



1. 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;



Ruins of Ancient Ephesus

existence at the time that John received this revelation, and, therefore, what follows pertained specifically to the primary elder of each of these assemblies – this would be the immediate application. However, we must realize that these elders were not so unique that what they faced is not common to all of us, and, consequently, we must seek to appropriate, as our own, the exhortations that they received (the secondary application, and most important for us).

Many, over the years, have sought to relate the characteristics of these various assembly elders to periods of church history; the variations in how this is carried out are almost as numerous as those who have attempted to do so. Such an application is obviously very broad and general, and our attention is drawn to a big-picture view of history – relating the traits of a particular elder to a segment of the “historical church” as it might have appeared over hundreds of years. Personally, I see this as a red herring, a tactic to draw our attention away from the reality of what we must be prepared to deal with in our own lives. It is very easy to view what we read in Scripture within such a generalized context; however, it does nothing to enhance my spiritual understanding of how I need to be living today. If we become bogged down in trying to slice history into seven segments (to correspond with each of the seven elders of the assemblies), then we can easily miss out on the greater opportunity to grow in the Lord through the exhortations given. At best, such an application is both highly subjective and vague; at its worst, it renders the exhortations given to be of no personal value. As such, I will set aside this largely unfruitful pursuit in favor of the necessity of seeking how the truths that follow can strengthen my walk with the Lord.

The first message is addressed to the messenger [*aggelos* – singular] of the assembly [also singular] at Ephesus.¹ Despite Ephesus being quite a large city at this time, it is addressed to the chief elder of a single assembly. It was here that Paul brought about a dozen disciples of John the Baptist into full faith in Christ (Acts 19:1-5). He then spent the next three months, within the local Jewish synagogue, seeking to find hearts that were willing to hear the truth (Acts 19:8); following this, he spent the next two years teaching the Word specifically to those who had come to faith in Christ (Acts 19:9-10). Paul spent a greater time at Ephesus than he did anywhere else in his travels. At the time that he wrote his epistle to this community of believers (c. AD 60-64), it seems evident that they continued faithfully in his instruction; his letter is one of further teaching, rather than rebuke or correction. John now receives a message for the head elder of this assembly, about thirty years after Paul’s epistle (c. AD 96).

¹ Stephanus’ 1550 NT, *Bibleworks* 8.

Jesus begins His message by identifying Himself according to what John has already written: He is the One Who holds the seven stars on His right (again, *hand* does not appear in the Greek), and Who walks about in the midst of the seven lampstands. The messenger, to whom Jesus addresses this first note, is one of those whom Jesus held in His right hand (1:16); a word of comfort from the Lord – he is in that place of favor. Jesus is also walking about in the midst of the seven assemblies; He is aware of them, and is ever present with them. As He promised, He is in their midst (Matthew 18:20).



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

Know (oida) speaks of fullness of knowledge, particularly when it is used in reference to God (as it is here).² The word appears here in the perfect tense, confirming that this knowledge is not something that has been gradually coming to the Lord – His full knowledge of this elder came, and it continues unchanged – showing Jesus' omniscience as God.

Here is another hint at the gross error of open theism, which says that God does not know what has not yet happened, that He is learning along with us as life unfolds. For the progressive omniscience of God to be true, this word would have to be *ginosko* (and in the present tense), which would tell us that God is coming to understand this man. However, the word used (*oida*) tells us that God has only had a full knowledge of him, and that it remains complete. By the same token, God knows (has complete knowledge) of all that we do; we might be able to fool a few people all of the time, some people some of the time, but we cannot fool God at any time.

Jesus begins to enumerate some of what He knows about this messenger to the Ephesians. He starts with his *works* – the deeds and activities of this elder. We must not forget that this is addressed to the *angel* (singular) of the *ekklesia* in Ephesus; we see the use of the word *thy*, and that is a correct translation of this singular Greek pronoun. If we keep in mind that the elder bore the responsibility of oversight (1 Timothy 3:2) and leadership by example (1 Peter 5:3), then we can see the logic of placing the problems and/or strengths within an *ekklesia* at the feet of the elder. The responsibility of the overseer (bishop) was to ensure the favorable walk of those under his oversight, hence the significant qualifications that Paul outlined to Timothy (1 Timothy 3) and Titus (Titus 1). This is a responsibility suited only for those with spiritual maturity and a love for His truth, not social popularity (as we see in churches today). Jesus has full understanding of all of the activities of this messenger; He knows what he has been doing.

He also knows that this elder has expended much energy in carrying out his work. *Labor* speaks of troubles and hardships that he has had to endure;³ his work within the *ekklesia* has not been easy. The fact that Jesus knows the labors of this man tells us that he has persevered through these hard times.

Jesus also knows this elder's *patience*, which is far more than simply the ability to endure waiting, or delays, without becoming annoyed. It speaks of endurance, steadfastness and

² Vine's Expository Dictionary, "know."

³ Friberg Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

perseverance.⁴ There is a subtle progression in these first three phrases that we might miss in our English translation. Jesus knows this elder's activities, He knows that he has gone through many hardships in carrying those activities out, and now we are told that He understands his steadfastness through it all. This elder has held the course, even when things were tough.

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; 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 ..." (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3). Paul commends them, using the very same words that Jesus uses to describe what He sees in the elder of Ephesus. This is good!

Jesus goes on, "... thou canst not bear them which are evil." *Not* is in the absolute form; this overseer of the *ekklesia* in Ephesus absolutely cannot put up with those who are evil.⁵ Once again, this can be nothing other than a very good thing; it would be very important that the elder of a group of Christians not be tolerant of evil. Within modern Evangelicalism, not only does the



leadership tolerate that which is evil, they openly embrace those who teach that which is contrary to the Word of God. Take, for example, the recent leadership conference sponsored by Holy Trinity Brompton, the Anglican Church in England that is home to Nicky Gumbel who produced the Alpha Course, which has been acclaimed by Evangelicals and Catholics alike. This church was also where the "holy laughter revivals" of the Toronto Blessing found their roots. In 2012, Rick Warren was a guest speaker at the leadership conference sponsored by Holy Trinity (and has been invited back for their 2014 conference). This year (2013) Bill Hybels was part of their roster of speakers. It was observed, "... there was,

interestingly, a very strong Catholic presence: Cardinal Schönborn, for example, was one of the keynote speakers [appointed Catholic archbishop of Vienna]; Christopher West led a series of workshops over two whole afternoons about the Theology of the Body [something that John Paul II taught, and West continues with the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church]; and the Carmelite Church (a Catholic Church) in Kensington was packed for the celebration of Holy Mass (followed

⁴ Gingrich Lexicon, *Bibleworks 8*.

⁵ Ibid.

by breakfast for all present), as part of the conference programme, on the Tuesday morning.”⁶ What has become increasingly evident, in recent years, is that the Anglican and Catholic Churches are coming closer together (i.e., the Anglican is moving back to the Catholic), and in the middle of all of this we find Bill Hybels, an Evangelical, who, by his presence, endorsed all that took place at this conference. The Catholic priest who made the quoted comments, first held mass at his parish, where he spoke of the passion of Our Lady of Fatima (a Catholic title given to Mary because of her reputed apparition appearing to three children at Fatima, Portugal⁷), then he walked “up the road to the HTB Leadership Conference. When you see things from the perspective of the call to conversion and the invitation to salvation, there is not a great distance from Fatima to Holy Trinity Brompton.”⁸ Indeed, there is not much difference between the two, nor is there a great difference between Fatima and Willow Creek Community Church (Hybels’ home turf) – they are all on the same broad road of compromise, which ultimately leads to destruction in hell. Evangelicals are unwilling to recognize that “narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” (Matthew 7:14), and definitely do not want to think about the broad way that leads to “the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell.”⁹ Such compromise would have not been permitted within the *ekklesia* at Ephesus.

Not only did this elder not permit those who were evil to have any part within the assembly, he also *tried*, or tested, those who, at first glance, appeared to be acceptable. The testing, in this case (*peirazo* [*pi-rad’-zo*]), is done in order to determine if what a person professes proves to be what is truly in his heart – do his actions agree with his words.¹⁰ This is the examination that we are to carry out on ourselves to ensure that we are *in the faith* (2 Corinthians 13:5); this Greek word places the emphasis on the testing so as to observe the results. In his epistle, John declared, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but **try** the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). In this case, the word *try* is *dokimazo* (*dok-im-ad’-zo*), where the emphasis is placed upon determining if something is genuine for the purpose of approval; the words and life of the individual are to be held up to the standard of the Word of God. In the former (*peirazo*), the test is whether there is integrity within the individual – do his words and life agree; in the latter (*dokimazo*), the question is whether he stands the test of God’s Word.

This elder was vigilant! There were some who would come into the assembly who claimed to be sent by God (*apostles*), but, when given more careful scrutiny, they were found to be *liars*, or false – they proved to be hypocrites. Apostles were looked upon with respect, and were given honor within the assemblies of that day; evidently, there were those who sought to gain this prestige by claiming to be what they were not (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). This is why Paul used this word (*peirazo*) to challenge us to ascertain if we are *in the faith*; we are the best at determining if we are truly committed to our professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, or if we are merely hypocrites wanting to appear as someone whom we are not. If we are willing to compromise on

⁶ <http://bridgesandtangents.wordpress.com/2013/05/18/from-the-htb-leadership-conference-to-our-lady-of-fatima/>

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_F%C3%A1tima

⁸ <http://bridgesandtangents.wordpress.com/2013/05/18/from-the-htb-leadership-conference-to-our-lady-of-fatima/>

⁹ Strong’s Online, *Online Bible*, <http://www.onlinebible.net/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

the directives of the Word of God, then we have a sure sign that our commitment is shallow at best. Evangelicals who participate in ecumenical activities have compromised the Word of God; you cannot say, “I love God,” and then fail to do what He has commanded (John 14:15; Romans 16:17). Disobeying God is what brought sin into the world; yet the ecumenical “Christians” have deluded themselves into believing that they can disregard God’s Word and still hold a place in heaven – why would they want to live forever with Someone Whom they don’t trust? How can they say that they trust God even while they refuse to do what He says? The elder of the *ekklesia* in Ephesus weeded these chameleons out; they had no place within his area of responsibility.



3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

This continues what the Lord has observed in the life of this elder. We just read that he could not put up with (*bear*; *bastazo*) those who were evil; now we hear that he has *borne* (same Greek word) – he has taken up the responsibilities of overseer and has carried them even when they were difficult.¹¹

The second *hast* is in the present tense; he is presently patient (the same Greek word is used as in the previous verse); he is **now** exemplifying steadfastness and perseverance – he is completely committed to his task at hand.

This man has labored to the point of exhaustion for the sake of the Lord. *Laboured* (*kopiao* [*kop-ee-ah’-o*]) is the verb form of the Greek word used in the previous verse (the *labor* that the Lord Jesus knows about). It appears here in the perfect tense, which describes a completed, past action with ongoing results.¹² What does this mean? Paul exhorted Timothy that elders who labored in the Word, were worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17); the Greek word is *kopiao* and is in the present tense – an elder was to be continually laboring in the Word. This means that the elder to the Ephesians has never, from the day that he began, set his labors aside; he has been committed to his responsibilities, and, through all of this time, he has never become weary (*fainted* – this, too, is in the perfect tense). What a picture of commitment and resolve to determine that the integrity of the Scriptures would not be compromised!



4. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Despite this seemingly impeccable review, Jesus says that all is not well with this overseer – he has given up, or abandoned, (*left*) his first love.¹³ Perhaps, through the stress and busyness of watching over the spiritual integrity of this flock, he lost sight of the reason for doing so.

To the lawyer who was testing Him, Jesus said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the **first** and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38). *First*, in both Matthew 22:37 and Revelation 2:4, refers to that which is of

¹¹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹² Strong’s Online.

¹³ Ibid.

primary importance.¹⁴ Our first love must be for the Lord Who saved us, and it is to be an all-consuming love; all that we do must flow out of this love. *Love* is from the Greek word *agape*, which identifies it as being an act of the will, and not the emotions;¹⁵ when we receive the command to love the Lord (as Jesus stated it), it is something that we are able to obey (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3). When we have been persuaded (believe) that Jesus died in order to pay the price for our sin, then we have the basis for saving faith, which is confirmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit abiding within (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit, in turn, is present to guide us into all truth (John 16:13), and to enable us to live out the righteousness of the Law of God (Romans 8:4), which has now been written upon our hearts (Hebrews 10:16-17). We are given all of the resources necessary to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind, yet we are warned to guard against the entrance of unbelief, or faithlessness, into our heart (Hebrews 3:12). This elder, evidently, had become so busy with his responsibilities of oversight that he had lost sight of the foundation for all that he was doing – a love for the Lord.

The Lord spoke to Isaiah about the children of Israel, how they were busily carrying out the sacrifices required by the Mosaic Law, but they were not being cleansed (Isaiah 1:11-15). Everything that they were doing was according to the prescribed tradition, but faith in the God of their salvation was missing – they had become faithless because they were no longer persuaded that God meant what He said. Their persuasion was turned away from God, and they found themselves teetering on the brink of apostasy. This elder, despite doing a great job of protecting the assembly from error, began to neglect the underlying necessity of a love for God. His life was filled with right works, but his motivation has become flawed. Jesus said that there would be those who had cast out demons in His name who would be refused entrance into heaven because they did not do the will of God (Matthew 7:21-23). That all-important first commandment is God's will for everyone – to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind (Matthew 22:37) – something that is expressed through our obedience to the first four of the Ten Commandments. Teaching the Scriptures with integrity, living in obedience to the Word of God, and proclaiming the Gospel message of hope is not about us – it must spring from our love for the Lord as our Savior. If we neglect the love of God for the busyness of “doing His work,” then we, like this elder, will hear that the Lord has something against us.



5. 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.

Remember, or call to mind, is the command given to this elder.¹⁶ Clearly, he is able to recall a day when his focus was on his love for the Lord, and all of his activities flowed out of that love. He is to bring to his mind those earlier days when the Lord was pleased with him.

Jesus plainly states that he has *fallen*; he has failed to retain the Lord's full approval. What we must carefully note about this Greek word (*ekpipto*) is that it only describes a descent from a place

¹⁴ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁵ Strong's Online.

¹⁶ Ibid.

of favor to one where the Lord is no longer entirely pleased with this elder.¹⁷ What is **not** included in this word is any thought of being apostate, or having fallen from the faith. Jehovah declared His dissatisfaction with Israel's empty sacrifices (the rituals were intact, but faith in the hearts of the participants was missing), and then implored Israel to mend their ways so that He could then forgive their sins (Isaiah 1:16-18). Even so, Jesus calls upon this elder to *remember* what used to be, and then to *repent*, or to change his mind, in order to restore what once was.¹⁸ He is to *do the first works*; what are the *first works*? The word *first* draws a comparison between what was and what now is¹⁹ – between acceptable activities that flow out of a heart of love for the Lord (what was), and a life of good activities with a waning love for the Lord (what is). The activities have not changed; the only change has been within the heart of this elder – his love for the Lord Jesus Christ has declined.

Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). This is a very simple statement, and not really very difficult to understand. This elder is evidence that you can obey the commands of the Lord without a proper love for Him; our works of obedience must flow out of our love for the Lord, and must **never** become the focus of our living. Evangelicals, in our day, have stretched and distorted the Word of God to the extent that they now feel justified in doing whatever they choose. After virtually destroying God's Word, they feel satisfied to say that they love the Lord, and are doing what He says – that is not what Jesus had in mind! Rick Warren has become a poster-preacher for all that is wrong within Evangelicalism today. In 2005 he was quoted as saying, “Now I don't agree with everything in everybody's denomination, including my own. I don't agree with everything that Catholics do or Pentecostals do, but what binds us together is so much stronger than what divides us ... I really do feel that these people are brothers and sisters in God's family. I am looking to build bridges with the Orthodox Church, looking to build bridges with the Catholic Church”²⁰ Warren is unabashedly a self-proclaimed, ecumenical bridge-builder. Since we have received a holy (separated) calling from God (2 Timothy 1:9), and have been indwelt by His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9), why would we even desire to join with those who have stripped the Scriptures of all authority? The danger, too often, is that they frequently speak of the authority of the Word of God even while their lives deny it. The Evangelical attitude of **acceptance** of those who hold to doctrines that are contrary to the Scriptures (which has gone way beyond accommodation) is no longer a matter of isolated incidents – there has been a general capitulation by the average Evangelical to the acceptance of Roman Catholics as being fellow “Christians.” Billy Graham was an early purveyor of this thinking; in his crusades (beginning in the late 1940s), he sought to include the Roman Catholics,



Rick Warren

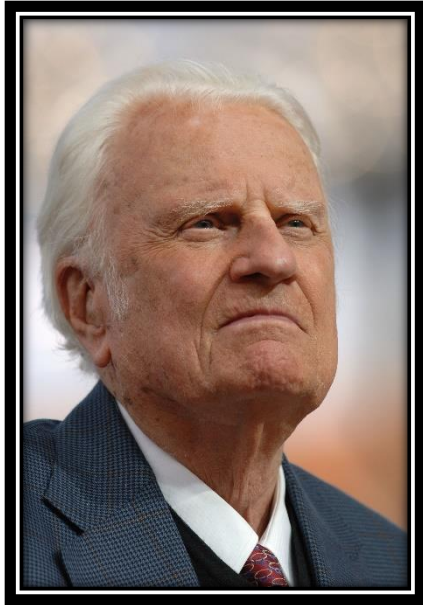
¹⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁸ Strong's Online.

¹⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁰ <http://letusreason.org/Popteach64.htm>

and expressed no concern about sending “converts” back to their fold. Although this practice was not openly promoted by his organization, the evidence is there if you desire to look for it. The late Chuck Colson gave this deception a whole new level of exposure and increased acceptability; now we see Rick Warren seizing the baton and endeavoring to give this heresy the appearance of



Billy Graham

Evangelical normalcy. The Church of Rome is not changing, but it is amazing to see the extent to which Protestants and Evangelicals are bending to court their favor; the roots of ecumenism are running ever deeper!

However, of late, Warren has begun to up the ante by seeking to provide the same inclusive attitude toward Muslims. We had a glimpse of this during Warren’s prayer at Obama’s first inaugural celebration in 2009, when he concluded his prayer by saying, “I humbly ask this in the name of the one who changed my life – Yeshua, Esa [or Isa], Jesus [using the Spanish pronunciation], Jesus”²¹ Here he petitions Esa (or Isa), who is none other than the Muslim version of Jesus – a pagan prophet who is subject to Mohammed, and absolutely is not a god. Why would Warren commit such blasphemy? However, there’s more: the latest escapade out of Saddleback church to hit the news is a still largely unpublished and, at times, denied document called *King’s Way*. Abraham Meulenberg (in charge of interfaith outreach at Saddleback)

and Jihad Turk, director of religious affairs at a mosque in Los Angeles, collaborated to produce this paper, which was unveiled at a somewhat exclusive dinner at Saddleback church, and attended by some 300 Muslims and members of Saddleback.²² “King’s Way describes a path to end the 1400 years of misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians by consulting the texts we each call sacred in order to form a basis that allows us the privilege to serve the needs in our communities together.”²³ The premise is that both Christians and Muslims believe in “one God,” and share two central commands: “love of God” and “love of neighbor”;²⁴ the underlying assumption is that Muslims and Christians believe in the same god (God). Although Warren has denied many things regarding this matter, the end is that he is in agreement, inasmuch as several of his staff members have affirmed the accuracy



Jihad Turk

Abraham Meulenberg

²¹ <http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/archive/ldn/2009/jan/09012003>

²² <http://www.ocreger.com/articles/muslims-341669-warren-saddleback.html>

²³ <http://standupforthetruth.com/2012/03/finally-a-look-at-the-kings-way-document-that-sparked-the-chrislam-questions/>

²⁴ <http://slaughteringthesheep.wordpress.com/2012/02/26/rick-warren-christians-and-muslims-serve-the-same-god/>

of the reports, and that he was fully aware of the paper from its inception. After all, “Warren has broken Ramadan fasts at a Mission Viejo mosque [with his next door neighbor], met Muslim leaders abroad and addressed 8,000 Muslims at a national convention in Washington D.C.”²⁵ Warren still vehemently denies advocating Chrislam (a merging of Christianity and Islam), yet his actions belie his words; Amos 3:3 still holds true: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” Rick Warren is forthrightly seeking to work/walk alongside of Muslims in his endeavors for world peace and development; therefore, it should not come as a surprise that he is also seeking to find a common basis of understanding with them. Jesus’ words (in John 14:15) are lost on Warren and the swelling tide of Evangelicals who are willing to stake their eternal destinies on Rick, rather than on Jesus. This elder of Ephesus would have tried (*peirazo*) Rick Warren, and banished him from the assembly!

Rick Warren is an example of where we can find ourselves, if we permit our love for the Lord to wane. The elder to the *ekklesia* in Ephesus had allowed his love for the Lord to falter; Jesus says, “Repent!” – turn from those things that have drawn you away from Me, and make Me your focus once again. It is a call for him to restore his passion for the Lord God, so that his protection of those within the *ekklesia* will spring from a heart for God.

However, Jesus’ words include more than simply a challenge to set things in order. In essence, this elder faces a choice: will he choose to follow the Lord and restore his position, or will he choose to ignore the challenge given and continue as he is? When we consider the Lord, and His desires for us, we always face a choice – He will **never** force His ways upon us, but He will tell us the consequences of disobedience. To Adam, Jehovah proclaimed, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16b-17). Adam faced a choice: he could live in obedience, and not eat of the forbidden fruit, or he could choose to eat, knowing full-well the consequences of his action. When Moses reviewed the requirements of the Lord with the children of Israel, he spoke of the blessings that would be theirs if they chose to be obedient (Deuteronomy 28:1-14), but he also made sure that they understood the troubles that would be theirs if they ignored the Word of the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:15-68); his conclusion: “I call heaven and earth to record [witness] this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live ...” (Deuteronomy 30:19).²⁶ The theme has not changed, for Paul writes: “... touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you ... saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

As Jesus speaks to this overseer, He outlines the consequences of not taking heed to the challenge to restore his relationship with Him. The *or else* would be better translated as *and if not*,²⁷ which places a greater clarification on the choice that stands before this messenger; if what follows does transpire, then it will be because the elder chose not to repent and restore what had been neglected. Jesus says that if he does not repent, then He *is coming quickly* (*will come* is actually present tense), and will remove *his lampstand* out of its place.²⁸ Why would Jesus remove the *lampstand* (which is the *ekklesia*), when the problem rests with the elder, or overseer?

²⁵ <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/muslims-341669-warren-saddleback.html>

²⁶ Strong’s Online.

²⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁸ Strong’s Online.

The New Evangelical, John Maxwell, has said, “Everything rises and falls on leadership,”²⁹ and, in a sense, there is an element of truth to that statement. To the assembly at Ephesus, Paul wrote, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints ...” (Ephesians 4:11-12a). This follows on the heels of when Christ led the multitudes from paradise to heaven and “gave gifts unto men” (Ephesians 4:8). The gifts (plural) that He gave were to enable some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers; the gifts were not the *men*, but all that was required for men to fill these roles within the *ekklesia*. This enablement was given for a very specific purpose: the equipping, or training, of the saints (v. 12).³⁰ It is not so that we could become perfect (sinless) in this life, but that we should be thoroughly equipped in order to live out the life of holiness to which we have been called (2 Timothy 1:9). We are told that the gifting is done by God, Who provides the gifts as He determines, and there is an order to how He has provided these to the *ekklesia* (1 Corinthians 12:11, 28). Man has established many institutes of higher learning, but God does not use them to determine the gifting that He provides to those who choose to do the works of righteousness and holiness that He has prepared for us in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). When God calls you to a specific task, He will ensure that you are properly equipped to carry it out; this does not mean that we can be casual about our Christian walk and then expect God to make us adequate for the task with no effort on our part. Rather, each of us is to “study [to exert one’s self, give diligence] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing [to cut straight; to teach directly and correctly] the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).³¹



John C. Maxwell

I believe that the time when God equipped people to be Apostles and Prophets has ended. We have the NT Scriptures that were primarily written by Peter, James, John, and Paul, who were all Apostles and Prophets used by God to establish His *ekklesia* during the time following Christ’s promised sacrifice. Peter wrote that “there were false **prophets** also among the people, even as there shall be false **teachers** among you ...” (2 Peter 2:1); it seems that the Spirit of God points to a distinction between what was and what will be. Today, we might have those who have been sent (apostles) and those who proclaim the truth of God (prophets), but it is in a much lesser sense than during that first generation of Apostles and Prophets after Christ’s ascension. The *ekklesia* is to have bishops, or elders, and deacons – those who are to protect the teaching that has already been given (not to receive new revelation – 1 Timothy 3), and who are equipped by God to meet the needs of the local assembly. God’s ability to equip individuals for this important responsibility, will be largely determined by their willingness to follow the command of 2 Timothy 2:15. If the elder or deacon proclaims that he knows God but does not live in accordance with the Word of God (whether through ignorance or choice), then he is a liar and does not have the truth (1 John 2:3-4); foundational to this is a love for God and His truth. The great deception that is coming

²⁹ John Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, p. xi.

³⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

³¹ Strong’s Online.

under the time of the Antichrist will be so pervasive even among “Christians” because “they received [accepted] not the love of the truth, [so] that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10; cp. John 14:6; 17:17). Paul warned Timothy that a day was coming when people will refuse to give heed to sound teaching, and will turn away from the truth unto lies (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Jesus said, “If ye love me [the Truth], keep my commandments” (John 14:15); “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). Obedience to the commands in God’s Word is the expression of our love for Him; however, we must guard against being caught up in the external activities, and lose the love for God’s Truth that is foundational to all of it (Matthew 7:21-23). Herein is the problem that the elder of Ephesus had fallen into.

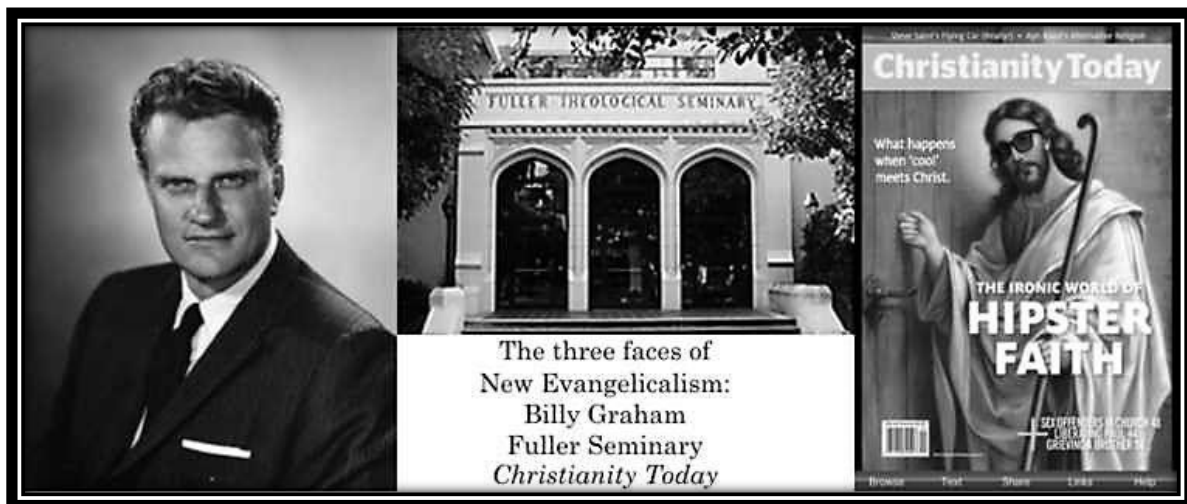
Peter identifies the responsibility of the elder within the local assembly: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God [the work of a shepherd] which is among you, taking the oversight [*episkopeo*; *bishop* is *episkopos*, an overseer] *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples [an exact pattern to be replicated; worthy to be imitated (Philippians 3:17)] to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3).³² The elder is to be a living illustration of a Christian, worthy of being followed by others; as those who have been charged with the spiritual oversight of the assembly, they must know that they will be emulated by those under their care. Consequently, if they fail to follow the Word of God carefully, they will then lead many onto that same path of error; they will still be *ensamples to the flock* but not in Biblical integrity. Today we see this in men like Billy Graham and Rick Warren, who not only lead those within a local assembly onto paths of error, but are, in fact, leading millions around the world into spiritual ruin.

