



<sup>1</sup> And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.



**Ruins of Ancient Sardis**

Jesus now turns His attention to the elder of the *ekklesia* in Sardis, which was the capital city of the ancient province of Lydia.<sup>1</sup> The city was wealthy, with one of the largest temples to the goddess Artemis (Diana, to the Romans); it was on a major route from the interior to the coast, it controlled a spacious and fertile valley, and was known for its military might.<sup>2</sup>

In typical fashion, as Jesus comes to this overseer, He identifies Himself in a very specific manner. He is the One Who has the *seven Spirits of God* and the *seven stars*. When John began writing

this Revelation, he referred to the *seven Spirits* that are before the throne of God (1:4). When we looked at this earlier, we understood this to speak of the fullness of the Spirit of God, and not to seven separate spirits of God. Anytime that we hear of the Spirit of God being given to us (John 16:13), or abiding within us (Romans 8:9), it is always in the singular. As Paul wrote of Jesus, we are told that “in him dwelleth [lives] all the fulness [the sum total] of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).<sup>3</sup> Jesus, in Whom the fullness of God dwells, now comes to this elder.

Jesus also reminds this overseer that He holds him (as well as the other six elders) on His right side of favor (1:20). When John first turned to see the Lord, he saw *seven stars* in His right hand (1:16), which Jesus later identified as being the elders of the seven specified assemblies (1:20). This brings the fullness of God very close to this elder; the One Who is holding him is also the embodiment of the completeness of the Godhead.

This One, Who is Almighty God in all respects, utters this now very familiar phrase to the elder of Sardis: *I know thy works* – I have complete knowledge of everything that you have been doing. However, the similarity ends there; whereas each of the previous elders heard more of the good things that the Lord knew about them, in this case Jesus launches right into his failure. He is told that he has a reputation (*name*) that he is alive, yet he is dead.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, this is speaking of his spiritual condition; this is the ultimate hypocrisy – everyone thinks that he is living, when, in reality, he is dead.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bibleplaces.com/sardis.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardis>

<sup>3</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>4</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

When Jesus confronted the Pharisees, it was evident that they had a similar problem. “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. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:27-28). The Greek word used to describe the *bones* (*nekros*; *dead*), is the same one that Jesus now uses to describe this elder. Despite being thought of as being spiritually alive, he is as dead as the religious scribes and Pharisees (and bones in a grave). Jesus’ advice to His disciples, concerning the Pharisees, was this: “All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matthew 23:3). The Pharisees said many things that were right, and their interpretation of God’s Word was not always wrong; therefore, Jesus’ instruction was to do what they said (for they spoke from a vast familiarity with the Law of Moses), but absolutely do not follow their example. They could expound the Law and provide all of the details of how it was to be kept **by others** – their perceived role was to provide instruction only; their lot in life (according to their humble estimation) was to appear as being righteous and to be held in high regard by the people. Jesus saw through their façade and exposed the death that was in them.

We might smugly think: how could they do that? How could they know so much about God’s Word and yet remain spiritually dead? How could today’s Evangelical theologians spend their entire lives studying the Bible and yet remain in heresy; or, even worse, turn away from the truth? As an example, consider Jack van Impe who began his preaching and evangelistic ministry in 1948, around the same time that Billy Graham got his start and when the concepts of New Evangelicalism were beginning to take root.<sup>5</sup> However, unlike Graham, van Impe aligned himself with the Fundamentalists of the day and stood against the compromise of the increasingly popular New Evangelical movement. Even into the 1970s, he was still considered to be a Fundamentalist;<sup>6</sup> even though he was becoming less enamored with their negative, militant stance, he still sought to maintain his reputation among them. He recognized that he would never be as popular as Billy Graham but refused to compromise his Fundamental position in order to enhance his popularity.<sup>7</sup> Van Impe’s *fundamentalism* was expressed this way: “I always felt that my best preaching took place when I was stirred to ‘righteous indignation,’ and I often ended up tearing people to shreds in ungracious tones and with unkind words”; his own admission is that “there is ... something wrong when a man preaches to the prejudices of men.”<sup>8</sup> This provides a glimpse into the unbiblical

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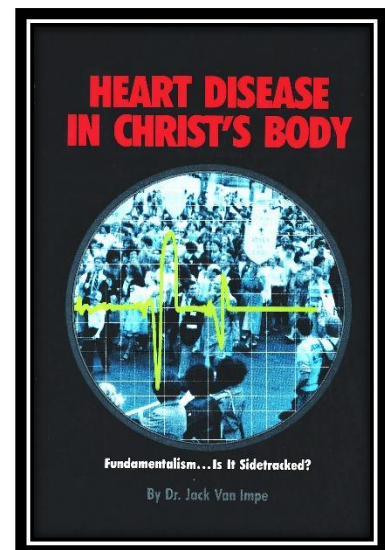
<sup>5</sup> <http://philadelphians.50megs.com/impe2.html>

<sup>6</sup> A *Fundamentalist*, as properly defined within this context, was someone who held to five defined, fundamental doctrines of the Bible: 1. the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, 2. the virgin birth of Jesus, 3. Christ’s substitutionary atonement, 4. the bodily resurrection and return of Christ, and 5. the historicity of Biblical miracles (including creation). The movement grew out of an effort to counter the significant inroads that modernism was making across denominations; whoever stood uncompromisingly on these *fundamentals* and refused to associate with anyone who didn’t, was approved by self-appointed monitors of who was *in* and who was *out*. This loose association, at its finest, included Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans; not unlike modern day ecumenists, they had arrived at a suitable compromise on the *essentials of Christianity* and they used that as their means of determining their fellowship – these are the subjective *essentials* that were never approved by God as being the minimum standard. **This** is the group with whom Jack Van Impe sought to remain a member-in-good-standing. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_fundamentalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_fundamentalism))

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.blessedquietness.com/journal/resource/vanimpe.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Jack Van Impe, *Heart Disease in Christ’s Body*, pp. 40-41.

workings of those who identified themselves as being Fundamentalists; nowhere in Scripture are we encouraged to verbally tear people apart simply because they don't agree with us, or even because they teach error. We are definitely counselled to identify those who teach that which is not in keeping with the Scriptures (Romans 16:17) – we are to *mark* (watch out for) them, which means that they must be identified (named), but we do not go about attacking them as a person. However, in the years just prior to his book, *Heart Disease in Christ's Body*, which was published in 1984, Jack changed his spiritual course, embraced Roman Catholicism, and joined the ecumenical, New Evangelical program. This man, who refers to himself as the “Walking Bible,” is purported to have memorized some 14,000 verses of Scripture,<sup>9</sup> and it is estimated that some ten million people attended his crusades between 1948 and 1980, with over a half-million professions of faith in Christ.<sup>10</sup> After standing firmly against the lure of ecumenical thinking for all of those years, he finally yielded. He now looks back and says, “There was a time when I was one of these right-wing fanatics [a Fundamentalist] ... who preached against everyone and everything, in the '70s. And then I had an experience that changed my life and brought me to the point where I started loving my Catholic brothers and sisters.”<sup>11</sup> His words to his wife were: “Rexella, I am quitting the ministry. I can't take this hatred any more.”<sup>12</sup> What was the significant shift that took place within his thinking? His focus became the love for, and unity with, all men; rather than Biblically retooling his Fundamentalism, he cast it all aside and leaped from the frying pan into the fire – from a Fundamentalist position that was unbiblical, harsh, and destructive into the deadly fire of New Evangelicalism, which is equally unbiblical, but appears warm and lovable. By turning away from any concept of Biblical separation, he could now embrace the heretics as his brothers and love everyone without discernment. I would assume that his ministry began out of a love for the Lord and a hatred of sin; tragically, it will end with a hatred for the Lord (rejection of His truth is as hatred – John 14:15) and a love of sin, namely, the spiritual fornication of ecumenism. Since his reformation, his ministry focus has changed from preaching the Gospel, to teaching prophecy; he is on record as stating that when he preached the Gospel they would receive hundreds of letters, but when he switched to prophecy, they began receiving thousands – it was financially more reasonable to teach prophecy than it was to preach the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps he never memorized “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). He has lost sight of that which saves (the Gospel), and has embraced the popular topic of the day – prophecy; he has forsaken the narrow truth of new life in Christ for a word that tickles the ears of a much broader audience (1 Timothy 4:2-3); he has abandoned the narrow Way that leads to life, and stepped onto



<sup>9</sup> <http://www.jvim.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.firstplumblineline.net/html/jackvanimpe.html>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

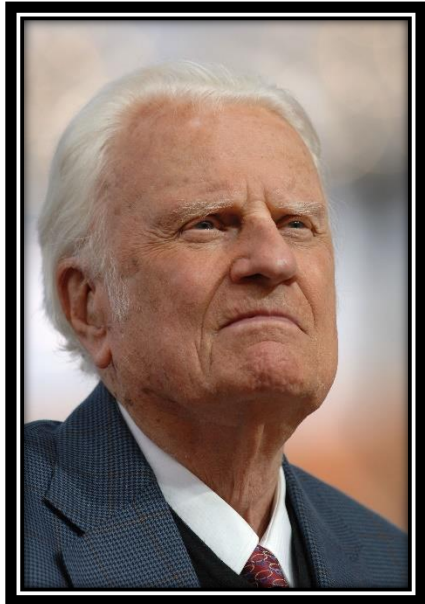
<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.blessedquietness.com/journal/resource/vanimpe.htm>

the broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). Jesus clearly proclaimed, "... he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – hold fast; "under misfortunes and trials to hold fast to one's faith in Christ"; active voice] unto the end, the same [he – the one who endures; this is the one who] shall [will – future tense] be saved [passive voice – it is God Who saves us; indicative mood – a simple statement of fact]" (Matthew 24:13).<sup>14</sup> Jack van Impe is one who did not endure.

We might well wonder at how this could happen; how could someone who has studied, memorized and taught the Scriptures for so many years turn away from the truth of the Word of God? After rehearsing some of the failures of the Israelites, Paul declared, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). We are warned, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12); for whatever reason, van Impe permitted unbelief to enter his heart – it crept in gradually as he embraced an unbiblical Fundamentalism, and it has flourished with his ecumenical transformation. He has lost sight of the Lord (Hebrews 12:2) and sees only the multitudes who are prepared to be his friends, but he must relinquish his hold on the truth and accept their ecumenical ways.

On another level, what do we do with men like Billy Graham, Rick Warren, and Bill Hybels? They have studied and preached from the Bible for many years yet remain firmly entrenched in compromise, which the Scriptures very clearly teach against. What do we do with local preachers who participate in ecumenical activities? The Word of God tells us to avoid them all because their teaching is not in accordance with His Word (Romans 16:17).



