ as He walks among the golden lampstands and the judgment seat of Christ is that the judgment of Christ now being exercised in the churches is for the purpose of removing the lampstand. Whereas, rewards will be determined before the judgment seat of Christ.

Removing the lampstand would be like removing a lamp, leaving the place in the dark. The verb is a future active indicative of *kineo*, which means to cause to go or to be moved. There was no true message being proclaimed. There is no evidence that Ephesus repented. But there is

evidence that the whole city was destroyed. The church in Ephesus is no longer in existence. The lampstand could have been removed long before the destruction of Ephesus in the middle of the third century. Perhaps the only thing that existed for some time before the city's destruction was a human fellowship. Christians must assemble to have fellowship with the Lord and then with His people. The fellowship must be spiritual, not human. Fellowshiping with the Lord results from studying His word and growing in grace and knowledge of Him.

The Lord may remove the candlestick in several ways. He may remove the messenger, the repentant members by scattering them, or the lampstand by persecution. The removal of the candlestick from Ephesus did not affect the invisible body of Jesus Christ. There are two aspects of the church—visible and invisible. The Lord said the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, which means the invisible aspect of the church (Matt. 16:18).

The church in Ephesus did not recognize her spiritual condition. This failure causes one to have an improper perspective. Physical illness is readily detected, but spiritual illness is not easily recognized. Few request prayer for their spiritual decline, but many request it for their physical condition. If every Christian recognized a decline in his spiritual life and was as anxious for its recovery as he is for physical recovery, the church would be spiritually different.

The warning from the teaching of the Ephesian letter is that if love wanes until one's life is nothing more than empty formality, he will have his witness transferred to another. In the Ephesian church, neither zeal nor orthodoxy waxed cold. Their love waxed cold. There is no value to a lampstand if there is no light in it.

SMYRNA

There was no recorded condemnation of the church in Smyrna. The Lord knew the tribulation and poverty of these saints. The word for "works" is not in the original text. The significant clause, "I know thy works," which is found in some of the other letters is not found in this one. The reason is not that the church was minus good deeds, but her history is compressed into one single word—tribulation, affliction, or suffering. Tenderness rather than strong rebuke was manifested for their inconsistencies. The Lord remembers all the tears we shed. The outside world exerted pressure, which was difficult to bear, upon the church in Smyrna. History records that Polycarp suffered martyrdom in Smyrna. Some believe he was the pastor/teacher of this church.

PERGAMUM

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 Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. (Rev. 2:14-16)

The chief characteristic of the saints in Pergamum was their laxity in the matter of discipline (Rev. 2:14-16). Any church that calls herself a church and does not exercise discipline is not a New Testament church. Jesus Christ is not speaking for her. The sword is not working in her behalf, but it is working against her.

Christ condemned the church in Pergamum for having those who held the doctrine of Balaam. The teaching that was hated by the Ephesian saints was accepted by the Pergaminian saints. The Ephesians would not tolerate evil doctrine. They tried those who said they were apostles and found they were liars. But the Pergaminians allowed them in the midst of the church. These saints were lax in the matter of discipline. There are some things with which we may be tolerant but others with which we must be intolerant.

Balaam's way (II Pet. 2:15), error (Jude 11), and doctrine (Rev. 2:14) are mentioned. Balaam was sent by Balak to curse Israel. Balaam taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication (Num. 22-24). Balaam's sin was loving the wages of unrighteousness (II Pet. 2:15). He erred for reward (Jude 11). He placed a price on his sermons. This is a common sin with barbers. It cannot be restricted to the "ministry." It is true in every realm of society. Balaam professed to be a prophet of the Lord, but the hypocrite implored the Lord to let him go. Finally, the Lord granted his wish.

Satan turned from persecuting the church in Smyrna to corrupting the church in Pergamum. Eating things sacrificed to idols in this church and in the church in Thyatira does not contradict Paul's message to the Corinthians concerning eating meat from animals that had been sacrificed to idols (I Cor. 8:1-8). Paul said, "We know that an idol is nothing in the world." Later, the gnostics taught false spiritualism. They were saying that everything corporeal is nothing. Fornication was also present among the members in the church in Pergamum. Fornication is a guilty entanglement with forbidden things as well as with a forbidden person. Satan defiled the separation of the saints in this place.

The deeds of the Nicolaitans in the first letter became the doctrine of the Nicolaitans in Pergamum. When false doctrine is tolerated, the teachers will assume the spirit of a hierarchy and will make demands. The meaning of the name Nicolaitans is getting the upper hand of the laity by the few. This teaches that we must not be led by any man-made organization. Anything unscriptural must be rejected. Indifference to evil is an insult to God. Toleration of evil doctrine or evil men is sin. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil (Prov. 8:13). It should not be given a chance to grow because a little leaven leavens the whole lump (Gal. 5:9).

The Pergaminians were warned that if they failed to repent, the Lord would fight against them instead of for them with the sword of His mouth. Many churches today lay claim to Jesus Christ fighting for them, but the lampstand has long been removed. They do not recognize that Jesus Christ is fighting against them. Neither an individual Christian nor a church has any promise that Jesus Christ is fighting for them unless they have a repentant spirit and seek to appropriate the things they have learned. When there is no conviction of sin by those who profess to know the Lord Jesus Christ, the sword of the word works against them. Where there is conviction of sin, the word works for them.

The saints in Pergamum were called to repentance. Repenting would mean putting away the evil things within the church. The church was guilty. But she was not threatened with removal of the lampstand. This church was threatened with coming judgment. The mouth was the source, and the sword was the weapon used. Therefore, what the Lord said would be the judgment.

THYATIRA

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 of 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 every one of you according to your works. (Rev. 2:20-23)

Condemnation preceded commendation in the Lord's message to the church in Thyatira. This church was condemned for tolerating a false teacher named Jezebel. This was the chief characteristic of this church. The Greek word for "sufferest" (*aphiemi*) means to tolerate (v. 20). There is no reference to discipline in this letter. The Ephesian church tried those who said they were apostles and found them to be liars. There is no reference in this letter to excommunicating anyone. Jezebel was guilty of claiming to be a prophetess. Scripture teaches that women should remain silent in the church (I Cor. 14:34, 35). Women claiming to be ministers today place themselves in the same category with Jezebel. Any local institution that ordains women is not a true local institution under the direction of Jesus Christ. The lampstand has long been removed. Jezebel was guilty of teaching men, a thing forbidden by the Lord (I Tim. 2:11, 12). Women are forbidden this office because Adam was first formed and then Eve, and Eve was first in the transgression (I Tim. 2:13, 14). Churches must keep the ordinances as the Lord has delivered them (I Cor. 11:2). Within the context of keeping the ordinances, the man is the head of the woman (I Cor. 11:3). The woman's place in society, the church, and the home is taught in I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians 11. Jezebel taught the servants of God, seduced them, taught them to practice fornication, and taught them to eat things sacrificed to idols. What the Lord said about the church in Thyatira is what He is saying about every church which has women in places they should not be.

The Son of God, whose eyes are like a flame of fire and His feet like fine brass, is the authoritative One. He is the Head of the church. Jezebel had assumed that place in the church in Thyatira, and the messenger and church tolerated it.

One view of Jezebel that is taught is that she was the wife of the messenger. Those who embrace that concept think the manuscript we use is incorrect. They say the letter was addressed to the messenger whose wife refused to assume her rightful place, and she was guilty of promiscuity. Another view is that she is to be used symbolically. Those who adopt the second view believe the church in Thyatira is typical of the age when Roman Catholicism was in power up to the time of the reformation. They say Jezebel is to be compared with the Roman Catholic church with her celibate priests, nuns, and spiritual brides. But that which she represents must not be restricted to Roman Catholics. Her unprincipled teaching and behavior cannot be given such restriction. Professing Christendom is filled with the teaching and behavior of the woman Jezebel.

Jezebel was a real woman in the church. This is not symbolical language representing what was taking place within the church. The Lord particularized. He had a particular person named Jezebel in mind. Jezebel of the Old Testament did not symbolize her. The apostles did not generalize. They particularized. Paul called the names of Euodias and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2). He did not say there were some women in the church in Philippi causing problems. The apostle called the names of Hymenaeus and Philetus (II Tim. 2:17). Their false teaching concerning the resurrection found pasture as easily as gangrene spreads in the human body. Christianity without

a resurrection ceases to be a living faith. Hymenaeus was excommunicated, but that did not stop his subverting activities. Hence, his name is mentioned in the second epistle, but there is no further reference to Philetus. Another illustration of particularization is the exhortation to “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). The offenders must be known in order to mark them. The Greek verb for “mark” comes from the word *skopeo* which means to look at, observe, contemplate, watch, or keep your eye on (Rom. 16:17; II Cor. 4:18; Gal. 6:1; Phil. 2:4; 3:17). The apostle John named Diotrephes who loved the preeminent place. He did not receive John as God’s appointed apostle (III John 9).

The false teacher tolerated by the church in Thyatira was a woman. The fact that a woman assumed the office of teacher should have been enough to convince the church that she was in error. Scripture teaches that a woman should not teach or usurp authority over the man (I Tim. 2:11, 12; I Cor. 14:34, 35). Many women have said that the churches would close their doors if it were not for women. Churches with women running them would be better to close their doors. Do you see any similarity between Jezebel and the women usurping the office of pastor/teacher today? The woman Jezebel called herself a prophetess. Jezebel also taught false doctrine. According to Holy Scripture, a woman has a place, but her place is in her husband (I Cor. 11:3). Every Christian woman should understand the Scripture, accept that truth, and rejoice in it.

Jezebel’s teaching can be likened to false mysticism. Mysticism is used in a good sense, and it is also used in an evil sense. Jezebel was guilty of evil mysticism. The Lord spoke of the remnant who did not follow Jezebel’s teaching: “As many as have not this doctrine (the doctrine taught by Jezebel) and which have not known the depths of Satan” (Rev. 2:24). False mysticism may be likened to the depths of Satan. Mysticism is used in a good sense when it refers to the doctrine of an immediate spiritual intuition of truths believed to transcend ordinary understanding. Christians believe and embrace many truths in God’s word which they do not understand because they have come from the mouth of Him who is the Truth, and God never spoke a lie. Mysticism in its good sense is an intimate union with God through contemplation and love. We love Him because He first loved us. Our knowledge of His love for us comes from the word of God. False mysticism is unconcerned about objective truth. Every true subjective experience is in harmony with the objective revelation of God’s mind. Therefore, any experience contrary to Holy Scripture must be ignored. Experiences that are not based on the objective truth of God’s word constitute the depths of Satan. That was Jezebel. She was very popular in the church in Thyatira.

Jezebel seduced God’s servants to commit fornication. There is evidence that more is involved in this than just spiritual fornication. They were actually involved in physical fornication. People practice what they teach, and they teach what they want to practice. Any philosophy that makes it easier to sin is of the Devil. The Bible ever points us to a Divine standard, and that standard calls for morality. Sensual lives feast on idolatry. Eating things sacrificed to idols was attached to their fornication. This involved a feast that was observed where immorality usually ensued. Toleration of Jezebel’s teaching and seduction made Thyatira far worse than Pergamum. A church must not tolerate the seduction of some church members by other church members who are not right with God.

The Devil uses feminine charm. This is seen in every sphere of life today. The woman with her seductive charm is used by the commercial, political, and religious world. Do we not note the

growing weakness in dealing with evil that exists in churches today? Dealing with evil in the churches is becoming increasingly difficult. Toleration of evil in the church is due to a lack of examination of individuals within the church. Everyone wants to get along politically, religiously, and commercially. People adjust to the situation instead of adjusting the situation. There are too many thermometers rather than thermostats. The thermometer only records the temperature, but the thermostat controls it. Every generation of Christians faces the question of how far to go in accepting the standards and practices of his particular generation.

There is a reason for nothing being stated concerning discipline in the church in Thyatira. Discipline can be exercised only on the basis of a knowledge of objective truth, which the church in Thyatira did not have. This church had been seduced by Jezebel and her teaching. The servants had been seduced; therefore, they had not been properly taught. Evidently they did not know enough objective truth to properly distinguish between truth and error. How many institutional churches today have been subjected to the truth of God's word so that they have a workable knowledge of His word to enable them to exercise discipline and to know the difference between good and evil? Most people do not know enough to distinguish between truth and error, good and evil, and light and darkness.

Christ gave Jezebel time to repent, but she had no will to repent (v. 21). Likewise, women in the "ministry" today have no spirit of repentance about being out of place. Some women remain silent in local churches but manipulate their husbands to accomplish their purpose. Men who do not assume the headship of their wives are as guilty of sin as women out of their place. Every person is responsible to repent whether or not he has the ability. One's inability is of himself. God is not the author of depravity. Man is the author of his own depravity. The only hope for the sinner is the unconditional promise of God. The conditional promise calls for hearing and believing. God commands all men everywhere to repent. There is also the command to believe. Hearing, repenting, and believing are found in the conditional promise of God. Man's hope, however, is not in God's conditional promise. It is in the unconditional promise of God in which God gives a hearing ear to the chosen. He also gives them repentance and faith.