If the elder to the Ephesians does not repent of his error, then he will continue to lead those within the assembly into a place that is not pleasing to the Lord, which will result in them following him away from the Lord (being removed out of their place of close communion with the Lord – Revelation 1:13). What a responsibility the elder holds before God! Ezekiel was made a watchman of Israel – in many respects a responsibility that is similar to that of the elder to the *ekklesia*. “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous *man* doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous *man*, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezekiel 3:17-21). The watchman was to be alert to anything that might pose a danger to those under his care; he was responsible for them. Whenever he sounded the alarm against danger, even if no one heeded his call to caution, he had discharged his responsibility. However, if he did not sound the alarm against danger, perhaps through neglect or not recognizing the threat, the responsibility for the resulting devastation would

³² Strong’s Online.

rest upon him. Jesus says to this elder of Ephesus that if he doesn't repent, then He is coming quickly to remove the assembly for which he is responsible. Why? – Because they will be following his lead, which is not pleasing to the Lord. Essentially, you cannot lead someone to a deeper spiritual walk with the Lord than your own; this elder was failing, and the assembly would follow.

The ecumenical devastation that has claimed most Evangelicals today began with a simple announcement by Harold Ockenga of a New Evangelicalism that would reach out to those who were called Liberals (spiritually) and, at the same time, distance themselves from those who practiced Biblical separation from the errant.³³ Within a decade, the voice of this *new* doctrine was being heard around the world through the popular crusades of Billy Graham, the written testimony of *Christianity Today*, and the graduates of Fuller Seminary. The message fell upon receptive ears; those who were once regarded as the enemy, were now brothers and sisters who simply held a different understanding of some doctrines. The watchmen were promptly retired or fired – they were no longer needed; the danger was gone, and everyone was now a part of one happy family.



A combination of Biblical ignorance and intellectual retraining took the sting of conscience away in this matter of ecumenism, and Billy Graham exemplified the wonder of “loving everyone to Jesus.”³⁴ We might well lay the spiritual shipwreck called Evangelicalism at the feet of several men who, decades ago, stepped into heresy, but that does nothing to allay our personal responsibility before God for our own destiny. Even though Rick Warren has picked the ecumenical torch up to carry it ever deeper into the mire of sin, Jesus’ words to us are still: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). We are individually responsible to God to live in accordance with His Word; we bear no responsibility to Warren to heed his hodgepodge of high-sounding words. However, there are still a few watchmen who are sounding the alarm at what is taking place within Evangelicalism, but there are few who are heeding the call to commitment to the Lord. “The Lord is not slack [hesitant] concerning his promise, as some men count slackness [slowness]; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should

³³ Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, Foreword, written by Harold J. Ockenga.

³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/michelepillar4/posts/finally-with-jesus-dr-billy-graham-i-had-the-honor-of-singing-for-the-crusades-i/1817081411649121/>

come to repentance [literally, *not wanting any to perish but all into repentance to come*³⁵]” (2 Peter 3:9).³⁶ Despite the Lord’s expression of patient perseverance toward fallen mankind, “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant [minority, a small number] according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5); Jesus said, “Enter ye in at [through] the strait [narrow] gate: for wide [broad] is the gate, and broad [spacious] is the way, that leadeth [is leading] to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait [narrow] is the gate, and narrow [restricted] is the way, which leadeth [is leading] unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).³⁷ Although the door to salvation is open, Jesus assured us that there would only be a few who would enter. He also said, “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh [to establish His kingdom on earth], shall [*ara*, calling for a negative response to the question] he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).³⁸ When the Lord comes in the clouds to gather His righteous, there will be a faithful remnant; however, when He comes to establish His reign on earth, there will be no faith in Him present on the earth. We must hold fast to our commitment to the Lord in order to remain among His faithful ones (Hebrews 4:14).

After providing a warning of the consequences for the status quo, Jesus confirms that the only possibility that His judgment will be stayed is if the elder should repent. *Repent*, as it appears here, is in the subjunctive mood – repentance is a possibility, but the choice rests with the elder.



6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

To this elder of Ephesus, Jesus has pointed out the many good things that he is doing, but that, in fact, all of these good things are meaningless because he has lost the love that he needs to have for God and Truth, which is the foundation from which all of these “right things” must flow. He has been issued the warning that if he does not change this, the assembly, for which he is responsible, will then be removed from the presence of the Lord. He may have erred in allowing his love for the Lord to cool, but Jesus does commend him for his hatred of the works of the *Nicolaitanes*; this is a final commendation for this elder.

Who were these *Nicolaitanes*, or *Nicolaitans* (as it is commonly spelled)? We see their name mentioned again in Jesus’ words to the elder of the *ekklesia* at Pergamos (2:15). There seems to be much confusion about who these people were, and to what aberrant doctrines they ascribed.

Some have thought that this group followed Nicholas, one of the seven who were appointed to attend to the mundane matters of daily living (Acts 6:2-6).³⁹ However, there is no evidence to suggest that Nicholas departed from the faith so as to arouse the Lord’s hatred; this appears to be a somewhat simplistic answer to the question, and perhaps it is used to avoid what is more likely the real identity of these people.

³⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

³⁶ Gingrich Lexicon.

³⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁸ Strong’s Dictionary.

³⁹ Merrill C. Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, “Nicolaitans.”

More commonly, it is held that the Nicolaitans were those who held to error very “similar to that of Balaam,”⁴⁰ and some, carrying this conjecture even further, say that this was the error of those who followed Nicholas (thereby combining the Balaam view with the simplistic one above). Those who give assent to the position that the Nicolaitans held the error of Balaam, use Jesus’ words to the elder of Pergamos to come to their conclusion: “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:14-15). Even though Jesus identifies that this elder was accommodating those who held to the teachings of both Balaam and the Nicolaitans, those who hold this position endeavor to draw the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the “Balaamites” together and make them one. It is also contended, by some, that the names (*Balaam* and *Nicolaitan*) are very similar in meaning: swallows of the people and conquerors of the people, respectively⁴¹; however, still others claim *Balaam* to mean *not of the people* – i.e., a foreigner.⁴² Nevertheless, a careful reading of 2:15 shows that the *doctrine of the Nicolaitanes* is in **addition to** the *doctrine of Balaam* – just as he was tolerant of those who held to the doctrine of Balaam, so this elder *also* had those who held to the hateful teachings of the Nicolaitans. Rather than viewing the Nicolaitans and the Balaamites as holding to the same error, it would be more in keeping with the text to identify these as two distinct problems.

Therefore, the question remains: who are the *Nicolaitans*? It was noted above that this word means conqueror of the people – does this hold substance under scrutiny? The Greek word *nikao* (*nik-ah’-o*) is most often translated as *overcome*, but also appears as *conquer* and *gotten the victory*, and finds its source in the word *nike* (*nee’-kay*) meaning *victory*.⁴³ The Greek word for *people* is *laos*,⁴⁴ which shows that *Nicolaitan*, meaning conqueror of the people, or victor over them, is a close tie to the Greek words from which it is formed. If we use church history as a backdrop, or a context, for this understanding, what becomes very evident is that there were some, even at this early date, who felt that they were more knowledgeable, more eloquent, or simply more spiritual than others. Today we would call them the *clergy*, which comes from two old French words meaning learned men and learning, knowledge, erudition (or, scholarship).⁴⁵ Therefore, what we see here is that the elder at Ephesus is commended by the Lord Jesus Christ for hating the works of those who elevate themselves above the rest of the assembly.

To His disciples Jesus said, “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28). Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, uses His own life as an example for the disciples to follow: as God, He chose to leave the

⁴⁰ <http://bible dictionaries.com/nicolaitans.htm>; Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary; Vincent’s Word Studies.

⁴¹ http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Book_of_Revelation/commentary/htm/topics/nicolaitans.html

⁴² Strong’s Dictionary, *ESword*, <http://www.e-sword.net/index.html>.

⁴³ Strong’s Online.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=clergy&allowed_in_frame=0

glory of heaven for the express purpose of tasting death in order to pay the price for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 2:9); He came to this earth to minister to the needs of His creatures who had been fashioned in His image (Genesis 1:26). He labored tirelessly to meet the physical needs of the people who came to Him during His earthly ministry; then He willingly gave Himself to the suffering of the cross in order to make spiritual life available to whoever will come to Him (John 3:16).

Earlier we looked at how Peter explained the role of the elder within the local assembly (1 Peter 5:1-3); there is to be no *clergy*, no *laity*; we are to be together (one) in Christ. We will have differing roles within the Body, and some will carry greater responsibilities than others. However, that must never be construed in any way to elevate one above another; rather, a greater responsibility should bring with it a greater humility through the obvious dependency upon the Lord in order to fulfill the role's requirements faithfully.

Anyone growing up in today's churches will be well acquainted with the clergy and the laity (most churches are very similar in this regard), and into which group they fall. Within Evangelical circles, the *clergy* are most commonly referred to as *pastors*. *Pastor* comes from the Latin word for shepherd, *pastorem*.⁴⁶ About AD 590, Gregory the Great (also known as the Roman Catholic pope, Gregory I) wrote a book, which came to be of some importance within the Catholic Church;



Gregory I

it is known by several titles, but the essence of its contents is summarized by two words from its title: “*pastoralis curae*,” or pastoral care.⁴⁷ In this document, Gregory speaks of the shepherd, or pastor, as one who knows “by the use and trial of prayer that he can obtain what he has requested from the LORD,” and the pastor fills “the post of intercession with GOD for the people.”⁴⁸ He also declares: “The conduct of a prelate [within the context, this is referring to those who are called *pastors*] ought so far to transcend the conduct of the people as **the life of a shepherd is wont to exalt him above the flock**” (emphasis added).⁴⁹ It seems evident that Gregory was already departed from the Biblical mandate in several areas, and the direction that the Roman Catholic Church would take in the years ahead, in these matters, was already apparent. He

determined that the pastor (someone who is filling a specific **position** within the church) needs to know how to obtain his requests of the Lord: “No one presumes to teach an art till he has first, with intent meditation, learnt it. What rashness is it, then, for the unskilful to assume pastoral authority, since the government of souls is the art of arts!”⁵⁰ What a departure from the Scriptures! There is no “pastoral authority” ascribed to men, and the rule of the souls of men is an art? Within the mind of Gregory, the *pastor* was the interceder with God for the people, indicating that there was already a concentration of spiritual “authority” in the office of “pastor” by this time (by

⁴⁶ <http://www.etymonline.com/>, “pastor.”

⁴⁷ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06780a.htm>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastoral_Care

⁴⁸ Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, translated by James Barmby, Part I, Chapter 10.

⁴⁹ Gregory, *Book*, Part II, Chapter 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Part I, Chapter 1.

contrast, Romans 8:26 and 34 make it clear that we have the Spirit of God and the Lord Jesus Christ interceding for us). The common people (the *laity*) were there to be ruled over, and told how they were to approach God – namely, through this earthly pastor, or bishop, of their souls (by contrast, 1 Peter 2:25 ascribes this exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ). Within this framework, the pastor is referred to as the *shepherd*, and is exalted over the *flock*. This is a gross miscarriage of the gifting of a shepherd that Jesus bestows upon some within the *ekklesia* (Ephesians 4:11); being gifted as a shepherd speaks to the work of a shepherd (caring, protecting, feeding, etc.), and not to the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep (a man to an animal), which is what Gregory sought to impose. The **role** of shepherd is something that Scripture attributes only to the Lord – Jesus is the ONE Shepherd (John 10:16). I am told that at the Master’s Seminary (John MacArthur’s school) they liken the *pastor* to an “under-shepherd”; why not just call them *elders*, as in the Scriptures? Very simply, to do so would undermine the elevated role of pastors within the minds of the average pew-warmer. Today it takes several years to train men to be *pastors*, yet the majority of this training is in theology (indoctrination into man’s thinking, and not the Word of God) and professional skill development (how to run a church, develop programs, and learn counseling techniques). By contrast, God’s purpose for the *ekklesia* is that we ALL might come to a precise and correct “knowledge of the Son of God,” and that we would not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:13-14). Seminaries endeavor to perpetuate their leaders’ interpretation of the Scriptures; whereas the *ekklesia* is there to exhort and challenge all individuals to grow in their understanding of the Word of God, and to learn to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). We are commanded to diligently expend our energies in interpreting the Scriptures correctly (with the guidance of the Holy Spirit); Bible colleges and seminaries teach how to rightly divide the word of man – there is a significant difference!

Early on, the church in Rome set out to elevate those who were leaders within their organization, and to make the *hoi polloi* (a Greek phrase meaning *the many*) subject to them.⁵¹ Jesus specifically taught against this, and emphasized His condemnation of this practice in His message to the elder in Ephesus. As time passed, the organized church increasingly stressed the need for “believers ... [to] yield to their pastors, follow their admonition, obey their commands, and submit to their authority.”⁵² Although this quotation accurately describes the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church, it comes from an article written by a “fundamental” Baptist *pastor*. Bud Talbert goes on to say, “We do not follow a pastor because he is perfect, but because He [*sic*] is God’s man for us, because God has gifted him and appointed him to be His spokesman to our souls. ... To refuse his leadership is to refuse God’s will.”⁵³ This teaching underscores the “all-important” role of the clergy (the *pastor*) and our humble relationship to them; the laity has no responsibility other than to bow to the superior wisdom and rule of their lords, the clergy! “God-called pastors ... have authority over the assemblies. Other Christians are to submit to



Bud Talbert

⁵¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoi_polloi

⁵² Bud Talbert, “The Pastor and His People,” Part 1, *The Whetstone*, Vol. 9 No. 3, May-June 2003.

⁵³ Ibid, Part 2, *The Whetstone*, Vol. 9 No. 4, July-August 2003.

this authority.”⁵⁴ Baptists pride themselves on the fact that, historically, they were never part of the Roman Catholic Church, and that “they remained true to the Scriptures and rejected the error.”⁵⁵ Huh? They have pulled the clergy-laity distinction right out of the Catholic Church, and embedded it into their traditions. They may not have come out of the Catholic Church (like the Protestants), but they have learned well from this great purveyor of heresy!

Evangelical churches (whether Baptist, Evangelical Free, Alliance, Pentecostal, or whatever flavor), for the most part, have adopted the clergy-laity distinction as their model despite there being absolutely no Biblical foundation for doing so, not to mention that it is actually contrary to Jesus’ teaching. Jesus commended the elder at Ephesus for his hatred of this unbiblical practice, yet it flourishes today, even among those who claim to uphold the standards of the Word of God. Although I have learned much from both Bud Talbert and David Cloud, I am grateful to the Lord that He has opened my eyes to the need to weigh all things according to the Scriptures. Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves ...”; both Talbert and Cloud use this to exert their “pastoral authority” over others. However, the Greek word translated as *obey* means to be persuaded first, and then to obey;⁵⁶ this is not obedience to someone in authority (1 Peter 2:13-14), but an obedience that has been tempered by first testing what is heard and seen against the Word of God. The Baptist problem with “pastoral authority” is further complicated if we consider the word *rule*; it is translated from a Greek word that means to lead,⁵⁷ which fits perfectly with Peter’s admonition to the elders to oversee the flock that is “among you” (1 Peter 5:2). One of the instructions given by Kings James to the translators of the KJV was this: “When any word hath divers significations, that to be kept which has been most commonly used by the most eminent fathers ...”;⁵⁸ therefore, we have perpetuated terms within our English Bible that are more compliant with tradition than they are with the Scriptures. “Beloved, believe not [do not be persuaded by] every spirit [the essence of, or that which guides, a man], but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets [someone who appears/sounds true, but isn’t] are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1); we bear a responsibility to continually examine everything that we hear according to the unchangeable standard of God’s Word, and, if it does not stand the test, then we must reject the message, and seek to correct the messenger (Galatians 6:1). We must be prepared to stand alone, if necessary, upon the Word of God.



David Cloud

⁵⁴ <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/pastorsauthority.html>

⁵⁵ <http://heritagebaptistchurch.ca/2013/05/29/a-brief-history-of-the-baptists/>

⁵⁶ Strong’s Online.

⁵⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

⁵⁸ http://www.kjvonly.org/other/kj_instructs.htm



7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

We now come to a phrase that is repeated for each of the seven assemblies. The Greek word used for *ear* refers to the physical appendage, but, metaphorically, it speaks of understanding, or knowing, what is heard; it's more than simply hearing words.⁵⁹ This is addressed to the one who has spiritual understanding (there has been a shift from a second person pronoun, as in the previous verse, to a third person pronoun⁶⁰) – namely, anyone who has been truly born-again by the Spirit of God, and who desires to know the truth of the Spirit (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14). *Hear*, likewise, includes the idea of attending to what is being said and carries the imperative mood – it is a command.⁶¹ If we desire to know what the Spirit of God would say to us, then we must give careful attention to what is being said. Even though the words of the Lord Jesus are directed specifically to the elders of these seven assemblies, we see that everyone within the assemblies, who has a desire to know and understand what the Spirit has to say, should pay careful attention to Jesus' words – they are meant for everyone who loves the Lord and desires to walk in obedience to His Word. We are to give our attention to what the Spirit is saying unto the *churches* – the word is plural, and provides confirmation that everyone in all of the assemblies would get to hear what the Lord had to say to each of their lead elders. This is why it is so important that we look carefully for that word from the Lord for **us**.

Here is an open invitation to anyone within the Body of Christ: to the one who is overcoming, Jesus will give him to eat of the tree of life that stands in the middle of the paradise of God. When God created the Garden of Eden for man, He placed the tree of life in the middle of it (Genesis 2:9); when man sinned, God ensured that he no longer had access to this tree, lest he eat and live forever in his sinful state (Genesis 3:22, 24). From Adam to Noah, many would have seen the angels guarding the access to the tree of life. In the New Jerusalem, we read of the tree of life growing on both sides of the river of life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1-2). Although the tree of life is accessible once again, John writes of a restriction that still applies: “Blessed *are* they that do [are doing] his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14).⁶² Doing what God has told us in His Word is not optional if our expectation is to dwell with the Lord in heaven. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The Spirit, through John, tells us that we cannot know God without doing what He commands, and if we say that we know Him but do not do what He says, then we are liars (1 John 2:4). “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and **all liars**, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). If we say that we know God but do not obey His commands, then we are liars destined for the lake of fire! Is it important that we allow the Spirit of God to guide us to know the Word of God so that we can obey the commands of the Lord? Eternally, yes!

⁵⁹ Strong's Online.

⁶⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁶¹ Strong's Online.

⁶² Ibid.

Overcometh is from the Greek word *nikao*, which we noted earlier as being part of the word *Nicolaitans*, and means *to conquer*. The verb form, as used here, speaks of those who are being victorious – those who are prevailing.⁶³ From the context, this can only mean those who are holding tenaciously to the Word of God and their love for God. Jesus, when speaking of the end times, said, “And because iniquity [lawlessness] shall abound, the love [*agape*] of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to endure faithfully through trials] unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:12-13).⁶⁴ It is not enough to keep doing the “right things,” we must also ensure that our love for the Lord does not diminish. However, we must not forget that our love for the Lord is exemplified through obedience to His Word. “... whoso keepeth [to continually attend carefully to] his word [God’s Word (singular)], in him verily is the love [*agape*] of God perfected [made complete]: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:5).⁶⁵ There is a fine line identified here, of which we must be aware. Our love for God will be demonstrated by obedience to His commands (John 14:15), yet we are capable of doing much of what God asks of us without a living love for God (Matthew 7:22-23). “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). *Unbelief* can be as simple as allowing our firm persuasion, that God is Who He says He is, to shift. Jesus said that we must endure in our love in order to be saved; permitting our love to wane, as the elder in Ephesus did, indicates a change in our belief – our focus is no longer on the Lord, but on doing right works. Our obedience must flow out of a heart of love (the expression of faith) for the Lord, or it is no longer obedience but empty works. James said, “... I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18b); faith without works is dead; works without faith is equally dead, “for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16b, cf. Isaiah 1:11-15). The writer of Hebrews warns us that a heart of faithlessness is apostasy, and James warns us that faith without active works of obedience is dead. We must not permit our activities for the Lord to cloud our love for Him as our Savior. We must *overcome* – to cultivate our relationship with the Lord through His Word, and not be focused on our activities.

As we have looked at the message that Jesus had for this messenger, we can see that He identified Himself to this elder in a most appropriate manner. He assured this leader that he was still in that position of favor (on Jesus’ right side), and, also, that He was very aware of all that was taking place within the city of Ephesus regarding this assembly (He was walking about in the midst of the assemblies). Jesus’ attentiveness to the challenges faced by this elder would be an encouragement for him to *repent* (v. 5) and restore his love for the Lord, which he had permitted to wane. Jesus is fully aware of our situations as well, and that should be an encouragement to increase our diligence to know “him, and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10).



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

Jesus now turns His attention to the elder (messenger or *angel*) of the assembly in Smyrna. Once again, He draws from what John has already written to identify Himself to this messenger (*aggelos*). What follows (*these things*) is from Him, Who is the First and the Last (1:17), the eternal

⁶³ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁶⁴ Strong’s Online.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

One. *First* and *Last* speak of time; timelessness has no beginning and no ending, but *time* has a beginning and will someday have an ending. Jesus assures this messenger that He was there when it all began, and He will be there when it ends; He is the ever-present One, “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

He is the One Who became dead and lives; He faced death and conquered it! By dying, He, Who was sinless, accepted the wages of sin (Romans 6:23) and paid the penalty for sins that He did not have – He bore the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). The due recompense for all sins has been taken by the Lord Jesus Christ; however, that does not mean that everyone will be in heaven! The door to heaven is open only to the one who is believing (John 3:16) and endures in that belief unto the end (Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 3:12), which, in turn, demands obedience to the will of God (Matthew 7:21). Jesus defeated



Ruins of Ancient Smyrna

death for everyone, but His full payment for sin is only **effective** in the one who **is believing** (1 Corinthians 15:55), as a result, when we are “absent from the body ... [we are] present [at home]⁶⁶ with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). The **faithful** who are in Christ have every reason to be encouraged – He is alive and we, too, shall live with Him!



9. 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.

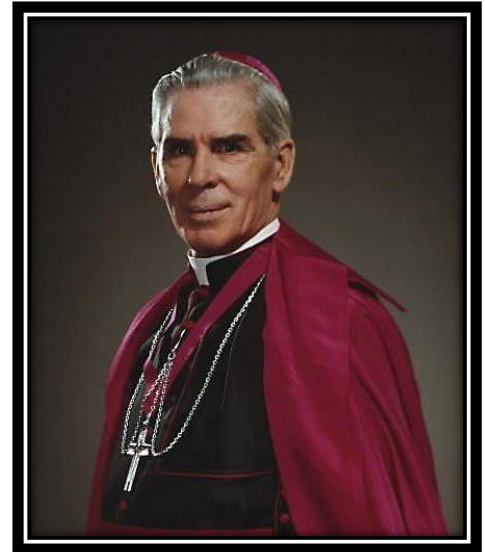
The first phrase is identical to that directed to the messenger of the assembly at Ephesus. *I know* – I, the eternal One Who took death on and am alive, have full knowledge (*oida*) of what you are doing (*works*) and who you are; I know you. However, the similarity in the messages ends right there.

Jesus goes on, “I know thy ... tribulation” The word in Greek is *thlipsis*, and, literally, it means to press together; metaphorically, it speaks of oppression, affliction, tribulation, and distress.⁶⁷ When Paul and Barnabas visited the assemblies of believers that they had just established in the cities where they had preached, we read that they went “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must **through much** [many] **tribulation** [*thlipsis* (plural)] enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The promise to these new Christians was that they would face many afflictions but that, by persevering in their faith, they would enter into God’s kingdom. What a contrast to the activities of the late pope of

⁶⁶ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁶⁷ Strong’s Online.

Evangelicalism, Billy Graham! From very early in his crusade work, Graham would send the “converts” back to whatever church that they called home – it mattered not if that church had long since left the truth of God’s Word. This would be like Paul and Barnabas persuading a soul of the need of forgiveness in Christ, and then telling him to return to his pagan temple and live for God! Willis Haymaker joined Billy Graham in 1949 as his crusade organizer,⁶⁸ and, as such, he would “call on the local Catholic bishop and other clerics to acquaint them with the Crusade plans and invite them to the meetings.”⁶⁹ Billy’s concern was that the Catholic bishops needed to understand that his “goal was not to get people to leave their church”⁷⁰ – he had no problem with people staying in their apostate denomination! Someone for whom Billy openly confessed to have a “special affinity,” was Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton Sheen.⁷¹ Throughout his life, Billy maintained a close association with many from the apostate Roman Catholic Church; he was quoted by *McCall’s* magazine (January 1978) as saying, “I’ve found that my beliefs are essentially the same as those of orthodox Roman Catholics.”⁷² The goal of every ecumenist, whether spoken or not, is to remove, or, at the very least, reduce the possibility of tribulation, while at the same time appearing to be more gracious and loving than those who hold to the Biblical truth. What do truth and error have in common? Paul charged the Corinthians, “Be ye [those who are believers in Christ] not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ...” (2 Corinthians 6:14); there is no place for those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to be joined with those who either flatly do not believe, or have distorted what they believe so that it no longer agrees with God’s Word. True Christians must not join with Roman Catholics or anyone who compromises God’s truth (that includes most Evangelicals). “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to [para – alongside of] the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).⁷³ This requires that we know the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15), for not everything that the errant will proclaim will be false, rather, it will usually be the more deadly mixture of truth and error – we must be discerning! “Beloved, believe not [do not be persuaded by] every spirit, but try [dokimazo – scrutinize to see if they are genuine (true to God’s Word)] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets [one who proclaims lies under the guise of truth] are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).⁷⁴



Fulton Sheen

One of the promises that Jesus gave to us was that “In the world ye shall have tribulation ...” (John 16:33), yet ecumenical accommodation has done its utmost to remove anything so distasteful from our lives. If Jesus promised it, and Paul and Barnabas told the new believers to expect it, then

⁶⁸ <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/001.htm#3>

⁶⁹ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am*, p. 163.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 692.

⁷² As quoted in: Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, p. 388.

⁷³ Strong’s Online.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

it must serve some purpose. “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11); if we choose to consider our trials as being from the Lord, then He will make sure that we learn of His righteousness through them. However, there is a caution: “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye* ... But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters” (1 Peter 4:14-15); in other words, we are to rejoice for the suffering that comes our way because of Christ, but there is no place for rejoicing when we suffer because of our own failures. I am reminded of Kent Hovind, a popular US creation-science debater, who deliberately violated state and federal laws, and then speaks of being persecuted when he is jailed for doing so.⁷⁵ We are to be



Kent Hovind

subject to the laws of the land (1 Peter 2:13-14) unless they are in violation of our obedience to the Lord (Acts 5:29). Hovind’s failure to withhold and remit payroll taxes does not fall into the latter category, and the Scriptures make it very clear that he is to live in subjection to the tax laws, no matter how unfair he thinks that they might be. His time in jail is his reward for violating state and federal laws, and cannot be construed to be persecution; this is simply justice, and Hovind should be repenting before the Lord, and not rejoicing in the suffering that he has brought upon himself. On the other hand, Peter says, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings ...” (1 Peter 4:12-13a). The messenger of Smyrna was experiencing the suffering of which Peter spoke, and Jesus assures him that He knows of the trials that he is facing.

Jesus tells this messenger that He has full knowledge of his *poverty*; he is destitute and in extreme poverty.⁷⁶ Then the Lord adds the assurance that he is abundantly rich; this is in the present tense – even while being in abject hardship, he is lavishly wealthy.⁷⁷ Jesus exhorted, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). The overseer of the flock at Smyrna had clearly accumulated treasures in heaven, despite his earthly poverty. “But they that will [determine to] be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition [utter destruction]. For the love of money [avarice – greed for wealth] is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith [to lead away from the truth to error (apostasy?)], and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:9-10).⁷⁸

⁷⁵ <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/15261/kent-hovind-evangelist-arrested-on-federal-charges>

⁷⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

⁷⁷ Strong’s Online.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

By contrast, Lisa Comes, Joel Osteen's sister, says this: "Remember, God delights in your prosperity! He wants to do something supernatural and new in your finances, even now!"⁷⁹ Joel Osteen is quoted as saying, "It's God's will for you to live in prosperity instead of poverty."⁸⁰ Osteen's whole work is founded on the concept of the power of the spoken word. He says, "Make a list of your goals, your dreams, the areas where you want to see change. Confirm your desires by Scripture, and then every day before you leave the house, speak those blessings aloud. Something supernatural happens when you speak those words aloud."⁸¹ What kind of words would these be? He tells us: "I am the head and I am not the tail. I will lend and I will not borrow. Everything I touch will prosper and succeed."⁸² Osteen quotes from Moses' words to Israel: "The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; **if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them**" (Deuteronomy 28:12-13). Unfortunately, he fails to provide the context for these words: obedience to the Lord's commands! These were conditional promises to Israel and Osteen casually rips them out of the context and turns them into a mantra that is supposed to bring prosperity. Beware!!