**Billy Graham**

We might marvel that this elder of Sardis is looked upon by others as being spiritually alive, and yet Jesus pronounces him dead. For many years I considered Billy Graham to be a lighthouse of spiritual wisdom, until the Lord opened my eyes to His truth and I recognized Graham's failure to stand for the truth of God's Word. Jack van Impe said, "I can't take this hatred any more," and with that he chose to embrace both Catholics and what they believe; he flipped from issuing warnings about Catholicism to being a mouthpiece for the popes.<sup>15</sup> He chose to trample underfoot the Son of God and His atoning sacrifice, and has fallen captive to the love of men and their accolades. Jesus taught that His kingdom was spiritual (John 18:36); the ecumenical kingdom is physical. Jack and Billy Graham are now on the same page; Billy spent his whole ministry teaching ecumenism, whereas Jack's late capitulation to ecumenism has undoubtedly shaken the faith of many and drawn a multitude into the very same spiritual fornication.

"Beloved, believe not [do not be persuaded by] every spirit, but try [test, examine] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1);<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.firstplumbline.net/html/jackvanimpe.html>

<sup>16</sup> Strong's Online.



John warns us that there are many who will teach from the Word of God, but they are false teachers! We have been warned, and, therefore, we must be spiritually vigilant so that we are not duped into following ecumenical teaching. Clearly, this elder of Sardis had been deceived!



**2. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.**

However, despite the precarious spiritual position of the elder of Sardis, there seems to be a slight glimmer of hope. Jesus issues the warning (and command) to become *watchful*; it is a call for the elder to be vigilant, and alert.<sup>17</sup> This is not a command that one would give to a corpse; therefore, we have some expectation that there is still a flicker of life remaining.

Along with being vigilant, this elder is called on by the Lord to *strengthen* the rest – those few, remaining, living elements of spiritual life that he is to confirm, or establish – as setting something up so that it remains immovable;<sup>18</sup> literally, he is to turn resolutely toward the remaining dying embers of his spiritual life.<sup>19</sup> Hope is rapidly fading, for those few areas of life are about to (*are ready to*) die – they are on the verge of being lost. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God ... For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end ...” (Hebrews 3:12,14). Here is an overseer who bears the responsibility of ensuring that the Word of God is taught with integrity, who has a reputation of being alive, yet stands on the brink of becoming spiritually dead.

In the same way that Jesus *knows* the activities of this elder, He now declares that He has not seen his works to be fulfilled (*perfect*) *before God*.<sup>20</sup> When we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are declared to be righteous before God through Christ. As such, God now has certain expectations of us: “For we are [a statement of fact; indicative mood] his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which **God hath before ordained that we should walk in them**” (Ephesians 2:10). We are called God’s creation (*workmanship*), and, as such, we are to put on the new man, “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24); we have been created anew in Christ by God for the predetermined purpose (*unto*) of walking in *good works*: namely, works of *righteousness and true holiness*!<sup>21</sup> Jesus says that He has not found this elder’s works to be according to the standard to which God made him anew in Christ.

If we have placed our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, what kinds of things are we to be doing? Do we seek spiritual fellowship with those who are entrenched in the compromise of ecumenism? The Scriptures make it very clear that we are to avoid such: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark [watch out for] them which cause divisions [dissensions] and offences [temptations to sin] contrary to [*para* – alongside of] the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid [turn away from] them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good [smooth] words

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<sup>17</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

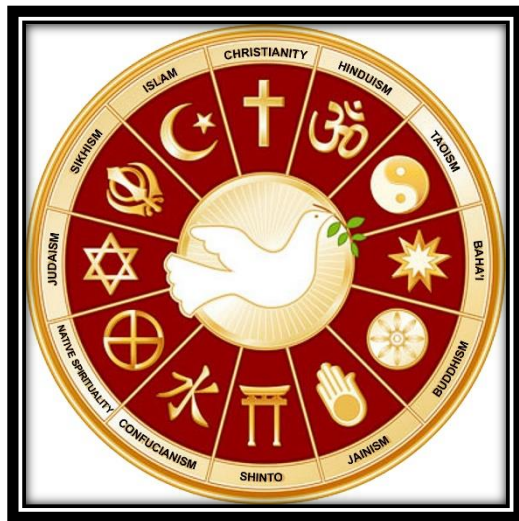
<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Strong’s Dictionary, *ESword*.

<sup>20</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

and fair speeches [flattery] deceive the hearts of the simple [unsuspecting]” (Romans 16:17-18).<sup>22</sup> Ecumenical teaching is deceptive: it is filled with expressions of *love* (the *good words* and *fair speeches*), yet it is a harbor of spiritual death for those who are too trusting (*simple*). “*The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war *was* in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet *were* they drawn swords” (Psalm 55:21); the ecumenist presents a mismatch between the words that he speaks, and his heart’s condition. He will speak words of logic and strong persuasion, yet buried within his words is the barb of the devil – the deadly hook of compromise. Ecumenists will



**The Broad Reach of Ecumenism**

seek to love you into their ranks, but, if you stand firmly in the Lord, they will then turn against you. A favored term in their vocabulary is *tolerance* (which they will liberally demonstrate to those who are of like mind), yet they will display their deep-seated *intolerance* if you refuse to join them in their accommodation of error. Our hope lies in the Lord: “Cast thy burden [that which you have been given; your lot in life] upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved [to totter or slip]” (Psalm 55:22).<sup>23</sup> It is as we remain dependent upon the Lord and live in His righteousness, that He will protect us from failure; however, if we permit a sliver of unbelief to enter our hearts, then we stand in danger of falling away from Him (Hebrews 3:12). Ecumenism can very easily be that sliver of unbelief: it is so alluring to be amicable with everyone, and to live in harmony. Nevertheless, we are warned that “If any man teach otherwise [teach something other than the truth, or teach error as if it were the truth], and consent [agree] not to wholesome [correct or sound] words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... from such withdraw thyself [keep away from them]” (1 Timothy 6:3,5).<sup>24</sup> We must guard our hearts, our minds, and our ears, lest we be snared by the devil’s soft words of compromise.

We have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ for the express purpose of walking in His righteousness and holiness (Romans 8:1; Ephesians 4:24); our failure to live as we must will not be hidden from the Lord. Even though this elder appeared to some to be alive, his life did not meet the measure of God, and he was about to be pronounced spiritually dead. Are we being obedient to what we hear from the Word of God? It is not a matter of what others see or don’t see, it is all about whether we are being faithful to what the Lord requires of us. Unless we show forth works of righteousness in keeping with our professed faith, our faith is dead (James 2:17). Clearly, this overseer had deceived everyone around him; however, that is of no consequence, for we are ultimately responsible to God, and it is by His standard that we will be judged – the accolades of our fellowman will not open the gates of heaven for us.

<sup>22</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew & English Lexicon.

<sup>24</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



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

Still speaking to the overseer of Sardis, Jesus commands him to *remember*: to call to mind, to recall.<sup>25</sup> As we abide in Christ, there are some things that we are to remember, and other things that we are to forget.

To the Philippians, Paul wrote: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Paul is saying that because he does not consider himself to already have laid hold of the ultimate prize in Christ, he will forget what is behind, and stretch forth unto what lies ahead – he will pursue with eagerness the goal of holiness in Christ (2 Timothy 1:9).<sup>26</sup> It is necessary that we not permit anything to hinder our pursuit of holiness in the Lord – that walk of righteousness, which must be guided by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:4). As Joshua charged the children of Israel just before his death: “... come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of [do not remember] 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 23:7-8).<sup>27</sup> Paul and Joshua are delivering the same message: do not fill your minds with this world, but single-mindedly pursue the Lord. Ecumenism is the teachings of Christ and the philosophy of the world blended together; it holds a gospel message in which there is no life (Colossians 2:8).

There are also things that we are to remember. The Fourth Commandment declares: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Paul calls on the Ephesians to remember that they were, at one time, strangers to the Covenant of hope that was in Israel, but now, in Christ Jesus, they have been made fellow citizens with the saints of all ages (Ephesians 2:11-22). Therefore, it is not that we are to become a people with no memories, but we must be careful as to what it is that we call to mind. Shortly after the Israelites left Egypt, they became tired of the daily provision of manna, and longed for meat and a more varied diet: “We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick ...” (Numbers 11:5). Their selective memories (they remembered the food, but forgot the slavery from which the Lord had delivered them) brought the anger of the Lord, and many died because they were obsessed with the food that they had left behind in Egypt (Numbers 11:33). We are to remember the Lord, His commands, and what He has done for us; we are to forget everything that would stand in the way of our pursuit of His holiness and our commitment to His Word.

Because this elder is on the verge of being declared spiritually dead (*therefore*), Jesus commands him to call to mind how he took hold of and understood (*heard*) the message of truth.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>26</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Although what he is to recall is not mentioned, the context requires that his recollection be of that which brought him spiritual life – namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether it was the manner in which the Gospel came to him or the enthusiasm by which he received it, we are not told; however, I would suspect that Jesus is calling him to remember the joy that was his as the message of Life broke upon his soul. Perhaps his situation is like unto the Seed that fell among the thorns, and he is now in the final throes of being completely choked by the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life (Luke 8:14).

The first command given is for this elder to bring to his mind the spiritual condition that he once enjoyed with the Lord, and then, having brought that to mind, he is given a second command: attend carefully to (*hold fast*) that memory.<sup>29</sup> With that memory now firmly in mind, a third command is issued: repent! The command is to turn back to what once was. Recall the joy and new life that came through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, cling to that faith, and then repent of the present failure, and, once again, embrace the truth of God's Word. *Repent* means to change one's mind for the better<sup>30</sup>; the command given by the Lord to this elder is that he revert back to his former place of favor in the Lord. Although he is in the final stage before being pronounced spiritually dead, there is still hope, and Jesus' desire is that he return to that place of favor at His right hand (Revelation 1:20), something that will only take place through repentance – a change of direction!

Jesus commands this elder to attend carefully (*hold fast*) to what he once had in the Lord. However, if he chooses not to give strict attention to (*watch*) what was, then the Lord will come on him as thief.<sup>31</sup> The word *watch* is in the subjunctive mood, which means that this elder may or may not be watchful (he has a choice to make); in the event that this overseer chooses to neglect what he might well recall, Jesus lets him know what the consequences will be. Even as a thief does not post an ad to let his victims know when he will come calling, so the Lord will come on this man at a time when he will be totally unaware.

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: "For yourselves [an intensive pronoun identifying the audience to the exclusion of others] know [*oida* – understand (perfect tense, a completed action not needing to be repeated)] perfectly [accurately] that the day of the Lord so cometh [is coming (present tense, indicative mood – a fact!)] as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2).<sup>32</sup> Paul goes on to state that, since the Thessalonian brethren are not of the darkness, that day will not overtake them as a thief, but they must still be alert (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6). We have here an expansion on the thought of the Lord Jesus Christ coming as a thief (not to rob, but at an unexpected time), and it is called the *day of the Lord* (Peter uses the same word picture in 2 Peter 3:10 to describe the destruction of the heaven and earth after the millennial reign). The OT prophets described the *day of the Lord* as a time of judgment. "For the day of the LORD of hosts *shall be* upon every *one that is* proud and lofty, and upon every *one that is* lifted up; and he shall be brought low ..." (Isaiah 2:12); "The LORD will destroy the house of the proud ..." (Proverbs 15:25). The *day of the Lord* is cast as a day of judgment upon those who have become high-minded, those who are not in the

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<sup>29</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online.



light of Christ. The prophet Joel described some additional events that will precede this day: “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come” (Joel 2:31). From this we can ascertain that a day of the Lord will follow these celestial signs. As we look at these several expressions of the “day of the Lord”, we can see that there is more than just one “day of the Lord,” but we can also recognize that each is a judgment on the wicked.