Some say that God commanding man who is unable to respond is only to mock him, and this destroys the nature of the commandment. There are three ways in which a thing may be said to be impossible: (1) There is a simple impossibility. There are some things God cannot do. He cannot lie, become unholy, etc. (2) There is a natural impossibility. A thing may be impossible according to its nature. A man cannot touch the sun or work above natural causes. (3) There is a spiritual impossibility. Things which have no simple or natural impossibility attached to them sometimes become spiritually impossible through man's fault. Man being commanded to do something, which through his own fault he is incapable of performing, is not mockery. God's commands do not tell us what God wills us to do but what we should do for Him. Most solemn of all reflections is that a man is personally responsible to God, and that is all one can say about Jezebel here. God gave her time to repent, but she did not. She willed not to repent. Since Jezebel would not repent, she was an unregenerate person in the church. Being unregenerate, she was unwilling to be able and unable to be willing. How different she was from Lydia whose residence was in Thyatira. God opened Lydia's heart, and she heard what Paul had to say (Acts 16:14). She had a conversion experience because the Spirit of God had opened her heart. But Jezebel's heart was unopened. The same grace of God is just as necessary for the repentance of a religionist as for a whoremonger, drunkard, drug addict, etc.

Jezebel was not only a religionist but she was a whoremonger. The context states that she was a fornicator. Her fornication rendered it impossible for her to be the wife of the messenger to the church. A distinction is made between adultery and fornication. Although the latter has a more general use, it is used to denote the sin committed out of wedlock. Jezebel was guilty of not only spiritual but physical fornication.

God was casting Jezebel into a bed. "Behold" (*idou*) is a demonstrative particle which gives a peculiar vivacity to the style by bidding the reader to attend to what is being said. This demonstrative particle is used many times in the Revelation. "I will cast" (*ballo*) is a present active indicative verb, meaning God was presently casting her into a bed. The same word is used in verse 24, where the Lord said He would put upon them no other burden. Jezebel was a harlot. She did not repent of her guilt of fornication. She was not a virgin espoused to Christ (II Cor. 11:2). The woman of Proverbs 7 is a classic description of Jezebel. Like the woman of Proverbs, Jezebel had discerned that some of the members of the church were young, simple, and did not know much. She would teach them the deep things, but she failed to tell them they were the deep things of Satan. She would deceive them with her fair speech. The bed of whoredom would be turned into a bed of anguish. Judgment first struck the woman Jezebel. She had descended into the depths of Satan.

Those who committed adultery with Jezebel would suffer great tribulation unless they repented. This wicked prophetess had seduced both married and unmarried servants. The verb form of "adultery" *moicheuo* is used only here in Revelation (2:22). The great affliction spoken of here is not the great tribulation later described in Revelation. This is in the present tense. The great tribulation is future; therefore, this cannot be interpreted as the great tribulation that will precede the coming of the Lord. Great suffering would come upon those who refused to repent. Only those who have grace have ability to repent. "Except they repent of their deeds" is not in the best manuscripts. They were to "repent of the works of her." They were called upon to repent of her deeds rather than their deeds. The impact of this is seen by comparing it with verse 26—"...He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." Why were they to repent of her deeds? They should do Christ's works rather than Jezebel's works.

The Lord threatened killing Jezebel's children with death. False teachers have their children as true preachers/teachers have theirs. Paul had his children. Timothy was his spiritual, not his physical son (I Tim. 1:2). Jezebel's children were her followers. The purpose of the Lord's judgment on Jezebel and her followers was that "all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts" (v. 23). All churches must know that God is a holy God. He is a God of judgment as well as of love and mercy. "Reins" comes from *nephros*, which speaks of the kidneys, the seat of the emotions. "Hearts," plural of *kardia*, is the word which speaks of the seat of the intellect. Although the letter itself is addressed to the messenger of the church, this warning is to be heard by each member of the church in Thyatira, and it is recorded that everyone in every age might pay heed to the message of this letter.

SARDIS

...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. (Rev. 3:1b-3)

The characteristic feature of the church in Sardis was that she was dead (Rev. 3:1). The church in Sardis had a name that she lived. She had all the outward characteristics of a living, vibrant church as far as the world was concerned. But the Lord said she was dead. She was a dead church in a dead world. There is a difference between the church being dead, in the sense that our Lord describes deadness here, and the world being dead. The world is dead in trespasses and sins. The context of Revelation 3:1-6 proves the church in Sardis was not completely, absolutely dead. The dead church in Sardis was marked by three failures: (1) She failed to do a complete work. (2) She was forgetful. (3) She failed to watch.

The Lord does not condescend to say more than is needed by any church or person. Christ's coming as a thief upon the church in Sardis does not refer to the second advent of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ would come upon them unexpectedly in providential judgment. This does not signify His judicial coming as King of kings and Lord of lords. This is a present providential judgment.

The moral death of Sardis included guilt, conscience, and affection. The word "dead" (*nekros*) does not mean the church was completely or absolutely dead, as verses 2 and 3 prove. A few in the church had not defiled their garments. The Lord gave the exhortation to them to be watchful and strengthen the things that remained which were ready to die. Such an exhortation would be absurd if Sardis had been completely or absolutely dead. The church was in a dead state. There are Biblical analogies of not being absolutely dead: (1) The word "blind" is modified by "cannot see afar off" (II Pet. 1:9). Christians who fail to add to their faith, virtue; to their virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; to temperance, patience; to patience, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity, are blind. However, they are not absolutely blind. (2) Paul's being carnal and sold under sin is modified by his delighting in the law of God after the inward man (Rom. 7:14-24). (3) The Lord called Peter "Satan" (Matt. 16:23), but that title was modified when Peter was one of the disciples selected to see the Lord on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13). Peter had only acted like Satan. (4) The man in the Corinthian church who was guilty of fornication was called a "wicked person" (I Cor. 5:13). But the word "wicked" is modified in Paul's exhortation to the church in Corinth to receive the repentant man (II Cor. 2:6-8). He was a Christian, and after repenting, he should be received back into the church from which he was excommunicated.

A dead church is on the best possible terms with a dead world. However, there is a difference between a dead church and a dead world. As long as Jesus Christ calls a gathering of people a church, it is a church. Hence, the church in Sardis was a church because there were a few who had not defiled their garments. One scarcely meets with a person today who does not call himself a Christian. To find one who is sanctified by the truth of God's precious word is equally hard. Many say they are Christians, but few have been sanctified by the truth of Holy Scripture. There is no graver symptom than a form of godliness without spiritual power. There is no standard of excellence today. Yesterday, orthodoxy was predominant. Today, freedom of thought without any standard is prevalent. Subjectivism is the norm.

Jesus Christ rebuked the church in Sardis (v. 3). He would come upon her in judgment, if she failed to repent. Jesus Christ knows all about us, and He knows our deeds. What value is the

praise of men when Jesus Christ knows all? Sardis had the reputation for being a dead church even though she had a name that she lived. The majority of the members in the church professed Christianity in name only. A corpse does not know that it is dead. It may look quiet and dignified, but it is dead. A dignified dead church and the preacher preaching a positive sermon with nothing negative is like embalming a corpse. It helps for only a short time.

The characteristics of spiritual life are seeing, hearing, speaking, doing, and growing. Christians must see what is truth and what is error. They must hear the truth and judge error. They should speak of the things they love and embrace, speak out against the things they abhor, and condemn things that are against God, truth, and righteousness. They must do something about the truth they have heard: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10). Christians should grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (II Pet. 3:18). These are the characteristics of life. They are not the honesty of the worldling, the temperance of the philosopher, the kindness of a good nature, or the mechanical observation of a formalist. There is nothing so unmistakable as natural death in plant, animal, or man. It makes itself visibly evident. Spiritual death is not always visibly evident. The question one should ask himself is not whether he is prepared to die but whether he is prepared to live.

The first failure of the church in Sardis was incompleteness. She failed to complete works or deeds by forgetfulness and unwatchfulness. The Greek verb for "perfect" (*pleroo*) means to complete, to consummate, to carry through to the end, or to bring to realization. Nothing the church did was complete before God. That is a terrible indictment. Whatever laudable efforts might have been made at the beginning were outweighed by the incompleteness at the conclusion. However, all was not completely lost, because the church was told to strengthen the things that remained that were ready to die. The word for "die" (*apothnesko*) means to rot or to wither. Therefore, she should strengthen the things that she still held. Many things creep into a Christian's spiritual life causing him to loosen his grip on the things he once held. Children of God will not keep what they have received if they do not labor to increase it. Biblical knowledge of any subject must be increased in order to retain it. The things so dearly loved by early Christians that made them distinctive is degenerating so rapidly that there is danger of their being lost. Completeness alone satisfies God.

Christians must "be ready to every good work" (Titus 3:1). "Ready" comes from the Greek word *hetoimos*, which means prepared or ready. Those who have believed in God should be careful to "maintain" good works for necessary uses (Titus 3:8, 14). They are to practice diligently, to maintain the practice, to take the lead in, or to care for divine principles. Hence, Christians are to be ready, be prepared, for every good work and then perform that work with all diligence. Whatever their hands find to do should be done with all their might (Eccl. 9:10).

Of all people, Christians should be the most industrious. They know that labor in the Lord is not in vain (I Cor. 15:58). The word "labor" (*kopos*) in this verse means intense labor with trouble. The Lord Jesus exemplified this by His own life and testimony when He said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). This verse harmonizes with Ecclesiastes 9:10. Industry in work is the opposite of laziness and indolence. There is no place for laziness or indolence in the life of a child of God. He should be tirelessly persistent in his activity in the things of the Lord. Meditation and study in the things of the Lord and manifesting what he believes in his everyday life have been committed to his trust.

Industry does not consist merely in activity but the proper direction of that activity. Direction comes from the word of God as the man of God preaches and teaches the Scriptures that have been committed to his trust. Properly directed industry preserves and matures character. Running water prevents stagnation. Blowing wind keeps the atmosphere wholesome. Employment of metal prevents rusting. Cultivated land prevents the growth of weeds. Furthermore, activity properly directed is wholesome for Christian growth and development. The Christian was designed for work. He is created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10). God did not intend that man should live idly. Even in his upright state before the fall, Adam was to till the ground. Since the fall, if man does not labor he should not eat.

Wisdom, good comprehension, and correct judgment about spiritual matters constitute the prize of industry. Study and meditation are necessary. All evidence must be compared and weighed because truth lies buried beneath the surface, and great industry is required in comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Truth is lodged deep under what appears to be knotty complications. Avoiding prejudices springing from education is not an easy task. The average person today will reflect his education. If he was educated in a liberal school, his philosophy is usually liberal, and if he was educated in a conservative school, his philosophy is conservative. Custom and passion are not easily avoided in judgment.

Solomon's exhortation to do with all one's might what his hand finds to do demands promptness, determination, and practical earnestness. Jesus Christ deserves our best. This does not mean that we are to work feverishly and without preparation, but we must work with deliberation, purpose in mind, and strength. We cannot do the work of the Lord with strength unless we are strong. We cannot be spiritually strong unless we know truth and then act upon the truth we say we love. As a man loves so he lives. If a man loves his wife, he lives for her, provides for her, and protects her. If a man loves his church, he lives for it. If he loves Jesus Christ, which precedes everything, he lives for Christ. As a man believes so he behaves. If his love is the love that has been shed abroad in his heart in regeneration, he will love Jesus Christ and will love living for Christ. Faith and love will not spoil the believer in any kind of secular work. It will make him sacred in the midst of all the dangers of secularity.

Whatever is to be done should be done with all of one's might. The Hebrew word for "might" means strength and vigor of body in opposition to a dry, withered and consequently languid state. The might of a Christian is not in himself. His strength is of the Lord. Connected with activity are three modes or conditions of mind: (1) impulse, (2) purpose or will, and (3) habit. "Impulse" is a sudden development of feeling with degrees of force. It precedes purpose and habit. What motivates a person? Many church members are motivated only by desire for recognition in the church. Others are motivated by power, the desire for preeminence. Some are motivated by impulse. The components of impulse are unknown. However, there is a determining state of feeling which has resulted from something being fed into the intellect. This determining state may be called will or purpose. Purpose gives direction to the way of life. In the state of will or purpose, emotion turns to intellect and uses experience. The will or purpose that it may not fade out forms itself into habit. Habit is more easily described than defined. The dictionary defines it as a customary practice or use, an acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary. After a man has been trained to do a particular job, the will, mind, and hand work together automatically. When a person has to force correct feeling at the correct time, something is wrong. The correct feeling should be in the structure of the soul so that it works spontaneously when needed. This is not to say there will not be

opposition and hindrances to be overcome by the believer in his work for the Lord. With every opened door, there are many adversaries.

Whatever is to be done should be done because there is no labor in the grave. The Lord said He must work while it is day because the night is coming when no man can work (John 9:4). Past time is unredeemable. Failure to prepare oneself adequately renders his redeeming the time impossible. A horse never runs better than when it runs for the stable. The goal before Christians is the heavenly kingdom; therefore, Christians must be prepared, maintain good works, and labor diligently because there is no labor in the grave.