Lisa Comes

Why would this elder of Smyrna abide in poverty when, according to Joel Osteen, wealth was just a spoken word away? On the other hand, and more importantly, how can Osteen continue to



Joel Osteen

dupe thousands of people every day with such half-truths? "For the time will come when they will not endure [accept as valid, listen to] sound [accurate, correct] doctrine; but after [according to] their own lusts [passions] shall they heap to themselves [surround themselves with] teachers, having itching ears [*crave to hear what one wants to hear*]; And they shall turn away *their* ears from [stop listening to] the truth, and shall be turned unto fables [fiction, myths – the opposite of the truth]" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).⁸³ Today, the average Evangelical desires pleasant words that will bolster his already swollen self-esteem; he has **turned from** the truth of God's Word, and is **turned to** the high-sounding lies of the devil. In recent years, there has been an abundance of teachers who "wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13); Osteen, and the thousands who share his philosophy,

⁷⁹ <http://www.joelosteen.com/pages/article.aspx?h4tid=22>

⁸⁰ <http://www.famousquotes.com/author/joel-osteen/2>

⁸¹ <http://www.joelosteen.com/pages/article.aspx?h4tid=52>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Friberg Lexicon.

are deceiving multitudes even while they, themselves, are being deceived. Satan will ensure that these false teachers have plausible arguments by which they seem able to support their heresies (his lies), and he will reward them with the accolades of those who are mesmerized by their eloquence. “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake ...” (Philippians 1:29); if we are committed to Christ, then we will suffer with Him. We must not be persuaded by the lying words of the many false teachers who have pervaded modern Evangelicalism.

Jesus not only has a full knowledge (*oida* – *know*) of the struggles of the overseer of the assembly in Smyrna, but He is also fully aware of what is taking place around him. He knows that there are those who say that they are God’s chosen people (the Jews) but who, in reality, are of Satan. Jesus calls this *blasphemy* (*blasphemia*), which, by definition, can either be directed against people or God.⁸⁴ However, the blasphemy in this case is directed against God; there are those in Smyrna who are saying that they are the chosen of God when they *are not but a synagogue of Satan*.⁸⁵ The word *synagogue*, within this context, does not refer to a building but, rather, to the people who are assembled together; these are people who have come together, but not for the glory of God. *Satanas* (*Satan*), within the Greek, literally means adversary; this is the one who is the constant opponent of God and of His people.⁸⁶ Satan is the enemy of God, but the application of the word *adversary* goes well beyond the spirit-being, Satan. As Paul explains the past condition of the believers in Ephesus, he says that “... in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience ...” (Ephesians 2:2). It is the spirit of Satan that is also our adversary, and which is working in the hearts of those who do not walk according to God’s Word. Therefore, the *synagogue of Satan* would be an assembly of those who are disobedient to God’s directives; this is strong language, and certainly not in keeping with today’s pleasant, ecumenically-tolerant speech. This makes every ecumenical gathering, since they are living in disobedience to God’s commands, a part of the *synagogue of Satan*.

We might be surprised that there would be those who claim to be godly when they are not. To the religious elite of His day, Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men’s* bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). The scribes and Pharisees were those who felt that they held the advantage in knowing and doing what God really wanted from men; however, Jesus calls them *hypocrites*, or pretenders.⁸⁷ Therefore, if they were not those who knew God, even while they proclaimed that they did, then, in reality, they were part of the assembly of Satan (Matthew 23:15). To the Jews who did not believe in Him, Jesus said, “Ye are of *your* father the devil ...” (John 8:44); again, Jesus used strong words to underscore the necessity of our hearts to be fully committed to Him if we are to be counted as one of His. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

⁸⁴ Strong’s Online.

⁸⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁸⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

⁸⁷ Strong’s Online.

Chuck Colson, who labored to join the Catholics and Evangelicals together, stated: “Whenever other believers ask if I’m a fundamentalist ... I reply, ‘Certainly.’”⁸⁸ However, his definition of a fundamentalist is someone who “affirms these truths,” namely: 1) “the infallibility of Scripture, 2) the deity of Christ, 3) the Virgin Birth and miracles of Christ, 4) Christ’s substitutionary death, and 5) Christ’s physical resurrection and eventual return.”⁸⁹ He considered these to be the “orthodox truths” about Jesus, and, therefore, in his mind, every professing Christian who acknowledges these “is a fundamentalist.”⁹⁰ Colson did not shrink from the term fundamentalist, he simply redefined it to make it fit within his frame of reference. Rick Warren, who has seized the baton of ecumenism, and is seeking to carry it to the next level, has said, “There is a difference between ‘evangelicalism’ and ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘the religious right.’ [sic] And people use them like they are synonyms. They are not – they are very, very different. I



Chuck Colson

I am an evangelical. I’m not a member of the religious right and I’m not a fundamentalist.”⁹¹ In the same interview, Warren went on to define what he meant by *fundamentalist*: “Now the word ‘fundamentalist’ actually comes from a document in the 1920s called the Five Fundamentals of the Faith. And it is a very legalistic, narrow view of Christianity”⁹² What is demonstrated here is that nothing is as it may appear – it is only as it is understood in the mind of the one who is speaking, and then, possibly, only at that moment. Everything is in flux; nothing stays the same. Colson stripped the Word of God of much of what God requires of us so that he could marry the Evangelicals and the Catholics (just like he, as a Baptist, was married to a Catholic); Warren tosses everything out and sees fundamentalism as being legalism, and Christian fundamentalism as “one of the big enemies of the 21st century.”⁹³ The reality is that it is becoming increasingly easy to claim to be a Christian, remain an active participant in the world, and still be accepted as a Christian within Evangelicalism. “Love [*agapao* (verb form of *agape*)] not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love [*agape*] of the Father is [absolutely] not in him” (1 John 2:15).

To the elder of Smyrna, Jesus says that He knows all about those who make the pretense of being within the family of God, yet who, in reality, are a part of the work of Satan. We will come to see that this is a message of comfort for this overseer.

⁸⁸ Chuck Colson, *The Body*, p. 186.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2005/05/23/myths-of-the-modern-megachurch/>

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ <http://web.archive.org/web/20060116060443/http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/living/religion/13573441.htm>



10. 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.

To this overseer, to whom Jesus has previously said that He has full knowledge of all that he is enduring, Jesus now commands him not to fear what he is about to (*shalt*) be suffering (*suffer*).⁹⁴ Earlier we noted how this runs contrary to today's Evangelical philosophy, which seeks to banish anything that might reduce that which brings us pleasure. Clearly, the affliction that this messenger of Smyrna has undergone to this point will soon be increased, but Jesus requires that he not be afraid in the midst of what he will have to endure (*suffer*).⁹⁵

Jesus then goes on to describe what this overseer, and the *ekklesia* for which he is responsible, are about to face. The pronouns used for the next few phrases are plural; the suffering will not only be borne by the messenger, but by others within the assembly, as well. The word *behold* is used to draw our attention to what follows – namely, what the devil is about to (*shall*) do.

The devil will cast (throw) some from the assembly in Smyrna into prison.⁹⁶ We've just heard that there were those in Smyrna who proclaimed themselves to be of God even though they were of the adversary (the devil); now we see that some of these hypocrites were soon to have some of the true believers imprisoned. It was not long after the day of Pentecost that the disciples of the Lord were first jailed (Acts 4:1-3). Who put them into prison? It was the priests and Sadducees (the ruling, religious Jews of the day) who were filling the part of being adversaries to God's truth; we could say that the devil cast the disciples of the Lord into prison. So we can understand that it was not the spirit-being (the devil) who is about to incarcerate the believers of Smyrna; rather, it would be those who would fill the role of the devil in this matter – those who were walking “according to the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2).

Throughout the Middle Ages, we had what has been termed the Inquisition. An *inquisition* is defined as, “an official investigation, especially one of a political or religious nature, characterized by lack of regard for individual rights, prejudice on the part of the examiners, and recklessly cruel punishments.”⁹⁷ The Inquisition of this time is generally thought of in terms of the actions of the Roman Catholic Church; they define an *inquisition* as “a special ecclesiastical institution for combating or suppressing heresy” – a considerable contrast to the accepted definition.⁹⁸ The Catholic Church recognizes that this has fallen into disrepute in modern times, but they claim that this is because people “on the one hand ... have ceased to grasp religious belief as something objective, as the gift of God, and therefore outside the realm of free private judgment; on the other they no longer see in the [Roman Catholic] Church a society perfect and sovereign, based substantially on a pure and authentic Revelation, whose first most important duty must naturally be to retain unsullied this original deposit of faith.”⁹⁹ Therefore, when we read of the Roman Catholic Church applying their authority against those who did not follow their teachings (as in

⁹⁴ Strong's Online.

⁹⁵ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁹⁶ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁹⁷ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/inquisition>

⁹⁸ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08026a.htm>

⁹⁹ Ibid.

the Inquisition), they were simply exercising their responsibility to stamp heresy out wherever they found it. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent, although often seen as an official response to the Reformers, produced a written documentation of the Catholic attitude toward anyone who holds any teaching contrary to theirs. Completed in December of 1563, it contains a long list of curses (*anathemas*) against all of those who uphold doctrine contrary to what the Church has established;¹⁰⁰ the document was given official approval by the Catholic pope, Pius IV, who issued the “command that the same be received and inviolably observed by all the faithful of Christ”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, the Second Vatican Council, which concluded in 1965, declared: “This Sacred Council accepts with great devotion this venerable faith of our ancestors ... and it proposes again the decrees of the Second Council of Nicea, the Council of Florence and **the Council of Trent**” (emphasis added).¹⁰² What is assured is that the modern Roman Catholic Church has ratified the



Pius IV

anathemas of the Council of Trent, and the machinery for the Inquisition (as carried out during the Middle Ages) has not been disabled; the Church has changed its tactics but not its heart. The devil might appear to be an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), but that does not change who he is; Rome might appear to be a friend and great humanitarian, nevertheless, it still does the bidding of its father, the devil. Anyone who stands solidly on the Word of God cannot be a friend of Rome.

In Smyrna, the purpose for the impending imprisonment is so that the believers might be *tried*; the Greek word is *peirazo* (*pi-rad'-zo*), a determination of whether their words and actions agree – the integrity of the individual will be under scrutiny. If a personal conviction is only as deep as the words spoken, then it will not take a great deal of persuasion to change it; however, if it springs from the heart, then it will be much more difficult (if not impossible) to change it. We are called to remain steadfast

in our faith (1 Corinthians 15:58); if we change our persuasion (what we are persuaded of [believe] forms the basis of our faith), then we have fallen away or apostatized.

Those who are part of the assembly at Smyrna (*ye*) are advised that they will have (future tense) tribulation (*thlipsis*) for *ten days*; this is a statement of fact (*have* is in the indicative mood) – they **will** face difficult times. We have seen that the elder of this assembly was already enduring tribulation (v. 9), and the promise is made that the whole assembly will face such trials. However, they are assured that it will only be for a short time (*ten days*); the *ten days* does not refer to the passage of a week and a half of time, but rather to show that their oppression will not last forever. Speaking of those who did not know God, and those who refused to be obedient to His Word, Paul wrote that these “shall be punished [the penalty required for justice] with everlasting [without ending – *ten days* pales before the thought of *never ending*] destruction [ruin] from the presence

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15030c.htm>

¹⁰¹ <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>

¹⁰² “Lumen Gentium,” Chapter VII, No. 51; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

of the Lord ...” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).¹⁰³ Those who are bringing this oppression into the lives of the assembly at Smyrna will face an everlasting recompense for their sins – what we endure within our lifetimes is miniscule compared to what awaits those who refuse the salvation of God, or those who turn away from the hope that we have in Christ. We might face affliction in this life, but we are assured that the presence of the Lord will be with us through it (Hebrews 13:5).

Jesus now returns to addressing the elder of this assembly, and gives him a command: *be continually (present tense) faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*. Here is another dichotomy in the life of this overseer of Smyrna. Jesus has already said that he is poverty stricken even while he is rich; now, if he remains faithfully in Christ unto death, then he will receive a crown of life! The reality is that this short time of tribulation could result in death, yet the promise of the Lord is that by being faithful unto death, life will spring forth. “We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent [to go abroad] from the body, and to be present [at home] with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).¹⁰⁴

Evangelicals today claim this promise but choose to ignore the foundation upon which it is built – namely, faithfulness. They want the prize without running the race; they envision winning gold, even while they refuse to abide by the rules of the game. They love their ecumenical friends while despising the Word of God, which says that we are to remove ourselves from them. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark [keep a watchful eye on] them which cause divisions [disunity] and offences [stumbling block] contrary to [para – alongside of] the doctrine [teaching] which ye have learned; and avoid [turn away from] them. For they that are such serve [are serving] not [absolute] our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly [appetites/desires]; and by good [deceptively friendly] words and fair speeches [flattery] deceive [completely] the hearts of the simple [innocent, naïve, unsuspecting]” (Romans 16:17-18).¹⁰⁵ Notice that it is those who teach doctrine that is not in accordance with the Scriptures who bring disunity; *unity* is found only in Christ, and, therefore, to depart from what the Word of God teaches, that is the *division* spoken of here. Within Evangelicalism, this has been reversed – it is those who desire to adhere to the Scriptures who are most often accused of spreading disunity. The Evangelical focus on unity has become skewed: it is no longer about being united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, but, rather, being united with others who profess to be Christians!

Chuck Colson illustrated this so aptly:

John Aker, head of the Slavic Gospel Mission [more commonly known as the Slavic Gospel Association], offers a remarkable example [of building bridges to other traditions].

When this able young minister was pastoring the Evangelical Free Church in Montvale, New Jersey, he developed a close bond in Christ with a priest from a nearby parish, Ken Herbster. Together they came up with a bold scheme: Aker would preach at the midmorning Mass in Father Ken's church, and the priest would preach for the Sunday evening service at Aker's church.

To “cut their losses,” they later quipped, they chose Super Bowl Sunday when attendance might be somewhat diminished. But neither man was prepared for what happened.



¹⁰³ Strong's Online.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

Following John's message at the mid-morning Mass, the Catholic congregation spontaneously stood and applauded. That evening, without prompting, the same thing happened when Father Ken preached at the Evangelical Free Church. ...

Now, there have been many ecumenical pulpit exchanges in recent years. Protestants preach about self-esteem or human dignity in a Catholic church, and a priest may deliver a message about aid to Central America in a Protestant service. What made John Aker's experience so remarkable was that both he and Father Ken preached powerful gospel messages of salvation through Jesus Christ. And it was all the more remarkable because John Aker, of all people, should have been most unwelcome in a Catholic parish. For he had once been a Passionist monk, was released from his vows, converted to Protestantism, and graduated from Trinity Evangelical Seminary.

If any man knows the differences that divide, John Aker does. But he also knows that what binds us together is stronger than that which divides us.¹⁰⁶

Colson also wrote that “we must strive for unity, because it is the essence of the church.”¹⁰⁷ Notice that the unity in question is external, not spiritual unity with Christ, and so he was elated when a friend of his wrote: “Fresh winds are blowing everywhere among Catholics and Protestants ... because everybody who belongs to Jesus belongs to everybody who belongs to Jesus, I’ve decided to turn my polemical guns [passionate arguments] on the enemy – not so much on my family.”¹⁰⁸ The unity being promoted is ecumenical, and not the Biblical unity with Christ that we are called to maintain. Paul challenged the Ephesians to live in keeping with their holy calling, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1, 3). The *unity of the Spirit* is NOT ecumenical unity! The Spirit of God is not in ecumenism; God will not support what His Word condemns. The unity to which we are called to carefully attend (*keep*) is our position in Christ. “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). If we are *in Christ*, then we are no longer under God’s condemnation; likewise, if we are *in Christ*, we will then walk in accordance with the leading of the Spirit of God, Who is now abiding in us (Romans 8:9). When we read, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12), we must take this as an exhortation to give careful attention to the unity that we have with the Spirit of God. If we lose our unity with God’s Spirit, then we are apostate: “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9b).

Faithfulness, and perseverance in that faithfulness, is required if we would emerge from this life spiritually victorious. The challenge that Jesus gives the elder of the assembly in Smyrna is to remain faithful unto death, for then a crown of life will await him; the understanding is that if he does not remain faithful, then the crown of life will not be there. “... when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned [remembered]: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die” (Ezekiel 18:24).¹⁰⁹ This is not an involuntary error (a slip of the tongue, so to speak); rather, it is a deliberate action, taken by a righteous man, to commit iniquity – at that moment his faithfulness and righteousness vanish – he is apostate!

¹⁰⁶ Colson, *Body*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁹ Strong’s Online.

Jesus, during His earthly ministry, taught the same thing: “Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.¹¹⁰ But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence:¹¹¹ and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Matthew 18:23-35).

This is a case of complete forgiveness being extended, for we read that the king “loosed him and forgave him the debt” (v. 27). However, when the king heard that this servant chose not to extend the same compassion to a fellow servant, he was recalled to stand before him. At this point, the king reminds the servant that he had been forgiven all (*I forgave thee all that debt*), but he lost that forgiveness, and was now required to repay all that he owed (v. 32-34). What is unmistakable is that the king expected the forgiven servant to model the forgiveness that he had experienced. This metaphor may be beyond understanding within the context of modern Evangelical theology, however, it is easily understood if we accept the fact that a heart of unbelief can undo what God has done for us (2 Peter 2:20-21; Hebrews 3:12; 10:26-27). This servant went from being hopelessly debt-ridden to being made free (*loosed*),¹¹² yet he chose to not live in the freedom that he had been granted. As we endure in our belief that Christ died to pay for our debt of sin, then we are no longer under the condemnation of the law, which says that we must die (Romans 8:1), however, it also means that we must live in accordance with the leading of the Spirit of God! If we turn away from walking in the Spirit, then we, like this ungrateful servant, will discover that God has withdrawn His forgiveness, and reinstated the penalty for our sin (Hebrews 10:26-27). When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included the words “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” and He went on to explain, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12, 14-15). The word *forgive* that is used here comes from the same Greek word as that used by the king in freeing his servant from his great debt. There can be no doubt that the servant was forgiven by the king; he was freed from that huge debt that he was unable to pay (we should be able to identify with him). Nevertheless, because he was unwilling to extend a similar forgiveness to a fellow servant (to walk in the king’s spirit of forgiveness), the

¹¹⁰ One day’s wages was about one drachma; 6,000 drachmas equaled one talent. In today’s terms, this servant owed his master about 60,000,000 day’s wages or about \$4 billion dollars (at minimum wage).

¹¹¹ This would be about 100 day’s wages, or about \$7,000 (at minimum wage).

¹¹² Strong’s Online.

king withdrew his forgiveness and reinstated the massive debt from which this servant had been freed. What a vivid picture of the condition of the apostate!

To the elder of Smyrna, Jesus says, "... be thou faithful unto death" A familiar phrase is: *the just shall live by faith*, but have we considered the context for this? "Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back [to withdraw one's self], my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 10:38); these are God's words. The challenge given to the *angel* of Smyrna is something that we must all take to heart: remain faithful or you will lose the *crown of life*.

We read of this crown in just one other place: "Blessed is the man that endureth [*hupomeno* – to persevere, endure (present tense, active voice)] temptation [a trial or a proving]: for when he is tried [accepted (after being proven)], he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love [are loving (present tense)] him" (James 1:12).¹¹³ The *crown* is considered to be a symbol of victory or honor.¹¹⁴ Jesus has promised a crown of life (eternal life) to those who remain faithful to Him. "And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). Are we hated by all, or, at least, by some? Are we hated because of the stupid things that we have done, or because we bear the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? "For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20). We must examine ourselves whether we are in the faith of Christ, or simply endeavoring to keep up good appearances (2 Corinthians 13:5).



11. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Again, we find the open command that everyone who has a desire for understanding should take heed to what the Spirit is saying. We must not forget that there are lessons here to which we must be attentive (*hear* is a command!).

In similar fashion to verse seven, Jesus speaks to the one who is conquering, or overcoming (present tense) – the one who is remaining faithful to the Lord. However, that's where the similarity ends. To the one who is continuing to be victorious in the Lord, Jesus now says that he should not be harmed by the second death.¹¹⁵ The word *hurt* is in the subjunctive mood and appears here along with the two Greek negatives *ou* and *me*, which makes this the strongest negative possible in the Greek language;¹¹⁶ the one who is *overcoming* (a present tense reality) absolutely cannot be hurt by the *second death*. The *overcomer* is abiding in Christ and walking faithfully according to the guidance of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1) – as such, he is not under God's condemnation, and the *second death* is the ultimate expression of God's judgment against sin. However, remember that apostasy is a reality! Jesus warned us: "Take heed that no man [no one] deceive you [should lead you away from the right way]" (Matthew 24:4b).¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Strong's Online.

¹¹⁴ Vine's "crown."

¹¹⁵ Strong's Online.

¹¹⁶ https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive_uses.pdf

¹¹⁷ Strong's Online.

To look at the modern landscape of Evangelicalism, you would wonder why the Scriptures are filled with exhortations to be careful, to remain steadfast, and to guard against becoming unfaithful; Evangelicals, who are, for the most part, ecumenical, do not pay any attention to these many warnings from God. They offer lip-service to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” However, for some reason, more times than not the reproofs of Scripture fall on deaf ears. We live in a time when even those who profess a desire to walk in God’s ways only have an appetite for soft words of approval; their swollen egos can only tolerate the gentle strokes of eloquent homilies designed to bolster their sensitive self-image. Any declaration of “thus saith the Lord” is deemed to be much too harsh and judgmental. There are no *overcomers* among modern Evangelicals, only those who have been overcome by the heresy that now passes for “Christianity.” Paul’s words to the Galatians are so appropriate for today: “If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received [in the Scriptures], let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9).

This is the first mention that we have of the *second death*. We read that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment ...” (Hebrews 9:27), which we would consider to be the first death. We are all destined to die physically; our corrupt bodies will return to the earth, even as the Lord promised to Adam (Genesis 3:19). If we are believing in the Lord as our Deliverer from sin, and if we remain faithful to Him until we enter that first death, only then will we become overcomers (Hebrews 3:6) and have our part in the first resurrection, which takes place when Christ returns to 1) resurrect those who have died in Him, and 2) catch those away who are still alive and remaining faithful, to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). We must not miss the need to faithfully continue in the Lord to the end; Jesus said, “... he that shall endure [to stand one’s ground, not flee] unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).¹¹⁸ Even as we accept the Lord’s words that the one who endures to the end will be saved, so we must acknowledge that the one who does not endure to the end will not be saved – once again, we find Biblical support for apostasy. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power ...” (Revelation 20:6). We now know who will **not** have a part in the second death! However, what is the *second death*? “But the fearful [cowardly], and unbelieving [unfaithful], and the abominable [detestable, abhorrent], and murderers, and whoremongers [sexually immoral], and sorcerers [those who use drugs for magic or witchcraft], and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth [present tense, includes the idea of keeping it burning¹¹⁹] with fire and brimstone [sulfur]: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).¹²⁰ This is the place called *Gehenna*, a place of eternal, fiery punishment; Jesus assured the scribes and Pharisees, the religious elite of His day, that they would find their place in *hell*, or *Gehenna* (Matthew 23:33), that place of eternal torment. Jesus also said, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ...” (Matthew 25:41); this place of eternal torment was made ready (*prepared* – perfect tense) for the devil and his angels – **not for man**! However, this place of eternal torment will become the habitation for all those who do not overcome (those who do not remain faithful to the Lord), no matter how religious they might be.

¹¹⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹⁹ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹²⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

As we come to understand the significance of the *second death*, we will also realize the importance of overcoming. We must be sure that we understand who is **not** overcoming, and what it is that places him in this area of condemnation, so that we can ensure that we are not among them (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Within the context of our consideration, there are two categories of those who are not overcoming. Firstly, there are those who have never ascribed to the truth of God. Within this group there are two sub-groups: 1) the outright pagan who has never professed to hold any affinity for God, and who will often openly admit that he is destined for hell (and remains unconcerned about that reality); 2) the religious pagan who, like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, has been deluded into thinking that he is okay, and will make it into heaven someday/somehow. I fear that many Evangelicals will find themselves in this latter group (deluded and lost); since most are no longer being taught the truth of God's Word, they are placing their faith in manmade theologies that do not hold spiritual life. Paul warned Timothy of a day when men would be "lovers of their own selves [selfish] ... having a form [appearance] of godliness, but denying [having denied]¹²¹ – the perfect tense means that they have either never accepted, or have rejected, the power of godliness that is in Christ] the power thereof ..." (2 Timothy 3:2, 5); these are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge] of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).¹²² Here we find the religious of Jesus' day (Matthew 23:33) as well as all of those today who profess to be Christians yet refuse to abide by the Lord's commands – "He that saith, I know [perfect tense (happens once) – *have come to know*] him [God], and keepeth not [present tense – is not attending carefully to] his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is [absolutely] not in him" (1 John 2:4).¹²³ If you say that you have come to know God (something that most Evangelicals will readily profess) but you are not doing what God has said that we are to do, then you are devoid of the truth! Today's best test is this: are you spiritually separate from all of those who are ecumenical? Jesus warned such people: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth [present tense – *is doing*] 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 (*ginosko*) you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).¹²⁴ To these professors of religious activities, Jesus says that not at any point in time (*never*) has He acknowledged (*knew*) their claim to be His;¹²⁵ they are totally unknown to Him. On another occasion, Jesus openly declared, "I know (*ginosko* – am acquainted with) my sheep" (John 10:14); Jesus knows those who are His, but He does not know those who are not doing the will of God. They may well have done miracles (*wonderful works*) in the name of the Lord, but Jesus calls their activities wickedness (*iniquity*).¹²⁶

A second group, within those who are not overcoming, are those who are called apostate, which is an area of great confusion today. Probably the best way to look at this is to begin with a definition of what *apostasy* means. One modern dictionary defines it as, "a total desertion of or departure

¹²¹ Young's Literal Translation.

¹²² Strong's Online.

¹²³ Ibid.

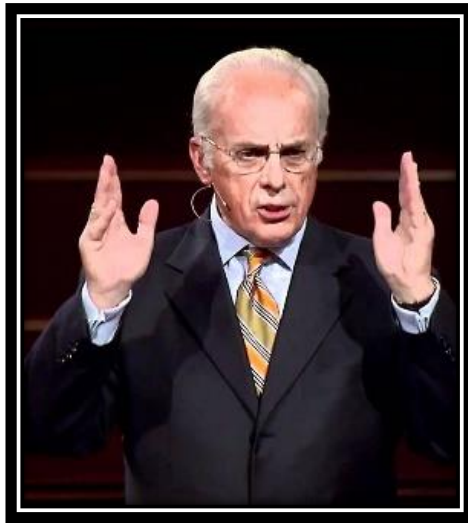
¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

¹²⁶ Strong's Online.

from one's religion ...,"¹²⁷ another says, "renunciation of a religious faith" or "abandonment of a previous loyalty."¹²⁸ An older dictionary states that it is "an abandonment of what one has professed; a total desertion, or departure from one's faith or religion."¹²⁹ A theological dictionary says, "Apostasy is the falling away from the Christian faith. It is a revolt against the truth of God's word by a believer."¹³⁰ In the words of a highly respected theologian, "It speaks of abandonment, a separation, a defection – the abdication of truth altogether."¹³¹ The overall tone is that *apostasy* requires something to be left behind, deserted, or abandoned; there is a separation from, or a departure from, something; in essence, there has been a fundamental shift from one thing to another.

It is at this point that the difficulties begin to arise. Having just provided a very acceptable definition of what *apostasy* really is, John MacArthur then goes on with this: "Can a genuine



John MacArthur

Christian fall away from the faith and become apostate? No."¹³² It seems that he wants to differentiate between a "Christian" and a "genuine Christian." However, he undermines his own definition of apostasy by calling *apostate* those "who profess faith in Christ and identify themselves as disciples but who never genuinely embrace the truth."¹³³ Paul tells the Thessalonians that it is those who have accepted a "love for the truth" who will be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10); *love* is from the Greek word *agape*, a love that is an act of the will, not a product of the emotions.¹³⁴ Clearly, the people to whom MacArthur is referring are not born-again Christians; they might like to appear to be Christians, and they may have even learned some of the language and customs that are common within Christian circles, but that is not enough to qualify as saving faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that

without a love for the truth, salvation is not possible! Therefore, if such a "Christian" forsakes the façade that they have been cultivating, are they apostate? What has this person abandoned? He has forsaken his façade, and has begun to act in accordance with his unregenerate heart; in essence, he has ceased to be a hypocrite, and is now being true to his convictions. Is he apostate? Clearly not! He never embraced the truth so that he might be saved, therefore, he was never saved; he never deserted faith in Christ because he never had it to begin with!

¹²⁷ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/apostasy>

¹²⁸ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apostasy>

¹²⁹ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), "apostasy."

¹³⁰ <http://carm.org/dictionary-apostasy>

¹³¹ John MacArthur, *The Truth War*, p. 43.

¹³² Ibid.