Jesus spoke to His disciples about just such a time. When they asked Him about when the temple would be destroyed, what signs would herald His coming again, and the end of the world (Matthew 24:1-3), He provided them with several details that relate to this time; let’s consider His discourse.

Before Jesus launches into His instruction to His disciples, He warns them: “Take heed [see to it] that no man [may] deceive you [lead you astray]” (Matthew 24:4)<sup>33</sup>; before He answers their questions, He warns them to see to it (*take heed*) that no one leads them away from the truth (*deceive*). This is a command (imperative mood) given in the present tense (they must be alert **continually**), and active voice (**they** are the ones who are to be watchful).<sup>34</sup> Since this is a command, we can rest assured that the Lord has adequately equipped us so that we can, in fact, ward off the deceptive ploys of the enemy: He has provided the Spirit of God to abide within us (Romans 8:9), and to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). It is as we are keeping the Lord’s commandments that we demonstrate our love for Him (John 14:15) and so remain in Him (John 15:10); by this means we will be equipped and prepared to withstand the deception that will come our way. This is the reason why it is so vitally important that we be **willing** to live according to the Word of God and not our traditions, or even what is commonly considered to be acceptable among Christians today; unless we are willing to follow the commands of Christ, we are poised on the brink of spiritual failure. If we are dabbling in that which is based on a falsehood (whether that be unbiblical traditions, or ecumenical gatherings), then we will **never** be adequately prepared to identify deception when it arrives on our doorstep. The only way that we can *take heed* is to live



Alan John Miller

in obedience to the Lord – beginning with the Ten Commandments (not suggestions that are open to debate), which were written upon our hearts by the finger of God when we placed our faith in Christ (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:15-17). If we are not prepared to pay the price for following the Lord, then we cannot claim to be His: “...whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he [absolutely] cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).<sup>35</sup> We might be willing to forsake worldly possessions for the Lord, but are we willing to lose the friendships of those who will certainly depart from us when we faithfully walk that narrow pathway to life?

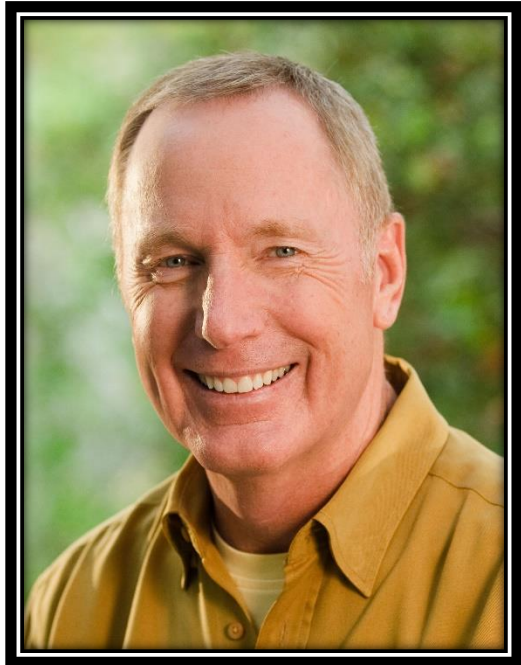
Jesus goes on to warn His disciples that many people will come who will claim to be God; “... many shall come in my

<sup>33</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>34</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

name, saying, I am ... and shall deceive many” (Mark 13:6). Both Mark and Luke show that their contention is that they are *I am*, the name of Jehovah (Exodus 3:14). Throughout the centuries there have been many who have declared that they are the Lord Jesus Christ; even today Alan John Miller, leader of the Divine Truth cult in Australia, asserts that he is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup> AJ (as he is known) was ejected from the Jehovah’s Witnesses because he left his wife and family for a woman ten years his junior. He proclaimed this new woman in his life to be the reincarnation of Mary Magdalene; however, it is reported that about ten women (including his latest “partner,” Mary Suzanne Luck) have also been called reincarnations of Mary Magdalene.<sup>37</sup> Many, both inside and outside of “Christianity,” have claimed to be God or Jesus, and how they live has proven them to be frauds. Nevertheless, today we have gone well beyond individual charlatans making such grandiose proclamations; now we hear the general, New Age cry, “I am god.” One such advocate, who says that her words have been channeled to her from the Archangel Michael, says, “The concept ‘I am a spark of God’, presents duality ... I and God ... There may only be the concept of unity within the statement, the thought form of ‘I am God’.”<sup>38</sup> So when the popular Evangelical, Max Lucado, says, “You have one. A divine spark,” he has stepped into the very popular, modern concept of the godhood of everyone;<sup>39</sup> the next step is simply to claim that divinity as your own. With the growing popularity of mantras being used to gain spirituality within the Emergent Church setting, the way has been prepared to use the mantras suggested by the channeled “Archangel Michael”: “I am God”, “I Am”, “I Am That I Am”.<sup>40</sup> Today, we stand on the threshold of millions of people around the world proclaiming their godhood (in accordance with the promise that Satan made to Eve – Genesis 3:5); indeed, many are professing to be “I am,” and the deception behind this is very old and runs very deep.



Max Lucado

Jesus goes on to speak of *wars* (armed conflicts) and *rumours* (reports) of wars (Matthew 24:6); do not be disturbed (*troubled*) by these, for they must come to pass, but they do not herald the end.<sup>41</sup> Then He says that nation will rise up against nation; as we look back on this time in history, we can recognize the difference between armed conflicts and the much larger scale aggression of nation against nation. We learn here that some of what Jesus is outlining will be fulfilled early on, whereas other things will find fulfillment much later. Under the control of the Roman Empire (which was in full force at this time), there would have been many battles fought

<sup>36</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_messiah\\_claimants](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_messiah_claimants)

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.aj-miller.com/>

<sup>38</sup> <http://spiritlibrary.com/michelle-coutant/i-am-god-unity-consciousness>

<sup>39</sup> Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life*, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> <http://spiritlibrary.com/michelle-coutant/i-am-god-unity-consciousness>

<sup>41</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

to subdue small pockets of resistance or rebellion. Even the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 would qualify as a *war* (the Roman armies against the Jewish rebels), but this would not be considered a nation rising up against another nation – the Jews were not a nation at this time. However, Jesus says that these smaller scale battles, and even national aggression, famines, epidemics and earthquakes, are only the *beginning of sorrows* (Matthew 24:8) – this is still not the end. *Sorrows* is from the Greek word *odin* (*o-deen*'), which literally refers to the birth pains that come at the time of delivery;<sup>42</sup> just as contractions are a sign that a baby is coming, so this time of great distress is an indication that the end is near, but not yet. In the same way that contractions become more frequent and intense as the time of birth draws nearer, so, through the use of the word *sorrows*, we can expect that the signs spoken of by the Lord will increase in frequency and intensity.

Consider earthquakes, for which it is easier to find statistics than for epidemics and famines: even though the measurement of an earthquake's intensity is a relatively recent accomplishment (1935 for the Richter scale<sup>43</sup>, and in 1972 the moment magnitude scale<sup>44</sup>), it is interesting to look at what has taken place even within this relatively short span of time. For example, from 1980 to 1989 (a period of 10 years), there were 119 earthquakes worldwide with a magnitude of 7.0 or greater; from 1990 to 1999 this figure was 153; for the next 10-year period, it was 144; what is very interesting is that from 2010 through 2013, a period of only four years, we have already recorded 79 earthquakes with a magnitude of 7.0 or greater.<sup>45</sup> During this same time period (1980 through 2013), of the 30 earthquakes measuring 8.0 or greater, 19 have taken place during the last five years, including the two quakes measuring greater than 9.0.<sup>46</sup> Statistics would seem to suggest that there is, indeed, an increase in the earthquake activity today. If these statistics are correct, then this would indicate that the end-time “contractions” have begun, and that they are intensifying.

As Luke records his parallel to this passage, he provides us with a glimpse of a time-line. He says that when we hear of wars and instability (*commotions*), “the end is not by and by [immediately]” (Luke 21:9); he then goes on to tell us about earthquakes, famines, epidemics and frightful signs in the heavens – based on the context, all of these appear to be signs of the end that will come with the described national unrest (which, as we indicated earlier, is not descriptive of the time during the Roman rule).<sup>47</sup> However, he no sooner lists these end-time signs, than he says: “But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute ...” (Luke 21:12); in other words, before all of these signs of the end begin to take place (which Matthew calls the *beginning of sorrows* – Matthew 24:8), persecution will fall upon the followers of Christ. It will be during the time of *wars and commotions* that this persecution will come; as we look back on history, we can recognize that the harassment of Christians began on the day of Pentecost. Until Roman Emperor Nero's infamous fire in Rome (about AD 64), the oppression came largely from the Jews, incited by their religious leadership. Paul, who was a zealous Pharisee, is described as “breathing

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<sup>42</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>43</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richter\\_magnitude\\_scale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richter_magnitude_scale)

<sup>44</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moment\\_magnitude\\_scale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moment_magnitude_scale)

<sup>45</sup> <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/search/> ; all statistics are through December 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Strong's Online.

out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts (9:1); with the full support of the Jewish religious elite, he set out to eliminate all of those who spoke of Jesus. This persecution began with the Jews at Pentecost, was escalated by the Romans beginning in AD 64, and largely came to an end with the Roman Edict of Milan issued by Constantine and his co-regent Licinius in AD 313.<sup>48</sup> With this Edict, the physical persecution was vastly reduced, but the spiritual decimation was just beginning; out of this favor from the Roman emperor grew the powerful and corrupt Roman Catholic Church. They were *Roman* in that their center for operations was based in Rome, which was the center for the physical rule of the world at the time; they were *Catholic*

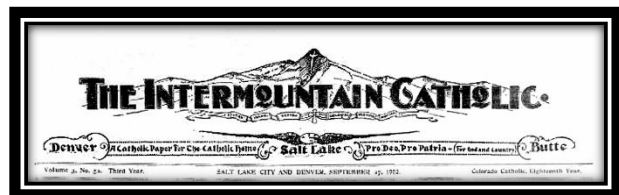


Emperor Nero

Emperor Constantine

to the extent that they viewed themselves as being the only organization capable of dispensing worldwide salvation. This increasingly dominant religious community has, from time-to-time throughout the centuries, continued the physical persecution of those who have opposed them; however, their greatest impact has been through the spiritual death that they have coddled in their false teachings. Of the Pharisees, Jesus said: “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13). The Pharisees had lost their hold on the truth that saves, so they weren’t entering into Christ’s kingdom, and, because of their false doctrine, they were also standing in the way of anyone else entering His kingdom! That is exactly the position of the Roman Catholic Church: they destroyed the life-giving Gospel of God through their compromises and accommodation of paganism, and that distorted message, now devoid of any life, is what they are still teaching today.