Nothing is stated about the church in Sardis being persecuted. A dead church in a dead world will never be persecuted. It will be lauded and extolled. Churches need to be warned against a worldly and boastful attitude of heart and mind, which believes the world can be won to Christ if we make the Christian faith bigger, better, greater, and more impressive than anything else on earth. Unfortunately some believers feel they must quote renowned Christians, cite impressive facts and statistics, or describe some Christian singing group as fantastic in order to testify or witness for Christ. They are often too ashamed to say anything and therefore remain mute. This is not God's way of winning people to Christ. This very matter is discussed in detail in I Corinthians 1:18-31. God's method of salvation is precisely not to employ worldly wisdom, the philosophies of this age, persuasive oratory, impressive arguments, etc. Jews demand miraculous signs, and Greeks look for wisdom (I Cor. 1:22). A miraculous sign would be something spectacular and imposing, while wisdom would constitute sophisticated and brilliant arguments. Therefore, Paul declared that he came to the Corinthians not with eloquence or superior wisdom as he proclaimed the testimony about God. If people were won over by fine speeches, brilliant arguments, spectacular facts, and flashy impressions about the bigness and greatness of the Christian faith, from where would faith in Christ come? Would faith not be redundant? All that would be necessary would be to overpower a nonchristian with impressive arguments, and he would capitulate and surrender. He might be overpowered and his mind have been beaten into submission, but that is not the same as responding to the Holy Spirit who shows a man his sinfulness and then shows him the cross of our Lord. The Holy Spirit draws by love and grace.

The second failure of the church in Sardis was her forgetfulness. She must "remember"—present active imperative of *mnemoneuo*, to remember. Her members must keep on remembering, hold in memory, what they had seen and heard. They must remember "how" or in what manner they had received and heard. Furthermore, they should keep on holding fast. Their remembering and their activity must be continuous.

The third failure of the church in Sardis was unwatchfulness. Because of her failure to watch, Christ threatened coming upon her as a thief. The threat of His coming as a thief does not refer to His second advent. It is a warning concerning His coming in a providential judgment upon the church. Jesus Christ comes to Israel as the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2). He comes to the church as the morning Star to receive His own unto Himself. But He comes to the world and religious profession as a thief in the night. A thief comes when one is unaware of what is taking place. The religious world continues as though everything is fine, when the truth is that the Lord has removed His lampstand from most institutions. He has already come in judgment, and they do not know it. They are merely assembling one meeting after the other, going on in the energy of the flesh.

PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia is one of the two churches against whom our Lord made no condemnatory statement. Indication is not that the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia were perfect, but there was no outstanding sin of which they were guilty.

LAODICEA

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 are 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. (Rev. 3:15-19)

The complaint against the church in Laodicea consists of three parts. She was neither cold nor hot but lukewarm. The sin of lukewarmness was Christ's chief complaint against the Laodicean church. Leaving quality love by the Ephesian church is climaxed in this letter to the church in Laodicea by Christ being left outside the institutional church. That was mob decision because Laodicea means people's rights. It was democracy in action. One might say that by a vote of the members in Laodicea, Jesus Christ was left outside the church. The Laodicean church was conformed to the will of the people. Scripture teaches that Christians must not be conformed to this age, whether secular or religious. They must be transformed by the renewing of their minds that they might prove what is the will of God (Rom. 12:2). This renewal is continuous. The average institutional church today is being conformed to the will of the people rather than to the will of God. A bird of paradise cannot fly with the wind because its progress would be impeded and its flight terminated. Likewise, the children of God cannot make progress while going with the will of the people.

Denominations have formed because of a misunderstanding of Scripture. A little Biblical knowledge by church members can be very dangerous. Heresies have been formed and cults have been started for lack of understanding of Biblical truth as a whole. One must study and have a workable knowledge of all the Bible, not a few isolated passages or a few favorite verses of Scripture. A subject should be considered in the light of all of God's mind. The Bible cannot be passed through like one would go through a cafeteria line, accepting this and that and something else and leaving a lot behind.

This is a very controversial passage. One must distinguish the local from the universal aspects of the church. Jesus Christ will not spue out of His mouth the universal church for which He died. But He will spue out of His mouth the institutional or local aspect of the church which today is infiltrated with many unsaved people brought into it through emotionalism and free willism, resulting from false teaching. The Laodicean church was an apostate institution because Jesus Christ was on the outside. Therefore, He was not in her midst. The lukewarm person or church has a form but no spiritual power. There is more hope for the person or institution that is cold than for the lukewarm. Religionists cannot be instructed. Christ gave instruction to the religious Pharisees and Sadducees of His day, but they had a part in killing Him. Human nature has not

changed. Religious hatred is the worst of all. The cold person is under no illusion as to his true condition. He is not deceived. He knows he is lost. That is the reason the Lord Jesus said that harlots and whoremongers would go into the kingdom before the religious Pharisees (Matt. 21:31). There is no deception as heinous as that of appearance.

The Lord reminded the Laodiceans that He knew their works. The Greek for “know” (*oida*) here is the stronger of the Greek words used to translate the word know. It means fullness of knowledge. God did not deal with the Laodicean church in the dark. The arrow was pointed straight to its mark. The word for “works” is a Greek word (*erga*) used in the plural form here, which means works, deeds, or actions. The Lord Jesus knew the actions, deeds, or works of these people. The statement “I know thy works” is used seven times in these seven letters. The public sees the outside, but Jesus Christ sees the inside: “...the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (I Sam. 16:7). Furthermore, the public reads reports, but few reports tell the truth. Reports are usually designed to look good in the eyes of the public. There is no rule as deceptive as the rule of appearance. On the other hand, the Lord knows the heart.

The Lord complained that the Laodiceans were not cold. The words cold, hot, and lukewarm are found very few times in the Scriptures. Hence, a comparative study cannot be made by looking at other verses. These words must be considered in the light of the present context. The Greek word for “cold” is *psuchros*. It is used only in Matthew 10:42 and here in this passage of Scripture. It means to be cool or cold. Metaphorically, it means to be sluggish, inert, or slow of mind. In Matthew 10:42, the Lord Jesus said that no humble action in its relation to a high principle is lost. It is retained in a future judgment. Metaphorically, in this hot desert of spiritual barrenness, which is as bad as the wilderness into which John the Baptist was sent preaching repentance, there is a famine for the pure unadulterated word of God. A cup of cold water of the pure gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is relished by every one of God’s elect. In Revelation 3:15-16, the word “cold” is used in the sense of being spiritually cold and lifeless. Orthodox coldness preserves the form of faith, although that faith is a farce. Among the Laodiceans, there was no pretension at all to spirituality. There must be some degree of spiritual temperature to have any spiritual activity. Apart from spiritual temperature, there is nothing but formal coldness. The Laodiceans were not cold. They were lukewarm.

Laodicea was not hot. The Greek word for “hot” is *dzeitos*. It is used only here in this passage of Scripture. Our English word “zest” comes from this word. Hot is opposite from cold. Science has taught that heat and motion are interchangeable. Heat is but a form of motion, and motion is but a mode or form of heat. Where there is heat there is both energy and motion. Food eaten is turned into the motion of our bodies. If there is any spiritual temperature, the word of God upon which we feast turns into spiritual activity. There is a desire for the things of God, for study, and meditation upon the Scriptures. Scriptures are then put into practice in our lives. A church is known by its spiritual enthusiasm and concern of its members. Christian zest does not consist in weak and lifeless wishes raising us just a little above a state of coldness. The major qualities of Christian heat are being “fervent in spirit” (Rom. 12:11), loving God with all of one’s heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37), hating everything that is contrary to the truth of God’s word (Prov. 8:13; Ps. 119:104, 139), and being zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

Laodicea was lukewarm. The Greek word for “lukewarm” is *chliaros*, which means tepid or lukewarm. It is used only in this verse. Lukewarmness is an insult against God. The Laodiceans were monetarily rich. They were at ease and interpreted it as peace. They had all the comforts of life and confused them with the Comfort of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They had academic knowledge and thought it was Divine wisdom. They had talents and confounded them with God-given gifts. They handled ordinances and thought they were touching God. They did a little work but not enough to involve sacrifice. They gave but not liberally or cheerfully. Their self-sufficiency and complacency were nauseous to Jesus Christ. The Laodiceans loved their religion, like many today love their denominations, but they did not love Jesus Christ. An Old Testament analogy to this lukewarmness is Ephraim’s being likened to an unturned cake (Hos. 7:1, 8-16). Ephraim failed in the matter of separation. He mixed himself with the people in a threefold manner—place and company, affinity and alliance, and morally in regard to the manner of life. Ephraim was an unturned cake, burned on one side and raw on the other, which made him fit for nothing. The Lord likened this condition to salt having lost its savor so that it is fit for nothing but to be trodden under the foot of man. An unturned cake is ruined on both sides. Contradictory qualities are religion on one side and carnal passion on the other, power on one side and absence of power on the other, theoretical knowledge of God on one side and no experiential knowledge of God on the other, profession without practice, and appearance of wealth without any money. When Jesus Christ rules in the heart, the heart of that person leads him to adjust all his human relations.

The Lord preferred either coldness or heat to lukewarmness. This is a comparative statement. There is no question about the hot condition, but what about the cold condition? There is no hypocrisy in coldness. But there is something nauseous in lukewarmness. Judas Iscariot was a reprobate. He lived a lie for a long time as he went along with Christ, seeing the miracles He performed and hearing His preaching. He was a devil from the beginning. Lukewarmness reminds one of reprobation, for which there is no hope. However, there is hope in coldness. Coldness does not illustrate reprobation. It illustrates depravity. Although the elect sinner is cold, he will be regenerated by the sovereign Spirit. The cold person is under no illusion as to his true condition, but the lukewarm person is deceived.

The church in Laodicea in lukewarmness cast the Lord Jesus outside the local church. This brings up an important question, Has the church failed? The church has failed no more than God’s purpose in national Israel has failed: “...I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). The church of Jesus Christ is His body. The church that Jesus Christ is building has not failed, is not failing, and will not fail. But the institutional churches that men are building have failed, are failing, and shall fail. Distinction must be made between the church and churches. Institutional churches are filled with imperfections. A crime argues nothing against the excellence of the law by which it is condemned and judged. The church which Jesus Christ is building is not responsible for the churches any more than the law which judges the criminal is responsible for the criminal’s perversion of the law.

There have been false teachers and false prophets, and there are false church members: “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (I John 2:18, 19). In contrast to antichrists who depart, Christians have an unction from the Holy One (I John 2:20). There is a

purpose in false institutions. In the mystery of God's providence, the false are manifested but the true will be identified. There will always be heresies. God has a purpose in them: "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. 11:19). The Greek word for "heresies," plural of *haireisis*, means a body of men separating themselves from the church and following their own tenets. The Sadducees and the Pharisees illustrate those following their own persuasions (Acts 5:17; 15:5). Heresies are like magnets, attracting the unsound. These things are among us that they which are approved may be manifest. Every error is not heresy, but every error that tries to pervert the truth of the gospel is heresy. Darkness makes light more visible, and light renders darkness more visible. The necessity for factions is emphasized with the use of the word "must" of I Corinthians 11:19. The statement "there must be factions" is made in the same sense as "it must needs be that offences come" (Matt. 18:7). However, the persons who introduce factions or occasion offenses can never be excused.

Although institutional churches are failing, the gospel is not failing. An understanding of the purpose of the gospel prevents one from saying the gospel is failing. The gospel has never failed, is not failing, and cannot fail. The purpose of the gospel is not to save all mankind but to save those the Holy Spirit regenerates. Therefore, Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The truth of the gospel is not recognized by either the religious or the irreligious. The Lord said the irreligious—the publicans and harlots—shall go into the kingdom of heaven before the religious—Pharisees (Matt. 21:31).

The facts of Christianity have always been stumbling blocks in the way of man-made religion. Christians either live with the truth of the gospel or die for it. They say about the truth of the gospel what Ruth said to Naomi, "...Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge..." (Ruth 1:16). The knowledge that the foundation of God stands sure never leads to passivity (II Tim. 2:19). Paul's statement concerning the foundation of God standing sure and his exhortation to everyone who names the name of Christ to depart from iniquity followed his condemnation of Hymenaeus and Philetus for false doctrine. The word "iniquity" which comes from *adikia* means injustice, wrong, falsehood, unrighteousness of heart and life, or violation of justice. Paul warned the elders in Ephesus of grievous wolves who would come in, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:28-30). Declension had already set in during the time of the apostles and will continue to increase (I Tim. 4:1; II Tim. 2, 3; II Pet. 2:1-17; I John 2:18-26; Jude 16-18).

Jesus Christ threatened to spue the lukewarm Laodiceans out of His mouth. Three different views are taught on the Lord's threat, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." (1) It does not imply that the intention is final. (2) It does not prove that they did not possess grace. (3) It refers to the definite finality of the Laodicean church. The next verse (v. 17), which shows their deception, proves it was a definite finality. The word "spue" comes from the Greek verb *emeo*, and it is used only in Revelation 3:16. Those who say that *emeo* does not imply that God's intention was final say the proof is found in verses 18-19. One must understand that the counsel of verse 18 is not general but particular. The verb *mello* (I will) is used in the sense of to be about, to be at the point of, or to be ready. This verb is used to speak of Him who was to come (Rom. 5:14). That Jesus Christ should come was a definite finality. His coming was ordained before the foundation of the world. A person's soteriological belief is soon detected by the manner in which he translates or interprets various passages of Scripture. Some argue that Christ spueing the

Laodiceans out of His mouth could not be a definite finality because the Laodicean church was already in His mouth; therefore, He could not spue out what was already in. This argument is nullified by the barren branch “in” Christ (John 15:2). Every branch “in the sphere of” Christ is cast forth. Judas had escorted Him, but he was a barren branch and was cast forth because he was a reprobate.