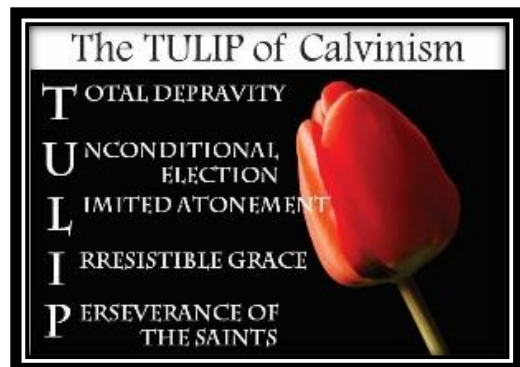
¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Strong's Online.

However, consider MacArthur's position: as a Calvinist, he cannot accept the Scriptures that teach the reality of apostasy. Since he ascribes to the unconditional election of those who will be saved, and the perseverance of the saints (these are the U and P of the five points of Calvinism identified by TULIP¹³⁵), he cannot accept that any true believers will be lost through their own faithlessness. Within this theology, if you are among the elect, then there is nothing that you can do to become lost; likewise, if you are not among the elect, then there is nothing that you can do to be saved. MacArthur prefers to maintain the integrity of his theology rather than to embrace the truth of Scripture in this matter – hence the confusion that he creates.

Nevertheless, the Scriptures do teach that it is possible for those who have been saved to forsake their salvation. Jesus, while speaking to His disciples, said, "Take heed that no man [may] deceive you" (Matthew 24:4); *deceive* is in the subjunctive mood, which means that this is a possibility, but not a certainty.¹³⁶ Evangelicals (and MacArthur) would have us to believe that this is not possible, or else they excuse Jesus' comment because Judas was in the company. Shortly after this, Jesus said, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). This does not mean that it is not possible to lead the elect away from the truth (*deceive*) but rather that, if they are able, these false Christs and prophets will, in fact, deceive some of the elect. Jesus declared apostasy (the falling away of those who have been saved) to be a real possibility! Among those who are not overcoming, there will be apostates – those who began in Christ, but did not remain faithful, or endure, to the end.

However, there is something more that we must know about those who are truly apostate: restoration to faith in Christ is not possible. "For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened [imbued with saving knowledge¹³⁷] ... If they shall fall away [*having fallen away*; the Greek carries no *if*; having committed apostasy¹³⁸], to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4, 6). Jesus calls us to repentance (Matthew 9:13); He died once for our salvation (Hebrews 9:28), and, in like manner, we can be saved only once. This does not mean that if we inadvertently sin that we have lost our salvation, nor does it mean that we will never sin again. To the Romans, Paul commanded them to continually "reckon ... yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11); the unspoken reality is that there will be times when we will fail to account (*reckon*) ourselves as being dead to sin, and will falter in our walk with God. What we learn shortly afterwards, is that both the Spirit of God and the Lord Jesus Christ are interceding for us with the Father (Romans 8:26, 28). If it is our desire to walk according to the Spirit of God, then sin will not be the norm in our lives (Romans 6:5-6; 1 John 3:9); if sin characterizes our living, then we have not known God (1 John 3:6). Through Christ, we have been



¹³⁵ <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/dabney/5points.htm>

¹³⁶ Strong's Online.

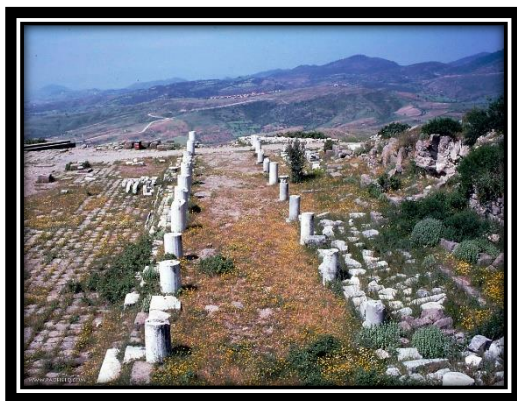
¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Gingrich Lexicon.

freed from the bondage of sin, and have become the servants of righteousness; therefore, we are to “yield [our] members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Romans 6:19). As part of our sanctification in Christ, we are to yield ourselves unto righteousness (to place ourselves at the disposal of righteousness¹³⁹ – namely, Christ!); we are to do the yielding (active voice, imperative mood). Clearly, if we could no longer sin (after being born again by the Spirit of God), then this command (and our action) would not be necessary. In Romans 7, Paul bemoans the struggle that it is to live righteously, yet he emerges from this in the victory of Romans 8:1 – “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*” What we learn from the rest of Scripture is that the falling away referred to in Hebrews 6:6 is not an inadvertent sinful deed in our walk with the Lord, but rather a deliberate act of turning away from Him (rationalized disobedience is often the first step). “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins [the reason for this is given in Hebrews 6:6], But a certain fearful looking for of judgment [condemnation] and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot [to treat with disdain] the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified [notice, this one who is sinning wilfully had been made holy through the blood of Christ!], an unholy thing, and hath done despite [insult] unto the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:26-29, this is confirmed by 2 Peter 2:20-21).¹⁴⁰ For those who have apostatized from faith in Christ, there is no hope, only condemnation; these will join the wicked, and be numbered among those who are not overcomers – those who will face the *second death*.



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



Ruins of Ancient Pergamos

Jesus now turns His attention to the overseer (elder) of the *ekklesia* in Pergamos, and directs John to write to him. When John turned and saw Jesus, he saw that “out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword” (1:16). As we noted earlier, this *sword* is a large weapon that would be used in warfare (in contrast to the small dagger of sharp discernment referred to in Hebrews 4:12); this is a weapon of judgment.¹⁴¹ The first words of Jesus, to the *angel* (messenger) of Pergamos, are that He has a sword that is used for inflicting judgment – an indication that what follows will include His condemnation.

¹³⁹ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁴⁰ Strong’s Online.

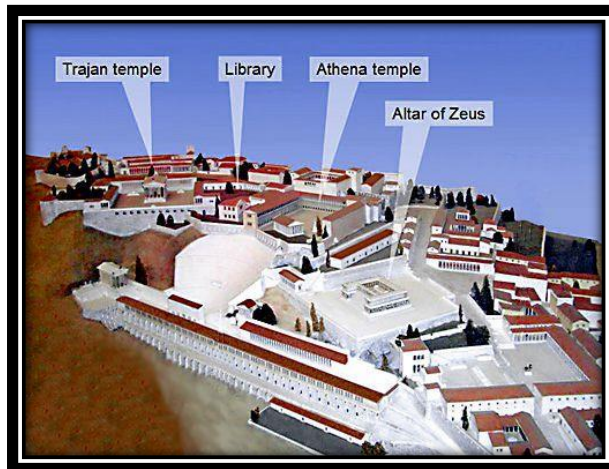
¹⁴¹ Ibid.



13. 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.

In similar words to those used with the previous two messengers, Jesus declares that He has full knowledge (*know*, *oida* in Greek) of the activities and deeds of this elder. Once again, He begins with a declaration of His omniscience – there is nothing that this elder is doing of which Jesus is not fully aware. In like manner, there is nothing that we do or think that is not known to the Lord. The Psalmist wrote, “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest [to sift] my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. For *there is* not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether” (Psalm 139:1-4).¹⁴² God is all-knowing! After describing the sharp, discerning dagger (*sword*) of God's word, the writer of Hebrews states: “Neither [absolute form] is there any creature [creation, anything created] that is not manifest [*aphanes* (*a* – not, *phanes* – seen) invisible, hidden; *not manifest*, although an acceptable translation, changes the sense of what is being expressed by including the word *not*] in his sight: but [*and*] all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do [with Whom we have to reckon¹⁴³]” (Hebrews 4:13).¹⁴⁴ We might be able to dupe others some of the time, but we can never fool God.

Jesus goes on to say that He is completely aware of where this elder is living – namely, in Pergamos, *where Satan's seat* is. The ancient city of Pergamos was built on several levels, from the lower portion that was located along the Caicus (kī'-kūs) River, to the acropolis some 1300 feet above.¹⁴⁵ The acropolis included the



Ancient Pergamos

Temple of Trajan (dedicated to the emperor) and the Temple of Athena, and between the two temples was their famous library (said to house some 200,000 volumes).¹⁴⁶ On a terrace close by, was the Altar of Zeus – a massive U-shaped structure (resembling a throne) that now rests in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.¹⁴⁷ Zeus, considered to be the father of gods and men,¹⁴⁸ is viewed within Greek mythology as being the supreme deity, and is typically represented as being muscular and sporting a grey beard.¹⁴⁹ Since all aspects of mythology are contrary to the Jehovah of the Bible, we can safely

¹⁴² Strong's Online.

¹⁴³ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁴⁴ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.bibleplaces.com/pergamum.htm>

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/go/Aegean/Bergama/sites/acropolis.html>

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus#cite_note-3

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Zeus>

conclude that the origin of all mythological gods rests entirely with Satan. Jesus describes Pergamos as being the place where Satan's throne (*seat; thronos* in Greek) is;¹⁵⁰ many believe that the Altar of Zeus was that throne where the deceived could worship at the altar of the king of all that is anti-God, namely Satan. An altar is typically a raised platform where religious ceremonies are conducted.¹⁵¹ Even though German archeologists excavated and moved the Altar of Zeus to Berlin, there is still a raised area at the site, and what they took includes many stairs leading to a well-raised, U-shaped platform where the religious ceremonies would have been carried out. Although there were several temples constructed to Zeus, this seems to be the only altar of its kind, undoubtedly making the worship of Zeus (Satan) more accessible to the ordinary people.

Jesus recognized that the elder in Pergamos was living where there was a strong satanic influence; the opposition to the truth of God would have been significant. Pergamos was considered to be the religious center for this area,¹⁵² a place to which people would come from miles around for the express purpose of demonstrating their commitment to the prevailing, satanic mythology. Satan would have ensured that there was strong opposition to the work of the messenger (elder). However, through all of this, Jesus commends this overseer for remaining firmly committed to His name (*krateo* – basic meaning, to be strong: *holdest fast* – to keep carefully and faithfully; present tense).¹⁵³ At the time that John was writing this message, this elder was still clinging to the name of Jesus, and he had absolutely not denied “*My faith.*”

What is the *faith* of Jesus Christ? Paul, as he wrote that strongly corrective letter to the Galatians, declared: “We *who are Jews* by nature ... Knowing [*oida* – fully known] that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by [if not through] **the faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed [been convinced] in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified **by the faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified [*because every flesh will not be justified by the works of the law*]” (Galatians 2:15-16).¹⁵⁴ We have seen that to believe means to be persuaded of the truth of something; faith, in turn, involves the expression of that belief – our confidence and trust being lived out through actions in keeping with that firm persuasion (belief). The *faith of Christ* (a noun, not a verb) speaks of the body of truth that forms the basis for our persuasion (belief) and actions (faith, belief expressed) – sometimes referred to as doctrine.¹⁵⁵ Paul wrote that to a Christian from a Jewish tradition, it was understood that the works of the Law did not bring salvation, rather, it was faith in the promise of Jehovah that He was sending the Messiah Who would open the way to spiritual rebirth; the works of the Law were to be an expression of their faith in God (Isaiah 1:11-15; James 2:17-18). Paul says that we will **not** be justified by the works of the Law, but we **might be** declared righteous through the body of truth concerning Jesus Christ (the One to Whom the Mosaic Laws pointed as the coming Savior). “So then faith *cometh* by [from] hearing, and hearing by [through] the word [utterance] of God” (Romans 10:17).¹⁵⁶ In other words, faith comes by hearing God speak to us, and persuading us of the veracity of His Word so that we believe. How does God speak to us? It is through His Word,

¹⁵⁰ Strong's Online.

¹⁵¹ Encarta Dictionary, “altar.”

¹⁵² <http://bibleencyclopedia.com/pergamos.htm>

¹⁵³ Strong's Online.

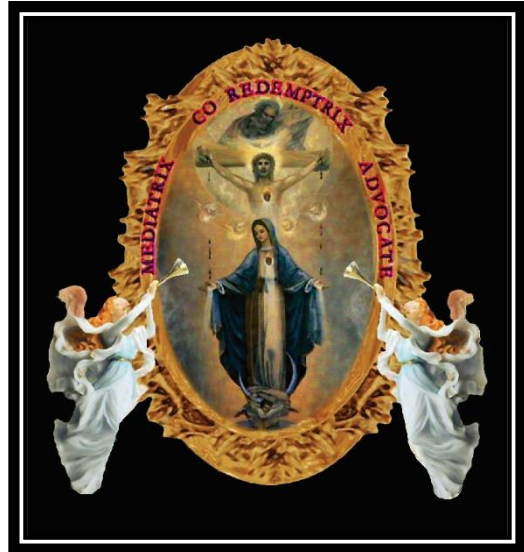
¹⁵⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

which is “able to make thee wise [instruct] unto salvation through [the] faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15b)! Central to our salvation is what we believe concerning Jesus Christ. “Looking unto [to look with undivided attention] Jesus the author [Originator] and finisher of *our* [the] faith ...” (Hebrews 12:2a). It is through the Word of God that we can learn (be instructed) about Who Jesus Christ is, and how we can be counted among those whom He has purchased out of sin. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); our freedom from sin can only be found in Him. God’s word to us, about the liberation that He has prepared for us, is a very narrow message of hope – a message of what He has accomplished for us, which we cannot, and must not try to, change in the smallest detail. Saving faith, therefore, is only possible through a precise and correct knowledge of Jesus – Who He is, what He has accomplished through His death and resurrection, and understanding that He is coming back to raise us to new life with Him.

It is at this point that ecumenism has erred – they have distorted, downplayed, and even denied the faith of Jesus Christ. *Ecumenical* comes from a Latin word that means general, or universal.¹⁵⁷ The ecumenical movement has tentacles that reach almost everywhere today, always seeking to draw those who claim to be Christians into one broad fellowship – we are all part of a universal church, at least within their minds. This fellowship is accomplished by downplaying, or denying, some of the central teachings of Scripture regarding Jesus Christ. Jesus’ simple declaration that He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6) suffers greatly under this general fellowship. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, promotes salvation through Mary. On September 5, 1895, Pope Leo XIII included this in his encyclical (a report commonly circulated among the upper echelon of the Church): “O Virgin most holy, none abounds in the knowledge of God except through thee; none, O Mother of God, attains salvation except through thee; none receives a gift from the throne of mercy except through thee.”¹⁵⁸ After this fashion, the Roman Catholics present Mary, the mother of Jesus, as being a Mediatrix (Mary mediates with God on our behalf¹⁵⁹), and a Co-Redemptrix (Mary is “co-Redemptress” with Christ in our salvation¹⁶⁰). What happens when an Evangelical, who professes to believe that salvation can only be found in Jesus Christ, joins together with a Roman Catholic? It is understood that the Evangelical will downplay his belief in Christ as the only Savior in order to maintain his general companionship with the Catholic; if he did not ignore his belief (at least temporarily), then he would recognize that the Catholic is a heretic (and not a Christian), and he would then separate from him in accordance with 2 Corinthians 6:14-17. The Evangelical who professes Christ as the only way of salvation, must, in essence, deny the Lord Jesus Christ so that he can warm his hands at the fire of ecumenism; however, when a watchman sounds the alarm within his hearing, unlike Peter, you



¹⁵⁷ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=e&p=3&allowed_in_frame=0

¹⁵⁸ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_05091895_adiutricem_en.html

¹⁵⁹ http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_le13is.htm

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

will not find him repenting of his sin (Matthew 26:75) but, rather, he will accuse the watchman of being legalistic and judgmental.

Therefore, within a ministerial association (which we have right here in Three Hills) you have all denominations coming together to accomplish certain tasks (sharing the ministry to the elderly, for example), and holding special community services from time-to-time. Every Evangelical church leader who participates in this association, can only do so by denying the words of the One Whom they profess as their Lord. However, this ecumenical mind goes well beyond the leadership. Everyone who sits under their teaching, or holds membership in their respective churches, is consenting to what they are doing, and shares in their guilt of denying the Lord Jesus Christ! This is one reason why the Biblical doctrine of separation from all that is error is so critically important (Romans 16:17); modern Evangelicalism has grown out of a clearly enunciated denial of Biblical separation and a hearty acceptance of all that is ecumenical.¹⁶¹

However, do not expect to hear only false teaching from such as these! Satan is far too crafty for that. What you will hear is teaching that might well be 95% truth, but included within their homilies, though unidentified, will be their error. A fisherman does not just throw a hook into the water and expect to catch fish (only Peter could do that with the Lord's specific instruction to do so [Matthew 17:27]); no, he uses a lure – something that is, or looks like, food to the fish, but within it is a barb that will hook the fish and cost it its life. Sitting under the teaching of an ecumenist can be just as alluring and equally deadly, spiritually speaking. If you long to live in spiritual victory being guided by the Spirit of God, but you continue to sit under the teaching of someone who is associated with ecumenism, then you will end up being spiritually confused, and a life of victory will allude you. Once you have recognized the error of those around you, you must immediately extract yourself in accordance with 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; do not delude yourself into thinking that you can remain in order to be a light in the darkness (Matthew 5:16) – when you live in disobedience to God's Word, you have no light to shine! Charles Spurgeon understood the necessary reality of separation: "It is never right to do a little wrong to obtain the greatest possible good . . . Your duty is to do the right: consequences are with God."¹⁶² Obedience to the Word of God must **always** come before our rational arguments; God's call to separation is for the protection of our spiritual purity in Him. When we deliberately fill our minds with the teachings of those who are ecumenical, we jeopardize the spiritual victory that we have been promised in Christ. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). This is a conditional promise of acceptance by the Lord: **if** you separate yourself, **then** the Lord will receive you. Conversely, if you ignore God's call for separation, then you have broken the condition upon which this promise hangs, and the Lord will not receive you! It is eternally important that we understand the Word of God on this matter, and do what He has commanded. Jesus explained, "If a man love me, he will keep [attend carefully to] my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (John 14:23-24).¹⁶³ How do we express our love

¹⁶¹ That is the proclamation of New Evangelicalism made by Harold Ockenga in 1948 (*Foreword to The Battle for the Bible.*)

¹⁶² <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/SPURGEON-QUOTES.htm>

¹⁶³ Strong's Online.

for the Lord? Obedience to His words is how we become the place of residence for God; His presence in us is initiated by faith, but it is kept by obedience (1 John 3:24a). Jesus also said, “If ye love me, keep [attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15). Obedience is not legalism; Jesus openly declared it to be an expression of our love for Him. Do not be fooled, or intimidated, by the ecumenists who love the fellowship of those of like mind and deny the Lord Whom they also claim to love. The elder at the *ekklesia* in Pergamos was not an ecumenist – he had not denied the faith of Christ!

This overseer remained faithful to Christ even when Antipas was killed for his faithful witness (*martyr* – Greek, *martoos*).¹⁶⁴ Evidently, Pergamos was a hot spot for violent persecution, yet, through all of this, Jesus proclaims the faithfulness of this elder. Clearly, Antipas did not die accidentally – he was killed for his witness as a follower of Christ! Jesus emphasizes that he died among those of this *ekklesia* who are where Satan is dwelling (present tense); Jesus has full knowledge (*I know* – Greek, *oida*) that this place is rife with paganism.¹⁶⁵



14. 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.

However, despite this elder holding fast to the name of Jesus, and having not denied the faith of Christ, Jesus is holding a few things against him, and He immediately outlines the problems. It is noteworthy that the difficulties are not with the overseer himself, but with what he is permitting those within the *ekklesia* to do. As the overseer, it was his responsibility to ensure that the teaching within the assembly was in keeping with the Word of God; however, when he openly allowed some to depart from the truth (to believe heretical doctrine), he had failed to adequately guard the assembly from heresy (Titus 3:10), and was permitting them to be exposed to spiritual danger.

There are those under this elder’s oversight who are holding (present tense) to the teachings of Balaam.¹⁶⁶ *Holding* comes from the Greek root word *krateo*, which means to be mighty or strong, from which comes the idea of prevailing, conquering, and holding the upper hand.¹⁶⁷ As we consider this word in light of the context, it is evident that those who were *holding* to the *doctrine of Balaam* were not inconsequential within this assembly – it appears that they had gained much more than just a toe-hold. Pergamos was the seat of strong satanic influence, and, even though the elder had retained his focus on the Lord, it is clear that there were some very strong individuals within the assembly who were not heeding his teaching, and were propagating heresy.

Who was Balaam? We read here that he taught Balac how to cause the Israelites to stumble by eating food offered to idols and committing fornication. You will recall that Balac (or Balak, as it appears in the OT) feared defeat by the Israelites as they journeyed to the promised land – he had heard of the overthrow of many nations, most recently the Amorites, and so he sought the expertise of Balaam to curse the Israelites so that he could then conquer them (Numbers 22:2-6). Even

¹⁶⁴ Strong’s Online.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

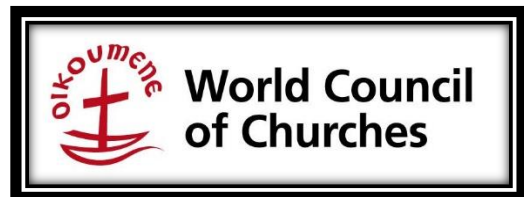
¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

though the delegation from Moab (Balac's people) and Midian (people who went along in support of Balac's petition) went to Balaam seeking divination, which is normally occultic in nature and forbidden by God, it seems that Balaam was not the typical occultic pagan. When the delegation presented their petition, Balaam's response was: "Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you" (Numbers 22:13); in his response, Balaam refers to Jehovah (*LORD*), the one true God, and the God of Israel. Despite Balaam's declaration that he could not go beyond what Jehovah permitted (Numbers 22:18), it seems that the prize that Balac offered to him was simply too much for him to abandon. Even though he could not curse Israel, for the Lord God put words of blessing into his mouth (Numbers 23:5, 16), and even though he proclaimed a Messianic prophecy (Numbers 24:17), he evidently returned to provide Balac with counsel on how he could cause Israel to sin against the Lord, and, as a result, be judged by Him (Numbers 31:8, 16, along with this verse). It was through the women of Moab that Israel turned away from the Lord to foreign gods (Numbers 25:1-2), and 24,000 died in the plague that the Lord sent in punishment for their evil (Numbers 25:9). It was through Balaam's words that the Moabites brought the Lord's judgment upon Israel, whether or not Balaam ever realized the reward that he was initially offered, we are not told, but it would seem that he tried to get it by providing counsel that would drive a wedge between Jehovah and Israel.

So, what was the *doctrine of Balaam*? As we look at Balaam, we recognize that even though he communicated with Jehovah, his heart was not filled with love for Him. Even though he realized that he could not speak anything other than what Jehovah gave to him, he was not dissuaded from trying to gain the prize that Balac dangled before him. His counsel to Balac was to entice the people of God to sin: encourage the women to mingle with the men of Israel,¹⁶⁸ show them that they are a people of similar desires and appetites (after all, they were family – they came from common ancestry, being descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew), and then lure Israel to participate in their religious practices (Numbers 25:2). Balaam understood that Jehovah would bring judgment upon Israel for such disobedience; his counsel was to get Israel to violate the commands of God, and, thereby, to be a curse to themselves. There are two branches to Balaam's doctrine: 1) it's alright to physically compromise the commands of God for we are all family (we can hold to our understanding of God even while we participate with those who believe differently), and 2) our spiritual lives and physical lives are mutually exclusive, therefore what we do in our bodies has no bearing on our spirituality. How do these find expression today?

First of all, the thought that we can retain our understanding of Who God is even while we join together with those of differing beliefs, finds its expression through ecumenism and contextualization. Ecumenism is prolific today – to the extent that it is virtually considered to be the norm within Christianity. From the World Council of Churches, which brings most of the liberal denominations under one umbrella, through to the local ministerial association, there has been a concerted effort made for everyone to come together because we all hold the "Bible" in common. As we have already seen, this can only be done by denying some of the fundamental truths of Scripture (particularly as it relates to Jesus being the only way of salvation); God has very specifically commanded us to have no part with those who do not



¹⁶⁸ The word *whoredom* in Numbers 25:1 identifies this as men pursuing women (Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon [BDB], *Bibleworks* 8).

hold to His Word (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Therefore, we must accept the responsibility to separate from the ecumenical movement, from the ecumenist (spiritually speaking) who participates in ecumenical activities, and also from the one who sits under the ecumenist's teaching. God has called us to holiness, and we must practice Biblical separation in order to maintain spiritual purity. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies [destructive false teachings], even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring [bringing – present tense] upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow [imitate or comply with] their pernicious ways [utter ruin] ..." (2 Peter 2:1-2a).¹⁶⁹ The *swift destruction* of these false teachers who will be among us, will be spiritual, and not necessarily physical: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment [condemnation] and fiery indignation, which shall [is about to] devour the adversaries [those who oppose]" (Hebrews 10:26-27).¹⁷⁰ We must guard our ways lest we be lured away from the truth!



Perhaps a little less known, is a growing acceptance of the missiological concept called contextualization, which is especially gaining ground within Islamic works and seeks to separate the spiritual and the physical. What is meant by this is that, for example, a Muslim can convert to Christianity and still continue to participate in many of the traditions of his Islamic

culture. From the website of Xenos Christian Fellowship, a mission practicing this error, we read, "These believers usually attend the mosque, commonly pray traditional Muslim prayers, fast, and do all the things their Islamic neighbors do. Yet there are two key differences between Muslims and Muslim **followers of Isa**" (emphasis added).¹⁷¹ Justification for this mind-boggling departure from being truly born-again by the Spirit of God, takes several paths. The creative interpretation of the Koran becomes the first area of difference: "... some Islamic teaching is reinterpreted along biblical lines, while some Islamic doctrines are rejected completely."¹⁷² The propagators of contextualization feel free to change the meaning of a pagan book so as to make it align more with the Bible; if they can't stretch the false teaching that far, then they will reject it. Consequently, they now have two books from two different religions (their form of Christianity is ONLY a religion), and both contain many rejected passages (I say *both* because they are not following the Word of God, either). They go on to identify the second key difference as being: "biblical believers meet regularly for Bible study, prayer and fellowship. This provides a venue for Bible teaching and instruction, discipleship, and community building."¹⁷³ First of all, these *followers of Isa* are NOT *biblical believers* (they remain firmly rooted in paganism), and, secondly, what kind of *Bible teaching and instruction* could be imparted when the whole premise is to continue to live as a Muslim? The overwhelming clincher is their attempt to use the Bible to justify contextualization: they abuse 1 Corinthians 7, particularly verses 20 and 24 as their foundation for this heresy: "Let

¹⁶⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁷⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁷¹ <http://www.xenos.org/essays/contextualization-building-bridges-muslim-community>.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called”; “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.” In their minds, this means that if you are a pagan when you become a Christian, then it is acceptable to remain in your paganism and practice your Christianity in secret.

This is a demonstration of the ability of man to rationalize virtually anything and make the Bible say whatever they desire in an effort to support what they want to do. First Corinthians seven is a passage where Paul works through some matters concerning marriage in light of the Corinthian’s disregard of the body and neglect of the marriage relationship. He says that if a believing husband or wife has an unbelieving mate, and the unbeliever is happy to remain in the relationship, then they should remain together (vs. 12-13). He then goes on to illustrate this concept further by saying that if you are circumcised or uncircumcised, when you come to the Lord, then don’t seek to change it – for neither one matters in the least (vs.18-19); or, if you are a servant when you are born-again, it matters not, for you are the Lord’s freeman; likewise, if you are a freeman when you become a Christian, you are Christ’s servant (vs. 21-22). After providing these examples to demonstrate that whatever your station in life when you come to faith in Christ, don’t be bothered by it, for that is not central to your new life in Christ; Paul then returns to the subject of marriage. However, the heretics behind contextualization use this as justification to spread the heresy that if you are a Muslim or a Hindu when you come to the Lord, then you should remain as a practicing Muslim or Hindu, and thereby avoid persecution. However, Islam and Hinduism are not just cultures, they are systems of faith that bear their own distorted promises of salvation. These contextualizing heretics seem to think that they can retain the veneer of a false religion, and, underneath of it, build a Christian life. “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: **old things are passed away** [to pass away, come to an end, disappear¹⁷⁴]; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). There is no room for hanging onto the *old* while trying to build something *new* underneath. If the Muslim or Hindu ways have not disappeared, then the new creature is not there, and that person remains outside of Christ. Jesus said, “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness [the *light* of contextualization does not measure up against the Standard of the Word of God, and, therefore, it is darkness!], how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:23).