It is most interesting to note the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to their formerly frequent and severe persecution of those who did not accept their doctrines. A Catholic newspaper, *The Intermountain Catholic*, which was published on a weekly basis from 1899 through 1920, carried a question and answer section. In the September 27, 1902 issue, this question was asked: “What are we to think of the severity of the church towards heretics during the middle ages?” The response is rather revealing: “Heresy is an awful crime against God, and those who start a heresy are more guilty than they who are traitors to the civil government. If the state has the right to punish treason with death, the principle is the same that concedes to the spiritual authority the power of life and death over the arch-traitor to truth and divine revelation and law and government ... Today those who are heretics are descendants of those who long ago left the church. The strength of the church’s arm is not directed at them ... But she was justified in the strongest proceedings against the originators of heresies ... Yet ... the church but seldom used her power in its extremity. Her general course was leniency and mercy ... An attack on faith



<sup>48</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict\\_of\\_Milan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Milan)



is a blow at her heart. Self-defense implies the right to take another's life when this is necessary to preserve one's own life ... The power of capital punishment is acknowledged for every perfect society. Now, by the will of the Lord Jesus Christ himself the church is a perfect society, and as such it has the right and power of capital punishment."<sup>49</sup>



**Shield of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**

Within modern Roman Catholicism, there is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – a gathering of cardinals, bishops, priests, lay theologians, and canon lawyers who ensure the “spread [of] sound Catholic doctrine and defend those points of Christian tradition which seem in danger because of new and unacceptable doctrines.”<sup>50</sup> This group was originally founded in 1542 by Pope Paul III with the name Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition<sup>51</sup> – this group is responsible for overseeing the investigation of heresies and the punishments levied against those who are found guilty of heresy. However, this was in no way the beginning of the years of persecution and slaughter brought against those who did not adhere to the Catholic way; that had been going on for hundreds of years prior to this formalization. Names have been changed to reduce the level of alarm among today's more sensitive masses, but the machinery that was used to inflict horrible torture and death during the time of the Catholic Inquisitions, is still in place and operational. The Catholic who provided the “answer” in 1902 was right: the Catholic Church still feels that it “has the right and power of capital punishment,” even though it chooses not to exercise that right during the present-day push for ecumenical unity. Although it might be difficult to find the Church's acts of “leniency and mercy” during those horrific times of excess, today the tactic has changed from coercion to deception. Since torture and promised death did not bring everyone under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic Church, their strategy has shifted to the false love of ecumenism to accomplish the task. By all accounts, it is working!

We are living in a day when nations are challenging nations for supremacy. This was evidenced in the two world wars that were fought during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the much saber-rattling that is going on today. We have looked at the increase in earthquakes – all signs that the end (the time of the return of the Lord) is near (Luke 21:9-11). From the 11<sup>th</sup> century through to the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church of Rome waged war against those who were deemed to be heretics according to her standards. This was a time when those who were faithful to Christ were “betrayed by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks [relatives], and friends; and ... [were] put to death” (Luke 21:16). We cannot assume that these persecutions will not reoccur, even though it seems that the emphasis on such oppressive tactics has changed, at least for now. However, as the faithful in Jesus Christ increasingly become a smaller minority, there is nothing to say that the oppression could not resume. The signs of the end are happening; for now, deception and accommodation are the weapons of choice in bringing everyone in line with the Catholic Church. Their harvest of converts

<sup>49</sup> <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93062856/1902-09-27/ed-1/seq-7/>

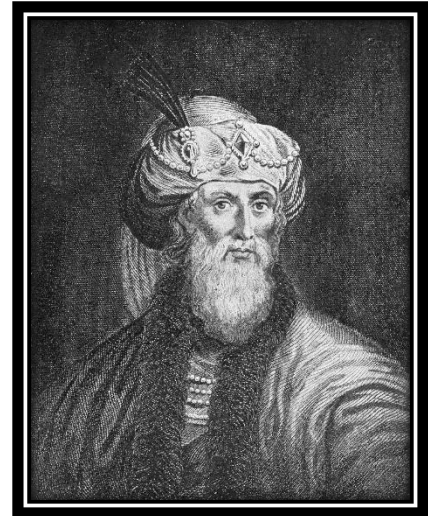
<sup>50</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_pro\\_14071997\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_14071997_en.html)

<sup>51</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congregation\\_for\\_the\\_Doctrine\\_of\\_the\\_Faith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congregation_for_the_Doctrine_of_the_Faith)

is proving to be much greater through the use of ecumenical honey, than through the vinegar of torture.

Jesus speaks of the signs of the end (Luke 21:9-11), then draws back to the severe persecution that will befall His followers, which speaks explicitly, but not exclusively, of the Catholic Church's activities (v.12), and then He draws back even further to speak of the fall of Jerusalem, which took place in AD 70 (v.20).

When Rome came against Judea beginning in 66 AD, in order to suppress the Jewish rebellion, Vespasian, the Roman general in charge of the operation, extended safety to all who surrendered to their control. It was Roman practice that when they conquered a people, they would simply have them declare allegiance to Rome, and then they would permit them to carry on with their own customs and traditions.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, when Titus came against Jerusalem, his first tactic was to allow them the opportunity to surrender and proclaim their allegiance to Rome, which would have resulted in everyone in the city surviving, and the city and temple remaining intact. However, Jesus told His disciples that when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then the destruction (*desolation*) of the city was close at hand. It was the Jewish zealots within Jerusalem who would not permit the people to surrender to Titus, and who forced the hand of Rome to destroy the city and kill so many. Jesus said that the inhabitants of Jerusalem “would fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations” (Luke 21:24); Josephus estimates that about 1.1 million people were killed, and about 97,000 were taken captive.<sup>53</sup> Jesus goes on to say (in the same verse) that Jerusalem shall be “trodden down [subdued by force] of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled [completed].”<sup>54</sup> The prediction given here is that Jerusalem would be destroyed by a people who were not Jews (*Gentiles* [*ethnos*], the plural form [as here] speaks of foreigners – the Romans), and the non-Jews will continue to hold Jerusalem until the *times of the Gentiles* is complete. How should we understand this?



Flavius Josephus

At the time that Jesus was on earth, there was a very simple way of knowing who was a Jew and who was not. The Jews took great pride in claiming Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their fathers; therefore, the distinction was based solely upon physical heritage: can you trace your family line back to Jacob? By contrast, Paul, in his letter to the Roman Christians, goes to great lengths to discredit the physical heritage and emphasize the spiritual side of our relationship with Christ. “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28-29). Paul is exposing the fact that the patriarchs of Israel were accepted by God because of their faith, and not because of their

<sup>52</sup> <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Spring04/Tyler/LandR.html>

<sup>53</sup> <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/war-6.htm>

<sup>54</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

family lines (Hebrews 11:8-9). He goes on to explain that “they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Romans 9:6); in other words, a Jewish heritage does not make anyone a true son of Israel. In His ongoing conflict with the religious Jews, Jesus stated, “I know [*oida* – full knowledge] that ye are Abraham’s seed [*sperma* – physical descendants]; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath [absolutely] no place in you”; He then goes on to tell them that they are doing to Him what they have seen of their father; the unmistakable implication is that Jesus is not referring to their physical ancestor, Abraham (John 8:37-38).<sup>55</sup> Their response is: “Abraham is our father”, to which Jesus’ response is: “If ye were Abraham’s children [*teknon* – by implication, involving a relationship], ye would do the works of Abraham” (v.39).<sup>56</sup> The thrust of this is that, although these Jews were physically descended from Abraham, they did not understand his faith; “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6; repeated in Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23). Further in His conversation with these men, Jesus plainly told them that, even though He knew that they were physically descended from Abraham, they were living according to their father, the devil (John 8:44) – their traceable ancestry meant nothing. From Paul’s explanation in Romans 2, we see that the true Jew is someone who has a spiritual relationship with the Lord. What was God’s longing for the children of Israel? “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6a); God desired a people who would, through faith, have a spiritual connection with Him, and not simply a people who were descended from those with whom He had had such a bond. This is further emphasized in the detailed explanation of how, through Christ’s sacrifice, the Jew (*Circumcision*) and the non-Jew (*Uncircumcision*) are brought together into one Body (Ephesians 2:11-22) – there is only one spiritual relationship! To the Corinthians, Paul clarified even further that both circumcision and uncircumcision were *nothing*, but obedience to the Lord’s commands was where our attention was to be placed (1 Corinthians 7:19).

Returning to the phrase that Jesus used, “the times of the Gentiles,” how should we understand it, particularly in light of what we have just learned? We have seen that being of Jewish ancestry has no bearing on whether we have been purchased by the Lord or not, so then we must understand *the Gentiles* to be those who are not *Jews* in the sight of God; i.e., they do not have a relationship with Him, they are not His children, and they remain the children of their father, the devil (to use Jesus’ words). If we take this back to Luke 21:24, we see that Jerusalem will be desecrated (*trodden down*) by unbelievers – those who have not been born again by the Spirit of God (*Gentiles*); clearly, both the Roman armies of 70 AD and the Jewish zealots would fit that qualification. As for the *times of the Gentiles*, we read that “as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:37); it was during the time of Noah that Jehovah declared, “My spirit shall not always strive with man ...” (Genesis 6:3), therefore, we would expect that, with the coming of the Lord in the clouds to gather His faithful ones, God will cease contending with man. When Noah entered into the ark, and Jehovah closed the door, at that moment He ceased to contend with the wicked in the world (Genesis 7:16); that pattern will hold true with the coming of the Son of God to gather His children from the ends of the earth. With the snatching away of those who

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<sup>55</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

are faithful (after the pattern of Noah and his family entering the ark), there will fall great destruction upon the earth – the wrath of God will be poured out upon sinful mankind.

“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to [is about to] sound, the **mystery** [*musterion* – hidden thing] **of God should be finished** [may be brought to an end], as he hath declared to his servants the prophets” (Revelation 10:7).<sup>57</sup> Paul explained this mystery: “...by revelation he made known unto me the mystery [*musterion*] ... That the Gentiles [the Greek shows the plural form that refers to the unbelieving non-Jews] should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel ...” (Ephesians 3:3,6). The *mystery of God* will be completed when those, from all peoples, who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and remained faithful to Him, are united with Him forever; at that same moment the *times of the Gentiles* will be fulfilled. We are told that Jerusalem will be occupied by foreigners (*trodden down of the Gentiles*) until that day. Since the destruction of the city in AD 70, it has never been a truly Jewish city; in reality, there have been several times throughout history when the Jews have actually been banned from Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup> Even today, Israel might have control of the city, generally speaking, but it is clear that they do not have full control because there is still a *Muslim Quarter*.