Judgment of Laodicea was absolute—“I will spue thee out of my mouth.” God did not spare apostate Israel, and He will not spare the apostate institutional church. “You will say then, Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in. Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you” (Rom. 11:19-21 NASB). Israel’s dangers are those of local churches. Religionists think they are progressing, but their progress is toward general apostasy. They are in danger of being spued out of Christ’s mouth.

The deceived Laodiceans were saying they were rich (v. 17). The word for “sayest” is the present active indicative of the verb *lego*, signifying it was actually presently being said. Their estimate of themselves was too high; therefore, the preacher and the people were exceedingly boastful. They felt they had reached the point where nothing else was needed. This is definite evidence of the absence of grace. The sayings of deceived people are not only worthless but dangerous. A man may say he has light while he walks in darkness, but he lies. He may say he has no sin, but he deceives himself and the truth is not in him (I John 1:6-10). The Lord Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23).

Deception is associated with the mind. The Laodiceans’ deception was based on ignorance. Satan’s devices are most effective in the sphere of ignorance. The idea expressed by the Laodiceans that they needed nothing more was the climax of their deception. Thinking that God will protect believers from deception without their striving to gain more knowledge is in itself a deception. Failure to continually grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ will result in deception. Christians are warned against this evil (Matt. 24:4; Rom. 16:18; Eph. 4:14; 5:6; II Thess. 2:3; I John 1:8; 3:7). Although Christians can be deceived, they will never be deceived to the point of destruction.

On the surface, the Laodiceans’ saying they were rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing, might appear true. One might say “I am rich” and not speak as the Laodiceans. He would have reference to his riches in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 8:9). He could also truthfully say he is increasing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and he needs nothing because he is complete in Jesus Christ. However, the Laodiceans’ statement cannot be understood as an expression of gratitude. Their statement cannot be compared with David’s, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage” (Ps. 16:6). David was not boasting. He was not self-sufficient. The Laodiceans kept on saying they were rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing. They had no recognition of the Lord. Their statement had no similarity whatsoever to Paul’s statement, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (I Cor. 15:10).

The Laodiceans said they had need of nothing (v. 17). This signifies that the messenger and the church were saying “I have no need of patience.” This is in direct contrast with “ye have need of patience (Heb. 10:36). Patience is a continual necessity. One member in a church cannot say he has no need of the others (I Cor. 12:18-25). Christians always have needs, and by grace those needs are recognized. Those who say they have no need have lost the mark of pilgrims. In their self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction, like the Laodiceans, they have lost the expectation of the abiding city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). If the Amillennialists who say we are already in the kingdom are correct, then we can all say we have need of nothing.

The Laodiceans said they were rich. Uninterrupted external prosperity, if not attended with Divine grace, will lead to secularization of the local church and destroy the distinction of the church from the world. Hence, in the instance of Laodicea, Jesus Christ must take the fan in His hand, drive out the chaff, and bring together the good grain. When tribulation for the world’s sake arises, those who have no root in themselves are offended (Mark 4:17); and they go away and walk no more with Jesus Christ (John 6:66). But His persecuted followers, having the root of regeneration in themselves, persevere. The fiery trial of the saints produces not apostasy but perseverance. The discernment by the members in the church in Laodicea was no longer sensitive to the major issues of Jesus Christ and His truth. Most of the members were marked not only by self-sufficiency but self-interests. Instead of a church of domineering clericals, like those under the Catholic teaching, they were a group of domineering individuals who sought to have their own way in Laodicea.

The Greek word for “rich” is an adjective, which comes from the Greek word *plousios*. It means the possession of that which is of great value. Hence, the word “rich” is used in more than just the sense of monetary gain. The Laodiceans had not only monetary wealth but they achieved other things as the result of their monetary gains. The Greek word may mean money or religious wealth. Paul exhorted Timothy to “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (I Tim. 6:17). Self-conceit is one of the dangers against which Christians are warned. The Laodiceans were attributing their gains to their own diligence. Earthly riches are uncertain. Christ told the poor church in Smyrna that she was rich. The Christians in that church were spiritual plutocrats. They were trusting in the things of the living God and not in monetary things. Laodicea was rich monetarily but poor spiritually. The richer a deceived person is the poorer he is. What we think about God is important, but what God thinks of us is of greater importance. Flattery is dangerous. Self-flattery is more dangerous, but self-flattery in the realm of spiritual matters is most dangerous of all.

The Laodiceans said they were increased with goods (v. 17). Here is a perfect active indicative of the verb *plouteo*, which means to become rich—I have become rich, or I have become wealthy. The perfect tense of the verb is used here of imagined spiritual riches. Laodicea did not possess spiritual riches. She simply said she did. Laodicea was ignorant of her spiritual poverty. While the rich young farmer was speaking to himself by way of applause, God spoke to him by way of condemnation (Luke 12:16-21). While Laodicea was saying of herself, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” Jesus Christ told her she was “miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Is there any real difference between “this night thy soul shall be required of thee” and “I will spue thee out of my mouth”? Regardless of one’s wealth, apart from grace he is poor indeed. Paul warned those who are determined to attain monetary wealth lest the one choosing to be rich fall into temptation because he is blinded by the love of money (I Tim. 6:17-

19). Money in itself is not evil, but the love of money is. The affluence of the Laodiceans gave them access to other things of great value. Corrupt principles breed corrupt practices, and corrupt practices teach men to invent corrupt principles.

The facts were that the Laodiceans did not know they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. The Greek word for “knowest” is *oida*. It is the stronger word for knowledge, showing the members of this church did not know their condition. A preacher cannot convince lukewarm people of their condition. The Spirit of God must convince them. The five adjectives—wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—were used to describe the Laodiceans. We will divide them into two and three. The latter three find their remedy specially mentioned in the counsel of verse 18. That is the reason for the division.

The adjective “wretched” (*talaiporos*) used to describe the Laodiceans is found only one other place in Scripture: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). Many preachers are divided over this chapter of Romans. Most of them believe the chapter describes an unsaved person, not a Christian. However, Paul was a regenerated man when he spoke these words. The adjective means enduring severe effort and hardship, wretched, or afflicted. Does this mean that Paul and the Laodiceans were in the same condition? Paul, unlike the Laodiceans, was not blinded by self-deception. Paul said, “...I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (II Tim. 1:12). He was a Christian when he said, “...I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). He delighted in the law of God after the inward man. Hence, the difference between Paul and the Laodiceans was that Paul was not self-deceived. Paul’s quickened consciousness enabled him to know that he was a soldier in conflict and not a slave in the chains of sin. Once the apostle had been alive without the law (Rom. 7:9). During that time, he lived a life of unconscious iniquity. He thought he was doing the will of God, but he was deceived at that time. He lived in good conscience before God even until the day he was quickened by the Spirit of God (Acts 23:1). The only conscience that can be relied upon is the one directed by the infallible word of God. Now, Paul lived that life no longer (Rom. 7). Before his consciousness was quickened, the law wrought death in him. It was a revelation of death without any remedy. Now, the law was spiritual; but he was carnal, sold under sin. Therefore, sin is the body of death which the soldier of Jesus Christ carries with him throughout life (I John 1:8-10). Paul was assured that Christ would deliver him from that body of death. Hence, he cried, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Rom. 7:24, 25). Conversely, the Laodicean church gave no cry like that of the quickened Paul. Her consciousness had not been quickened by God’s grace. The church did not know she was deceived. We can say of the Laodiceans what Christ said of the Sadducees: “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures” (Matt. 22:29).

The Greek adjective “miserable” (*eleeinos*), used here to describe the Laodiceans, is found only one other time in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 15:19, it is used to describe those whose hope in Christ was only in the world. Those who do not believe in the important truth of the resurrection are also most pitiable. If life redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ is limited to this world, what hope is there for the satisfaction of the innate appetites given to the redeemed? Children of God have an insatiable appetite for spiritual things. As physical food is a necessity for the sustenance of the body, spiritual food is a necessity for the sustenance of the spiritual life. Hope goes beyond this life: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (I Cor. 15:19). True Biblical hope is based on past, present, and future. As to the past,

its foundation rests in the covenants of God, especially the unconditional covenant. It is reiterated by the prophets, renewed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and preached by God-called preachers. As to the present, this hope centers in God. It is manifested in Christ, wrought in the heart of the individual by the regenerating Spirit of God, and never makes us ashamed. As to the future, the eye of faith looks to the second coming of Christ for the complete realization of that for which we hope.

The wretched and miserable Laodiceans did not know they were poor. The Greek word for “poor” (*ptochos*) means reduced to beggary, poor, needy, or destitute. It is used also of the destitution of spiritual virtues, and that was true of Laodicea. This word is used two ways in connection with our subject and in the light of its context. There is more than one kind of poverty. The church in Smyrna was poor, but she was rich. She was poor in monetary things but rich in spiritual virtues. Contrarily, the Laodicean institution was rich in monetary things and poor in spiritual virtues. Some are wealthy who are also rich in spiritual things. But they are so by God’s appointment. The difference between the Laodiceans and the saints in the church in Smyrna may be compared with the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus, of Luke 16:19-31. The Greek words *plousios*, “rich,” and *ptochos*, “poor,” are used in that passage. In commenting on the rich man and Lazarus, it has been said that what comes after death is to us of far more importance than what comes before death. On the surface, that may sound good. However, salvation must precede physical death, or there is no hope after death. Our concern is not just here or hereafter but here and hereafter. The rich man and Lazarus are contrasted in life, in death, and in eternity. In life, the rich man was a plutocrat. He fared sumptuously every day. The poor man ate crumbs that fell from his table. When the rich man died, there was a well-planned and orchestrated funeral for him. When the poor man died, angels escorted him into the bosom of his father Abraham. In eternity, the rich man begged for someone to come with a drop of water to touch his tongue, but the poor man was in the bliss and glory of the Son of God forever.

The wretched and miserable Laodiceans did not know they were “blind” (*tuphos*). They could see physically, but they were blind spiritually. They lacked spiritual discernment because they had been blinded by Satan (II Cor. 4:4). Since the gospel is declared in this dispensation of grace, how is it that so many who hear continue unenlightened and unbelieving? The answer is found in the condition of the human heart rather than the veil being upon this dispensation and the gospel not being declared. The Laodiceans were blind because there was no harmony between that which perceives and that which is perceived. The natural man does not understand the things of God because they are spiritually discerned (I Cor. 2:14). As there is no rainbow to the eyes of the blind or music to the ears of the deaf, there is nothing spiritual to the perception of the natural man. The natural man does not live in the sphere of Divine grace. Therefore, he lives in this world that is dominated by a lower principle. His horizon is restricted to the things of this life. (See I Cor. 2:14.)

The Laodiceans did not know they were “naked” (v. 17). The Greek word for naked (*gumnos*) is used variantly: (1) literal unclothing, (2) the unclothed spirit (II Cor. 5:3), (3) in a metaphorical sense (Heb. 4:13), (4) destitute of the robe of righteousness, and (5) destitute of earthly power (Rev. 17:16). While the Laodiceans were dressed in costly array because of their wealth, they were naked before God. Ezekiel described every person born as naked—dead in trespasses and sin (Ezek. 16:4-7). Sin is set forth by the term nakedness. When Adam sinned, he stood naked before God and tried to cover his nakedness. Sin revealed his shame. Aaron made the golden calf, and the Israelites danced around it naked. Their shame was exposed. Jesus Christ was

stripped of His clothing at Calvary. He was unclothed that we might be clothed upon with His righteousness. Nakedness was a manifestation of His humiliation.

Jesus Christ counseled with the Laodicean church to buy of Him gold tried in the fire. The verb *sumbouleuo* is a compound verb which means to counsel with or to deliberate. Four of the five times it is used in the New Testament refer to counseling with or deliberating among wicked people to kill either the Lord Jesus Christ or His messenger (Matt. 26:4; John 11:53; 18:14; Acts 9:23). It is used in a good sense where it means to advise or counsel. This is not a general counsel in Revelation 3:18. It is restricted to those who have hearing ears. Christ reveals the objects for one to see. He gives the light by which those objects can be seen, and He gives the eyes with which to see. The seeing eye and the hearing ear are of God: "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them" (Prov. 20:12). The reconciliation of Christ's definitive statements "I will spue thee out of my mouth" and "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire" is not difficult. This was not a general counsel any more than the invitation of Isaiah 55:1-2 was a general invitation. Our Lord's invitation in Isaiah 55:1-2 may be compared with the counsel of Jesus Christ in Revelation 3:18.