Paul asked the Corinthians the rhetorical question, “What concord [agreement or harmony] hath Christ with Belial [a reference to Satan]?” (2 Corinthians 6:15).¹⁷⁵ The obvious answer is: “NONE!” The conclusion that Paul reaches for the Corinthians is this: “Wherefore come out [a command] from among them, and be ye separate [a command to set boundaries of separation], saith the Lord, and touch not [a command, do not cling to] the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you ...” (2 Corinthians 6:17).¹⁷⁶ This is a **conditional** promise where God says, “I will receive you,” if you separate yourself from unbelievers, unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, the infidel, and idols (vs. 14-16); all of these descriptive words can be applied to Islam and Hinduism. To the Pharisees, Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell [*Gehenna*] than yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).¹⁷⁷ His condemnation of those who seek to contextualize Christianity within paganism would be equally forthright! The proponents of

¹⁷⁴ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁷⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁷⁶ Strong’s Online.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

contextualization obviously do not understand what it means to be a child of God, and they seek to instill a false hope into those whom they “convert” from paganism to a different form of paganism (Galatians 1:8); despite their “conversion,” they are still destined for hell.

When Joshua made his final exhortation to Israel, he declared: “Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom *to* the right hand or *to* the left; That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; **neither make mention of the name of their gods**, nor cause to swear *by them*, neither serve them, **nor bow yourselves unto them**: But **cleave unto the LORD** your God, as ye have done unto this day” (Joshua 23:6-8). Joshua did not advocate contextualization, but rather separation! Those who are taught this fallacy within Islam are referred to as being *Muslim followers of Isa*. Who is Isa? Are Isa and Jesus the same? I mentioned earlier that when Rick Warren prayed at Obama’s first inauguration, he closed his prayer in the name of Isa (among others); this demonstrates that there is a willingness to accept the Muslim Isa as being Jesus, the Son of God, and the eternal Logos. However, there are some very significant differences. About Jesus, the Koran says, “O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, **Jesus**, the son of Mary, **was but a messenger of Allah** ... So believe in Allah and His messengers. And **do not say, “Three”**; desist - it is better for you. Indeed, **Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son.** ...” (Surah 4:171).¹⁷⁸ Most significantly, Islam believes that Jesus (or, Isa) is only a man, and not the Son of God, and most definitely not God. Despite the carelessness of men like Rick Warren, the Bible is very clear on these matters. “And the angel answered and said unto her [Mary], The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called [named] the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).¹⁷⁹ The Spirit of God, through John, declared, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ...” (John 1:1, 14a).

Another significant difference is that the Koran says that Jesus/Isa did not die on a cross. “And [for] their saying, ‘Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.’ And **they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him**; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain” (Surah 4:157).¹⁸⁰ The Bible tells us, “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. ... Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:50, 54). To the Corinthians, Paul declared, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). The Muslims express the wish of Satan – oh, that Jesus had not died, for, through His death, Satan’s defeat has been confirmed in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15.

In their very essence, both ecumenism and contextualization are doctrines of Balaam. There is a willingness to sacrifice the narrow truth of God’s Word for a broader fellowship and acceptance. When the men of Israel were enticed by the women of Moab to join them in the celebration of their gods, the men might well have thought that they could retain their allegiance to Jehovah even

¹⁷⁸ <http://quran.com/4>

¹⁷⁹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁸⁰ <http://quran.com/4>

while they bowed to the gods of stone. The first commandment that God wrote upon the tables of stone was that they were not to have any other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3); the Law of God, the Ten Commandments, are as relevant today as they were the day that Moses saw them for the first time. The record of God's judgment on Israel is written for our exhortation (1 Corinthians 10:11) so that we might learn from their errors, and not repeat them. However, it is abundantly evident that Evangelicals are more willing to bow to the god of expediency than to stand firmly on the Word of God.

Another expression of the doctrine of Balaam that seeks to separate the spiritual and the physical and was fairly common at the time that John wrote this challenge to the elder of Pergamos, is known as Gnosticism. It originated within the philosophies of that day, and, at the time of John, was in the throes of running out of steam and general popularity.¹⁸¹ However, this pagan, higher-level of thinking absorbed some Christian concepts (particularly popular was the idea of salvation through Christ), and became a hybrid with as many variants as there were proponents of this teaching. Out of this melding, came the idea that our goal must be to develop our spiritual side, for as that becomes dominant, then our physical demands will diminish. This flowed out of the pagan concept of good and evil being in continual war with one another; philosophers scorned the Gospel message as being far too simplistic, yet latched onto the liberation of their spirits through Christ as a means of elevating their spirituality (or good). Within the broad category of Gnostics, were those who proclaimed that what was done in the body did not matter at all (after all, that was part of the evil), and so they could live in whatever sinful state that they desired – their spirits were freed, and what took place physically didn't matter.

We might think that this is an ancient perversion that does not find expression today. However, consider the mindset of most Evangelicals: if someone calls himself a Christian, then we are to accept him as such and must not judge how he is living. The foundation for this is the simplistic, scaled back perversion of the Gospel that is so common today. It goes something like this: if, at some time in your life, you have prayed a prayer to accept Jesus as your Savior, then you are on your way to heaven – no matter what your life might look like since that prayer. Within the Evangelical philosophy, as long as you have secured a spiritual "salvation" by uttering a few words, then what is done in the flesh is of no consequence. That is Gnosticism! That is what Balaam demonstrated in his own way: hold a shallow head-knowledge of God and all that He is capable of doing, and then live with your feet well-planted in this world.

We are not told exactly what expression the *doctrines of Balaam* took within the assembly at Pergamos; however, we do know that it was present among the people, and Jesus held the elder of the *ekklesia* responsible for this departure from the faith. Within the first century AD, many looked upon philosophy and philosophical debates as their pastime; into this was absorbed enough Christian language so as to find acceptance within some assemblies, and this became a means of spreading their philosophical musings among those who were truly born-again. The result was a compromised faith in Christ through the acceptance of worldly teachings in addition to the Gospel; as we have seen, a compromised faith is really no faith at all. We must remain alert, for the words used by the purveyors of heresy will often be Biblical terms that they have redefined in order to deceive the unobservant. The Scriptures warn that there will be false teachers; we must remain diligent so that we do not become entangled in their webs of heresy.

¹⁸¹ <http://biblehub.com/topical/g/gnosticism.htm>



15. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

So, or in like manner, this overseer had those who held to the hateful teaching of the Nicolaitans. In the same way that there were those within the assembly at Pergamos who were clinging to the error of Balaam, so there were some who were holding fast to the teachings of the Nicolaitans. The Greek word *krateo* (*krat-eh'-o*), translated as *hold*, speaks of using strength, to seize, and to dominate¹⁸²; as we noted with the doctrine of Balaam, this is more than simply giving assent to these heresies – there were individuals who were gaining a following in their promotion of the heresies of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Perhaps the *angel* (overseer) of the assembly had made some effort to have them turn from their error, but they were determined to not depart from it, and the elder was evidently unable to remove them from the *ekklesia*.

If we consider that there would have been a plurality of elders within this assembly, perhaps it was one of this overseer's fellow elders who held to this heretical doctrine of the Nicolaitans (and that of Balaam). What is evident is that there were a number, within this group, who were convinced that some people were superior to others, in direct contradiction of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 20:25-28.



16. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Regarding these areas of tolerated, doctrinal error, Jesus has one word for this overseer: repent! The Greek word translated as *repent* means to perceive afterward, and, consequently, to feel remorse and to change one's mind.¹⁸³ This word is a command – not a suggestion or plea.

As is so often the case when a command is given by the Lord, He also discloses the consequences of not being obedient. Once again (as in verse five), the *or else* could be shown as *but, if not* – which underscores more strongly the choice that this elder faces. However, if he will not repent, notice the actions that Jesus will take: 1) He is coming to this elder without delay, and 2) He will use the long sword from His mouth to make war against those who hold to these false teachings.¹⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that Jesus does not provide this elder with a long period of time to repent; there will be no time to weigh the pros and cons of repenting versus not repenting. The command has been issued, and Jesus is coming to him without delay. However, what is equally significant is that Jesus will not fight against the elder, but against those who hold to these aberrant teachings (*them*). Even though Jesus is not pleased with the tolerant attitude of this overseer, His judgment will be expressed against those who cling to these false teachings. This is not a slap on the wrist. This is the same sword that Jesus will use to kill all of those who follow the Antichrist into battle against Him when He comes to establish His rule over the earth (Revelation 19:15, 21). When John turned to see Jesus speaking to him, he saw this sword coming out of His mouth (Revelation 1:16) – judgment will be based on the word of the Lord. This is in keeping with the admonition that we are given to avoid anything that is not in agreement with the Word of God

¹⁸² Strong's Dictionary; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

¹⁸³ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁸⁴ Strong's Online.

(Romans 16:17). This is the sword of judgment that will be used on those who stand in opposition to the Lord; those who are practicing the error of Balaam and the heresy of the Nicolaitans will feel the thrust of the Lord's judgment.

The Lord does not hold the elder responsible for how those within his assembly stubbornly cling to these strange doctrines; rather, He holds him accountable for permitting them to hold influence within the assembly. In the same way, we are not answerable to God for those who firmly hold onto their ecumenical ways; however, we will be held responsible to Him for accepting such persons into our sphere of spiritual fellowship. The principle at work here does not only apply to those charged with the oversight of the *ekklesia*; we must all take heed to God's desire for our spiritual purity and consistent walk in harmony with His Spirit. Even if we do not depart from the faith into ecumenism, we will be accountable if, in contravention of God's Word, we do not separate from those who are ecumenical (failure to do so is disobedience). Remember, there are those who are ecumenical by conviction (they understand its tenets and embrace them), and there are those who refuse to separate from them (they are ecumenical by association). If we are in spiritual fellowship with either one, then the command of God to us is that we are to repent! We must be on guard as to where we look for spiritual encouragement and enlightenment. Do we seek spiritual guidance from Evangelical writers? Do we look to popular preachers? Are we sitting under the teaching of those who are accepting of ecumenism? Jesus says, "Repent!" Why are we sifting through the garbage looking for something of value when God has called us to holy living and to discover the living truth of His Word? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places in Christ*: According as he hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy [pure, upright, worthy of God¹⁸⁵] and without blame before him ..." (Ephesians 1:3-4). God's desire that we are to be holy should not come as a surprise – we have been chosen **in Christ**, Who, as eternal God in the flesh, is holy! Holiness is the preeminent characteristic of God; the heavenly beings acclaim Him as "holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8) – perhaps hinting at the tri-unity of Jehovah, but certainly emphasizing His holiness. Repent, turn from browsing through the ecumenical trash, and desire the wealth of spiritual sustenance that is available in Christ! Do not spend time pondering God's call to repentance; when you hear His call to repent, do it!

The elder of the gathering in Pergamos is called to repent – not for what he is practicing, but for what he is permitting within the assembly that he has been called to oversee. Even though he is failing in his responsibilities as an elder and needs to repent, the Lord's judgment will fall upon those who are refusing to depart from their compromising ways. Evangelicals seem very content to permit their "pastors" to tell them what the Bible says (they never look for themselves), yet, when it comes to the final judgment, they will stand, or fall, on their own. Despite modern teaching to the contrary, we are saved individually, and, as such, we are also individually accountable to God for how we live. Those who teach heresy will have to answer for that, but those who accept their heresy will be no less accountable – not for teaching it, but for accepting it. We must consider ourselves warned!

¹⁸⁵ Gingrich Lexicon.



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

Once again, the call is to everyone, who has understanding, to give heed to what the Spirit of God is saying to the *ekklesia* of Christ. If nothing else, we must see this as a flag to stop and give consideration to what the Lord Jesus Christ is telling the elders of these various assemblies. Here is a message from God for everyone!

After the manner of the previous two messages, this one is addressed to the one who is overcoming – the one who is living victoriously. Keep in mind that this is speaking in the spiritual sense, and not the physical. The elder of Pergamos was living in a very difficult place (where there was a stronghold for Satan), yet he was holding fast to the name of Jesus and had not denied His faith – that would qualify him as someone who was prevailing spiritually. Yes, he had whereof to repent, but that was for what he was permitting in the midst of the assembly, and not for what he was doing.

To the one who is spiritually victorious, Jesus says that He will give him to *eat of the hidden manna*. One day when the Jews were all disturbed about Who Jesus was, He said to them: “I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:48-51). Jesus explains that the manna (which literally means *what is it?*¹⁸⁶) that their forefathers ate did not provide them with anything beyond physical sustenance, for they all died. However, He identifies Himself as being the *living Bread* Who came from heaven to give eternal life to anyone who will consume what He offers. The *bread* is His body that He willingly gave to be crucified so that we might, through His death, find spiritual life and hope for eternity. As Paul taught the Corinthians about what we call the Lord’s Supper, he wrote, “The bread which we break, is it not the communion [fellowship, participation¹⁸⁷] of the body of Christ? For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread [for we all of the one bread do partake¹⁸⁸]” (1 Corinthians 10:16b-17). If we have placed our faith in Christ for our salvation, then we are made partakers of the Bread – we are part of the Body of Christ; we become participants in the mystery that was hidden for many ages: Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). To the Corinthians, Paul explained that he came to them speaking only of “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” so that he might “speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden wisdom [concealed away¹⁸⁹], which God ordained before the world [foreordained¹⁹⁰] unto our glory ...” (1 Corinthians 2:2, 7). The reality of the predetermined sacrifice of Christ on the cross remained hidden for many centuries; the promise of redemption had been given (Genesis 3:15), and the carefully instituted sacrifices (part of the Mosaic Law) foreshadowed the coming One, yet it remained sufficiently hidden so that the religious leaders of Jesus’ day did not recognize Him when

¹⁸⁶ Strong’s Online.

¹⁸⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁸⁸ Young’s Literal Translation.

¹⁸⁹ Strong’s Dictionary.

¹⁹⁰ Strong’s Online.

He did come – they longed for a political savior, and not One Who could save them from their sins. In like manner, many of today’s Evangelicals are busily building “the Kingdom” so that Christ can come to rule on earth, yet they neglect the personal salvation that He secured the first time that He came. Paul explains that, if this reality had not been hidden from the self-righteous, religious leaders, “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8); it was *hidden* so that the purposes of God might be fulfilled, so that we might become members of His family. During His earthly ministry, Jesus explained that He used parables with the religious leaders so that they would hear but not understand (Matthew 13:13-14); despite having spent their lives studying the books of Moses and the prophets, they did not have the eyes of faith to understand what God would be doing in their time. They used their intellect to gain their “understanding” of God’s Word, and, because they refused to have their spiritual eyes opened, Jesus saw fit to leave them in their blindness (John 9:41). The Bread of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ, remained a *hidden* mystery to them.

However, to the one who overcomes, Jesus says that He will give him of the *hidden manna*, that life-giving Bread of Life, in Whom we are to abide (John 15:4). Jesus said, “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22); as He spoke of the end of times with His disciples, He revealed to them that “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13); the writer to the Hebrews declared, “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end ...” (Hebrews 3:14). These verses are all expressing what Jesus is saying to anyone who is living victoriously – there is eternal life for those who faithfully persevere.

Jesus goes on to say that to the one who is overcoming, He “will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*.”

Within the traditions of the day, there were a couple of situations where the white stone played a significant role. The first was judicially: in the courts, a white stone represented acquittal, and a black stone, condemnation. When Paul gave testimony to his former life of persecuting believers in Jesus, he said: “Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*” (Acts 26:10). That last phrase is literally: *I cast against them a small worn stone* (namely, his vote of condemnation – the black stone).¹⁹¹ The casting of a stone referred to voting, the color (white or black) determining the intent of the vote.

The second tradition was carried out by the host of a gathering. If there was someone who was considered to be a special guest, the host would demonstrate his particular appreciation for that person by giving him a white stone bearing his name or a message – something that was meant only for that person.¹⁹² This finds particular application to the Lord’s promise to the overcoming ones – the white stone will have a new name meant only for the one receiving it. This action speaks of favor and blessing – meant for the one who has remained faithful to the end (Matthew 24:13): namely, the overcoming one.

Interestingly, the word *written* (referring to the name on the stone) is in the perfect tense, which speaks of an action taken only once in the past, and never needing to be repeated. Jesus died for sin only once (1 Peter 3:18), we come to faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord only once (Hebrews

¹⁹¹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹² <http://philologos.org/bpr/files/w003.htm>

6:4-6), at which time all things are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17) – this would indicate that we also receive a new name given to us by the Lord. However, this white, inscribed stone is only for those who remain faithful – to those who are spiritually victorious to the end; the stone *will* be given (future tense) to the overcoming one. Such overcoming is only possible by remaining **in Christ** (Romans 8:1-4) unto the end: “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end ...” (Hebrews 3:14); a literal translation of the Greek reads as: *For partakers we have become of Christ, if only the origin of the assurance* [or the ground of hope¹⁹³ – Christ!] *as far as the end we may firmly hold fast.*¹⁹⁴ We hold the choice of remaining faithful to Christ; it is *we* who must *firmly hold fast* in order to fulfill becoming a partaker of Christ in the end. How do we remain in Christ? “And he that keepeth [is keeping – attending carefully to] his [God’s] commandments dwelleth [*meno* – is remaining] in him [God], and he [God] in him. And hereby we know that he abideth [*meno* – is remaining] in us, by the Spirit which he [God] hath given us” (1 John 3:24).¹⁹⁵ The choice that we all face is whether we will obey the Lord or not; we cannot be casual in our commitment, for our faith will be tested: “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13). However, as we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not alone as we choose obedience – the Spirit of God abides within us to guide us into all truth (John 16:13), and to intercede with the Father on our behalf (Romans 8:26). God ensures that we have all of the resources necessary to live in victory through the sufferings that will be ours as we walk according to the leading of the Spirit of God (Ephesians 1:3).



18. 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;

Jesus now turns His attention to the overseer of the assembly in Thyatira. To this elder, Jesus first identifies Himself as *the Son of God*. During Jesus’ time on earth, this was a pivotal identification for Him. When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Before He was born, Jesus was



Ruins of Thyatira

already identified as the *Son of God*. When the devil sought to lure Jesus away from His mission to earth, his first two temptations hinged on “If thou be the Son of God” (Matthew 4:3, 6). During His ministry years when Jesus would encounter a demon, the response was often, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?” (Matthew 8:29); the clear indication is that the world of evil recognized Jesus for Who He was. Jesus’ true identity was a thorn in the side of the religious leadership of

¹⁹³ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁹⁵ Strong’s Online.

His day; we read: “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18) – they understood that if Jesus was the Son of God, then He was God, and their well-honed theologies would then be in tatters. When the religious leaders of the Jews looked for a basis to destroy Jesus, the high priest challenged Him with this: “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63). When Jesus affirmed that He was the Son of God, the high priest used that as the means to seek His death; within their Jewish theology, this was blasphemy. In their minds, they were being faithful to the First Commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods [plural] before me [singular]” (Exodus 20:3);¹⁹⁶ they thought that they were remaining faithful to Jehovah and not following the example of their forefathers who had incited the anger of God by worshipping the gods of the heathen. However, what they missed was that just before the First Commandment, God identifies Himself as “the LORD thy God”: literally, Jehovah (singular) thy Elohiym (*Elohiym* being in the plural form). When God created man, He said, “Let us make man in our image ...” (Genesis 1:26); the Hebrew includes the plurality of the Godhead at this point. John wrote that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... All things were made by him [the Word] ... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us ...” (John 1:1, 3, 14). The religious Jews sought to avoid the judgment of Jehovah by clinging to Him as being only one God (which He is, but not according to their understanding); when Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30, YLT), this was beyond their comprehension – how could plurality be found in singularity? As Jesus relinquished His life in payment for the penalty of sin, the Roman centurion recognized Him for Who He was, and declared, “Truly this was God’s Son” (Matthew 27:54, YLT).

Jesus now comes to this elder of Thyatira, and proclaims that he is about to hear from the Son of God – the One Who paid for the salvation of his own soul. Jesus’ identification as the Son of God in no way reduces His position as God. This is a word from God to this elder, no less than any of the others, but here there is an emphasis on Who Jesus is within the Godhead.

This has been a stumbling block for many through the years, and, as a result, many have departed from the faith at this point. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, say that Jesus is a son of God, like unto Satan, who is considered to be another of God’s sons. “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7); John expresses here the mystery of God’s plurality and unity. This has been unceremoniously removed from all modern translations, including the JW’s Bible. The NASB, which is probably the best literal translation made from the corrupted texts, renders verse seven this way: “For there are three that testify ...,” and then proceeds into the latter part of verse eight. The American Standard Version is even more subtle, for they make the second half of verse six into verse seven, and then carry on into verse eight (thereby eliminating any semblance of verse seven).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ BDB.

¹⁹⁷ **King James Version:** ⁶This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. ⁸And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

American Standard Version: ⁶This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. ⁷And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁸For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one.

Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of the higher critics, this is still a part of the Word of God; be sure that your translation includes all of it.

Jesus goes on to describe Himself according to what John expressed when he turned to see Who it was who spoke with him (specifically, 1:14-15). He is the One Who has eyes of blazing fire, and feet of fine bronze; this is the One Who can see all things, and Who is unchanging (the *brass* speaks of that which is solid and long-lasting). The Psalmist understood something of God's keen eyesight: "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest [to sift – to remove what is not wanted; God knows all that makes up our lives] my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. For *there* is not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether" (Psalm 139:1-4).¹⁹⁸ It is this all-seeing One, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is about to address the overseer of the assembly at Thyatira.



19. 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.

Again the Lord begins by declaring that He has full knowledge (*know* – Greek, *oida*) of the activities of this overseer. After identifying Himself to each of the overseers of the seven assemblies, Jesus always begins His homily in this manner – He assures the elder that He has a complete understanding of what he is doing; there is nothing hidden from His view. This can be either encouraging or frightening. For those who are engaged in works of righteousness that may be either hidden from the eyes of men, or ridiculed by them, it is uplifting to know that the Lord knows and understands; however, for those who are maintaining a façade of righteousness but hold no love for the truth, this should strike fear to their hearts – they might well be deceiving those about them, but God knows the reality of their hearts. To this overseer, Jesus assures him that He knows all about him – whether that would bring fear or comfort to his heart is dependent upon his activities.

Jesus goes on to identify several things in the life of this elder, of which He knows all. The



Mt. Sinai

first is his *charity*, his love. Not surprisingly, this Greek word is *agape*, a love that is an act of the will, and not a product of the emotions or favorable circumstances. When Jesus said to the lawyer (who was a Pharisee), "Thou shalt love [*agape*] the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love [*agape*] thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40), His first declaration is simply a statement of fact (it is in the indicative mood) but He adds that this

¹⁹⁸ Strong's Online.

factual declaration forms the primary commandment that we are to obey. The translators have made the *love* to sound like an emphatic command, but the Greek simply reads, *You will love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ...*;¹⁹⁹ this is something that we are to choose to do, that with which we are to be occupied. However, Jesus identifies this expression of love for God as, in reality, the primary commandment that we face. Therefore, even though *love* does not appear in the imperative mood in this passage, these two declarations (our love of God and neighbor), are identified as being decrees from God; they are a summation of all of the Law and the teachings of the prophets. Our love for God is expressed through our obedience to the first four of the Ten Commandments. This is the beginning of our relationship with Him; it is an act of the will, a choice, and is independent of the situation in which we find ourselves.²⁰⁰

When we consider the Ten Commandments in light of this, we can recognize that our relationship with God will hinge on what we do with those first four Commands (namely, have no other gods, make no images for worship, do not take up the Lord's name for no purpose, and remember to sanctify the seventh day unto the Lord – Exodus 20:3-11). God has said that here are four things that we can choose to do that will demonstrate our love for Him. Our obedience to the final six Commands flows out of our love for God, and expresses our love for our fellowman (honor our father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, and do not lust after someone else's possessions – Exodus 20:12-17). The Ten Commandments form God's Law, and comprise the foundation for living faithfully before Him and with integrity before our fellow man.

When God met with Moses at Mt. Sinai, he gave him two very distinct forms of Law: 1) the Law of God, which He wrote upon tables of stone with His own finger (Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; Deuteronomy 4:13), and 2) the Law of Moses, which was not written by God upon tables (*luwach*) of stone (*eben*) but in a book (*cephar*), and contained all of the details for the sacrificial system, the Levitical priesthood, and the many dietary and civil laws to which Israel was to adhere (Exodus 24:4, 7).²⁰¹ The Law of God is presented with a sense of timelessness: God wrote them, and He wrote them upon stone – there is a permanency attached to the Ten Commandments. Therefore, when Jehovah declared through Jeremiah, "I will make a new [fresh] covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ... I will put **my law** in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:31, 33),²⁰² it would only follow that the Law that God promised to write on the hearts is the same Law that He wrote upon tables of stone (God does not change – Malachi 3:6). When Jesus met with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, He said, "This cup *is* the new [fresh] testament [covenant] in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20);²⁰³ the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of that New Covenant with Israel in fulfillment of Jeremiah 31. Therefore, when we read, "For he [Christ] is our peace, who hath made both [the Jew and the Gentile] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [that barrier of separation] *between us*; Having abolished [to cause to be useless] in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances [the rules and

¹⁹⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

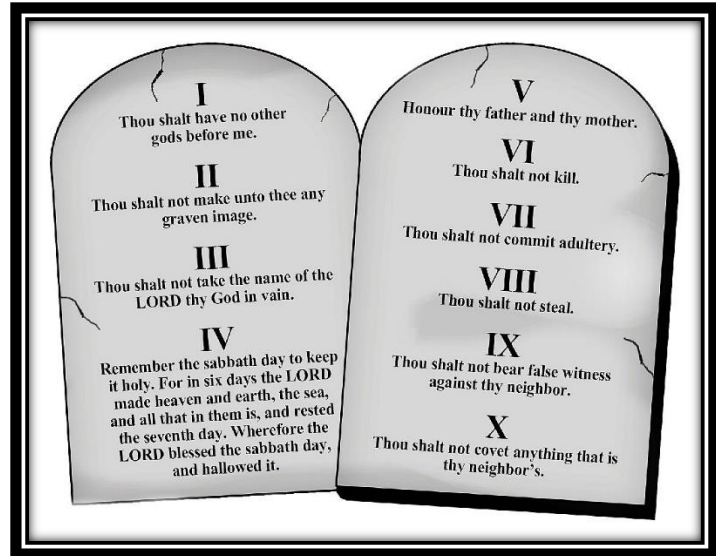
²⁰⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁰¹ Strong's Online.

²⁰² Strong's Dictionary.

²⁰³ Strong's Online.

requirements of the Mosaic Law²⁰⁴] ...” (Ephesians 2:14-15),²⁰⁵ we must discern that the *law of commandments* that the Lord rendered to be of no more value was the Law of Moses, and **not** the Ten Commandments. By not recognizing the uniqueness of the Law of God, many have declared that the Ten Commandments were also done away with at the cross of Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth; as we are convinced that Jesus died for our sins (we believe), and as we, through repentance, exercise the faith of Christ in Whom we now abide, God has written His Law (those Ten Commandments) upon our hearts, and has given us His Spirit to teach us His righteousness (John 16:13). It is the power of the abiding presence of the Spirit of God that brings the Law of God and the New Covenant together! As we abide in Christ, and walk according to the leading of the Spirit of God, the righteousness of the Law of God (those Ten Commandments, once written upon stone, but now written by God upon our hearts) will be filled-up in us. “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That **the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*” (Romans 8:1-4). If the Law of God had been abolished at the cross, to what concept of the *righteousness of the law* is Paul referring?



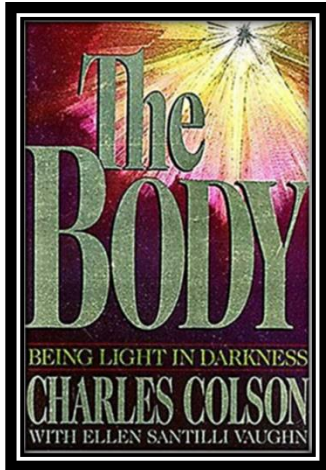
The stumbling block for many is: “... for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14b). Romans 8:1 clarifies that if we are **in Christ**, then we are not under the *condemnation* of the Law: the Law of God is no longer a death sentence for us – by the grace of God, we have been freed from sin so that the righteousness of His Law might be expressed through us. Not that we are no longer subject to God’s Law (as some like to read this) but, rather, we have been freed from the penalty of the Law so that we can live in obedience to the Law that He has now etched upon our hearts. It is by God’s grace that we are enabled to walk according to His Law (Ephesians 2:8-10). Therefore, if it is our sincere desire to live in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord, then we must remember the first four of the Ten Commandments that specifically relate to our relationship with Him. Jesus, the eternal Logos (John 1:1), the Word of God (Revelation 19:13), reminds us, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Everything that He has charged us to do springs from His Ten Commandments; as Jesus told the lawyer, our love for God (which must be expressed in obedience to those first four Commands) forms the basis from which everything else

²⁰⁴ Strong’s Online.

²⁰⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

that He requires of us will flow. Is it any wonder that Evangelicals are in such a mess today – they have cast aside the foundation upon which all that Christ requires of us is to be built.