At this point, it is necessary to bring the accounts given in Matthew and Luke together. We’ve seen where Luke admonishes flight from Jerusalem when it is encircled with armies; Matthew encourages flight “when ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place ...” (Matthew 24:15). Daniel mentions this *abomination* on four different occasions; although a bit of a side journey, it is of value considering our overall desire to understand the words of Scripture concerning the end-times. The first reference comes in Daniel 8:13 (although the word *abomination* does not appear here, the desecration of the temple dealt with here fits the concept), where the question is raised (in Daniel’s vision) as to how long the desolation of the sanctuary will last; the response is: “And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (v.14). The Jewish historian, Josephus, links this to the desecration of the temple under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes, which began with the appointment of Jason as high priest in 171 BC (Jason purchased his appointment).<sup>59</sup> Under Antiochus, Jerusalem was later looted, the temple was stripped of all of its gold (he cared only for wealth and power), and he sought to impose Greek customs on the people of the city by denying them the right to continue their Jewish traditions.<sup>60</sup> He further profaned the temple by setting an idol upon the altar of God and sacrificing pigs to his pagan deity. Judah Maccabee (or Judas Maccabeus) regained control of Jerusalem and cleansed the temple in 165 BC (fulfilling a period of 2,300 days, or just over six years, of desolation as Daniel was told).<sup>61</sup> What is noteworthy is that the temple was desecrated but not destroyed under Antiochus Epiphanes.

The second expression comes in Daniel 9:27: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease

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<sup>57</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>58</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Jews\\_and\\_Judaism\\_in\\_the\\_Land\\_of\\_Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_and_Judaism_in_the_Land_of_Israel)

<sup>59</sup> <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1589-antiochus-iv-epiphanes>

<sup>60</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XII, Chapter 5.4.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Henry Commentary.



[put an end to], and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make *it* desolate, even until the consummation [complete destruction], and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”<sup>62</sup> We looked at this verse when we began our study of Revelation, and saw that its fulfillment fits the time when the Roman armies, under Commander Vespasian (and, later, his son, Titus), came against Judea, ending with the **destruction** of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. Jesus told of this coming devastation of the city (Luke 21:20), therefore, it cannot be referring to Antiochus



Coin showing Antiochus Epiphanes

Epiphanes for two reasons: 1) that was history at the time of Jesus, and 2) the city was not destroyed under Antiochus. Further to that, Antiochus had absolutely no consideration for the Jewish people and was another of those who sought to annihilate them completely;<sup>63</sup> he would never have affirmed a covenant with Israel. By contrast, the Roman practice was to procure a pledge of allegiance from a conquered people and then permit them to continue with their culture and religion. Josephus notes that Titus, on several occasions, sought surrender from the Jews in Jerusalem (often using Josephus as his mouthpiece), but the zealots, who had control of the city, refused any offers of peaceful surrender and killed anyone who set out to oppose them on this matter.<sup>64</sup> If it had not been for the zealots, in all likelihood Jerusalem would not

have been destroyed and the temple would have remained; however, through the zealots, Titus accomplished the prophecy that was made by the Lord. With the destruction by the Romans, the activities of the temple ended – and they remain so unto this present day. Throughout its history, Jerusalem has been destroyed twice: first by the Babylonians in c. 586 BC, and then by the Romans in AD 70.

The third reference, made in Daniel 11:31, comes toward the end of the vision that Daniel was given concerning the ruling powers that will come (11:2). It is generally accepted that this refers, once again, to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (the vision having already dealt with the rulers who came before him): “And arms shall stand on his part [his military forces will stand – Antiochus will be victorious], and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength [stronghold<sup>65</sup>; the temple area was the most fortified area of Jerusalem], and shall take away the daily *sacrifice*, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.” These three actions (pollution, removing the daily temple practices, and setting up the abomination) did not take place simultaneously but over the space of a few years. The *pollution* began with the appointment of a Hellenized Jew, Jason, as high priest (a position that he purchased). Shortly thereafter, the high priesthood was granted to a higher bidder, a Benjamite named Menelaus<sup>66</sup>, whose confidence rested in Antiochus. Rumors of the death of Antiochus encouraged Jason to retake the office by force. Antiochus heard of this and

<sup>62</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1589-antiochus-iv-epiphanes>

<sup>64</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book V, Chapter 9.1, Chapter 13.1.

<sup>65</sup> Strong’s Dictionary.

<sup>66</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason\\_%28high\\_priest%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason_%28high_priest%29)

took it as an affront to his rule; he launched an attack against Jerusalem, reinstated Menelaus as high priest, and stripped the temple of everything of value. When Rome curtailed Antiochus' attempts to gain control of Egypt, he took his wrath out on the Jews and Judaism; he sent his army through Judea with the commission to slay and destroy.<sup>67</sup> Jewish practices were outlawed completely and an idol was setup on the altar in the temple in an effort to complete the destruction of Judaism. However, Antiochus underestimated the Jews, and, under Judah Maccabee, they regained control of Jerusalem and were able to cleanse the temple. As already mentioned, this cleansing closed the period of 2,300 days referred to in Daniel 8:14.

The fourth reference in Daniel to the abomination is: "And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice* shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, *there shall be* a thousand two hundred and ninety days" (Daniel 12:11). It is held by some that this also refers to the period of Antiochus Epiphanes; in about 168 BC, he robbed the temple in Jerusalem, thereby halting the daily temple activities (even the desecrated activities that would have taken place under the unworthy high priests), and about 165 BC, Judah Maccabee restored the temple worship – a time that some have calculated to be 1290 days. This time fits within the 2300 days spoken of in Daniel 8:14, which covers the broader time frame of when the temple was desecrated beginning with the illegitimate high priests; the 1335 days referred to in Daniel 12:12 is said to point to the time of Antiochus' death just 45 days after the cleansing of the temple.<sup>68</sup> Others claim that since the Lord referred to this prophecy as being fulfilled in the future (Matthew 24:15), then it is not possible for this to fit the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. However, as we know, prophecies can have both a specific and a general application; the specific application would appear to be what took place during the time of Antiochus, whereas Jesus' general reference to the *abomination of desolation* could well find fulfillment during the time of the Roman conquest. Jesus said that when they saw the *abomination of desolation* in the holy place which was spoken of by Daniel, then they were to flee Jerusalem. The zealots, who controlled Jerusalem at the time that the Romans were advancing against it, removed the rulers of the city and the priests of the temple by force, and installed priests who supported them in their zeal for war. They appointed a high priest by casting lots, and the lot fell to someone who knew nothing about the high priestly duties nor was he in the line of succession for the priesthood. When the general population of the city, under the leadership of Ananus the legitimate high priest, rose against the zealots, the zealots retreated into the holy place of the temple. Ananus, the legitimate high priest, bemoaned this contamination of the holy place and is quoted as saying, "Certainly it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or these sacred places, that ought not to be trodden upon at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains ...."<sup>69</sup> To those who were aware of



Judah Maccabee or Judas Maccabeus

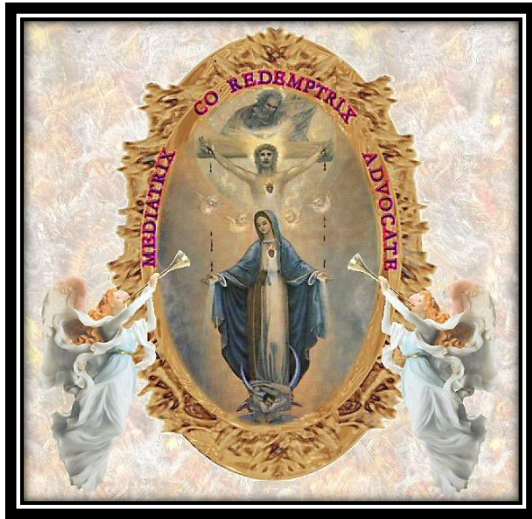
<sup>67</sup> <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1589-antiochus-iv-epiphanes>

<sup>68</sup> Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, Daniel 12:11.

<sup>69</sup> Josephus, *Wars*, Book IV, Chapter 3.10.

Jesus' warning, truly, the *abomination of desolation* now stood in the holy place (in the form of the murderous zealots), and the city was about to be surrounded by armies – the time to flee was now!

Jesus said, “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:22). When Titus first encountered the zealots in Jerusalem who were determined to defend the city at all cost, he was of a mind to cut the city off from receiving any provisions, and, in essence, starve the people into submission.<sup>70</sup> This would have resulted in a prolonged standoff, with the end being the death of everyone within the walls of Jerusalem. However, this was not to be; Titus continued to encroach upon the zealots, and ultimately the city and temple were completely destroyed; even though many perished, Josephus records that some 97,000 were taken captive – defeated, but still alive.



Matthew now speaks of a time of false Christs and prophets: “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). Following the

destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20), there will come those who profess to be the Messiah or a prophet of God, and they will provide great proofs to support their claims (*great signs and wonders*). The reality is that, if they are able to, they will deceive those who have been truly born-again; signs and wonders must never be the proof that we rely on to accept someone’s message. “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); the Standard for our testing must be nothing less than the Word of God. The departure from the truth of the Gospel, which Paul preached with great clarity, was almost immediate, and within a relatively short span of time led to what has grown into the Roman Catholic Church. Within this framework of religion have come many false Christs and prophets; the Catholics proclaim Mary as a co-Redeemer with Christ – what greater falsehood could there be than this? As for *signs and wonders*, consider how many “saints” are venerated by the Catholics<sup>71</sup>; the life of each “saint” must be carefully scrutinized and they must be responsible for at least one miracle (by someone praying to them, and they, in turn, interceding with God).<sup>72</sup> The Catholic Church is filled with falsehood, and yet we see Evangelical men like Billy Graham and Jack van Impe embracing Catholics as brothers in the Lord. Clearly, the enemy is powerful to deceive even those who, like van Impe, have spent years warning against being

<sup>70</sup> [http://www.livius.org/ja-in/jewish\\_wars/jwar04.html](http://www.livius.org/ja-in/jewish_wars/jwar04.html)

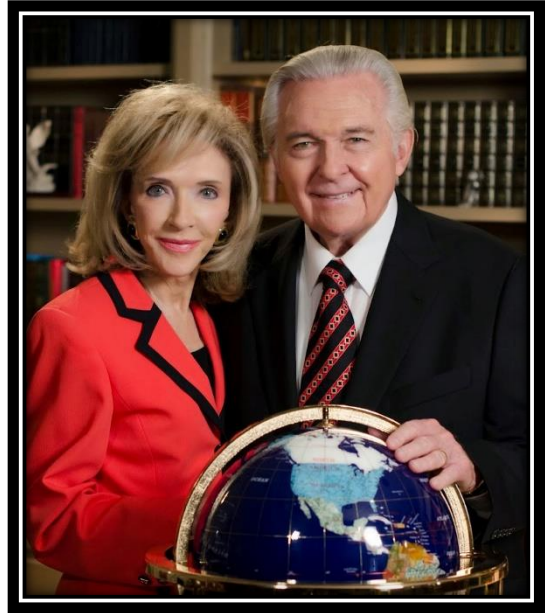
<sup>71</sup> The figures are varied: from more than 10,000 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_saints](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_saints)), to more than 2,500 according to a 1956 tally (<http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Aug1997/wiseman.asp#F2>), to a mere 921 (<http://catholicexchange.com/saints-101-how-many-saints-are-there>).