The verb "buy" (*agoradzo*) was appropriate to the merchandising Laodiceans (v. 18). Christ would have those among them who had hearing ears to turn from the salesmen who peddled the wares of the world to the One who said, "HO, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (Is. 55:1, 2). Buying without money is a figure of grace. Spiritual poverty must be displaced by the wealth of God's grace. Few church members are thirsty for the living water; therefore, they do not heed the Lord's invitation through Isaiah and John.

Isaiah knew of a water higher than natural water: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses" (Is. 44:3, 4). The Lord told the woman of Samaria, "...Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Isaiah drew a picture which the elect Jews would appreciate in Isaiah 55:1. Isaiah's invitation was not general. It had appeal only to thirsty souls. Likewise, Christ's counsel was for the hearing ones in the Laodicean church. It was not a general but a particular invitation. When a person is thirsty, he knows he wants water. No one naturally thirsts for righteousness. When one is thirsty for spiritual drink he is not satisfied until he gets spiritual drink. The hireling prophets of John 10 came with their messages, but one whom God has elected to salvation who has been made thirsty by the regenerating Holy Spirit will not heed the voice of a hireling prophet.

The word "come" of Isaiah 55:1 implies leaving something. The regenerate leave something when they approach Jesus Christ in a true conversion experience. Coming to Christ is not a mere mental act. It is not a physical act of walking down the aisle, raising one's hand, signing a card, etc. It is not a mystical experience unfounded in truth. Coming to Christ involves the Christ of Scripture and believing the testimony of the Scriptures. Therefore, coming to Christ is salvation, not in order to obtain salvation. Those who come buy without money.

Isaiah invited the destitute Israelites to come to the waters. Men need cleansing from sin, and the people of God need constant refreshing. There is something for everyone in Isaiah's statement. There is something for the elect of God who have not yet been converted, and there is something for the elect of God who have been converted. The water speaks of cleansing and sanctification: "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26). Isaiah spoke of waters cleansing and refreshing. The prophet called those who had no money to buy wine and milk. Wine typifies the joy God gives His own that gladdens the heart. Milk nourishes, and bread of Isaiah 55:2 is the staff of life. Conclusively, water cleanses and refreshes, wine gladdens the heart, milk nourishes, and bread is the staff of life for God's people.

The prophet gave a portrait of the buyer, who is reduced to the extremity of want. The elect who buy of Christ spend what they have bought upon Jesus Christ. That which is received from Him will be bestowed upon Him. Christ is all in all to the redeemed. The grace of God alone brings people down to Christ's price. Who will deny that grace is necessary to bring the unregenerate to Christ and His price? Man manifests who he really is by the things in which he delights. A lawless person does not appreciate obedience. One characterized by pride does not desire lowliness. The haughty do not value meekness. Jesus Christ can be appreciated only in a nature that is like unto Himself (II Pet. 1:4).

The Laodiceans, like the religious Jews of Isaiah's day, bought that which was not bread, and they labored for that which did not satisfy. The false is not satisfying because it is not sustaining. Present day Laodiceans try every religious gimmick imaginable trying to keep people satisfied and coming to church services. They provide recreation, family centers, and entertainment, such as musicals, concerts, dramas, etc. They have money to purchase things that do not satisfy and will not sustain.

Christ advised the poor Laodiceans to buy from Him gold. Spiritual poverty must be displaced by spiritual wealth. Gold, which is frequently mentioned in Scripture, represents the deity of Jesus Christ. The vessels of the tabernacle portray this. The ark was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold (Ex. 25:9-16). The mercy seat was made of pure gold (Ex. 25:17-22). The table of shewbread was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold (Ex. 25:23-30). The candlestick was made of pure gold (Ex. 25:31-40). The altar of incense was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold (Ex. 30:1-10). Pure gold represents Jesus Christ as God absolutely considered. The acacia wood overlaid with gold represents the two natures of Jesus Christ—the God-Man. The ark was a treasure chest which represents Jesus Christ in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.

The Lord counseled the Laodiceans to buy of Him gold tried in the fire. The Greek word for "tried in the fire" is the perfect passive participle of *puroo*, which means to set on fire or to be tried with fire. Anything tried with fire withstands the test. Jesus Christ withstood all tests. All His enemies confessed that they found no fault in Him. The Laodiceans' need could not be purchased with their riches. But whatever Christ gives in grace can withstand all tests.

Christ advised the naked Laodiceans to buy white raiment from Him. Worldly riches may buy raiment in abundance, but they cannot purchase white garments to clothe one in the sight of God. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is necessary to clothe the sinner that the shame of his nakedness might not appear. The bride of Christ will be "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white" (Rev. 19:8). The fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints which are the fruit of the

righteousness of Christ in them. The righteousness of Jesus Christ within a person will manifest itself in the life of the individual. Jesus Christ was unclothed that we might be clothed: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Is. 61:10).

Christ advised the blind Laodiceans to use eyesalve. There seems to be a difference between buying and using. They are both infinitives, but there is a difference between them. Christ is said to have purchased His own, thus making them His private property (I Cor. 6:20). The eyesalve is ours, and we are to use it every day. God's provision for the elect consists of gold for the poor, white raiment for the naked, and eyesalve for the blind. The word used for "anoint" is the aorist active infinitive of *egchrio* which means to rub in or anoint. The verb for "see" is a present active subjunctive of *blepo*, which means that you may keep on seeing. Failure to use the eyesalve will result in being blind and unable to see afar off: "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (II Pet. 1:9). Some Christians are shortsighted, and others see great spiritual distances.

God separated His elect ones from the apostate institution of Laodicea by chastening. God chastens those He loves. Those without chastisement are not His children: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. 12:6-8). Every child of God is chastened, some to a greater degree and some to a lesser degree, because there is no perfect Christian. Chastening is the most comprehensive way God reveals that the chastened person is the object of His infinite love. Where there is spiritual vitality, it will respond to God's chastening. Absence of response indicates that the person is not a Christian.

The Lord spoke to "as many" as He loved in Laodicea (v. 19). This proves His love is restricted. God does not love every man without exception any more than He gives eternal life to all men without exception. Does God love those who have already died in their sins? If He does, God loved them and now He does not love them; and that would make God mutable. But He is immutable; He does not change. If God loves those He will consign to the lake of fire at the white throne judgment, the incomprehensible spectacle, of an omniscient God would work at cross-purposes with Himself. Christ is not God's gift to everyone. Jesus Christ does not intercede for everyone. God's love is eternal (Jer. 31:3). It is infinite, and it passes knowledge. The love of God is holy. It is regulated by principle and not by human sentiment. The love of God is immutable and uninfluenced. Human love is reciprocal, but God loved His elect ones when we were unlovable. Divine love is not a response to something outside of God Himself. Since God's love is absolute, to cease loving would mean that God defeats Himself. The highest manifestation of God's love is Calvary. Jesus Christ gave Himself as a ransom for many at Calvary. If He died for everyone without exception and yet many die in their sins, He died in vain for some. A threefold description of God's love is God's love of purpose (Rom. 9:13), His love of accomplishment (John 3:16), and His love of satisfaction (Is. 53:11).

As God separated the remnant from among Israel, He separates His own from an apostate condition. Haggai's prophecy was God's last call to the remnant among Israel. His prophecy was addressed to that small remnant of Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple. Haggai's message preceded the first advent of Jesus Christ. The remnant's

devotion to God and its zeal for God's house caused them to separate from the mass of Jews in Babylon. The people addressed by Haggai differed from those addressed by Jeremiah. Jeremiah preached the same truth as Haggai, but he addressed apostate Jews. Like Isaiah, his message only made the people more complacent (Is. 5:10-13). Jeremiah's message was rejected and despised. It was sent to an apostate generation that was ripe for God's judgment. But the message of Haggai was heeded and obeyed because it was addressed to the remnant of the people whom God loved. The number of those who separated from Babylon and returned to Jerusalem was small. We are not told the number of Laodiceans who responded to the call of Jesus Christ. But everyone for whom Christ died responded to Christ's rebuke and chastisement.

Jeremiah, unlike Haggai, carried on a dangerous ministry. He was opposed by the Jews to whom he ministered (Jer 12:6). They devised devices to cut him off from the land of the living (Jer. 11:18, 19; 26:8). He was opposed by false prophets (Jer. 23). He was thrown into a slimepit (Jer 38:6). He was carried by the apostate Jews into Egypt (Jer. 43:1-6). The Jews to whom Jeremiah prophesied rejected the prophet because they were apostate. The Lord had rejected them: "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the LORD hath rejected them" (Jer. 6:30). As the reprobate Jews were rejected by the Lord, the reprobate Laodiceans would be vomited out of Christ's mouth. But God neither rejects nor vomits out of His mouth those He loves.

God separates those He loves from an apostate condition by rebuke. "Rebuke" (*elegcho*) is a frequently used verb in the New Testament. God's people require constant rebuking; therefore, ministers should "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2). Jeremiah's rebuking the reprobate silver resulted in his demise. Whereas, Haggai's rebuke did not have the same result. He rebuked the remnant for sowing so much and bringing in so little, for spiritual malnourishment, for lack of satisfaction, for spiritual coldness, and for failing to place their wages where they would reap lasting benefit. They must consider their ways—judge themselves. The remnant listened, and they searched themselves. They did not search their neighbors but made personal practical application of every rebuke. Haggai instructed them to go up to the mountain, which signifies spiritual higher ground. Only those who responded to Biblical rebuke were loved by God. The prophet spoke words of consolation to the obedient ones (Hag. 2:20-23). Like Haggai's words of consolation to those responding to his rebukes, the Lord spoke words of comfort to the overcomers in Laodicea. There is no comfort for those who refuse to receive rebuke.

The Lord rebukes and chastens the ones He loves to separate them from an apostate condition. The Greek word for chastening here is the verb *paideao*, which means to train, to be instructed, to chastise, to castigate with words, or to chastise with blows. It is the effect of love. The wounds of a friend are faithful: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend..." (Prov. 27:6). A friend loves at all times (Prov. 17:17). Jesus Christ is the friend who sticks closer than a brother. He does not love today and cease loving tomorrow. His love is everlasting. When God's people refuse His rebukes, He chastens them.

The Laodiceans were exhorted to be "zealous" (*dzeleuo*), which means to show affection or desire earnestly (v. 19). The present active imperative tense of this verb means "keep on being zealous." These Laodiceans were also exhorted to "repent" (aorist active imperative of *metanoeo*, which means to understand and to undergo a change in frame of mind and feeling, to repent, or to make a change of principle and practice). The aorist in the imperative mood emphasizes immediate action at a point in time.

Human reason and natural feeling may suggest innumerable arguments to defer obedience. But human expedience and policy are unknown in the lives of those who have tasted God's wonderful grace. Genuine faith, faith which is the gift of God, hears the Lord's voice only to obey. While great religious institutions boast of their position and progress with self-Laodicean complacency, the spiritual-minded people are distressed at such progress at the expense of fidelity to God and the truth of His word. Concerned Christians find themselves in a position of isolation in proportion to the measure of their fidelity to Jesus Christ. There is a difference between isolation and separation. The Bible teaches separation. Christians are separated by covenant (John 17:6), calling (I Pet. 2:9), command (II Cor. 6:14-17), and dedication (Rom. 6:11-23). Several questions may be asked the Christian that he may examine himself concerning his separation: Are you in a position in your daily life, wherever you are, to declare the whole counsel of God? Are you a member of a local church with which you disagree? Is the whole counsel of God declared there (Acts 20:27)? Are you now in such a compromising position that you are actually destroying the very things you once upheld (Gal. 2:18)? Are you avoiding the appearance of evil, which includes any compromising position (I Thess. 5:22)? Are you utilizing your Christian liberty in a way that it becomes a stumblingblock to the weak (I Cor. 8:9)?

PROMISES TO OVERCOMERS IN THE CHURCHES

Promises were given to the overcomers in each of the seven churches: (1) The overcomer in the church in Ephesus was promised he would be given “to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). (2) To the overcomers in the church in Smyrna the Lord promised, “I will give thee a crown of life....He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:10, 11). (3) Those in Pergamum were promised, “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...” (Rev. 2:17). (4) Overcomers in the church in Thyatira were promised “power over the nations....And I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2:26, 28). (5) The Lord promised overcomers in Sardis, “the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5). (6) To the Philadelphian church the Lord promised, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (Rev. 3:12). (7) Jesus Christ promised the Laodicean church, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

There is spiritual ascent in all the promises given to the overcomers in the seven churches. Restoration was promised to overcomers in the church in Ephesus (Rev. 2:7), security to those in the church in Smyrna (Rev. 2:11), sustenance and nobility to those in Pergamum (Rev. 2:17), dominion to those in Thyatira (Rev. 2:26), victory and confession to those in Sardis (Rev. 3:5), citizenship to those in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:12), and kingship to those in Laodicea (Rev. 3:21). Kingship was promised to those who came out of an apostate condition. They will rule and reign with Jesus Christ throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

EPHESUS

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. (Rev. 2:7)

The promise was given to the overcomer with a hearing ear. The hearing ear is of God (Prov. 20:12). God has never made a promise to an uncircumcised ear. The uncircumcised person has ears, but he does not hear spiritual things. He is unable to discern them. The hearing ear represents the person who believes and obeys. The message of the letter is individualized—“he that hath an ear.” Each hearing ear is responsible to the Spirit of God. The promise of the future should have its effect on the church in the present.