In simple terms, the ecumenism of Evangelicalism violates the First Commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Within the ecumenical mind, there is an infatuation with unity to the point that Chuck Colson declared, “We must strive for unity because it is the essence of the church.”²⁰⁶ Colson demonstrated that *striving* for this unity will require a change in how we view the Word of God; we must be willing to accommodate those who hold to very different doctrines from us. In his mind, it was only a matter of whittling our beliefs down to a few bare statements that can be agreed upon by almost anyone; unity has become a matter of *obedience* – to be ecumenical, we must be willing to set aside everything that would hinder our coming together with all of those who profess to be Christians.²⁰⁷ Can you see it? Unity has become the god of the ecumenical movement in violation of God’s First Commandment!



Jesus tells the overseer of Thyatira that He knows his love (*charity, agape* – love as an act of the will) – He has a full understanding of the love that this elder has: its expression to God and to his neighbor is not hidden from Him. Based upon what follows, it would seem that He is pleased with what he finds in this elder. However, the fact that He comes with blazing eyes would seem to indicate that, despite this, all is not well.

There is an order of words in this verse that stands out because *thy works* is repeated. In the first instance, the transliteration of the Greek is: *I have known of thee the works*, which places the emphasis on the elder, and what immediately follows is an expression of what those works include.²⁰⁸ Since the conjunction translated as *and* could as easily be *even*, it can be seen that the *charity, service* and *faith* are the expressions of the works that Jesus saw in this elder: *I have known of thee the works, even the charity, and the service, and the faith* ... – each of these is noted by the Lord as being present in this overseer.

Jesus goes on to say that He *knows* the *service* of this *angel*. The word *service* comes from the Greek *diakonia* (*dee-ak-on-ee'-ah*), which simply refers to someone carrying out the activities prescribed by someone else; you can recognize our word *deacon* within this.²⁰⁹ Jesus assures this elder that He knows his activities of service; he has not been inactive, but, rather, has been involved in meeting the needs of those about him.

Jesus knows the *faith* of this elder, and there is nothing to indicate that it has diminished. He is not particularly commended for his steadfast faith, but neither is his faithfulness questioned.

This next attribute reverts back to the opening statement of the verse, namely that Jesus has known this man’s patience; literally, *I have known ... the patience of thee*. Jesus speaks specifically

²⁰⁶ Colson, *Body*, p. 102.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁰⁹ Strong’s Online.

of his perseverance and endurance (*patience* – *hupomone*, the noun form of *hupomeno*).²¹⁰ The Son of God, the One Who has feet of fine bronze, comes to the elder of Thyatira and mentions his steadfastness; the One Who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), the unchanging One (Malachi 3:6), makes note of the endurance of this elder.

Then Jesus seems to repeat His first phrase, but with a different word order: *I have known ... the works of thee*.²¹¹ By comparison to the opening phrase, this places the emphasis upon the works. Jesus goes on to add that the last of these works are more than the first; there has been a progression in the activities of this elder. He may have been steadfast, but he was not stuck fast; there was growth in his work for the Lord.



20. 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.

Notwithstanding – despite all of the good things that have just been reviewed, the One Who has blazing eyes identifies a problem. This is a word of contrasting thought, often translated as *but*. The Lord says that He has a *few things* against this elder; the Greek phrasing is exactly the same as in verse 14, where *notwithstanding* appears as *but*.

Although Jesus has a *few things* against this overseer, they all revolve around someone referred to as Jezebel. It is unlikely that this was the name of a woman within the assembly at Thyatira; rather, it would be a reference to someone with the character of Jezebel from the OT.



Baal & Astarte (Ashtoreth, Easter, Isis)

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31); his name means *with Baal*, and hers, *not exalted*.²¹² It is generally accepted that Ethbaal had been a priest of Astarte, who, within the pagan religions of the area, was the female counterpart to the male god, Baal; both were considered to be sovereign over fertility.²¹³ Jezebel's background included a very close association with pagan practices. Ahab, who was king of Israel (after Judah and Israel separated), was more evil than any king before him (1 Kings 16:30); then he went above and beyond that by marrying Jezebel, a pagan woman, and embracing her pagan religion. The precedent for this kind of failure had been set by Solomon: “For it came to pass, when Solomon

was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 11:4). Within Solomon's time,

²¹⁰ Strong's Online.

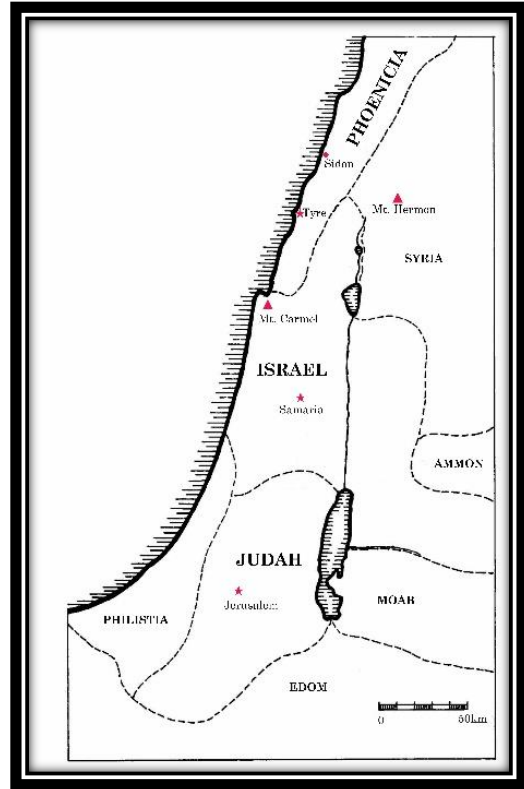
²¹¹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²¹² Strong's Online.

²¹³ <http://www.jesuswalk.com/joshua/canaanite-religion.htm>

all of the religions functioned side-by-side – there was ecumenical harmony; he built temples and places of worship to the gods of his pagan wives (1 Kings 11:7-8), and everyone co-existed. Jezebel, by contrast, was not content to share the religious stage with anyone else; she sought to eradicate the worship of Jehovah by having all of the prophets of God killed, at least everyone whom she could find (1 Kings 18:4); this is why she took it as a personal affront when Elijah demonstrated to Israel the unsurpassing power of Jehovah, and then killed her prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18:19, 40). Jezebel has become synonymous with all that is evil and pagan, and is a symbol of aggressive, self-indulgent sin; yet here we see her pagan practices living on within this assembly.

A little research into the worship of the ancient peoples of Phoenicia (Sidon, where Jezebel was from, is part of this region) shows that there were two primary deities: Astarte and Baal. When Elijah challenged Ahab, he told him to gather Israel unto Mt. Carmel, but he also specifically requested the presence of “the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves [the Hebrew word is *asherah*, a reference to the goddess, Ashtoreth or Astarte] four hundred, which eat a Jezebel’s table” (1 Kings 18:19).²¹⁴ There were 850 prophets of paganism on Jezebel’s payroll; there can be no doubt as to the depths to which Ahab and Israel had fallen.



The root of the problem with the overseer of Thyatira is that he has permitted a woman, whom Jesus refers to as Jezebel, to carry on within their assembly. For some reason, this elder did not deal with this source of paganism in their midst; he let her alone (*sufferest*) and so she continued to practice her evil ways.²¹⁵ It seems that he, like Ahab before him, lived in fear of, and in the shadow of, a domineering woman; Ahab refused to deal with Jezebel, and this elder evidently had not found the fortitude to deal with his Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess. Interestingly, this is a title that she had taken for herself. Just as there were those who sought to claim the title of Apostle for the respect and admiration that it carried, so this woman claimed a title for the purpose of infusing her words with greater weight, and her life with greater importance. Considering the setting for the work of this woman, it would seem evident that she would have retained a semblance of the faith of Christ within her teaching; this was not someone who taught pure paganism within the assembly, but, rather, her doctrine would have been a hybrid of Christianity and paganism – an *alongside of* doctrine (Romans 16:17).

However, despite this, we must not overlook the fact that Jesus calls her *Jezebel*, after the one who zealously sought to inflict pure paganism upon Israel. Pure paganism, or paganism mixed with truth, it matters not; before God, they are the same thing. This was something that Paul endeavored to pound into the hearts of the Galatians: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from

²¹⁴ Strong’s Online.

²¹⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another [a different] gospel: Which is not another [of the same kind as the true Gospel]; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert [to transform into something of an opposite character²¹⁶] the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel [an *alongside of* gospel (Greek – *para*), see Romans 16:17] unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed [delivered over to divine wrath]. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9).²¹⁷ The Galatians were being persuaded to add some of the Jewish traditions to their faith in Christ in order to be truly saved (Acts 15:1, 5). Paul likens this to paganism: “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how **turn ye again** to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire **again** to be in bondage?” (Galatians 4:9). Paul sees their faith in Christ when it is mixed with Jewish traditions, as being no different from the paganism that they first left behind when they came to know the Lord! Is the Gospel message narrow? Eternally, yes!

This woman calls herself a prophetess – she is claiming authority that is not hers. She is teaching heresy, and the servants of Jesus are being led astray; *teach* is in the active voice (the woman is teaching), *seduce*, on the other hand, is in the passive voice, which means that true believers were being caught in her spell, and were submitting to her deception – she was teaching, and they were being led away from the truth. Evidently, she was somewhat of a pied-piper, even if she was not forcing others to follow her falsehood, they were doing so anyway. Jesus now spells out the teaching of this woman and the error into which many were falling as they followed her lead: fornication and eating idol-sacrifices. Considering the Gnosticism that was so prevalent at this time, both of these fit well within this philosophy: focus on the spiritual and ignore the physical. When the leaders of the assembly in Jerusalem extended an olive-branch to the Gentile Christians in Antioch, their request was “that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication ...” (Acts 15:20); the first two things that these leaders forbade are the two things into which this woman was leading others. Through Jezebel, Gnostic error was taking root in the lives of those who were being deceived.

It’s interesting that, within the assembly at Pergamos, there were those who held to the teaching of Balaam, and, within this *ekklesia*, we find those who followed someone like unto Jezebel; both were following heretics from Israel’s history who sought to inflict spiritual damage. Balaam, as we learned, caused difficulties within Israel before they entered into the Promised Land; Jezebel, on the other hand, came to a position of influence many years later within the northern kingdom of Israel, after the nation of Israel was divided. Balaam’s counsel lured the Israelites into idolatry and fornication with the Moabites (Numbers 25:1-3); Jezebel led Israel into the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth (again, idolatry and fornication). After King Ahab married Jezebel, we read that he “went and served Baal, and worshipped him. ... And Ahab made a grove ...” (1 Kings 16:31, 33). We saw earlier that the word *grove* is not simply a grouping of trees, but is translated from the Hebrew word *asherah*.²¹⁸ This was a sacred tree or pole set up near an altar; it could be a living tree, a pole, or a carved image of the goddess Asherah (equivalent to the Babylonian Ishtar,²¹⁹ and

²¹⁶ Vine’s, “pervert.”

²¹⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²¹⁸ Strong’s Online.

²¹⁹ BDB; <http://bibleencyclopedia.com/asherah.htm>

the Canaanite goddess, Ashtoreth²²⁰). As Moses reiterated God's desires for the children of Israel, he (through the guidance of the Spirit of God) proclaimed: "Thou shalt not plant thee a grove [*Asherah*] of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee. Neither shalt thou set thee up *any* image [a sacred stone or pillar set up in relation to an altar]; which the LORD thy God hateth" (Deuteronomy 16:21-22).²²¹ Groves of trees hold sacred significance in the rituals of pagans, virtually around the world. Often one tree within such a grove holds more importance than the others, perhaps being the place where the grove began. Many times, the pagan priest will summon his god to make its presence known in a particular tree; the tree, in essence, becomes the mediator between the pagan and his god.²²² The oak tree, considered to be sacred because of its longevity and strength, was often selected as the center of pagan ceremonies – its reach upward (through its branches) and downward (through its roots) were thought to draw the gods of the heavens and the underworld together.²²³ Consider the words of Jehovah to Moses (and, therefore, to the children of Israel): "Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: But ye shall destroy [pull down] their altars, break [shatter] their images, and cut down their groves [*Asherim* (plural of *Asherah*)]: For **thou shalt worship no other god ...**" (Exodus 34:12-14a).²²⁴ Each of these (altars, images, and *Asherim*) was used by the pagan inhabitants of the Promised Land as part of their worship of false deities; Israel is very specifically commanded, before they even entered the land, to be sure to remove all such paganism! There was to be absolutely no mingling of paganism with the worship of God.

When Joshua, the successor of Moses, came to the end of his life, Israel had not yet conquered the whole of the Promised Land; there were still some pagan tribes around them. His words to Israel reiterated Jehovah's earlier command: "... come not among [do not associate with] these [pagan] nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of [keep in remembrance] the name of their gods, nor cause to swear [give an oath of allegiance] *by them*, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the LORD your God ..." (Joshua 23:7-8).²²⁵ Joshua called for a distinct separation between Israel and the pagans who were still around them; he desired Israel to practice Biblical separation, something that God desires of us as well (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). The doctrine of Jezebel teaches that one can hold a right concept of God in one's head, and still live like the world; Gnostic heresy says that spiritual understanding is all that is important – the physical doesn't matter. Within this mindset, fornication and eating those things dedicated to idols are not to be taken seriously, and Christianity is deemed to be only spiritual (after all, God is a spirit – John 4:24); therefore, this Jezebel taught that one could worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) even while submitting to the flesh (and the devil).

We might scoff at the gullibility of those from Thyatira who were being drawn into error by the teachings of this Jezebel, but let's consider how this might find expression today. The Greek word translated as *fornication* is the root of our word *pornography*, and speaks, in general terms, of any illicit sexual activity; within Scripture, it is frequently used metaphorically to speak "of the

²²⁰ Unger's Bible Dictionary, "gods, false – *Asherah*."

²²¹ BDB.

²²² Vykintas Vaitkevičius, *The Sacred Groves of the Balts*, p. 4 (PDF: <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/ksisu.htm>).

²²³ <http://www.sacredearth.com/ethnobotany/plantprofiles/oak.php>

²²⁴ Strong's Online.

²²⁵ BDB.

association of pagan idolatry with doctrines of, and professed adherence to, the Christian faith.”²²⁶ When we come to the Lord as our Savior from sin, we are one with Him (John 17:21); He is abiding within us by His Spirit (Romans 8:9), and we are said to be *in Christ* (Romans 8:1) – a place of spiritual security (Romans 8:38-39); therefore, we must guard against a heart of unbelief (Hebrews 3:12), which would undo our relationship with Christ. To the Ephesians, Paul used the relationship that Christ has with His purchased ones to illustrate the roles and bond that are to be present within a marriage relationship, and he ends with this: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined [*proskollao* – glued to] unto his wife, and **they two shall be one flesh**. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church [*ekklesia* – the company of His called out ones]” (Ephesians 5:31-32).²²⁷ When we are born anew by the Spirit of God, we are spiritually *married* to the Lord Jesus Christ (we become a part of the Bride of Christ) – we have become one spirit with Him (that is Paul’s teaching to the Ephesians; cp. 1 Corinthians 6:17). Jesus spoke of this oneness this way: “Abide [a command] in me, and I in you” (John 15:4). Within the physical realm, any sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship is considered to be fornication (a broad term that includes adultery); comparably, any spiritual activity in which we might participate that is outside of our *marriage* to the Lord is spiritual fornication. Today, there are those who speak of having an open marriage, by which they mean that neither the husband nor the wife is required to be faithful to the other; when we are born-again by the Spirit of God, we are born into a strictly monogamous relationship with the Lord – there is no such thing as an *open marriage*, spiritually speaking. The Word of God outlines the responsibility that we bear in our marriage to the Lord: “If ye love me, keep [attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15). When Jesus describes the Way of life as being narrow (Matthew 7:14; John 14:6), then we must not seek to broaden it – for to do so is spiritual fornication, a step into paganism. To the Galatians, Paul declared that seeking to add Jewish traditions to faith in Christ for salvation was equivalent to returning to the paganism from which they had been saved (Galatians 4:9); there can be absolutely no mixing of anything with the truth of God’s Word without contaminating and destroying its message of life.

If we join together with those who have endeavored to broaden the Way, then we are committing spiritual fornication – we are cultivating a spiritual relationship with someone who has either departed from the Lord, or who has never known the Lord. Our minds might immediately be drawn to the popular ecumenism of the day, and we would not be wrong; all of those who profess to be born-again and, at the same time participate in ecumenical activities, are guilty of spiritual fornication! However, let’s consider, for a moment, some other things. Through Jeremiah, the Lord proclaimed to Israel: “Thus saith the LORD, **Learn not the way of the heathen**, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them” (Jeremiah 10:2). Have Christians today neglected this “thus saith the Lord,” and learned some heathen ways? Reflect, for a moment, on the festival of *Easter*, considered by most Christians today to be a time for remembering Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection – the core activities of God through which He made spiritual life available for all of mankind. However, the word *Easter* comes from a pagan goddess of fertility, whose name might appear as Eastre, Austron, Ishtar, Isis, Cybele, Venus, Aphrodite, Astarte, or Ashtoreth (depending on which culture you consider), and celebrations

²²⁶ Vine’s “fornication.”

²²⁷ Strong’s Online.

would be held in her honor at the time of the spring, or vernal, equinox.²²⁸ As the pagans tell us, “Contrary to what the Church may try and tell you, Christianity came late to the Easter party. There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers.”²²⁹ Isn’t it interesting that the pagans not only lay claim to the Easter celebrations, but also recognize that such practices had no part in the traditions of the early Christians. How did it all begin?

During the latter part of the first century AD, the Jews and Christians, within the Roman Empire, were subjected to considerable persecution; the Jews were the target and Christians were caught in the same net as they were considered to be a sect of the Jews. In AD 70, Rome destroyed Jerusalem and drove the Jews out, but that did not stop the Jews from seeking to regain control of *their* city. The flavor of the persecution began to shift somewhat during the second century; the Jews were very possessive concerning Jerusalem, and, as a result, the Romans were forced to subdue two significant revolts in AD 117 and 135.²³⁰ After crushing these revolts, the Romans imposed restrictions that were specifically focused on the Jews, even going so far as to include any traditions that were considered to be Jewish. Consequently, the leadership of many churches, particularly those in Rome and Alexandria (two notorious hotbeds for heresy), sought to distance themselves from the Jews. Therefore, for example, rather than observing the seventh-day Sabbath of rest, they shifted it to Sunday; rather than commemorating the last supper of the Lord as the fulfillment of the Jewish Passover, they kept it on Sunday as well, and called it a remembrance of Christ’s resurrection. In essence, they gave in to pragmatism in an effort to evade persecution.



Constantine I with *Sol Invictus* (the Invincible Sun) behind; on coin minted in AD 313.

In the case of the departure from the Sabbath, we read this of Constantine (after he became favorably disposed toward Christians): “He always mentions the Christian church with reverence in his imperial edicts, and uniformly applies to it, as we have already observed, the predicate of catholic [meaning *universal*]. ... He ... enjoined the civil observance of Sunday, though not as *dies Domini* [day of the Lord], but as *dies Solis* [day of the sun], in conformity to his worship of Apollo, and in company with an ordinance for the regular consulting of the *haruspex* ([AD] 321) ...” (*haruspex* – “one of a class of minor priests who practiced divination, especially from the entrails of animals killed in sacrifice”²³¹).²³² We read further that “Constantine in [AD] 321 forbade the sitting of courts and all secular labor in towns on ‘the venerable [reverenced] day of the sun,’ as he expresses himself,

perhaps with reference at once to the sungod, Apollo, and to Christ, the true Sun of righteousness;

²²⁸ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=e&p=1&allowed_in_frame=0;
<http://www.religioustolerance.org/easter1.htm>

²²⁹ <http://www.witchology.com/contents/march/ostara.php>

²³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Jerusalem

²³¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/haruspex?s=t>

²³² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christians Church*, Volume III, Chapter 1, pg. 29 (PDF edition).

to his pagan and his Christian subjects.”²³³ Clearly, Constantine did not gravitate to keeping the first day of the week from any Biblical persuasion (this is not surprising, since there isn’t any justification for such a change, nor did he relate the change, in any respect, to Christ’s resurrection), rather, it seems to have been a pragmatic gesture on his part to meld his subjects together, both pagan and the favored Christians, thereby leaving the Jews exposed.

Regarding the celebration of *Easter*, there are a couple of noteworthy items. First of all, it is important to understand that Constantine saw himself as an *over-bishop*, providing general guidance and protection for all of the churches within his realm. Remember, too, that at this time there was a growing anti-Semitic attitude. As Constantine (a pagan emperor who regarded Christians with favor) established the celebration of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, he did so by making it a floating date and a fixed day (Sunday); this is in contrast to the *Jewish* Passover, which was a fixed date and a floating day. As he communicated this decision made at the Council of Nicea (a gathering of church leaders convened by Constantine in AD 325), he did so in this way: “Let us then have nothing in common with the **detestable Jewish crowd**; for we have received from our Saviour a different way” (emphasis added).²³⁴ He described the Jews as those who had “impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin”; it was common at this time to attribute to the Jews a “parricidal [to be guilty of killing a parent or relative] guilt in slaying their Lord.”²³⁵ What becomes evident in this attitude toward the Jews is that the blame for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ is laid at their feet, thereby appearing to free their accusers of any responsibility; however, Scripture makes it very clear that it was our sins that nailed Him to the cross (1 Corinthians 15:3). Furthermore, although Jesus died upon a cross, He did not die from the crucifixion; rather, He willingly relinquished His life to the Father so that He could complete the payment for the sins of the world through His death (Matthew 27:50 – He “yielded up” [sent away²³⁶] His spirit). Once again, Constantine’s pragmatism ruled the day: this proved to be another way for Christians to distance themselves from the Jews who were being singled out for persecution.



Easter (or Oestre) goddess of dawn, spring time, and fertility.

The word *Easter* is not a translation of the Greek word *pascha*. *Easter* appears once in the KJV in Acts 12:4, and is a mistranslation of *pascha*, which is correctly translated as *passover* in every other instance. “... there is no equivalent word for ‘Easter’ in the Greek language, for one simple but important reason: *the word is Anglo-Saxon for a pagan festival* [and the name of the goddess of fertility and spring²³⁷]. The word in its original use is entirely pagan” (italics in the original).²³⁸

²³³ Schaff, *History*, Chapter 3, pg. 92.

²³⁴ Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, Book III, Chapter XVIII.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

²³⁷ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=e&p=1&allowed_in_frame=0

²³⁸ http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/fasts_feasts/harper_pascha_easter.htm

Easter was not a Greek goddess; within their culture, this pagan deity was known as Aphrodite, Athena or Demeter. Therefore, the word *Easter* was not brought into our KJV from the Greek – in truth, it is a contamination that was carried forward from the Roman Catholic Church. Jesus was the *Paschal Lamb* Who died for the sins of the world in fulfillment of the Jewish celebration of the Passover; He died at the ninth hour of the day (Matthew 27:46), which was the time when the sacrificial lamb was slain according to the Passover tradition.²³⁹ It seems that even within the early editions of the English Bible, some translators chose to ascribe the name of the pagan goddess of fertility to the tremendous sacrifice that Jesus made for us! The Wycliffe Bible of 1395 used the word *pask* (Passover), but the Tyndale translation of 1525 injected the word *ester* (Easter).²⁴⁰ Clearly, Tyndale ignored God's specific instructions to Israel: "These *are* the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and **destroy the names of them out of that place**" (Deuteronomy 12:1-3). Rather than ensuring that the names of pagan deities did not enter into our thinking, it seems that Tyndale, for one, preferred to refer to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ by the name of a pagan goddess, instead of using the name of the Jewish festival – an abomination that has been perpetuated for almost 500 years!

The Jezebel of Thyatira taught a doctrine that contaminated the minds of those who were part of that assembly, but, even in our day of enlightenment, we are not immune to such spiritual adulteration. Too often it simply flows from our mouths without a second thought. However, as we desire to live in spiritual holiness, we must be on guard against anything that would pollute the purity that God desires for us. "And every man that hath this hope in him [the hope of being like Christ] purifieth himself, even as he [Christ] is pure" (1 John 3:3).



21. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Jesus says that He gave this Jezebel opportunity (*space*, literally *time* [*chronos*]) so that she might repent of her heresy, and she refused to do so.²⁴¹ It seems that those who are caught up with compromise, rarely leave it behind; in their minds, they have rationalized their error to the extent that they are convinced that they are right; they have eyes to see, but they see not. "For this people's heart is waxed gross [callous, unable to understand], and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:15). As a result of their unwillingness to hear and see the truth of God, their ability to hear and see is lost; those who refuse to receive a love for the truth will be sent a great delusion, and will believe a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

²³⁹ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11934-passover-sacrifice>

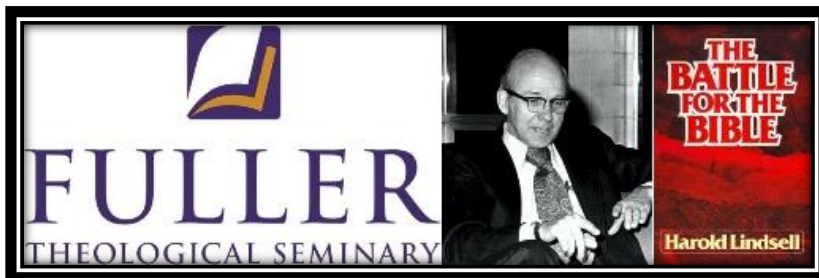
²⁴⁰ https://www.studydrive.org/desk/?t1=en_wyc&q1=ac%2012;
[https://www.studydrive.org/desk/?t1=en_tyn&q1=ac%2012.](https://www.studydrive.org/desk/?t1=en_tyn&q1=ac%2012)

²⁴¹ Strong's Online.

History tells us that schools such as Yale, Harvard and Princeton, in their early years, endeavored to prepare men for ministry in the service of the Lord; yet today they are bastions of worldliness with only a philosophical shell of religion left. Charles E. Fuller sought to establish Fuller Seminary as a counter-measure to the worldliness and compromise that had infiltrated Princeton, yet his efforts were thwarted by Harold Ockenga who ensured that Fuller was founded upon ecumenical principles. Too often the thought of those who are more Biblically oriented and still involved in such failing institutions, is to remain involved in an effort to save the foundering ship. A classic example with Fuller Seminary is Harold Lindsell, who had a significant role during the formative years of the school. Almost thirty years later he wrote a book called *The Battle for the Bible* in which he outlined, very clearly, the spiritual danger involved in questioning the inerrancy of Scripture; despite this, he continued to support Fuller Seminary, even though, within a decade of opening its doors, it would no longer defend Biblical inerrancy.²⁴² What we must be careful to learn is this: our only allegiance must be to the Word of God, and we must constantly measure everything that we hear and read according to the doctrines of Scripture. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [put to the test, examine] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). A prophet, within the context of the Bible, was someone who openly declared the truths of God; a false prophet is someone who professes to teach Biblical principles, but who is not being true to Scripture. John’s challenge is that everyone is to test everything that comes his way under the light of God’s Word; Paul commended the Bereans for testing what he taught according to the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11) – in this day of prolific error, we must be practicing Bereans!



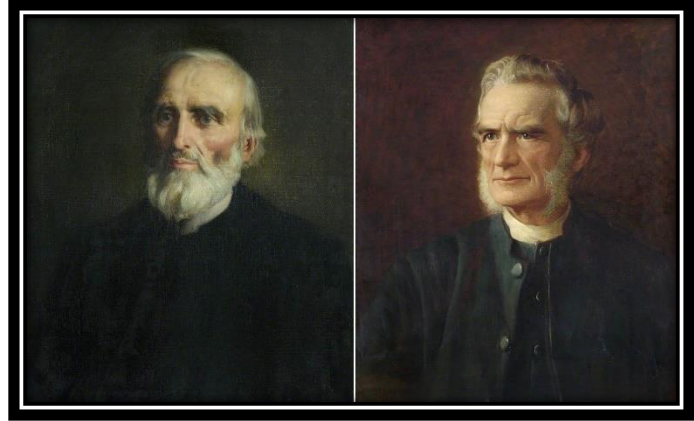
Harold J. Ockenga



Today, the question might well be: which Bible? This can be as complicated, or as simple, as you would like. Without digressing into the philosophy of the Higher Critics of the late 1800s, suffice it to say that the popular position of many theologians of the era was that the oldest texts were the most accurate, and that the Biblical doctrine of God’s preservation of His Word was irrelevant (despite Psalm 119:89, 152; Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25). Out of this came a completely new Greek text of Scripture (referred to as the Westcott-Hort text), which is filled with thousands of variations from the Received Text (or Textus Receptus) upon which the KJV is based. The Received Text manuscript carries nothing of the modern Higher Critics’ philosophy, and, based on this alone, it is more true to the original texts of Scripture; it was the accepted Greek text used by Christians for centuries. ALL modern translations have followed the corrupted text of Westcott and Hort (and all of its subsequent revisions); even the New KJV has felt its influence. Those on the final review committee of the NKJV were about

²⁴² George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, p. 269.

equally split between those who favored the Textus Receptus vs. the text from Westcott and Hort.²⁴³ There is no denying that the KJV translation has its problems, nevertheless it springs from a manuscript that was not tampered with by modern philosophy, nor were the translators influenced by the modern corrupt texts. Therefore, even though the New American Standard Bible might be a more accurate translation, it is based upon the wrong text and, thereby, incorporates all of the corruptions from the Westcott-



F.J.A. Hort

B.F. Westcott

Hort manuscript. The only English translation that stands outside of any influence from the corrupt text of Westcott and Hort is the KJV; it may not be a wonderful translation but, at least, it provides a more solid foundation from which to examine the teachings that come at us.