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.catholicdoors.com/faq/qu221.htm>



taken in by such error; van Impe has abruptly turned to cling to that very same error as if, by some miracle, it was now truth.

Matthew and Mark then record the same phrase: “Behold, I have told you before” (Matthew 24:25; cp. Mark 13:23). *Behold* is in the imperative mood; this is a command to pay attention!<sup>73</sup> Jesus has told them beforehand what will take place, therefore, they are to take heed so that they are prepared for what will come. The warning has been issued that there will come many who will declare themselves to be messiahs or who will claim to speak the truth of God’s Word, yet they will be deceivers; because Jesus has exposed the falsehood that is coming, we are to be prepared for this onslaught of deception! Matthew goes on to say that we are not to believe those who tell us that Jesus can be found here or there; interestingly, the one place



**Jack and Rexella van Impe**

identified is the *desert*. The leaders of the Emerging Church push their followers to pursue the experiential traditions of the Desert Fathers (experience is the ultimate guide) – those monastics and heretics who lived in isolation and developed many traditions that are now being hailed as a means to communicate directly with Jesus. Jesus warned us that such deception would come; we must heed His warning and avoid such heresies. By contrast, Jesus says that when He comes again, it will be seen by everyone – it will be as visible as the discharge of lightning (Matthew 24:27). He then makes this observation: “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together” (Matthew 24:28). It would seem that this is referring back to the false messiahs and prophets, for a corpse (*carcase*) has no life in it; just as a dead body will attract scavengers, so these proclaimers of a message that is devoid of life will attract those who love to hear their words – do not be drawn in by their popularity! We must discern the death that they represent and avoid them.

Luke then goes on to provide more details regarding this time leading up to when the *times of the Gentiles* will be completed – when the *mystery of God* will be brought to an end: “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars ...” (Luke 21:25). Matthew provides a glimpse of a timeline of when these *signs* shall take place and more details as to what these *signs* will be. “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 ...” (Matthew 24:29). The *tribulation* of which Jesus has been speaking is the time when there will be an abundance of false messiahs and prophets spewing forth messages of death, who will gather to themselves many who cannot (or are not willing to) discern the death that they are feeding upon. However, this profusion of false teachers will culminate in the unveiling of the Antichrist, who will be proclaimed as the savior of the world; this will be the ultimate fulfillment of the *eagles* being attracted to the *carcass* – the world will follow him with a frenzy! If we consider

<sup>73</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



the activities of the Antichrist when he brings his control to bear upon the world, then we will begin to see the reality of the tribulation that will be faced during this time. The timeline revealed by Matthew is that, after this time of oppression, the described signs will be revealed in the sun, moon, and stars. The sun will become dark (*darkened*), the moon will not give its radiance (*light*), and the stars shall disappear (*fall* – the word also speaks of that which fades or ceases to exist) from the heaven.<sup>74</sup> Isaiah spoke of this day: “For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine” (Isaiah 13:10), as did Joel: “The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining” (Joel 3:15).

Luke adds that there will be things happening on the earth as well; the signs will not be limited to the heavenly bodies: “... and upon the earth distress of nations (peoples), with perplexity (anxiety); the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear (terror), and for looking after (expectation, or anticipation of) those things which are coming on the earth ...” (Luke 21:25-26). Spiritual powers will also be impacted: “... for the powers (supernatural powers) of heaven shall be shaken (waver or totter)” (Luke 21: 26).<sup>75</sup> Everything will indicate that something is about to happen; the frequency of the birth pains is increasing, as is their intensity.

With this buildup of expectation, Matthew, Mark and Luke all lead with these words: *and then*; they each state, at the time when these things are happening, then ... “shall they see the Son of man coming” (Mark 13:26). The Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be seen coming in the clouds of the heavens, “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 24:31). This will be a moment of inexpressible joy for those who have faithfully endured in the Lord. “In a moment (an indivisible amount of time), in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).<sup>76</sup> To the Thessalonians, Paul elaborated on this great event: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout [this is the appearance of the Son of Man in the clouds], with the voice of the archangel [the one charged with the responsibility of gathering Christ’s faithful ones], and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain [surviving] shall be caught up [*harpazo* (*har-pad’-zo*) – to snatch away] together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).<sup>77</sup> This is the event that Evangelicals have as the focal point of their eschatology – the rapture, the snatching away of the saved ones. However, unlike the Evangelical version, this will not be a mysterious disappearance that no one will be able to understand. The Lord will come with a shout, the sound of the archangel will be heard, and the trumpet of God will be blown – none of this sounds particularly quiet, nothing like people simply vanishing without a sound.

Mark writes that *they* shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds; Matthew elaborates a little on this event and tells us who *they* are: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in

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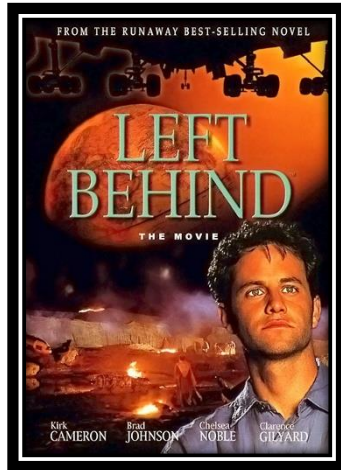
<sup>74</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

heaven: and then shall all the tribes [peoples] of the earth mourn [a strong expression of remorse], and they shall see [catch sight of] the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).<sup>78</sup> Unlike the Evangelical rapture theory, Jesus says that everyone will see Him coming in the clouds; the faithful will see Him and rejoice for their redemption has come; the rest of the people of the earth will see Him and recognize that they have missed out, and they will be overcome with grief. The harvesting work of the angels will take some time – sufficient for everyone who is left on the earth to see Him and know that their destiny has been sealed; it is the change from corruptible to incorruptible that will take place in an indivisible



amount of time (1 Corinthians 15:52). Those who have ignored, rejected, or turned away from the salvation that Christ procured for all people (1 John 2:2) will see Him coming in the clouds and they will realize their error, but it will be too late. Those who looked to the Antichrist as the savior of the world will recognize their misplaced hope. However, unlike the popular *Left Behind* movies, there is no second chance at salvation. Between the snatching away of those who have remained faithful to Christ, and the ushering in of Christ's kingdom on earth, great calamity will come to those remaining on the earth. This will be the time when God's wrath will fall upon mankind.

Luke began this particular section by stating that Jerusalem would be occupied by Gentiles (non-Jews) until “the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). With the snatching away, from the earth of those who are in Christ, God will bring to an end the *times of the Gentiles*. Three of the Gospel writers include Jesus' parable of the fig tree: when it leafs out, then you know that summer is very near at hand; in the same manner, Jesus says, “when ye see these things come [present tense, *coming*] to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand” (Luke 21:31).<sup>79</sup> As a matter of fact, Jesus states that the generation that witnesses these events will be there to see all of these things finished – namely, the Kingdom of God established on earth. When will God's kingdom be established on earth? It will be when Christ comes to begin His millennial reign; the same generation that sees the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds to receive His own, will also see Christ's reign on earth ushered in.

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:37-39). Noah, *a preacher of righteousness* (2 Peter 2:5), spent considerable time building an ark according to God's specifications, during which time he warned every one of the coming destruction. The day came when Noah, his family, and the chosen animals entered into God's sanctuary (the ark), and “the LORD shut him in” (Genesis 7:16). At the moment that God shut the door of the ark, all hope for those outside of the door was gone; those who refused to heed Noah's message of warning now faced the wrath of God's destruction of the physical world as they knew it. In the same way, the

<sup>78</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>79</sup> Strong's Online.

coming of the Son of Man heralds a closing of the door of salvation in Christ (the *times of the Gentiles* is fulfilled at that moment); those who are left behind will face God's wrath. It is at this time that the peoples of the earth will recognize that the day of wrath of the Lamb of God has come, and that they are helpless (Revelation 6:15-17).

Regarding this day of destruction, Matthew says that "of that day and hour knoweth no *man*" (Matthew 24:36). This is the same warning that Jesus gives to the overseer of Sardis – you will not know when I will come to you! The question is: will he be watchful and ready for the Lord, or will he choose to ignore the Lord's warning and face a day of the Lord's judgment? The choice is his. The Lord is very careful not to override the will of this elder, just as He allows us to exercise our wills – this is part of what it means for us to be created in the image of God. We are permitted to use our wills to choose; however, we do not have a choice when it comes to the consequences of our selection. Adam had the freedom to choose, but the Lord had already made it clear to him what the consequences of such a choice would be (Genesis 2:17). To this elder, the Lord has promised to come at a moment that he does not know. Likewise, He will come to us through death, or in the clouds of the air; either way, we will not know when He is coming, but we must be prepared or we will find ourselves among those who are left behind. Jesus' word to this elder is to repent, return to faithfulness (*hold fast*), and watch, or else he will be called to account on a day when he least expects it.

Could there be more to this warning than simply not knowing the time when the Lord will come? Jesus warns, "I will come on thee as a thief ...." A better translation of the Greek word *epi* (*on*), which would be more consistent with the context, would be *against*.<sup>80</sup> A thief does not show up to discuss the pleasantries of the day; he is there for only one purpose, and that is to steal and to cause devastation. Since Jesus says that He will come unexpectedly, as a thief, it can be understood that He will be coming *against* this elder; Jesus, Who is the fullness of God almighty (3:1), will come against the overseer of Sardis when he does not expect it – if he does not repent and watch!



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

Still addressing the elder of Sardis (*thou*), Jesus tells him that there are a few people within the *ekklesia* at Sardis who have not contaminated (*defiled*) their lives with sin. What is not stated here, but would seem to be implied, is that the spiritual life of this elder has become stained with sin. He, like everyone who is born-again by the Spirit of God, was made a new creature in Christ – free of all spot or stain; we are to "put on [clothe one's self with] the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).<sup>81</sup> However, as this overseer faced life, he evidently failed to keep his garments of righteousness spotless and clean, to the point that the spiritual life, which he once enjoyed, is about to be declared dead. However, despite the failure of this overseer to maintain his relationship with the Lord as he should, there is still a small minority (*few*) within this assembly who have remained pure before the Lord. This underscores

<sup>80</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

the fact that we are individually accountable to God; it is **my** choices that will determine **my** spiritual destination, and not the decisions of those around me, or even those whom I might hold in high esteem. Therefore, to do something or to believe a particular doctrine just because my friends do, is a tragic error! In the same way, to do or believe something simply because someone I hold in high regard does or believes it, is equally dangerous. “Take heed, brethren [we must recognize this as a warning to those who are truly born-again, and it is a warning that we must take to heart], lest there be in any [*tis* – the word is singular; i.e., any one] of you an evil heart of unbelief [this is a general warning, but it is directed to you and me, individually], in departing [to fall away, to become apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).<sup>82</sup> Consider God’s judgment of the unrighteous: “And whosoever [*tis* – anyone (singular)] was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).<sup>83</sup> The final judgment of God will be determined one-by-one; no one will be condemned to the lake of fire because of the position of Billy Graham or Robert Schuller or Jack van Impe – God’s judgment will be based solely upon what we, individually, have done with the salvation that Christ died to procure for us! Remember, we must remain faithful to the Lord in order to be saved (Mark 13:13); following after a heretic (whether their name is Billy, Robert, Jack, Joel, or Rick) is NOT remaining faithful to the Lord! My name will appear in the Book of Life because **my faith** has been placed in the salvation that Christ has accomplished for me (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8, 17:8); my name will remain in the Book of Life **as I choose to persevere** (*hupomeno*) in Christ unto the very end (Matthew 24:13; Revelation 22:19).