The word “overcometh” is a present active participle of *nikao*. It means a person who is overcoming. It speaks of continuous victory. Overcoming is difficult. It denotes inward and outward opposition. The Lord said, “...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Hatred was being manifested toward Jesus

Christ; nevertheless, He said He had overcome the world. This appeared to be false outwardly, but it was true inwardly.

The overcomer was promised he would be given to eat of the tree of life. Eating speaks of appetite for the word. There is a lack of spiritual appetite today, but there will be no lack of appetite in the kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ will be in the very midst of everything in the kingdom. He will give impulse to everything we do in the kingdom. The tree of life leads one's mind back to the garden of Eden. The beauty of this promise may be seen by comparing these two trees. The tree reminds one not only of Eden but of the future. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was in the paradise of old. There will be no evil in the new paradise. In the first, there was created uprightness. In the second, there will be uncreated righteousness. Created righteousness is capable of falling, but uncreated righteousness is incapable of falling. In the first, there was sin. In the second, the overcomer shall eat without worry about being wrong with God. In the first, eating was a sign of God's covenant of friendship with Adam. In the second, eating is proof of God's eternal covenant of grace. The overcomer, therefore, has a foretaste of the future even in this present experience. The word "paradise" (*paradeisos*) is used only three times in the New Testament (Luke 23:43; II Cor. 12:1-4; Rev. 2:7). There is a life that shall never fail.

SMYRNA

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

The overcomer was promised that he would "not be hurt of the second death." The word "hurt" (*adikeo*, to hurt, damage, or harm) is a judicial term signifying that the overcomer will not be wrongly judged to the second death as he might be to the first death physically. Christians may be unjustly treated in physical death, but justice will have its say concerning the second death. They should not fear the person who is able to kill the body but not the soul (Matt. 10:28). The second death was dealt the death blow for all the elect of God, and they will never be hurt by the second death. The Lord was telling the saints in Smyrna to be faithful unto death and He would give them the crown of life. They might be unjustly treated in life and in physical death, but they would not be harmed in the second death. Justice was satisfied when Christ died; and in His death, He tasted death for the elect of God.

PERGAMUM

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Rev. 2:17)

A threefold promise was given to the saints in Pergamum who had ears to hear. They would seek to do something about their condition. The overcomers were promised to be given to eat of the hidden manna. The hidden manna was something between the individual and Jesus Christ. This may be a secret to many. What is public in a spiritual way will not help if one does not have his own secret communion with God. The lawless one does not appropriate obedience. The proud do not appreciate lowliness—taking one's rightful position in the dust at the feet of the sovereign Lord. The overcomers were promised a white stone. This means consciousness of God's approval. This is a secret between the Lord Jesus Christ and the faithful Christian. Antipas no

doubt had a white stone. The overcomers were promised a new name. Abram's name was changed to Abraham—friend of God. Simon's name was changed to Peter—a stone. The new name in each was marred by the old nature. Abraham was the friend of God, but he lied. Peter's new name was marred by warming himself by the enemies' fire and cursing and denying that he knew Jesus Christ. Every Christian has been given a new name. He does not know the name, but his new name is also marred by his old nature. However, the overcomer will receive a new name that will never be marred by the old nature because he will no longer have the old nature. Thank God for what we have now, but there is great anticipation in our hearts and lives of what we shall have in the future.

THYATIRA

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 will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. (Rev. 2:24-28)

The Lord promised He would not put a greater burden on the remnant in Thyatira than they could bear. The word “burden” (*baros*) is used three ways in Scriptures. It is used in the sense of woe, command, and responsibility. By way of encouragement, Jesus Christ exhorted the remnant to hold fast until He comes. The sum total of Biblical doctrine is to be held fast by God's people.

A distinction is made between the followers and nonfollowers of Jezebel (vv. 24, 25). The Greek word for “rest” (*loipos*) means the rest, the remnant, the rest of any class of consideration, or the rest who are not of a specified class or number. It is translated remnant (Matt. 22:6), other (Matt. 25:11), others (I Thess. 4:13), which remain (Rev. 3:2), remnant (Rev. 12:17; 19:21), and rest (Rev. 20:5). In Romans 11:7, a classic illustration of its meaning is “the rest were blinded” who were not the elect. Here is a distinction between the elect and the nonelect. The “rest” of Revelation 2:24 refers to those who had not been seduced by Jezebel. Hence, the distinction is clearly made between those who did and those who did not follow Jezebel. The remnant had not known the depths of Satan. Satan seeks to imitate Christ; therefore, he has his depths—the mystery of iniquity.

The overcomers in Thyatira were promised power—authority—over the nations. “Unto the end” (2:26) proves the Christian life is not a battle but a campaign. It will not get easier. The promise to the overcomers is a dazzling prospect for us. We will have power over the nations. Contrary to Amillennial teaching that we are already in the kingdom and presently have authority, this is future. Christ will rule with a rod of iron when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. At that time, we will have authority over the nations. We will judge the world (I Cor. 6:2). The Lord Jesus Christ is an autocrat. His power is absolute. It will be manifested to the whole world when He reigns as King.

The overcomer will be given the morning star. The church's responsibility is to be true to Jesus Christ and to maintain an undimmed testimony before the world. Christ's church cannot be publicly honored where He suffered and died. The day of glory will come, and then the overcomer will have authority over the nations. He will reign with Christ when He reigns. But

while Christ is being rejected, His people are privileged to share His rejection. This is the age of suffering, not the age of reigning. The morning star is not Christ shining in public and manifesting glory. That is connected with the rising of the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings. The morning star is Christ unseen by the sleeping world and unknown by corrupted religionists. The day star has risen in the heart of the regenerated. The overcomer is wholly engaged with the coming Savior. The morning star carries the heart away from the present world to glory. This marks the overcomers in Thyatira.

SARDIS

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

The few who were faithful were promised they would walk with Christ in white. The overcomer in Pergamum was promised a white stone, which was private between the individual Christian and God. The white raiment promised the overcomer in Sardis signifies public recognition. It denotes Christ's public approval of those who had not defiled their garments. The clothing spoken of here is clothing one with light as with a garment that shall shine (Matt. 13:43; Dan. 12:3). The body will be glorified, transfigured into the likeness of Christ's body (Phil. 3:21). Their names would not be blotted out of the book of life. This is not the book of the living described in Psalm 69:28. It is the book that contains the names of the elect of God. Christ will confess the name of the overcomer before the Father and His angels. There is nothing for the overcomers to fear in the highest heavens.

Christ would confess the names of the overcomers before His Father and before His angels. While on earth Christ spoke of confessing those who confessed Him before His Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32, 33) and before angels (Luke 12:8, 9). "In heaven" is omitted from Revelation because there is no longer any contrast between the Father in "heaven" and the Son on "earth." The two confessions that seemed separated are now united.

PHILADELPHIA

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 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. 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. (Rev. 3:9-12)

Jesus Christ promised the Philadelphian saints that He would make their enemies bow at their feet (Rev. 3:9). The church's enemies were the same as those in Smyrna. They are called the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). Smyrna was the suffering church, but no mention is made of suffering in Philadelphia. The church's enemies are not presently bowing before her feet, but they will in the future. They will be made to recognize that God loves His people. Their bowing

will be before Jesus Christ and His church. The verse does not say it will be before the Lord Jesus Christ alone, because Jesus Christ is in the church and the church is His body. Let our enemies rage, curse, blaspheme, and persecute. The day will come when each of them will bow before us and acknowledge that the sovereign God loves us with an everlasting love.

The Philadelphian saints had kept the word of Christ's patience; therefore, He would keep them from the hour of trial that shall come upon the world to try those who dwell upon the earth (v. 10). Is this promise restricted to the local church at Philadelphia, or does it refer to the body of Christ? Does the preposition "from" (*ek*) mean to be kept from the hour of trial, or does it mean to be preserved in and brought through it? This preposition is as controversial among students of eschatology as the preposition *eis* is among those who study soteriology.

The preposition *ek* must be given careful study because it is used in various ways (Matt. 3:17; Acts 13:17; Matt. 1:20). In composition it denotes egress, separation, or source. Hence, one must determine by the context how the preposition is used. Peter spoke of the Lord knowing how to deliver the godly "out of" (*ek*) temptations (II Pet. 2:9). According to the context, God saved Noah and delivered Lot from being destroyed. Salvation is no insurance against the trials of life. Christians are not always preserved from the wrath of men, but they shall be preserved from the future wrath of God. Noah and Lot were saved from the judgments of God, but the text states that they both emerged victoriously from the test of apostasy. They stood alone among the mockers and unbelievers.

It is true that the preposition *ek* can mean to be kept out of, exempted from, or preserved through. But the question is, what is its significance in Revelation 3:10? The context determines its usage. Other truths within the context must be interpreted before one can determine the meaning of *ek* in Revelation 3:10.

What is the meaning of "the hour of temptation"? The two things that must be investigated in this question are "the hour" and "temptation." Amillennialists think it is strange that the church in Smyrna suffered severely and the church in Philadelphia was exempted from suffering. They believe the hour of temptation was a time of trial through which the Philadelphian saints would be preserved. Dispensational premillennialists say this refers to the great tribulation from which Christ promised to exempt the body of Christ.

The significance of the word "hour" must be considered. The word "hour" (*hora*) can be used of a definite or an indefinite time. The Lord spoke of an indefinite period of time when He said to the woman of Samaria, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth..." (John 4:23). We are now living in that indefinite period of time called "hour." The word is used in both senses in John 5:25 and 28—"...The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (v. 25). "Hour" is used in an indefinite sense in this verse. Throughout the dispensation of grace is the hour when the elect of God are hearing the voice of Jesus Christ and are living: "...The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice" (v. 28). This refers to a definite time—the hour of resurrection.

Does the "hour of trial" (*peirasmos*) refer to the great tribulation (that time which is yet to come), or to some particular period of testing from which the Philadelphian believers would be kept either from or through? The saints in this church were promised they would be kept. The word

“kept,” *tereo*, means to attend carefully, take care of, guard, watch over protectively, to maintain, to preserve, or to shield (John 2:10; 17:6, 11, 12, 15; I Thess. 5:23). Christ promised to “keep” the keepers of His word. Here is a future active indicative form of the verb *tereo*. This verb used with the preposition *ek* indicates being kept from rather than being brought through. The context indicates that there was some great trial from which the church will be kept.

The word for “world” in verse 10 is not the ordinary word *kosmos*, which means harmonious arrangement or constitution, order, the universe, the human race, the godly in contrast with the ungodly, the mass of men alienated from God, or the world system. It is *oikoumene*, meaning the inhabited earth. Affliction is spoken of as coming upon all the inhabited earth. God tests His people, but for what purpose would He test the heathen? The only reference to testing the heathen is when the Ephesian saints had tried the false apostles and found them to be liars (Rev. 2:2).

The Philadelphian church was not exempted from providential judgment. The absence of condemnation to this church does not indicate that she was perfect. That is not what our Lord was emphasizing. He was stressing that as she had undergone affliction, she would be kept from the hour of trial coming upon the inhabited earth. The Father in the Person of the Son is judicially judging the churches today. A great mistake is made when one loses sight of the fact that Jesus Christ is now judging us. Judgment begins at the house of God. Although Revelation 3:10 indicates the church will be kept from the future hour of trial (great tribulation), this must not be stressed to the extent that we fail to recognize Christ’s present judgment of the churches.

“Behold I come quickly” may refer to Christ’s second advent or His coming in providential judgment upon the churches. The Greek word for “quickly” is *tachu*, which means speedily or without delay. It is used seven times in Revelation (2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20). The Lord’s threat of coming quickly was addressed to the church in Ephesus (Rev. 2:5), the church in Pergamum (2:16), and the church in Philadelphia (3:11). The churches in Thyatira and Philadelphia were exhorted to hold fast till Christ comes (2:25; 3:11). The church in Sardis was told He would come on them as a thief (3:3). Do all these references to Christ’s coming to the churches refer to the second advent, or do they refer to His coming in providential judgment upon the churches? Let us review the letters. In relation to Ephesus, Christ’s coming is in judgment on the church (2:5). In reference to Pergamum, Christ’s coming is in special judgment on the church (2:16). There is a reference to not only His coming in providential judgment but also His second advent in reference to Thyatira (2:25-28). Christ’s coming as a thief on the church in Sardis is not a reference to His second advent. A warning and a promise are both given to Philadelphia. Christ’s coming will mean preservation for the church and subsequent punishment for the unsaved.

What does the statement “that no man take thy crown” mean? Holding fast to what one has is directed to the Philadelphian saints, but the principle applies to all Christians for all time. This denotes opposition. “Hold fast” comes from the Greek word *krateo*, which means to hold, hold fast, keep carefully and faithfully, to continue to hold, or to retain. Keeping a firm grip on the things God has committed to us is impossible without putting them into practice in our lives. Therefore, Christians strive not only to gain higher ground but to keep what they have already gained. This is more of a trust than a privilege. Christians are to hold fast that no man take their crown. Some say the crown is not what one has but what he shall have if he proves faithful. Others say it is a vivid description of forfeiting through misconduct what one has gained. The

favorite verse quoted in support of that view is II John 8. It is an admonition to every child of God. We are to look to ourselves only in this instance, that we lose not those things which we have gained but that we receive a full reward. Many of the Christians who will appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ will have lost their rewards. We do not look to ourselves for salvation but for rewards.