Has the Lord given you space to repent of an area where you have faltered in your walk with Him? Do not fail to repent!



22. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

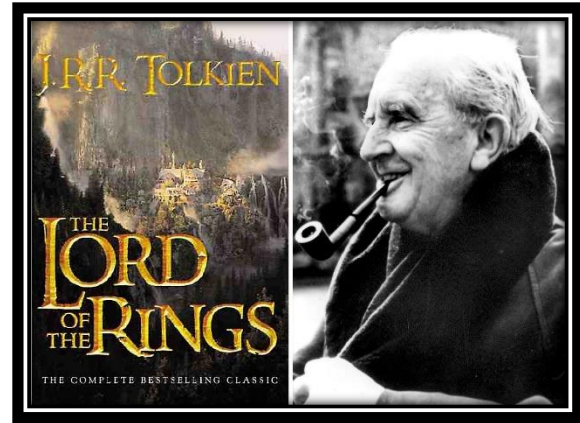
The word *bed* is not referring to one of luxurious living; it is from the Greek word *kline* (*klee'-nay*), which speaks of a small couch, or a stretcher upon which a sick person would be carried.²⁴⁴ This Jezebel will feel the impact of the Lord's judgment against her; she is being singled out for a very specific punishment (present tense – *am casting her*). However, Jesus then goes on to speak of His actions against those who are working with her in this error – those who are committing spiritual adultery with her. It is not only those who propose error who will be judged; those who follow and accept their error are also subject to punishment. Although Jesus is not specific about what form His punishment against Jezebel and her fellow adulterers will take, clearly these are events that would not have taken place had they adhered to the teachings of His Word, or if she had taken the opportunity to repent.

I've said this before, and I'll say it again: we are all individually accountable to God! We cannot think that we can hide behind some Evangelical teacher who has convinced us of his high-sounding error: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). After exhorting Timothy to teach the Word with perseverance, Paul states: "For the time will come when they will not endure [listen to] sound doctrine; but after their own lusts [desire for what is forbidden] shall they heap to [accumulate, gather around] themselves teachers, having itching ears [craving to hear what you want]; And they shall turn away *their* ears from [stop listening to; *apostrepho* – to remove] the truth, and shall be turned [*ektrepo* – to turn aside] unto fables [myths,

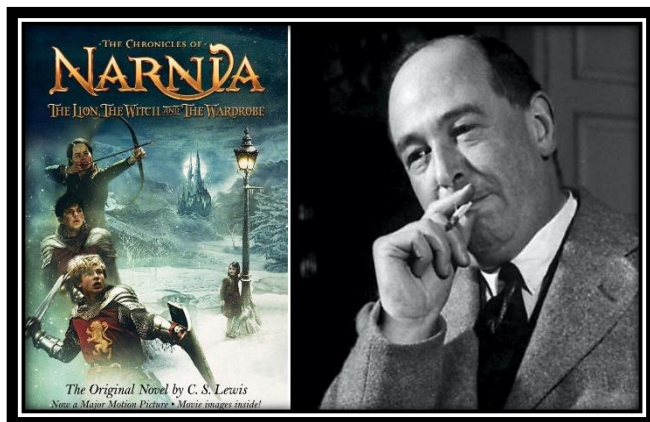
²⁴³ <http://www.truthfulwords.org/articles/nkjames.html>

²⁴⁴ Strong's Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

fiction]” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).²⁴⁵ It is interesting to notice the cause and effect expressed here: these, who will no longer accept Biblical exhortation, and who will refuse to listen to the truth, will gather teachers around them who teach in accordance with their desires – they will develop an insatiable craving for more of what they want (as long as it is NOT the truth). It goes on to say that they will stop listening to the truth, and, as a result, they will be turned to myths. Their simple act of refusing God’s truth will lead them into lies (mythology and fiction) – there is nothing else available for them! As we reflect on the desires of modern Evangelicals, we find that their lives often include a venture into the mythological – not necessarily the gods and goddesses of ancient mythology, but the much more acceptable fantasy literature of men like J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: such volumes as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. These are virtually standard fare for those growing up within Evangelical circles. Rest assured, spiritual-sounding justification for this is always close at hand: it is rationalized that the familiar often becomes the neglected, and that this can happen with spiritual truths; this is an apt description of Evangelicals who are content to be convinced that they can slide into heaven with virtually no effort. The neglect has come about because the need for diligence and perseverance in the Christian’s walk has been removed by those who spin false gospels. The Evangelical answer is to weave the fantasy literature of heretics into their lives so that “mythology can provide this template reset that is necessary to see life afresh with a childlike wonder.”²⁴⁶ C.S. Lewis is quoted as saying, “This excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual.”²⁴⁷ Yet by the end of his life, Lewis was in the process of converting to the Roman Catholic heresies – obviously, his own philosophy didn’t even work for him.



J.R.R. Tolkien



C.S. Lewis

Inasmuch as C.S. Lewis is regarded as one of the shining theologians of modern Evangelicalism, we would somehow expect that his writings would cast a new light on the truths of Scripture and engender a renewed passion for the Word of God. We could not be more wrong! Here is a quote from Lewis’ book *The Last Battle*, which is a part of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series that has become a staple within children’s literature:

Then I fell at his feet and thought, Surely this is the hour of death, for the Lion [Aslan or God] (who is worthy of all honour) will know that I have

²⁴⁵ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁴⁶ <http://sharperiron.org/article/christians-and-mythology-part-6-recovering>

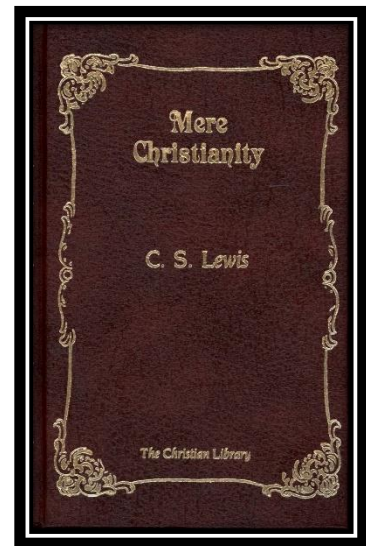
²⁴⁷ <http://sharperiron.org/article/christians-and-mythology-part-6-recovering>.

served Tash [the devil] all my days and not him. ... But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me.

Then by reasons of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one? The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that **no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him.**

Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, Child? I said, Lord, thou knowest how much I understand. But I said also (for the truth constrained me), Yet I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me thou shouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek (emphasis added).²⁴⁸

Is it with this heresy that Lewis would have us fill our minds, and the minds of our children, so that we can view the Word of God with new enthusiasm? How pathetic! However, Lewis did not restrict his heresy to his fantasy literature only; in *Mere Christianity* he stated: "There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and **who thus belong to Christ without knowing it**" (emphasis added).²⁴⁹ If this is the teaching of a renowned Evangelical theologian, then we would all be better off renouncing everything Evangelical; Billy Graham has said virtually the same thing, so this is not an isolated case within the Evangelical community.²⁵⁰ We need to know that J.R.R. Tolkien was a Roman Catholic, and C. S. Lewis, toward the end of his life, was in the process of becoming one; with the prevalence of ecumenism today, we can understand that this is no longer considered to be a matter of any significance. These are the myths and fables that are flooding into Evangelical minds as they **turn away from** God's truth. We must be alert and diligent in order to remain faithful to the Lord.



The Lord deals very specifically with this Jezebel and everyone else who teaches heresy. It is true that those who are teachers are held to a higher standard: "My brethren, be not many masters

²⁴⁸ http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Wolves/cs_lewis-exposed.htm

²⁴⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 176; a book that was influential in Chuck Colson's "conversion."

²⁵⁰ "God is ... calling people out of the world for His name ... They may not even know the name of Jesus, but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven" (<http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/graham/general.htm>)

[teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation [judgment]” (James 3:1).²⁵¹ Jesus declared, “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes* [this is the physical example]. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more [this is the spiritual application]” (Luke 12:47-48). As I teach the Word of God, I am mindful of this warning, which serves to make me diligent in ensuring that I present the Word with accuracy. However, there is also a warning to you, the listener/reader: if I am accurately presenting the Scriptures (and I do ask that you test what you hear/read from me against the Word of God), then it is incumbent upon you to do what you are being taught; you are no longer in ignorance about what the Lord expects of you, and so you are without excuse (2 Peter 1:10, in light of 2 Timothy 1:9 [our calling] and Ephesians 1:3-6 [our election]). The word of the Lord to you is this: Repent, or you will bear the consequences of diminishing from the “thus saith the Lord.”

Those who have followed this Jezebel into sin will be thrown into *great tribulation* unless they should repent and return to what the Lord requires. The word *tribulation* comes from the Greek *thlipsis*, which means a pressure or a pressing together, from which comes the idea of oppression, distress or affliction.²⁵² At the time of this word to the overseer of Thyatira, repentance was still a possibility. This Jezebel is being cast into a bed of sickness (present tense); those who are following her lead will face great suffering unless they repent. Jezebel had her opportunity to repent, and she spurned it – her destiny is secured; however, the Lord graciously holds the door of repentance open to those who were caught up in her spiritual adultery. The reality of James’ warning is demonstrated within this *ekklesia*: the teachers will face a greater judgment.



23. 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.

In the previous verse, we learned that Jesus was going to bring *great tribulation* down upon those who were committing spiritual adultery with this Jezebel. Here He states that He will *kill her children with death*. Within this heretical faction in this *ekklesia*, it is without question that this Jezebel was the leader; the heresy began with her, and she was its authority. However, it is evident that there were those who had been convinced of her doctrines, and were actively involved in perpetuating her spiritual infidelity – they were her spiritual *children*, albeit children of error. Although some people are simply content to be followers, there are others who become convinced of their leader’s wisdom, and begin to proclaim his/her “wisdom” as their own.

As Paul wrote to Timothy, he referred to him as his son (1 Timothy 1:2); Timothy was not Paul’s child, according to the flesh, but, rather, he was one into whom Paul had poured his heart so that he would carry on a spiritually stable work. In the same way, Jesus referred to His disciples

²⁵¹ Strong’s Online.

²⁵² Ibid.

as *children* (Mark 10:24); He was investing His life and energies into training them to proclaim His Gospel accurately.

If we consider the example of the Galatians, it becomes evident that it is during the *follower* stage that repentance and the forsaking of error is still possible. As he begins his letter of correction, Paul states that he is amazed that they are so quickly falling away from God Who called them into the grace of Christ (Galatians 1:6). He goes on to ask them to consider whether they are now being made perfect through the efforts of the flesh, when their walk with God began through the work of the Spirit; then he raises an interesting question: “Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain” (Galatians 3:3-4). Evidently, they had suffered for their faith in Christ, and Paul opens the door of hope that their suffering was not for nothing; i.e., there is still hope for them to change their ways (repent) and return to the Lord. He goes on to clarify that “Christ is become of no effect [estranged] unto you, whosoever of you are **justified** [made righteous] **by the law** [no one is justified by the Law (2:16), therefore, these would be those who **think** that they are so justified]; ye are fallen from [*ekipto* – *are fallen from*] grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the **hope of righteousness by faith**” (Galatians 5:4-5).²⁵³ At the beginning of his letter, Paul was amazed that they were so quickly **falling** from the grace of Christ; now he says that if they are convinced that they are being made righteous by keeping the Law, then they **are fallen** from the grace of Christ (they are apostate). By contrast, he says that we are waiting for the righteousness that comes by faith through the Spirit of God. In Greek, the word *justified (by the law)* is the verb form of (*the hope of*) *righteousness*; the dichotomy is clear: justification comes either by keeping the Law (which is not possible according to Galatians 2:16), or it is by faith.²⁵⁴ What we learn through Paul’s letter is that these two (the Law of Moses and faith in Christ) must never be mixed; to do so destroys the Gospel of God, which is founded upon His grace through personal faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9)! What is impossible for the Law of works to accomplish, God did through Christ so “that the righteousness of the law [of God] might be fulfilled in us, who walk ... after the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).

These *children* of Jezebel are, therefore, those who are convinced that she is right. They are no longer simply mindlessly following her teachings; they have become converts to, and/or propagators of, her heresy. Jesus says that He will *kill* them *with death*. As we look at this in our English, we might well wonder how else could they be killed? In the Greek, this is an emphatic statement that indicates that they will not die of natural causes; some refer to this as a Hebraism after the manner of God’s promise to Adam: “for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die [dying thou shalt die]” (Genesis 2:17).²⁵⁵ The two terms are brought together to provide an emphatic expression of how the Lord will deal with these children of error. *Kill (apokteino)* means to slay or put to death, and metaphorically speaks of depriving someone of spiritual life leading to eternal hell (*Gehenna*, not *hades*), and *with death* speaks of the loss of life due to sin (but not as a natural process) and, spiritually, eternal loss of life in Christ); therefore, we have the soul being deprived of life in Christ now, and then facing the increased torment of hell (*Gehenna*) forever.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Strong’s Online.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary.

²⁵⁶ Strong’s Online.

Jesus goes on to explain that, through His action against the children of this Jezebel, all of the assemblies will come to understand (*shall know*) that He is the One Who examines the innermost thoughts (*reins*) and the motivational workings (*hearts*) of everyone.²⁵⁷ Jesus will *kill* them in such a manner that everyone will know that they have been judged by the Lord for their spiritual failure. They have departed from the Gospel, and they will be dealt with accordingly.

Everyone within all of the assemblies, not just Thyatira, will receive from the Lord in accordance with their works. This might appear to be a confusing thought – every one being rewarded according to their actions. The Psalmist declared, “Also unto thee, O Lord, *belongeth* mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work” (Psalm 62:12). After proclaiming God as his salvation, and encouraging the reader to trust in Him, he warns against trusting in ill-gotten gains, and then concludes by ascribing unto the Lord both strength and kindness, for He will reward each person in keeping with their deeds. The underlying thought is the necessity of trusting in the Lord, and not in material accumulations; the Lord will give to each person according to his actions, which will either fall in line with trusting in the Lord, or setting his heart on this world. Jesus said, “For the Son of man shall [*mello* – is about to] come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). Earlier He 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” (Matthew 7:21); Jesus then went on to explain this with the parable of the two houses – one built upon the rock and the other upon the sand. The one who does what Jesus says is considered to be wise, and his deeds are established upon the rock, but the one who does not heed the words of the Lord is considered to be foolish, and his deeds are destroyed, for they are built upon sand. So how does the Lord Jesus *reward every man* in accordance with his works?

Perhaps this is a little like viewing the trees and the forest; considering the reward for deeds done is like looking at the trees – if you’re not careful you can lose sight of the big picture (the forest) and the ability to place this detail within a proper context. In Romans 2:5-11, Paul goes through a very similar explanation that almost makes it sound like we are saved by our good intentions. Let’s look at what is coming in order to, once again, place the trees within their proper context in the forest. Jesus told His disciples, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31). The gathering of the purchased souls (the overcomers who are found to be faithfully *in Christ*) will take place when the Lord returns in the clouds of the sky. Religious *Babylon*, which has infiltrated every area of the world system from the Garden of Eden forward, will be tried by the Lord, and the saints are commanded to have no part with her lest they become recipients of her judgment (Revelation 18:2-4); spiritual separation from all that is not of the Lord is critically important so that we do not face the same condemnation as the unrighteous (Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 6:17). After the judgment of *Babylon*, we read: “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people [large multitude] in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God ...” (Revelation 19:1). John witnessed

²⁵⁷ Gingrich Lexicon.

the saved multitude in heaven giving praise to the Lord; then he sees them following the Lord Jesus Christ as He comes from heaven to establish His kingdom on the earth (Revelation 19:11-15). Satan is then bound for a thousand years, while those with Christ rule and reign with Him on earth during that time. John then tells us that “the rest of the dead [the unrighteous, those who were not gathered at Christ’s coming in the clouds] lived not again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5a). At the end of the thousand years, Satan is loosed, and he immediately draws together those who were reluctantly obedient to the Lord during the millennium, and brings them against the Lord in battle. This is the end, for Satan is cast into the lake of fire, the earth and heavens vanish, and the dead (the unrighteous from all ages, those who were killed when they joined Satan in his last-ditch attempt to defeat the Lord, and everyone else who died when the earth and heaven were removed) are now resurrected to stand before God to be judged according to the record of their deeds and whether their name is in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:11-13).

What does a view of the forest tell us? First of all, we notice that there are only two places in eternity: either you are among the saved and part of the Lord’s kingdom, or you are not saved and find your place in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels, Antichrist, and the False Prophet (Revelation 21:7-8). During His ministry, Jesus made it very clear that there are also only two positions in this life: “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30); there is no middle ground and no fence to straddle. The Scriptures are also very clear about what it takes to be *with* the Lord: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works [*ergon*], lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works [*ergon*], which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).²⁵⁸ We are saved by *faith*, and NOT by our *works*; in the final judgment, we are told that God will judge everyone standing before Him according to their *works* (*ergon* – Revelation 20:13 uses the same Greek word as Ephesians 2:9) and whether their name is in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:12). God’s judgment will be based upon their works, which cannot save, and the Book of Life – if their name is entered there, then they are saved! Those standing before God will include **all** of the unrighteous **and** everyone who was saved during the millennium. The *forest* tells us that our works will not determine our destiny; so what is the reward that Jesus spoke of that will be received for our works (Matthew 16:27)?

We also read in Scripture: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). This speaks of deeds being built upon the Foundation, Jesus Christ; these will be the works of those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Nevertheless, their deeds will be tested; if their deeds are approved (in keeping with righteousness and holiness), then they will be rewarded. However, if their deeds fail the test requirements, then they (the works) will be destroyed – there will be no reward, but the salvation of the worker is not in jeopardy because he is *in Christ*. The Scripture is clear that we must all give an account to the Lord for what we have done in this life (Romans 14:12). For those who have not placed their faith in the Savior, all of

²⁵⁸ Strong’s Online.

their deeds will be vaporized in an instant, and they will receive the Lord's condemnation because they are still in their sins (John 3:36; Revelation 20:15). For both the righteous and the unrighteous, their deeds will be subject to evaluation; the difference will be that the righteous will remain in Christ, even if some of their deeds fail the test; on the other hand, the unrighteous will hear, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ..." (Matthew 25:41). The *works* are **not the foundation** – they are **built upon a foundation**, either of rock (the Lord Jesus Christ), or of sand. It is the foundation upon which we build that will determine the reward for our works. The only one who can build upon the Foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ is someone who has placed his faith in Him (Ephesians 2:8), for then, and only then, has he been re-created in Christ for the express purpose of doing His will – namely, the works of righteousness and holiness for which we have been created anew (Ephesians 2:10; 4:24). "Enter ye in at the strait gate ... Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14); faith in Christ is that *strait gate*: "Jesus saith ... I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Unless we have Christ as the Foundation for our works, we will stand before God on judgment day without Christ and with no works to save us. We must be *in Christ* by faith, and remain in Him by faithfulness – our eternal destiny depends upon it (Matthew 24:13).

The warning is that Jesus, the One Who knows our hearts, will be giving to everyone their reward *according to* their works: to the unrighteous, who are children of Jezebel (in this case) and are not in Christ, it will be death and the place of eternal torment; to the righteous, those who are in Christ by faith, it will be according to the Foundation upon which they have built, but their eternal destination will remain intact. Remember: "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus ...*" (Romans 8:1).



24. 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.

Jesus continues to address a larger community than just those in Thyatira; this would appear to be a continuation of the thought begun in the previous verse where all of the assemblies will know that Jesus is the One Who searches the depths of the hearts of all men. He begins to address a very particular group of people within the broader context: the *you* is in the plural form. He then goes on to specifically identify the *rest* of those within the assembly of Thyatira, those who have not fallen for the teachings of this Jezebel, as being included among those whom He is now addressing; therefore, *you* does not refer only to the remainder of the assembly in Thyatira. Jesus continues to define this broader group as those who absolutely are not holding to (*have*) the spiritually adulterous doctrines of the group led by this Jezebel. He has already dealt with those who have embraced this heresy (v. 22-23); now He turns His attention to those who have remained faithful to Him – those who have not come to understand the deeper things of Satan (the heresy of Jezebel). It seems that the people, who have not become a part of this heresy, have identified these false teachings as originating with Satan. There is some debate as to what *as they speak* refers, but it seems that Jesus' reference to the *depths of Satan* is how the faithful ones were referring to this heresy.

That Jesus is speaking to those who have remained true to Him, is unique in His writings to these first four gatherings. To this point, He has limited His comments to the overseers; however, in this case, He has not only elaborated on how He will deal with the heretics, but now He speaks specifically to all of those who have not embraced the doctrine of Jezebel, no matter where they might be. The implication of this is that the spiritual infidelity that characterized the teachings of this Jezebel were not limited to the *ekklesia* in Thyatira, and, as we have seen, these compromised teachings were probably fairly common during this time. Whenever you meld the prevailing philosophies of the day with the teachings of Christ, there will tend to be a *fit* within a larger group of people who are not prepared to make the sacrifices that a disciple of Christ must make, yet who desire to be considered as being Christian (Luke 14:26-27). Today the common term for these people would be “nominal Christians”; the truth of the matter is that they are not Christians at all.

A classic example is Oprah. She openly declares herself to be a Christian, claiming, “That is my faith.”²⁵⁹ She made this bold statement while recording one of her *Lifeclass* programs with New Age guru Deepak Chopra, but she explains: “I’m not asking you to be a Christian. If you want to be one I can show you how. But it is not required. I have respect for all faiths. All faiths. But



Oprah Winfrey

what I’m talking about is not faith or religion. I’m talking about spirituality.”²⁶⁰ Within her mind, there is a difference between having faith (of whatever stripe) and being spiritual – she advocates a positive spirituality that exists outside of faith. Don’t forget that the devil is a very spiritual being, and he believes in the true God of the Scriptures (James 2:19). Oprah defines her spirituality this way: it “is living life with an open heart, through love, and allowing yourself to align with the values of tolerance, acceptance, of harmony, of cooperation and reverence for life.”²⁶¹ As you can see, her *spirituality* runs along a pathway that has nothing whatsoever in common with faith in Christ; therefore, it is safe to conclude that, although Oprah calls herself a Christian, she has redefined the term, and her “faith” is not the saving faith of the Scriptures. We are told that she received guidance in her public “profession of faith” from Stedman Graham, among others (Stedman is

her live-in partner with whom she has “spiritual union”²⁶²); even though the Black Christian News Network stands in defense of Oprah’s profession, she remains outside of the Word of God – she is NOT in Christ, and the wrath of God remains upon her (John 3:36).²⁶³

Although Oprah might exert influence (perhaps, *sinfluence* would be more accurate) upon certain elements of society, she probably has limited effect on the average Evangelical. Do we find evidences closer to home of such a false profession of being a Christian? In other words, is the spiritual fornication of *Jezebel* prevalent today? You need look no further than the global

²⁵⁹ <http://www.charismanews.com/us/33290-oprah-winfrey-i-am-a-christian>

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stedman_Graham

²⁶³ <http://www.charismanews.com/us/33290-oprah-winfrey-i-am-a-christian>

ecumenical movement, which finds its voice through your own local ministerial association. Another glaring example is John Paul College, founded in Australia by two Catholics, an Anglican and a Uniting Church²⁶⁴ leader, which promotes itself as embracing Christian values, and explains its ecumenical philosophy this way:

Ecumenism recognises [*sic*] that people from different Christian faiths and traditions can work together towards greater unity while each preserves his or her traditional faith and practice.

It does not seek to ignore these differences; but through understanding and mutual respect, we aim to live in harmony whilst respecting our differing beliefs ...

By being involved in ecumenism, we are able to celebrate our diversity whilst embracing our unity.

As a consequence, we gain a new pride in ourselves within our own Christian beliefs and traditions whilst we all hold true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁶⁵



These are high-sounding words, capped with that ultimate of spiritual anesthetics: *we all hold true to the gospel of Jesus Christ*. This philosophy exhibits a high degree of tolerance: its claim is that you can believe your way, I can believe my way, and that is perfectly acceptable. What they will not bring themselves to consider is that, very often, both beliefs cannot be right – they are contradictory to one another. For example, ecumenism frequently brings Catholics and Evangelicals together; the former believes that Mary is co-redeemer with Christ and a mediator between man and God, whereas the latter will claim that Christ is the only Savior and Mediator – both cannot be right, yet, in the name of unity, the Evangelical will effectively ignore (in reality, deny) his view of Christ. The ecumenist hails this as a reason to *celebrate our diversity* while *embracing our unity*! All of their celebration will not rescue their souls from hell!

The late Chuck Colson, who was a tireless advocate of ecumenism, so eloquently said: “We must **strive** for unity because it is the essence of the church” (emphasis added);²⁶⁶ yet those are only his words, and they find absolutely no support within Scripture. The excuse that many ecumenists use to support their spiritual compromise comes from the prayer of the Lord Jesus when He said, “... That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). Taken in isolation, this might appear to be a prayer for unity among all those who profess His name. However, we cannot take this single Scripture and remove it from the rest of God’s Word; we must leave it within the context of all of God’s proclamation to us so that we are able to understand what is being said. Jesus’ petition is that those who are *in Him* by faith might remain there through faithfulness – it is all about remaining spiritually united with the Lord Jesus Christ with no thought of a unity that comes through a compromising and accommodating approach to God’s Word. There are some, like Colson, who place some emphasis upon an orthodox, or traditional, approach to the Scriptures. He said, “... when it comes to unity, biblical orthodoxy is more relevant than denominational identity. In many ways, for example, conservative Catholics have more in common

²⁶⁴ This is uniquely Australian, and is the union of Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Union denominations accomplished in 1977 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uniting_Church_in_Australia).

²⁶⁵ <http://www.jpc.qld.edu.au/health-wellbeing/spirituality/>

²⁶⁶ Colson, *Body*, p. 102.

with conservative Baptists than they have with liberal Catholics.”²⁶⁷ What it all comes down to is this: what is *orthodox*? Perhaps a more important question would be: who determines what is orthodox? For Colson, being *orthodox* in his view of God’s Word still permitted him to compromise God’s Word in order to bring the Catholics and Evangelicals together; unfortunately, that view is gaining ever wider acceptance among Evangelicals. Within my local community, a formerly very conservative congregation is now being led by a thoroughly ecumenical “pastor” (his most recent training was at a school that taught both Catholics and Evangelicals), and he is preparing to lead his people through the Alpha Course, which was developed by a charismatic and is highly acclaimed by the Catholic Church. The blind one will still retain his orthodoxy even while he is being led away from the truth of Scripture; typically, this does not happen overnight, but is accomplished by a slowly descending fog from the devil.



World Missionary Conference 1910, Edinburgh, Scotland

Modern ecumenism received its first significant boost through the World Missionary Conference held in 1910, which brought 1200 delegates together from Protestant churches and missionary organizations, primarily from Great Britain and the United States.²⁶⁸ Prior to coming together in Edinburgh, Scotland, eight committees of twenty members each, worked for two years preparing reports on assigned topics; one topic, relevant to our discussion, was titled: “Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity.”²⁶⁹ E.E. Olcott, a delegate who attended the conference representing the Reformed Church of America,

came away with a vision for a greater need for cooperation among denominations, and the need to see the good in other religions and philosophies.²⁷⁰ There can be no doubt that this conference provided a significant stepping-stone in the downward “progression” into modern ecumenical thinking.

In support of that one notable topic on cooperation and unity, a Continuation Committee was formed, which led to the formation of the International Missionary Council in 1921.²⁷¹ This Council, whose membership was limited to representatives of national councils of churches and mission organizations, became an advisory group to stimulate overall cooperation and to facilitate

²⁶⁷ Colson, *Body*, p. 111.