There are many sins that can defile our pure garments of salvation; however, as I consider the vast landscape of Evangelicalism today, probably the most prolific contamination comes from the sin of compromise that can often be so easily rationalized, and the increasingly popular ecumenism provides the greatest opportunities for such pollution. The first step in avoiding this corruption is to recognize that ecumenism, no matter how innocent it might appear, is spiritual fornication! Once we are prepared to acknowledge that everything ecumenical is to be avoided, then we have the basis for repentance before God; if we would avoid something, then we must turn away from it. While driving, if you see that you are heading toward a tree and desire to *avoid* an accident, then you must steer away from it; it would be considered foolish to say that you wanted to avoid an accident yet refused to steer away from the obstacle. So it is with ecumenism; it does no good to say that you desire to remain spiritually pure if you continue to join with them – separation is what God requires in order to keep His people pure! The recurring command for all of the elders who are failing the Lord in any area is: repent! Repentance demands that we change our pattern of living; we cannot claim to have changed our minds (repented) if we continue to live as we have. “But if we walk [are walking (present tense; subjunctive mood)] in the light, as he [God] is in the light, [then] we have fellowship [*koinonia* – close communion, intimacy] one with another [each other; this is not man-to-man, but man-with-God], and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth [is cleansing] us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).<sup>84</sup> John goes on to tell us, “And hereby we do know [are knowing] that we know [have known] him [God], if we keep [are keeping – carefully attending to]

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<sup>82</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT, *Bibleworks* 8; Gingrich Lexicon.

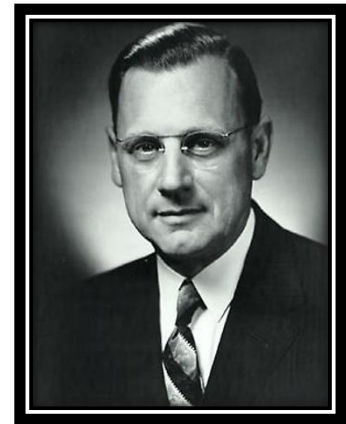
<sup>83</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>84</sup> Strong’s Online.



his commandments” (1 John 2:3).<sup>85</sup> From this we can learn that if we are walking in the light of God (this is a **choice** that we must make), and enjoying close fellowship with Him, then we will be carefully obeying His commands; the two go together. This is why the spiritual separation that God has carefully defined in His Word is so critically important; His desire is for our purity so that our communion with Him will not be obstructed. It is when sin clouds the skies of our lives that the light of God’s presence does not shine through; failure to walk in obedience to the Lord will cloud the sky – repentance (turning away from the path and source of failure) will clear the skies and restore our fellowship with Him (1 John 1:9). We must be prepared to join the few of Sardis who had discovered that the key to purity before God is obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ!

Speaking of those who have remained pure before Him, Jesus says that they will walk with Him *in white*. *White* always symbolizes purity, and, to those who have absolutely *not defiled their garments*, Jesus extends the promise of walking with Him in *white*. *Walk* is in the indicative mood, which means that this is a statement of fact; a future is confirmed when they will be with the Lord and they will be dressed in white. We read of just such a future time when great multitudes will be standing before the Lamb of God and they will be *clothed with white robes* (Revelation 7:9). What we must not miss is that the preparation for the *white robes* in that heavenly realm begins now; it is as we live in this life in purity and holiness before the Lord that we will qualify to be dressed in white in the heavenlies. This should not be surprising, for we are to be clothed now in the *new man* “which after [in accordance with] God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).<sup>86</sup> Evangelicals have molded God into a god of love who is tolerant of their worldliness; His essential holiness has been suppressed in order to accommodate their inherent need to live in harmony with modern culture. The “thus saith the Lord” of the Scriptures has been replaced with that gentle “Yea, hath God said?” of the devil (Genesis 3:1). The blind accommodation of ecumenism will never survive the “thus saith the Lord” of God’s Word; however, it will thrive under the devil’s approach – raising doubt about what God has told us in His Word is one of the favorite tactics of Satan – after all, it worked with Eve.



Harold J. Ockenga

When Harold Ockenga announced New Evangelicalism, it came with a very direct dismissal of Biblical separation<sup>87</sup>; this new brand of Evangelical living was liberated to re-evaluate the Word of God in light of the stance of Liberal theology and “science,” there was a new freedom for social integration, and an exhilarating acceptance of other Christians, free from all judgment. In essence, everything was now open for debate without the necessity of someone being wrong; objective truth had been dealt a crippling blow, and over the intervening years it has increasingly languished – to the point that it is now basically consigned to the narrow-minded legalists. Evangelicals very quickly shed any hint of appearing to be judgmental – except of those who insisted that the way to life eternal was still narrow; *tolerance* became the watchword, except when applied to those who still hold to the Scriptures, without debate. It soon followed that the

<sup>85</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>86</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>87</sup> Harold J. Ockenga, in *Foreword to The Battle for the Bible* by Harold Lindsell.

Word of God must no longer be considered to be inerrant (without error) – the words of Scripture were carefully redefined so as to accommodate the aberrant views of heretics, and to permit the broad unity of ecumenism. Generally speaking, Ockenga’s generation of Evangelicals became part of a massive landslide into apostasy, followed by a new generation of religious pagans who still considered themselves to be Christians. A subtle redefinition, or reapplication, of key words became a means of maintaining a façade that everything was as it had always been; the statements of faith used by many Evangelical organizations were carefully drafted so as to reflect a



conservative view of the Bible and to make it appear like nothing was changed. For example, we know that Billy Graham embraced the Roman Catholics from the earliest days of his crusades, yet, in contradiction to this, the statement of faith of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association still includes these words: “Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation.”<sup>88</sup> There appears to be a disassociation between professed beliefs and practice; however, the old

adage, “what you do speaks so loudly that I can’t hear what you say,” finds application here. A person’s walk through life will tell more about what they truly believe than can often be discerned from their words.

The undefiled of Sardis will walk with the Lord Jesus Christ in white because *they are worthy*. Since they have walked faithfully with the Lord in this life (*not defiled*), it is only fitting that they would also walk with the Lord in the future. *Worthy* comes from a Greek word that strictly means “bringing up the other beam of the scales.”<sup>89</sup> The faithful, undefiled walk of these few from Sardis will be balanced with a walk in white with the Lord when they are in glory. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10); if we walk according to God’s desire for us (in obedience to His Word), then we can be assured that we, too, will walk with the Lord in white. Faithfulness in this life provides us with assurance of a place with the Lord in glory. “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we [may] hold the beginning of our confidence [faith] stedfast unto the end ...” (Hebrews 3:14). The *end* can only refer to our physical death or the return of the Lord in the clouds of the air to gather those who are His. It is not good enough to be faithful to the Lord for a while. “But when the righteous turneth away [apostatize] 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<sup>90</sup>; compare with Hebrews 10:26). Jesus said, “... he that shall endure unto the end, the same [that one!] shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> <http://billygraham.org/about/what-we-believe/>

<sup>89</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>90</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>91</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



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

Once again, Jesus speaks to the one who is living victoriously in Him (*overcometh* is in the present tense; it is not a past accomplishment but a present reality). This is a message specifically for everyone who is living faithfully in the Lord. Remember (this is something that we must not forget!), “But whoso keepeth [may be carefully attending to] his [God’s] word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him [God] ought himself also so to walk, even as he [the Lord Jesus] walked” (1 John 2:5-6).<sup>92</sup> Along with the word *keepeth* (Greek - *tereo* [*tay-reh’-o*]), there is a Greek particle that makes the second part of this statement contingent upon the first; i.e., in order to have the love of God truly fulfilled in his life, this person must be carefully attending to God’s desires for him (living in obedience to the Lord). Jesus openly declared, “If ye love me, keep [*tereo* – imperative mood (a command), and active voice (we must do the *keeping*)] my commandments” (John 14:15); there must be no mistaking of God’s desire for His children: to walk faithfully with Him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4). This is the one who is overcoming!

There are two things outlined here that Jesus will do for all who are overcomers in Him.

The first is that this person, this one who is living victoriously and obediently in Christ, will put on (*be clothed*, which is in the middle voice; therefore, he will dress himself) white, or brilliance.<sup>93</sup> The faithful ones of Sardis were just promised that they would walk with the Lord in white (v.4, same Greek word), now that privilege of being clothed in such dazzling brilliance is extended to all those who are continuously faithful to the Lord (overcoming in Him). The *white* garments are an expression of innocence and purity; however, this is not something for which we are to wait until the Lord comes for us, rather, we are to live in purity before Him now, so that we will be worthy of walking with Him in glory. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know [*oida* – understand; perfect tense, happens only once – *have known*] that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him [mortal changing to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53)]; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth [present tense, active voice – a continuous state of purification] himself, even as he [the Lord] is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).<sup>94</sup> Since the Lord is pure (present tense), and if we desire to be as pure as He is, then we must strive to live in keeping with His Word; we must diligently protect our hearts from anything that would detract from confirming that Jesus is the only Way to God (John 14:6). Anything ecumenical is off limits for the child of God: “... come out [a command that we are to obey (active mood)] from among them [unbelievers, unrighteous, darkness, Belial (Satan), infidels and idols], and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not [do not permit yourself to cling to] the unclean *thing*; and [then] I will receive you [future tense, but a statement of fact], And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be [a fact] my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”

<sup>92</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

(2 Corinthians 6:17-18).<sup>95</sup> This is the Lord's call to separation from everything that would contaminate our lives and hinder our fellowship with Him; this is Biblical separation!

The siren call of New Evangelicalism was to a “repudiation of separation” and to participation in the Liberal theology of infidels so as to understand their heretical position more fully.<sup>96</sup> God's call is to **turn away from** all that is impure (*unclean*), and to **be turned to** Him so that we might live in purity, and, thereby, be accepted as His child. The child of God is **saved from** all that is of the world, and **saved to** walking in the light of God's Word! The invitation of New Evangelicalism was, in fact, to turn away from God's Word and His call to purity (although that is not how they made it appear), and to turn toward a greater social involvement with those who are faithless before God. The stark reality of the matter is that Ockenga's call to New Evangelicalism was a summons to spiritual devastation upon the rocks of compromise and accommodation; he lured many of his generation into apostasy and doomed the next generations of Evangelicals to a religion of self-righteous paganism that is devoid of life, and which assures that everyone in its grasp will have a place in eternal hell. In Ockenga's own words, his appeal to this new, casual, undemanding Christianity-lite “received a hearty response from many evangelicals.”<sup>97</sup> They desperately clung to God's promise, “I will receive you,” but turned away from the requirements of God that could make that wonderful assurance a reality. Since Evangelicals (there's no longer anything “new”) continue to cling to what the Lord has called *unclean*, they will not hear His, “Well done, good and faithful servant ...” (Matthew 25:23), but will join their fellow infidels in “outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30). Are we prepared to count the cost of following the Lord wholeheartedly, and live in light of eternity? Are we sufficiently persuaded of the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior that we will keep ourselves pure from ecumenism and Christianized customs that are truly pagan?<sup>98</sup> If it is our desire to please the Lord, then we must learn to say, “NO!” – being counted among the Lord's *overcomers* depends upon it. In order to qualify to wear the brilliantly pure garments that Christ has for us, we must be living in purity **now** (1 John 3:3); we cannot enter eternity with filthy garments and expect the Lord to accept us – we have been adequately equipped to begin the purification process now (Romans 8:1-4).