The “crown” (*stephanos*) represents reward for service done and not eternal life which is a gift. There are a number of crowns for the believer spoken of in the Scriptures (Rev. 2:10; James 1:12; II Tim. 4:8; I Thess. 2:19; I Cor. 9:25; I Pet. 5:4). No one can steal the crown from a Christian, but the believer can forfeit his crown (II John 8). Service and not salvation is under discussion. Failure to hold fast what one has gained will cause his reward to be altered and placed on the brow of another who is faithful. There is no empty space in either the arena of conflict below or in the place of victory and banqueting in the kingdom. Hence, the loss is by forfeiture. Service is a great privilege, but it is a privilege which is withdrawn and given to another whenever a person fails to fulfill his task.

Future blessing is promised the overcomer in the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:12). That which is of little strength in the eyes of the world will be made a pillar in the temple of God. There are two Greek words for “temple” in the New Testament—*hieron* and *naos*. There is a great difference between them: *hieron* speaks of the temple precincts; whereas, *naos* refers to the shrine proper. The latter is used here. Jesus Christ promised to make the overcomer in Philadelphia a pillar in the very shrine of God, not in the precincts. A pillar is a symbol of strength. Out of those who have little strength, God promised to make pillars in the shrine of God. There were two pillars in Solomon’s temple (II Chron. 3:17). The name of one was Jachin, which means “he will establish,” and the name of the other was Boaz, which means “in him is strength.” We may have only a little strength today, but in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, we will be established and our strength will be recognized. Hence, the weak in the eyes of the world and tried saints in Philadelphia will be made strong in eternal blessedness in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The word “temple” is used to speak of a plurality of believers (I Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19). It is interesting to note that in the passages in Revelation and Corinthians, the word *naos* is used for temple. This does not contradict John’s statement that he saw no temple in the new Jerusalem because “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” (Rev. 21:22). The statement “and he shall go no more out” (Rev. 3:12) is all the commentary we need to understand the meaning of the pillars in the temple of God. God’s people do not literally become pillars in a literal temple. This is symbolical language. Overcomers will be permanently in the presence of God. God’s delight will be to make the overcomers abiding ornaments, like Jachin and Boaz of Solomon’s temple, in the heavenly and eternal abode with Himself.

The four occurrences of the statement “my God” of Revelation 3:12 speak of the glorified God-Man of whom it is written, “the head of Christ is God” (I Cor. 11:3) and the words of Christ Himself—“...I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). The overcomer considered as a pillar in God’s temple will have a threefold name inscribed on him: (1) The name of “my god” means the believer belongs to God. (2) The name of the “city of my God” means the overcomer has citizenship rights in the holy city, the city that will come down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) “My new name” is the promise made to the overcomer to fit that which is entirely and eternally new.

Children of God have the name of Christian now, but this name is marred by its bearers. But when “my new name” is written indelibly in the kingdom, Christians will be in our glorified state. That new name will never be dishonored or disgraced.

LAODICEA

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. (Rev. 3:20, 21)

The importance of the Lord’s exhortation to the Laodiceans is emphasized with the demonstrative particle “behold.” This particle *idou* is used thirty times in Revelation alone. It is translated “lo” in four of the thirty places. The importance of this demonstrative particle is emphasized by its relation to the things with which it is related (Rev. 1:7, 18; 2:10, 22; 3:8, 9, 11, 20; 4:1; etc.). “Behold” is used in connection with Christ standing at the door of the Laodicean church (3:20).

John saw Christ standing. The perfect active indicative of the Greek verb *histemi* is used for “stand,” showing it is a past action with continuing results. Jesus Christ is still judging, and He is still knocking. Standing is the posture of judgment. Sitting is the posture of intercession. The description of Christ standing in judgment is recorded in Revelation 1:12-16. The majority among professing Christians magnify Christ’s intercessory work. But Christ intercedes not for but against mere professors. He is now interceding against national Israel (Rom. 11:2). Israel is an apostate nation (Rom. 11). Local church members should beware lest they too be cast off because of disobedience (Rom. 11:17-21). The time will come when the institutional church, like Israel, will no longer repent. Judgment will be inevitable.

Christ promised the Laodiceans He would come in and sup with the Christian who heard His voice and opened the door to Him. “I will come in to him” is a future active indicative of the compound Greek verb *eiserchomai*. Christ does not come in to the whole assembly. It is too late for that. The call is now to anyone who opens to Him for judgment because the doom of Laodicea was sealed. The word for “sup” is a future active indicative of the verb *deipueo*, which means I will make him share in my most intimate and blissful intercourse. This verb comes from a noun which means a meal or supper. It referred to the evening meal which was eaten in a leisurely manner. The fellowship would not be hasty. The average religionist wants to hurry and get his little religious bit over so he can do what he wants for himself. Many institutional churches provide convenient services Saturday so the people can do whatever they desire on Sunday. This is the spirit of Laodicea.

Christ was standing at the door of the Laodicean church knocking. His posture of standing rather than sitting indicates judgment. The only other place in the New Testament where He was seen standing was when Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:55). The Song of Solomon, which depicts the relationship between Jesus Christ and His people, is an analogy to Jesus Christ standing outside knocking (Song of Sol. 5). Christ was not standing in front of the Laodicean church building. He was standing at the door of the intellect, conscience, love, affection, and hope with His transcendent charms. However, the Laodicean church, as a church, was allowing persons and things to enter instead of the transcendent charms of Christ. Christ’s knocking is not at the door

of unregenerate but regenerate hearts to cause them to repent and come out as witnesses against the apostates in the church. The result of Laodicea's unfaithfulness was that the church became filled with hypocrites. Hence, the church lacked spiritual discernment.

The renewed heart is addressed in Revelation 3:20. The particle "if" (*ean*) is a third class condition particle. The unrenewed person cannot hear the voice of Jesus Christ. His heart is a house with many rooms, one is filled with pride, another with sensuality, another with covetousness, etc. Satan has a mortgage on the whole house, and he will foreclose if God does not intervene in grace. Every room has had an accumulation of sin since the individual was born. Both verbs "hear" (*akouo*) and "open" (*anoigo*) are aorist active subjunctive. They are used ingressively, which views the acts as having occurred with emphasis upon the initiation. The Arminian says this passage refers to salvation and the door must be opened from the inside because Christ never forces His way into the heart. However, the Bible gives God credit for what Arminians credit to man's free will. In regeneration, God must open the heart, give the hearing ear, and give the seeing eye. Christ was no longer addressing the church. He was now appealing to the individual—"if any man." The doom of the church in Laodicea was sealed, but there is no doom to the elect. There is a difference between the doom of the church and the response of the elect. Christ was calling the elect individuals in the Laodicean church to repent and come out as witnesses against the apostate condition of Laodicea.

This is not now the time to consider how to set the churches right. It is too late for that. The question is, How can I as an individual be right with God? The regenerated person should follow the example of Peter and John. When released from incarceration, they went to their own company (Acts 4:23). People going to their own company may be viewed from two points of view. As people who know the Lord and have a spirit of discernment want fellowship with like persons, disgruntled worldly church members who possess the spirit of Laodicea will go to their own company.

The Christian who answers Christ's call as Judge will be judged now and need not worry about being condemned with the world: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (I Cor. 11:31, 32). God's chastisements are judgments. They make us discern that which is fleshly and that which is not spiritual in our lives. Those who refuse the call of Jesus Christ as Judge will be condemned with the world. The Lord's friends are those who do what He commands: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).

Christ was not coming quickly in judgment on the Laodicean church. He was already there at the door knocking. Judgment had already been passed on the church. To those with quickened hearts the Guest would become Host to all who responded to His knocking.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the self-invited Guest. He was uninvited by the Laodicean church. The door of this church was closed to Jesus Christ of Scripture. Many preach a Jesus, a gospel, and a spirit, but they know nothing about Jesus Christ, the gospel, or the Holy Spirit. Paul feared that the minds of the Corinthians would be corrupted by such false preaching (II Cor. 11:3, 4). Although the door of the Laodicean church was closed to Jesus Christ of Scripture, it was not closed to philosophy and vain deceit. Paul had earlier warned the Colossians and the Laodiceans against this evil: "FOR I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh....And this I say, lest any man

should beguile you with enticing words....Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:1, 4, 8).

The Greek word *philosophia*, translated philosophy, is found only in Colossians 2:8. Etymologically, it means the love of wisdom. However, in modern use it stands for a system of knowledge, much of which is antichristian because it is not after the Christ of Scripture. Therefore, it is vain because it goes beyond its bounds. Philosophy does not gain more honor by extending its search but by recognizing its limits. The term is used by false teachers to describe their religious systems. Spiritual matters are beyond the grasp of human philosophers. God-given faith ascends higher than mere human philosophy. Paul did not speak of mere hypothetical danger when he said, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). Human philosophy seeks to deduce the fundamentals of Christianity from its own principles. One such instance is demonstrated by those who deny the Divine Triunity. They say that one plus one plus one equals three, thus deceiving many with their vain philosophy. The truth of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is that one times one times one equals one. Another example of vain philosophy that deceives men is the denial by many of the impeccability of Jesus Christ. A denial of this kind is demonstrated by some saying that every suggestion Satan made was appealing to Jesus and opened up to Him real possibilities. They say that since He was fully human, He could have made the wrong choice. Conversely, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was more than man. He was and is the God-Man. The philosophy that God has done His part and man must do his is vain. It is the philosophy of man. Man is depraved and cannot and will not come to Jesus Christ.

Laodicea’s preference for philosophy and vain deceit was tragic. When the thoughts and affections in any institutional church are for church members or anything other than Jesus Christ, it is sad. The time is coming when individual apostate churches, like Laodicea, will culminate in a general apostasy that will cover the earth. This condition will not occur while Jesus Christ is walking in the midst of the lampstands, as He is now, but when He takes His place on the throne of heaven (Rev. 4; 5). It will be after the church things of Revelation 2 and 3. The only reason there is not already a culmination of these apostate institutions into a general apostasy is because Jesus Christ is still walking among the local churches.

Jesus Christ promised the overcomer in the Laodicean church that He would grant him to sit with Him in His throne: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Rev. 3:21). The tense of the verb *nikao*, “to him that overcometh,” does not carry the idea that one has conquered, subdued, or overcome. The tense of the verb is “to him who is overcoming, conquering, or subduing.” It is a present active participle of the verb *nikao*. Overcoming supposes conflict. Our conflict is with self. This is an inner, private, and solitary conflict. It may not be detected by those with whom we come in contact. Christians also have outer conflict. This is conflict with the world. We are in the world but not of it. Conflict with the world is public. It is known by others. Furthermore, we have conflict with Satan.

Christians are exhorted to overcome as Christ overcame. How did Jesus Christ overcome? He did not overcome after the manner of the religious ascetics. Had He overcome in that manner, He could not have been called the friend of publicans and sinners. On the other hand, Jesus Christ did not become a part of the religious establishment of His day. He died outside the camp (Heb.

13:12, 13). Like Christ, Christians overcome by suffering, not after the manner of religious ascetics. Prior to His death the Lord comforted His disciples and then told them they would suffer tribulation: "These things I have 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). God never promised the elect a rose garden or a highway without any detours or rough roads. All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer (II Tim. 3:12). All Christians suffer to an extent. The degree of suffering depends on our faithfulness in witnessing. Distinction must be made between Christ suffering for our sins and our suffering because of our sins. Much of our suffering is because of our sins, but His suffering was at Calvary for our sins. He suffered not only at Calvary but throughout His ministry. Wherever He preached, religionists were aroused and wanted to kill Him. He suffered for righteousness' sake. Recipients of grace who witness as we should will suffer for righteousness' sake. Nevertheless, we overcome through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Overcoming is continuous. God never begins something in His people without bringing it to completion. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11). Although this verse is a prophetic statement, it has a present application. Overcoming is impossible separate from the finished work of Christ. This is the ground of victory. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. The blood of the eternal covenant secures all the covenant gifts to the elect for all time (Heb. 13:20, 21). The blood of the Lamb signifies the death of Jesus Christ. This denotes the death of sin and the defeat of Satan himself. The death of Christ is the life of our hope and the assurance of our victory because Christ poured out His soul unto death, and He divided the spoil with the strong (Is. 53:10-12). The blood of the Lamb signifies the substitutionary death of Christ. Sin must be punished, and it was punished in the death of the Lord Jesus. The blood of the Lamb also signifies that Christ's death was effective for taking away our sins. The elect overcome because of the word of their testimony. Those who respond to the call of Jesus Christ as Judge are judged by Him, have fellowship with Him, and come out from an apostate institution with a testimony against that institution.