²⁶⁸ http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=5620

²⁶⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1910_World_Missionary_Conference

²⁷⁰ http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=5620

²⁷¹ <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/international-missionary-council>

joint conferences; specific churches and mission organizations were not represented on the Council – it functioned strictly as a means to enhance and encourage ecumenical cooperation. With the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, pressure was placed on this Council to join the WCC as its missionary arm, which it did in 1961.

What we can understand from this very brief history of more recent ecumenism is that the modern ecumenical philosophy, which we see playing out among Evangelicals, has been around for many years. What is equally evident is that, right from the beginning, the primary thrust of ecumenism has been to promote **unity among professing Christians** – handling the Word of God with integrity was never a matter for concern. The ecumenical movement has become the modern-day mouthpiece for the doctrines of Jezebel; they are a powerful, loosely-organized alliance that has achieved amazing success in capturing the minds of Evangelicals, despite being built upon a foundation of spiritual fornication!

We have already noted that at the time of the writing of this note to the elder of Thyatira, philosophical debates were common and popular. *Philosophy* speaks of a love of knowledge (from the Greek *philo* (loving) and *sophia* (knowledge or wisdom)).²⁷² If we consider the Scriptures for a moment, what we find is this: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge ...” (Proverbs 1:7); the fundamental need is for a love and reverence for the Lord, and not a love for knowledge (a *philosophy*). If we are a truly born-again Christian, then we must fear the Lord, and this needs to permeate every fiber of our being so that we will then walk in obedience to His commands (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-4). However, this is **not** a *philosophy*; the term *philosophy*, as we know it, refers to man’s pursuit of knowledge without any consideration for the fear of the Lord; it is a human, and not a godly, wisdom. Paul warned, “Beware lest any man spoil you [to lead astray] through philosophy [*philosophia* – human wisdom] and vain deceit [a deception that contains no truth], after [according to] the tradition of men, after the rudiments [the fundamental teachings] of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).²⁷³ *Philosophy* (human wisdom) is not something that we should be cultivating; in contrast to the pursuit of human wisdom, we are to seek “first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

We often reminisce about the good, old days when Bible colleges taught the Scriptures with care and accuracy, and sought to engender a love for God’s Word within their students. It’s interesting to note that as they sought to gain accreditation with outside organizations, they were forced to reduce the number of hours that the Bible was taught, and those freed hours of teaching were filled with new programs in philosophy, sociology, and psychology – all from a “Christian”

“[Neo-Evangelicalism] differed from fundamentalism in its repudiation of separatism and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day.”

Harold J. Ockenga, *Forward to The Battle for the Bible*

perspective, of course. *Philosophy* includes no provision for “thus saith the Lord,” yet there is ample room for everyone’s rationalized opinion – the commands

of Scripture were left to the old Bible teachers who were rapidly being squeezed into the philosophical mold of compromise, or out of teaching altogether. When the New Evangelicalism of Harold Ockenga found its voice, two things happened simultaneously: 1) Biblical separation

²⁷² http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=p&p=27&allowed_in_frame=0

²⁷³ Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

was abandoned, and 2) philosophy took center stage and became the bond between the Evangelical and the Liberal – it was their newly-discovered common ground. This New Evangelicalism (which is no longer “New”) closed the door on the authority of God’s Word and provided an opportunity for worldly philosophy to take its place; this did not happen immediately, but Ockenga laid the groundwork and expressed the intent. It wasn’t long before the Bible was no longer considered to be inerrant and all Biblical doctrines were subject to debate; ecumenical accommodation and compromise had just been granted a new lease on life. Ockenga struck a chord that resonated with many Evangelicals who longed for a positive expression of Christianity that demanded very little of them. Such a “Christian” philosophy permits ecumenism to flourish, it opens the door for Evangelicals and Catholics to get together, it welcomes Eastern mystical traditions with open arms (the Emergent Church), and it allows worldliness to become the acceptable norm – all the while retaining the name “Christian.” However, it will absolutely not support someone who is totally committed to the Lord, to the love of His Word, and to living in obedience to His commands. The two worlds are mutually exclusive, and we must be prepared to bring that same distinct separation into our own lives! Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth” (Luke 11:23). It is a *philosophy* of Christianity that allows Rick Warren to reach out to Rome for support for his worldly endeavors and to welcome the Muslims into his world-enhancement programs. It is a *Christian* philosophy that permits Joel Osteen to spew forth his feel-good homilies of health, wealth, and unending pleasure, and still be viewed as an influential Evangelical. Benny Hinn, Peter Popoff, and Reinhard Bonnke use a variation of this philosophy to promote their own deceptive health and wealth ministries. These men have waded into the popular philosophies of the day and have refused to accept a Biblical love for the truth of God so that they might be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10). We, like the faithful of the *ekklesia* in Thyatira, must remain true to God and His Word and avoid the *depths of Satan* that find expression through the ecumenical philosophies of today.

To the faithful in Thyatira, Jesus says that He will absolutely not add to the burden that they are already carrying; namely, standing firm against the error of Jezebel that is pressing in all around them. Accordingly, we **must** hold out against every form of ecumenism!



25. But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come.

For some reason, the translators of the KJV saw fit to isolate this verse from the previous one; there are many variations on how this passage has been handled by those who have translated the Scriptures into English (Wycliffe, Tyndale, etc.), but most draw them together in some form. Considering that the original Greek texts contain no punctuation at all, no spaces between words, no markers to show when one sentence ended and another began, it becomes a matter of understanding the ancient Greek language in order to determine words, sentences, paragraphs, etc. As I consider the thoughts at play here, I would concur with the early translators that the concluding thought from the previous verse needs to be closely linked to this one.

It seems that Jesus is saying that He will not lay on them any other spiritual responsibility (*burden*) but that which they already have: hold fast to the truth!²⁷⁴ These are the faithful ones – those who have remained true to the Lord even in the midst of oppressive error. The burden that they were bearing was to stand against the teachings of this Jezebel – Jesus will not add to this.

²⁷⁴ Vine’s “burden.”

However, He does command them to *hold fast*; they are to expend energy (it is in the active voice) in order to retain a firm grasp on their faithfulness.²⁷⁵ His challenge to them is: *only what you are holding – keep hold of until the time when I have come*.²⁷⁶ The Greek verb *come* is in the subjunctive mood, but is preceded by the particle *an*, which adds an element of uncertainty as it relates to time; the ambiguity is not **if** He will come but **when** He will come.²⁷⁷ Once again, we must exercise caution as to how we handle this; we must carefully place it within the context of Scripture. When speaking of future events with His disciples, Jesus said, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13); *cometh* is in the indicative mood, which means that it is a statement of fact – the Son of Man **is** coming, but we do not know specifically when. Jesus’ words to the faithful in Thyatira is that they are to remain true to Him until He comes for them – whether this would be in the clouds of the air, or through physical death, they are to *hold fast*; the timing of both events is unknown to us.

If our desire is to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ in this day of oppressive ecumenism, then His word to us is this: retain a firm grasp on My truth and do not relax your hold even for a moment. What is His truth to which we must cling? The instruction in God’s Word is twofold: 1) “... put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt ...,” and 2) “... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22, 24). Through putting the *new man* on, we learn to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37-40).

However, Evangelicals today (even if they might not willingly admit it) are determined to hold onto the *old man*, even while professing to live as a *new man*; this is all part of the *Christian philosophy* that has found real traction in today’s spiritual quagmire. A significant part of putting off the old, corrupt nature is learning to stay well away from error. We are to avoid those who teach a gospel that is alongside of God’s truth, which includes absolutely everything that is ecumenical (Romans 16:17); spiritually, we are to have nothing to do with anyone who advocates a position of ecumenical acceptance – ecumenism is an *alongside gospel* that is anathema for the true child of God (Galatians 1:9)! We are commanded to not take hold of what is unclean, if we desire to have the Lord receive us (2 Corinthians 6:17); in essence, we are to stop all forms of error from entering our minds: we are not to sit under ecumenical teaching, and we are not to watch or read their materials. If we are spiritually confused, then we must search our hearts as to whether we have been negligent in this area (2 Corinthians 13:5); “Be not deceived [do not be led astray]: evil [bad] communications [associations] corrupt [destroy] good manners [habits]” (1 Corinthians 15:33).²⁷⁸ Furthermore, we must also recognize that those who continue under the teaching of an ecumenist are also contaminated (*unclean*) because they remain there in violation of the Scriptures. Therefore, we must extend our protection to include those who are tolerant of ecumenism (these are also included among the *bad associations* of 1 Corinthians 15:33); they might not be actively ecumenical, but they refuse to separate themselves from those who are, and, thereby, they bear the same stain – they are followers of *Jezebel*. We are called to *put off* the *corrupt old man* – we must sever **all** spiritual ties to that which is not in keeping with the Word of God; in our day, the significant separation is from everything and everyone ecumenical. We would question the sanity

²⁷⁵ Strong’s Online.

²⁷⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁷⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁷⁸ Gingrich Lexicon.

of a married couple who admit that they are struggling in their marriage if one (or both) is involved in an adulterous relationship – our advice would be simple: repent of your adultery and remain faithful to one another! By the same token, it is ludicrous to wonder why we are struggling spiritually when we are committing spiritual fornication against the Lord by permitting ecumenical thinking to enter our minds; the solution is the same: repent, separate from ecumenism, and cleave to the Lord.

We cannot claim to have put off the *old man* if we continue to abide in the spiritual fornication of ecumenism. We must not become lazy in our spiritual journey with the Lord; He has called us to separate from everything that is unclean, and that is what we must do. We are masters of rationalization, but there is **nothing** that we can say that will justify disobeying the Lord at this point. Take your best reason for continuing to attend an ecumenical prayer meeting or for reading literature from ecumenical organizations, and present it to the Lord; His response will still be that He has commanded you to separate from such (2 Corinthians 6:17). Since He has commanded you to separate from all things ecumenical (and He has), then by attending their meetings or reading their literature (no matter how innocent, or how well intentioned you might be), you are disobeying the Lord. Jesus said very clearly, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth [is carefully attending to] them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).²⁷⁹ Beware, lest disobedience creep into your life and Satan gain a toehold thereby; “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [unfaithfulness, pointing to a wayward walk], in departing [falling away] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).²⁸⁰ It is only by continually attending carefully to the Word of God that we can be assured that we are abiding in Him (1 John 2:3-6).

As we noted earlier, God’s instruction is twofold: there is to be a definite *putting off* (as we have just seen), but there is also a very important *putting on* of a nature created by God *in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:24; Matthew 12:43-45 underscores the importance of *putting on*). God has created us in Christ for the express purpose of walking in His righteousness (Ephesians 2:10); we have been saved in Christ to walk in obedience to Him. Jesus declared, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15) – a very concise statement that tells us so much. *Love* is from the Greek word *agape*, which is love as an act of the will, and not the emotions; it is in the present tense and subjunctive mood – *if you may be loving me*, Jesus is saying, this is what I command you to do: attend carefully to (*keep*) My commands.²⁸¹ The life of the follower of Christ in simple terms is this: avoid that which is evil, and obey the Lord’s commands.

The Psalmist declared: “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). Here is what we are to avoid, and what we are to embrace. The Psalmist identified three descending levels that the person who is *blessed* must avoid. The first is to not heed the counsel of the ungodly: do not listen to the ecumenist who calls you to remain in their fellowship; they may be doing many wonderful things, and your dream might be to influence them back to what is right, but the Word of God is very clear that we are to have no part with them (spiritually). If we fail here, then the next level down will have us standing in the pathway of these sinners; we might not be overtly promoting sin

²⁷⁹ Strong’s Online.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Strong’s Online.

(other than the easily-hidden disobedience to God), we are just simply standing with, or joining, those who are – which means that we are condoning their sinful actions. The lowest level is where we sit with those who are in error and scorn the narrow-minded who refuse to heed *the counsel of the ungodly*. The one who is blessed does not begin this descent, or, having begun, repents before hitting the *depths of Satan*. For the child of God, the Psalmist makes it clear that there must be only one thing that brings true *delight*: the Word of God, which contains His instruction for us. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105); we will only benefit from the light of the Lamp when we make God’s Word our focus. The Word of God tells us how we are to live; we will only discover His desire for us as we take time to study His Word. We cannot close our eyes, open the Bible at random, point our finger to a passage, and expect to discover the marvel of God’s light; rather, “Study [God’s command to make every effort] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).²⁸²

God’s word to us, as it was to the faithful of Thyatira, is this: know My Word, and hold fast to My Word – not just while things are going smoothly, or for a little while, but to the very end! “For we are made partakers of Christ [we will share in the glory of Christ], if we hold [may retain (subjunctive mood)] the beginning [the original saving conviction] of our confidence stedfast unto the end ...” (Hebrews 3:14).²⁸³ As Jesus spoke of events that are yet to come, He said, “But he that shall endure [something that we must do] unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13); if our faith remains steadfast in the Lord until the day that we die, or the Lord comes for us, then we are assured that we will be saved (it is a statement of fact). To be faithful to the Lord requires that we have absolutely no part with ecumenical fornication.



26. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Jesus speaks again to the one who is *overcoming*; this is the one who is living victoriously in Christ – remaining steadfast in his faith²⁸⁴ and avoiding error. The present tense of this verb speaks to a continual overcoming: *he that is overcoming*; this is not a past action that has ceased, or a temporary action that lasts for a season, but is a present action that must be perpetuated. Within this assembly, there were still those who were continuing to hold tenaciously to their faith in Christ; they were not being lured into error by the compromising words of this Jezebel. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death” (Proverbs 16:25); undoubtedly there were many who had been led into error through the teachings of this woman, and who thought that they were still on the pathway to life. They would have looked with pity on those who were remaining faithful to Christ and His Word – after all, why would you go through all of the difficulties of clinging to such a narrow truth when there was an easier way that held the same promises? The primary problem that such poor, deluded people have is this: they have become so convinced of the veracity of their error that they refuse to take the time to examine their

²⁸² Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁸³ Strong’s Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁸⁴ Strong’s Online.

false hope against the Word of God – they are comfortable in their error; therefore, they have no time to listen to anything that might shine the light of the truth on their delusion.

We might wonder, how can they be so short-sighted? Before we pick up a proverbial stone to cast at these people, perhaps we should first consider our own position before the Lord. The predominant error of our day is ecumenism: it began with a push for unity among professing Christians; however, with the present growing popularity of the Emergent Church and its emphasis upon experiential mysticism, there is now a desire for a broader unity that will draw all religions together. Do I take the time to examine what I am being taught against the light of the requirements of the Word of God? Considering that ecumenism is standard fare within mainstream Evangelicalism, it seems evident that there are very few who take the time to study the Scriptures so as to evaluate what they are being taught – there are not many Bereans left in this day of naiveté and apathy (Acts 17:10-11). The question is: “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter?” (James 3:11); this is an appropriate question to ask regarding someone who remains in ecumenism, and, at the same time, seeks to present himself as being a Biblical Christian. As long as he remains tied to ecumenical error, whatever he teaches will be tainted, and will definitely not be pure. What is even more amazing is that there are those who pay lip-service to adhering to the narrow-way even while exposing themselves to the dangers of ecumenism by sitting under the teaching of those who refuse to separate from this spiritual fornication. Is it any wonder that they are confused about so many things? However, consider the position of the listener: if his desire is to be a true follower of the Way, then he must not fill his mind with both the pure words of Scripture **and** the tainted words of such a teacher – this will only lead to spiritual confusion, and will grieve the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). Jesus said that the Spirit would come to guide us into all truth (John 16:13); if we continue to feed at the trough of compromised teaching, then we cannot expect to ingest the truths that the Spirit of God has for us – the sweet water of God’s Word will not sanctify the bitter water of the ecumenist, but the bitter will certainly contaminate the sweet. We are to be overcomers! If we refuse to separate from error, whether blatant or subtle, then we are not one who *is overcoming*!

However, Jesus is not only addressing the one who is overcoming, but also the one who is keeping (*keepeth* is present tense) His works unto the end. *Keepeth* comes from the Greek word *tereo* (*tay-reh’-o*), which means to attend to carefully.²⁸⁵ Jesus also said, “If ye love me, **keep** my commandments” (John 14:15); *keep* also comes from the Greek word *tereo*, and, this time, it is in the imperative mood – this is a command!²⁸⁶ What are His commands that He wants us to keep? We’ve all heard of ten of them (the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20), which God wrote upon our hearts when we placed our faith in Him for salvation (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8:10). We are to be very carefully obeying these commands of the Lord. “For we are his [God’s] workmanship [creation], created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). It is God’s desire that we live according to the works that He has prepared for us; Jesus commanded us to do so, if we love Him. Nevertheless, we have not been created in Christ to function as robots; we still have a will that we can exercise either in compliance with God’s commands to us (obedience), in compromise of His desires, or in rebellion against Him. Nevertheless, His invitation is open to everyone: “... whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). Who provides the *water of life*? To the Samaritan woman Jesus

²⁸⁵ Strong’s Online.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

said, "... whosoever drinketh [may drink] of the water that I shall give him shall [will absolutely] never thirst ..." (John 4:14); to the multitudes who followed Him, Jesus said, "If any man thirst [should be thirsting], let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37b).²⁸⁷ If we desire to satisfy our spiritual thirst and come to the Savior to drink of His life-giving water, then we must be prepared to live in accordance with the Water of Life. In other words, we must live in obedience to His commands, or we simply cannot claim to have partaken of His life-giving water: "And hereby we do know [are knowing] that we know [have known] him [God], if we keep [may be attending carefully to] his commandments. He that saith, I know [have known] him [God], and keepeth not [is not attending carefully to] his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is [absolutely] not in him" (1 John 2:3-4; see Revelation 21:8).²⁸⁸ Our profession does not assure us of a place in heaven (Matthew 7:21) – we must be committed to doing His will *unto the end* (Matthew 24:13). Jesus has turned His attention to the one who is overcoming and keeping His word to the very end, which could be his physical death, or His return for him and everyone who is His (the *rapture*).

Jesus goes on to declare, concerning those who are victorious in Him, that they will receive authority (*power*) over the nations – those who are outside of His victorious ones. The word *nations* comes from the Greek *ethnos*, which originally meant a multitude, and, in turn, carries the thought of a nation or people.²⁸⁹ The Greek plural form, as it is used here with the definite article, typically referred to non-Jews or foreigners.²⁹⁰ To the Ephesians, Paul very carefully explained that the separation between Jew (*Circumcision*) and Gentile (*Uncircumcision*) has been removed in Christ; we are made one in Him (Ephesians 2:12-16)! The reality, within end-time teaching, is that *the nations* refers to those who are not in Christ by faith. The distinction is no longer between Jew and Gentile but between the faithful in Christ and those who are not (*ton ethnos*).²⁹¹

In one of his visions, Daniel saw a series of four beasts arise and exercise dominion over the earth (they are identified as being kings; Daniel 7:17), and then he saw the Son of man who "came with the clouds of heaven ... And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). This speaks of the day when Christ will return to earth to establish His earthly kingdom, when He will rule all peoples with a *rod of iron* (Revelation 19:15), and those who have been purchased by His blood (the overcomers) "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). Daniel was told that "the saints of the most High shall take [receive] the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (Daniel 7:18).²⁹² Daniel prophesied of a day when the saints of God will be given authority in the earthly kingdom of the Lord, which will carry forward into the heavenly kingdom (Revelation 21:24); Jesus clarifies to the elder of Thyatira that this grand future will be given to the ones who are being victorious in Him.

²⁸⁷ Strong's Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-negation.htm.

²⁸⁸ Strong's Online.

²⁸⁹ Vine's "nation."

²⁹⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁹¹ Strong's Online.

²⁹² Ibid.



27. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

This continues from the previous verse, where Jesus outlines what He will do for the one who is overcoming in Him. Whoever is victorious in the Lord will shepherd (*rule*) the multitudes (*nations*, from v. 26) with a staff (*rod*) made of iron;²⁹³ in other words, the people will be guided with a firm hand. We find this same Greek phrase in Revelation 19:15, where we read of Jesus returning to earth to establish His millennial kingdom: “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and **he shall rule them with a rod of iron**: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” Those who are conquering in Christ will be priests, and exercise kingly power (*reign*) with Him over the earth (Revelation 20:6). This will be a time of peace and prosperity (when the wolf and the lamb will lie down together – Isaiah 11:6), a time when the will of God will be done on earth (Matthew 6:10), yet we know that this compliance will be largely external. When Satan is released at the end of the thousand years, he will gather the rebellious ones together to make war against the Lamb of God: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations [the unbelieving, as we just explained] which are in the four quarters [corners] of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: **the number of whom is as the sand of the sea**” (Revelation 20:7-8).²⁹⁴ We might wonder how those who have lived under the prosperity and shepherding of the Son of God would not willingly submit to Him wholeheartedly; what is demonstrated here is that man’s sinful nature will prevail unless there is a willing submission to Christ by faith. Clearly, the obedience of many during the millennial reign of Christ will not come from the heart (i.e., faith in Him as their Lord, resulting in the salvation of the soul), but will only be external – a submission to the *rod of iron*. Even then, the Narrow Way to life will be found by only a few (Matthew 7:14).

We often wonder how so many people living at the time when Jesus walked this earth, refused to believe in Him and would not submit to Him as their Lord; surely the many miracles that He performed should have been ample proof that He was the Messiah – after all, WE would have believed in Him! As we consider the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are amazed, all over again, that the people will witness the prosperity of the earth and His righteous guidance of all people, and still so many will not accept Him as their God and Savior. We may well look at historical Israel and the words of Scripture about these future generations, and be critical of them for their unbelief.

However, before we begin to glory in our comparative righteousness, it might be good for us to ponder our own reflection. Today we have every opportunity to hold the Word of God in our hands, and to freely study it with the promised guidance of the Spirit of God so that we might come to understand His desire for us. In other words, we are without excuse to know what God wants of us: His longing for us to live in His holiness (1 Peter 1:15), to walk in obedience to His commands (John 14:15), and to separate from all that is not in agreement with His truth (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Nevertheless, despite all that God has done to encourage our life in Him, most, even among those who profess to know the Lord, still walk in spiritual fornication and darkness. How can this be? We are sinful by nature and masters at rationalizing and justifying our actions. This is most

²⁹³ Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁹⁴ Strong’s Online.

eloquently expressed through Jesus' words: "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" (Matthew 7:22-23). These have made proclamations, dispelled demons, and performed miracles in the name of the Lord – yet all of this was outside of Him, for He never knew them. Despite these many evidences of supernatural power, Jesus says that He was never there with them; this is an explicit warning that events (and people) are not always as they may appear. As Jesus spoke to His disciples of the future, He said, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs [*indications*, seen as miracles] and wonders [*omens*; something so unusual as to arouse closer observation²⁹⁵]; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before" (Matthew 24:24-25).²⁹⁶ Notice that Satan will inspire events that will appear to be miraculous, to the extent that even the faithful one in Christ (the *elect*) will be deceived – if he is not alert. Jesus says that we have been forewarned (*I have told you before*), so that we might not be deceived; we must have our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ so that the wonders of the devil are not a fatal distraction to us (Hebrews 12:2 – *looking* means to give attention to the exclusion of everything else²⁹⁷). We must have no part with anything that is alongside of God's message to us – perhaps it may appear to be so true, but yet not quite right: avoid it! (Romans 16:17). Possibly the greatest lure for the Christian in our society is the "loving" embrace of ecumenism; if we would stand firm in Christ, then we must have no part with ecumenism or anyone who participates in, or accommodates, the movement or its ideology (remember – it is spiritual fornication!).

The Psalmist, in what we call a *Messianic Psalm*, said, "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. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Psalm 2:7-9). Speaking of the day when Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will rule the earth (the millennium), the Psalmist proclaims that He will have authority over the heathen in all of the earth. His authority is already in place over those who are His, for they are living in submission to Him (at least we are supposed to be), but His control over the heathen will be something new; the kingdoms of this world are Satan's domain and function under his control (Luke 4:5-8). The Lord holds general authority over all things as He works to guide them according to His plan, but, during the millennium, He will impose obedience – that will be very new! Keep in mind that Satan, during this time, will be bound and unable to stir the ungodly into open rebellion against the Lord (Revelation 20:1-3). The visual image used by the Psalmist is like to someone striking a vessel, fashioned from clay, with an iron rod; the rebellion of the ungodly multitudes will be shattered, or crushed, during the Lord's millennial reign, and it will remain so until Satan is loosed.

In His words to the overcoming one, Jesus reiterates the truth of this Psalm: His shepherding with a rod of iron will completely subdue the rebellion of the ungodly, and those who are overcomers will participate with Him in overseeing the harmony of all people. *Shiver* is an Old English word that means to break into pieces, to shatter.²⁹⁸ Jesus' role as the one True Shepherd

²⁹⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁹⁶ Strong's Dictionary.

²⁹⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁹⁸ American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828 edition, "shiver."

will be to remove open rebellion from the earth, but, as noted earlier, that will not remove rebellion from the hearts of the ungodly. If there was ever an ounce of hope for the doctrine of universalism (everyone will be saved), it would have to be during the millennial reign of Christ; however, what is evident is that even universal conformity does not mean that everyone has a new heart of faith.

Jesus goes on to declare that He has received (perfect tense) this millennial kingdom from God the Father. The Psalmist referred to this kingdom as *everlasting*, going on for eternity (Psalm 145:13); Daniel wrote of a *forever* kingdom (Daniel 4:3; 7:27); Peter tells us that the kingdom of the Lord is *everlasting*, or without end (2 Peter 1:11).²⁹⁹ Jesus will shepherd (*rule*) all of the peoples of the earth – it is promised by God the Father. Equally sure is the promise that those who are overcomers in Christ will participate with Him in the governing of this *everlasting* kingdom.



28. And I will give him the morning star.

Jesus, the One Who created all things (John 1:1-2), will give the predawn (*morning*) star to the one who is overcoming. The Greek *proinos* (*pro-ee-nos* ') comes from a word (*proi* [*pro-ee* ']) that means early in the morning, and can include the last watch of the night, namely from about 3:00 to 6:00 AM.³⁰⁰ “And in the morning [*proi*], rising up a great while before day, he [Jesus] went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35);³⁰¹ here we see the word used specifically to refer to a time before daylight. Therefore, our word *morning* (*proinos*) can be taken to refer to the time just before the sun rises – that time of day when the *morning star* (the planet Venus) is most prominent in the eastern sky.

The phrase *morning star* appears only one other time in the Bible; Jesus says that He is “the root and the offspring [*genos* – descendant] of David, and the bright [brilliant] and morning [*orthrinos* (*or-thrin-os* ') – early] star” (Revelation 22:16).³⁰² Both of these are in fulfillment of prophecies concerning the Lord. Speaking of the coming of the Messiah, the Lord declared, “I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH [sprout, shoot (Messiah from the Davidic family line)]” (Zechariah 3:8);³⁰³ Jesus says that He is that *offspring* of David – His earthly ancestry comes through the line of David. The Lord used Balaam to prophesy concerning the coming One: “... there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel ...” (Numbers 24:17). Two separate prophecies show the promised One as being a Descendant of David and a Star – Jesus, as *the Son of God*, claims them both.

Some modern translations have broadened the concept of the *morning star*. In Isaiah 14:12 we read, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” *Lucifer* (*light-bearer*) is called the *son* (the descendent) of the *morning* (dawn).³⁰⁴ The American Standard Version (ASV) reads: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning!” – (thereby introducing the idea of a *star*, even though the Hebrew carries no such thought); the committee that worked on

²⁹⁹ Strong's Online.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

the ASV included those from “the Baptist, Congregationalist, Dutch Reformed, Friends [Quakers], Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Protestant Episcopal, and Unitarian” denominations (it is a truly ecumenical translation).³⁰⁵ The New American Standard Bible (NASB, a revision of the ASV) takes this a step further: “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn!”; the New International Version (NIV) closes the loop: “How you have fallen from heaven, **morning star**, son of the dawn!”³⁰⁶ Through textual corruption, Satan has maneuvered two of the most common English translations in use today (the NASB and the NIV) into calling the devil by a name that is reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ. Rest assured, the devil is not the bright and Morning Star; however, you can be sure that his initial desire was to be like unto the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)!

To the one who is victorious in the Lord, Jesus says, “*I will give him the morning star.*” Isaiah prophesied of the coming day of the Lord: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isaiah 9:2). The morning star (the planet Venus) tells us of the approaching day – a promise that the darkness is ending and that daylight is very near; to the one who is overcoming, Jesus is that Hope of light of a new day dawning.



29. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Unlike each of the previous three notes to the elders (2:7, 11, 17), Jesus, here, places the command, to hear the Spirit of God, at the end of His charge – a pattern that will hold for each of the remaining elders. There doesn’t appear to be a reason for the change; however, it does make the last things spoken to be that to which we are to give heed – we are to carefully attend to what the Spirit is saying to us.

³⁰⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Standard_Version

³⁰⁶ http://www.studylight.org/desk/?t=en_nlt&q=isa%2014