The elect owe their victory to the truth of which they are witnesses. (1) God has spoken, and what He has said has meaning. It is the communication of the mind of God to the mind of the elect: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Let His mind be our mind. Word is speech, and speech is, by definition, reason communicating itself. This is why the Lord Jesus called Himself "the Word." (2) The word God has spoken becomes a testimony. The business of the Christian is witnessing. Having the witness in himself, he sets to his seal that God is true (John 3:33). The Christian lives as a true witness and may die its martyr, as those who "loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11). The elect overcome because they love not their lives unto death. One Christian martyr of the past said that death was much sweeter to him with the testimony of truth than life with its least denial.

We overcome by faith: "WHOSOEVER believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John 5:1-4). Men naturally swim with the stream like a dead fish. Only

a live fish can go against the stream. A person must be born of the Spirit of God to go against this evil world system. The whole world lies in wickedness (I John 5:19). The world has its tyrannies. There is the tyranny of public opinion, which already has its influence over many church members. There is a tyranny of present attractiveness. The world's sensuality has entered many religious institutions. Evidence of the senses is powerful. There is the tyranny of fashion and the spirit of society. These are all tyrannies with which we must contend. But the believer is overcoming. The only faith that is victorious is the faith of God's elect (Titus 1:1). Victorious faith breaks loose from the world's customs and raises one above all circumstances. It ascends above the world's authority, example, influence, spirit, and religion. Victorious faith is the coronation of Jesus Christ in the heart. It is the faith which is anchored in Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus never concealed from His disciples the difficulties with which they must contend. But Jesus Christ our Head has overcome; therefore, His body will also overcome. He told the disciples they must suffer for righteousness' sake: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:24, 25). "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25). The same providential law is applicable to each individual believer. He must disown the authority of his selfish ego to live the life of the integrated person. The life of service constitutes dying in order to live. He who hates his life in the lower sense will preserve his life in the higher sense. If the members of Christ's body do not overcome, they cast reflection on the Head who has perfectly gained the victory. Jesus Christ is victorious over hell, death, and the grave.

The Lord Jesus will grant the one overcoming to sit with Him on His throne as He overcame and is sitting with the Father on His throne: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21). Many equate these two thrones. However, the throne in heaven where Jesus Christ is now sitting cannot be equated with David's throne on which He will sit when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. Peter distinguished the two thrones (Acts 2:29-35). Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of the Father on the Father's throne, but He will sit on His own throne, the throne of His father David. As Christ has two thrones—His and the Father's, the believer will be given authority "over the nations: And he shall rule them..." (Rev. 2:26, 27). This authority is in Christ. Therefore, the Christian is now seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph. 2:6), and he will rule and reign with Christ in the kingdom.

One must be an overcomer before he can experience the throne of the future. Like the Ephesian saints, he must overcome the leaving of quality love. Like the saints in Smyrna, he must be faithful unto death. After the manner of the overcomers in Pergamum, he must refuse the seductions where Satan's seat is located. Like those in Thyatira, he must separate from the depths of Satan. As the overcomers in Sardis, he must keep himself unspotted from this world's system. Like those in Philadelphia, he must maintain the place of dependence. Like the overcomers in Laodicea, he must be satisfied solely with Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ will be the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Christ's kingdom will be universal in extent (Ps. 72:8; Zech. 14:9). It will be righteous in administration (Ps. 72:1-7). His kingdom will be everlasting in duration (II Pet. 1:11). Think of the privilege of the one overcoming to sit with Jesus Christ on His throne. The love of Jesus Christ for His own passes

knowledge. The Son of God did not rest until He made man in His own image. He did not rest until He had assumed the form of man for the purpose of redeeming the fallen elect that they might once again have and experience that blessed image in which man was made. He cannot now rest at the Father's right hand until His elect are fashioned into His glorious image and sit with Him on His throne as He overcame and is now sitting on the throne of His Father.

Jesus Christ is not presently on the throne of His father David. He is on the Father's throne and will remain there until all His enemies are under His feet. He will then sit on His throne, and righteousness and peace will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. When He sits on His throne in the kingdom, He will then give the overcomer the honor of sitting with Him on His throne. Those who persevere now will reign with Him in the future: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him..." (II Tim. 2:12). The verb for "suffer" is present active indicative of *hupomeno*, which means to persevere or endure. It is present tense; hence, it is now taking place. It is the mood of reality. "We shall also reign with Him" is a compound verb in the Greek (future active indicative of *sumbasileuo*). It is used only in this text and in I Corinthians 4:8. How can the believer's present endurance and future reign be simultaneous when enduring is in the present tense and reigning is in the future tense? We died with Christ in the past. We presently live with Him, and we shall reign with Him in the future.

There are those who say that when John wrote Revelation 3:21 the time was at hand and all was fulfilled in the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth. They believe that putting the reigning of the saints with Christ possessing the kingdom into our future robs the church of her glorious and distinctive position and inheritance now and advances a concept of eschatology that creates disharmony and disorder in God's great scheme of redemption. Amillennialists erroneously claim that Scripture permits no kingdom of outward observation at Christ's second coming. They say that Nicodemus entered the kingdom of God which is not of this world through the new birth. Thus, one must be born of the Spirit to enter the church which is now nearing completion. Their concept of the millennial kingdom is that it is promised no one because millennialism means two kingdoms—one spiritual and the next earthly for the Jews and millennialists. Believing the church and the kingdom are the same, they regard Christ's church as a custodian for the kingdom of God. They state the two are one and to enter the church is to enter the kingdom and vice versa.

One is in error to explain away God's promise of the coming kingdom until it becomes indefinite and loses its designed meaning. To say that inheriting the kingdom is the same as being born again is a manifestation of confusion twice confounded. Scripture teaches that those born of the Spirit become "heirs" of the kingdom: "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (James 2:5). Those rich in faith and loving God are the ones who are the heirs of the kingdom by "promise." If the church is the kingdom and those who are rich in faith and love God are now in it, as the Amillennialists teach, why are they designated "heir"? Through much tribulation we "shall" enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22). This is the age of overcoming. Reigning is future. Present perseverance and future reigning are not simultaneous. Flesh and blood cannot inherit this promised kingdom (I Cor. 15:50). The believer is in the local church in flesh and blood, but he will be in his glorified body when he inherits the kingdom. Amillennialists work hard to find a way to spiritualize the promised kingdom away so that the language loses its ordinary significance. They teach that Christ's promise to the disciples in Matthew 19:28—"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"—refers to the time He was speaking. This teaching would divide the church, which they call Spiritual Israel, into twelve parts, each with its own administrative head.

Victorious Christians will participate in the reign of Christ. Rulership was promised even in the Abrahamic covenant: "And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee" (Gen. 17:6). Nations and their kings come from the natural seed of Abraham, but spiritual kings will come from the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Christ "hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). "Reign" is a future active indicative of the verb *basileuo*, which means to reign. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince. He is the first in rank of the kings of the earth; therefore, He will be the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Saints are co-heirs with Him. However, the Lord Jesus Christ is the chief inheritor, the absolutely sovereign One among the co-heirs. Trying to reconcile the inheriting with the spiritualistic theory of the kingdom denies that the kingdom is really inherited.

EXHORTATION TO THE CHURCHES TO HEAR

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)

“He that hath an ear, let him hear” were often repeated words by the Lord. These words appear in each of the letters to the churches. The call to hear comes after the promise to the overcomer in the last four. It is reversed in the first three. In every case, the words commend truths of great concern to all. Only the overcomer has a hearing ear. Both “overcometh” (*nikon*) and “keepeth” (*teron*) are present active participles (Rev. 2:26). This means we are overcoming. We are not overcome. We are also guarding the truths God has committed to us. The person failing to be overcoming and keeping does not have a hearing ear, and those without hearing ears have never been regenerated.

The ear referred to is not the natural ear. Summons is not to every man. Spiritual truth needs a spiritual organ for reception. Only he to whom God has given a hearing ear can hear (Deut. 29:4). This is the person whose ear has been awakened (Is. 50:4, 5).

The summons to hear what the “Spirit” says to the churches shows the absolute identity between the words of the Son and the Holy Spirit. What Christ speaks is declared to be what the Spirit speaks. The Spirit declares these things to the churches. Notice the churches are plural; therefore, the message is not limited to one church. The Lord repeated what He said during the days of His flesh, “What I say unto you I say unto all” (Mark 13:37).

Those with an ear to hear in the Laodicean church, like those in each of the other six churches, were exhorted to hear what the Spirit said to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This same exhortation was given by Jesus Christ in Mark 4:23—“If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.” Assuming that a person has ears to be hearing, let him be hearing. Christians must take heed “who” they hear (Rev. 3:22), “what” they hear (Mark 4:24), and “how” they hear (Luke 8:18).

The one heard by those who have hearing ears is the Lord: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 3:22). The Lord Jesus Christ went into the sheepfold to preach God’s message to the Jews. He called His own sheep by name. They recognized the voice of the true Shepherd and followed Him. They did not follow false shepherds (John 10:1-16). Christians hear the voice of the Shepherd, Jesus Christ, through His undershepherds. As those who merely profess to be undershepherds will sooner or later be found out, so will those who pretend to have hearing ears. The undershepherd, like the Shepherd of the sheep, is known first of all by the authority by which he speaks and by the leadership he gives. The true undershepherd’s motto will be, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11:1). Jesus Christ individualized the sheep. He called them by name: “...he calleth his own sheep by name...” (John 10:3). Preachers who major on crowds fail to think in terms of individuals. Jesus Christ led His sheep according to truth. The Captain of our salvation is leading many sons to glory: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the

suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:9, 10). Jesus Christ is the “good” Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep: “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:11).” Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20). The Lord Jesus continues leading His sheep: (1) out of a life of sin into the joy of acceptance, (2) out of all human religions into total dependence upon Himself, (3) from infantine feebleness into manly strength, (4) from the narrow views of human religion into the limitless expanse of spiritual knowledge, (5) from fleshly activity into spiritual activity, (6) from the wearying activity of the flesh (Eccl. 10:15) into the refreshing service of the Lord, and (7) from slavish fear and dread of God’s terror into a reverential fear and patient waiting for Christ’s second advent. Jesus Christ is the “chief” Shepherd who will come as King of kings and Lord of lords: “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (I Pet. 5:4). Foregoing the privilege of rank, the Lord, Jesus Christ condescended to become the Son of Man that the elect sons of men might become the sons of God. The true undershepherd must follow Christ’s example in each of the preceding exemplary acts.

The Lord gave instructions not only on the preacher’s but the hearer’s responsibility. Christians must heed the substance of what they hear: “And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath” (Mark 4:24, 25). The art of attention is as difficult as that of homiletics. Here is a precept. One must hear with discrimination, attention, and retention. That which is worthy of hearing should be heard correctly and heeded. Heeding is valueless without practicality. One does not listen for favorite fragments but for the whole word of God: “...I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:128). Many listen for pet subjects and fail to consider the whole counsel of God.

Preaching and hearing are both serious. With many today the form and expression of things is more important than the subject or matter. They consider matter comparatively immaterial if a great orator is speaking. His voice, elocution, and rhetoric are most important to them. Little thought is given to the theme of music. Melody, style, composition, and execution seem important. Christians are warned that the portion to which they give themselves to hearing they will gain by hearing: “And He was saying to them, Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides. For whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him” (Mark 4:24, 25 NASB). Those who find food are those who hunger for it. Those who hear with God-given faith receive assurance and grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord. Those who hear have more desire to hear, better understanding of what they have heard, and more personal possession of the blessings of which they hear. They receive more spiritual benefit from the blessings they possess. God gives more to those who value what they have. To those who have grace He gives more grace: “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6). He imparts grace upon grace: “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). He not only pardons but pardons abundantly: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will

abundantly pardon” (Is. 55:7). No one can stand still in spiritual matters. He either gains or loses the things he has gained. Therefore, Christians are advised to “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward” (II John 8). A church filled with devout hearers will progress for the Lord. If those who declare the truth have a right to expect the attention of the hearer, how much more should He who is the Author of the truth that is preached. Anyone can have what is given; only the diligent will have more.

There are two sides to the coin of promise to the hearers. On one side, he who has regard for the word will be given more: “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17). The other side of the coin is that he who disregards the word shall lose even what he has. Disregarded truth will become disliked truth.

Christians must take heed how they hear: “Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:18). This is the manner in which we hear. Failure to heed how one hears will result in that which he seems to have being taken away. This is a companion verse: “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26). God has condescended to speak through unworthy mouths as we witness for the Lord. People seldom perceive the importance of this. Many preachers infatuated with themselves interpose their personalities between their congregations and the truth. They are more concerned with their own success than with the truth they claim to preach. People are aiding their vain glory with flattery. Careless hearing caused God to remove His word from the Jews. Careless hearing by us may result in God removing His word from us. Contrast an orchestra consisting of many performers with various instruments and a small music room in one’s ear. In the ear, there is room for all the members of the one orchestra to play together without being personally in the chamber of the ear. The true performance is in the ear’s music room. An ear capable of hearing and understanding is a miracle by the sovereign God of the universe. Profitable hearing requires regeneration. Regeneration prepares the ears for hearing. Prejudice and partiality must be removed by the grace of God. We must be impartial, not filled with prejudice, and listen with the intention of practicing what we hear.