Jesus told a parable of a king who had prepared a marriage feast for his son, but, when he called those who had been invited, they all had excuses for not attending, and so he brought in the uninvited to ensure that the festivities would not be without recipients. We read: “And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are* chosen” (Matthew 22:11-14). We might, from our modern perspective, be horrified at the harsh treatment of this guest; however, if we place it within the context of Jesus speaking about the kingdom of heaven, then it will become more clear. When we place our faith in the Lord Jesus

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<sup>95</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>96</sup> Ockenga.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> *Christianized, pagan customs* include the obviously pagan Christmas, Easter, Valentine's, and Halloween, but there is also the more subtle organizational structure of most churches today that contravenes the Scriptures, and find its origin in the Roman Catholic Church, which is fraught with paganism.



Christ for the salvation of our souls, He makes a wedding garment available for us that we are to put on: “put on the new man, which after [according to] God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).<sup>99</sup> Unless the holiness and righteousness of God are a part of our daily living, we have not donned the *new man*, and, therefore, we have no part in the Lord; it is according to the leading of the Spirit of God that we show forth the righteousness of the Law of God (Romans 8:4). No righteous wedding garment means no part with the Lord in eternity!

The second thing that the Lord says that He will do for the one who is overcoming, is that He “will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” For the one who is living faithfully for the Lord, Jesus says that He will not erase, or obliterate (*blot out*), his name from the Book of Life.<sup>100</sup> By connotation, this means that those who are not *overcoming* (including the overseer of Sardis) stand in danger of having their names removed from this Book. What do we know of this Book?

The first reference that we have to God keeping a book of names is after Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. Shortly after witnessing the miracles that God performed at the Red Sea, and after Moses had been in the mountain with God for some time, the Israelites constructed an idol of gold, and returned to the pagan practices of Egypt. Moses rebuked the people: “Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin” (Exodus 32:30). As Moses seeks God’s forgiveness for the people of Israel, he says to Jehovah, “Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exodus 32:32). Moses’ plea is this: Lord, forgive these people, but if You won’t, then remove **my name** from Your book. This is similar to Paul being willing to be cut off from Christ forever, if only his people, the Jews, would repent before God (Romans 9:3). However, notice the Lord’s response to Moses: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Exodus 32:33). The Lord makes it clear that Moses’ magnanimous gesture to sacrifice his relationship with God for the sake of Israel is unacceptable; it is the one who sins against the Lord who will be cut off. Likewise, Paul’s willingness to be separated from God, if only the Jews would repent, is equally impossible. As we consider that it is the sinner who is removed from God’s book, we might well think that His book must be empty, “For all have sinned ...” (Romans 3:23).

Along with man’s fall into sin came the expression of God’s grace; God made coats of skin to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21) – a picture of His mercy extended to cover their sin. We read of Adam and Eve’s second born: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous ...” (Hebrews 11:4). Faith in God’s grace, expressed through the required shed blood of a perfect sacrifice, provides spiritual life for the repentant sinner. It is the unrepentant sinner, the faithless one (which excludes those who are innocent, as we will see), whom God will wipe out of His book. Those who come to God believing that His grace is sufficient to cover their sin, will find Him faithful and merciful to do just that; when their sins are covered, God will write their names into His book.

The concept at work here is somewhat similar to citizenship rights today. If you are born in Canada, you are a Canadian citizen and will have all of the rights and privileges of such, or if you move to Canada and take out citizenship, then you have committed yourself to upholding the laws

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<sup>99</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

of the country, and your name is added as a citizen. Two things can remove your name from a citizenship roll: 1) you die (at which time a death certificate is issued confirming your removal from the rights and privileges of citizenship), or 2) you renounce your citizenship. Although death will rob you of your earthly citizenship, it is no longer of any value anyway, since you are dead. However, to renounce your citizenship requires a deliberate act; it is a willful turning away from the responsibilities and privileges that you have as a citizen.

We are not told many details on how God keeps the Book of Life. However, Jesus said, “Suffer the little children [*paidion* (*pahee-dee’-on*) – used for infants and small children] to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such [such as these] is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14)<sup>101</sup>; elsewhere we are told to become as little children (*paidion*), if we would see the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). From this we would conclude that little children would have their names in the Book of Life – those who are still in innocence, i.e., the time before becoming accountable. With accountability comes responsibility for our inherited sin nature, at which time our name is removed from the Book of Life – “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book ...” (Exodus 32:33). However, when we come to faith in Christ, our sins are covered by His blood sacrifice (the fulfillment of the coats of skin that covered Adam and Eve), and, thereby, our name is entered into the Book of Life through faith. What also is very evident is that God does not record our names in this Book of Life using indelible ink. In Romans 11, Paul states that we (the Gentiles) have been individually grafted into the Holy Tree by faith (v.17); however, the warning is that we are not to be arrogant, for “if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee” (Romans 11:21). The natural branches (the children of Israel) were removed from the Holy Tree because of unbelief (v.20), and it is unbelief that can see us lose our position in Christ. If our names are entered into the Book of Life by faith, then there is only one way for our names to be removed from this Book: a willful turning away from that faith.

What does a *willful turning away* look like, and do we need to be concerned? There are many variations on how this will appear, but there are two primary positions with everything else falling somewhere in between. The first position is one of a complete departure from God – turning to a place of antithesis to what it means to be a truly born-again Christian. For example, consider Charles Templeton who went from being an evangelist, preaching the Word of God, to becoming an agnostic – he was no longer persuaded that God even existed. He went from faith to faithlessness; he turned away from God and cast everything away that was Christian.

However, there is also the more subtle *turning away* – those who enter a life of compromise and accommodation but retain their Christian vocabulary and habits. They have found an acceptable means (in their eyes) of justifying and rationalizing their sin (compromise and

accommodation **are** sins). The most prolific form that this takes in our day is through acceptance of, and participation in, ecumenism (which is nothing less than spiritual fornication). An organizational example of this is One Hope Canada

(formerly the Canadian Sunday School Mission). Although their new website has seen the removal



<sup>101</sup> Strong's Online.

of much of this evidence, it is still available through some of their sub-ministries. Here we find: “We respect and seek to work with local churches.”<sup>102</sup> Considering that most local churches will be ecumenical, this places One Hope within the ecumenical field. Further on we read: “We aim to function in our culture with relevance and authenticity”<sup>103</sup>; our culture is an expression of the fallen state of mankind – why would they strive to be relevant within such a sinful context? The ministries of One Hope continue to present themselves as being Biblical: “The Bible is our authority in all matters of faith and practice,”<sup>104</sup> yet they clearly deny the mandates of Scripture in the same statement of faith. One Hope’s new website is more subtle, for they have completely removed their statement of faith and left one ambiguous statement: “We present the Gospel, to those having the least opportunity to hear of Christ and especially to children and youth, and we disciple believers for living and serving through His Church.”<sup>105</sup> That can say as little or as much as you want.

The life of compromise and accommodation is by far the most common for those who turn away from the narrow way to life (Matthew 7:13-14); they continue on with little or no change in their lifestyle, yet they live in contradiction to 2 Corinthians 6:17 – “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you ....” Releasing our grip on what is *unclean* (like ecumenism) is conditional to the Lord accepting us; even though our religious activities might continue unabated, a carelessness with the Word of God has taken over. Guard your heart lest you be caught in the snare of ecumenism and have your name removed from the Book of Life because you have forsaken saving faith in Christ.

Consider the regulation that Israel had regarding sin:

And if any soul sin through ignorance [in error or inadvertently], then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, *both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them* (Numbers 15:27-29).<sup>106</sup>

Here we have God’s provision for the children of Israel, and for the Gentile who might be living among them; this describes someone who has already placed their faith in the Lord to cleanse them (their place in the Book of Life has been secured by faith). When they falter in their walk of faith, there is a prescribed way to deal with their sin; their faith, so expressed through repentance, results in forgiveness, spiritual cleansing, and retention of their name in the Book of Life. However, these instructions are followed by a warning:

But the soul that doeth *ought* presumptuously [intentionally], *whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth* [blasphemes] the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off [eliminated/killed] from among his people. Because he hath despised [viewed with contempt] the

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<sup>102</sup> <http://miramichivalleybiblecamp.com/about-us/>

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> <http://onehopecanada.ca/passion/>

<sup>106</sup> Strong’s Online.

word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity *shall be* upon him (Numbers 15:30-31).<sup>107</sup>

By contrast, this is someone who sins deliberately, thereby showing contempt for the Lord's commandment and blaspheming against the Lord. Within Israel's economy, that person was killed in order to purge the sin from their midst, and he died in his iniquity – his name was blotted out of the Book of Life. The person who did not have faith in the Lord's provision for cleansing, could not commit such a presumptuous sin because his sinfulness would simply be the product of his unregenerate heart; it is the one who has professed faith in the Lord who would blaspheme the Lord by deliberately acting contrary to His commands. Ezekiel wrote of this matter as well:

But when the righteous turneth away [apostatize] 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).<sup>108</sup>

There is a finality to apostasy, properly defined. We must note that this is not referring to a failure along life's way – this is a wilful turning away from righteousness (whether overtly or covertly), and it results in spiritual death, for which there is no remedy. The writer of Hebrews expressed the same thought:

For if we sin willfully [deliberately, intentionally] after that we have received the knowledge [precise and correct knowledge<sup>109</sup>; “what one comes to know and appropriate through faith in Christ”] of the truth, there remaineth no more [no longer continues to exist a] sacrifice for sins, But a certain [only – emphasized in Greek] fearful looking for [expectation] of judgment [condemnation] and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised [rejected] Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer [worse] punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot [despised] the Son of God, and hath counted [regarded] the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified [made holy], an unholy thing, and hath done despite [insult] unto the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29).<sup>110</sup>

What we must not miss from this passage is that it is speaking of someone who has been truly born-again (*he was sanctified* by the blood of Christ); this is not someone professing to have faith when there is none – this is someone who has been made holy through faith in Christ. Apostasy takes place when a person who has been bought out of sin by the blood of Christ, turns away from God! Prior to this we read, “For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened [cause to fully know; “imbue with saving knowledge”<sup>111</sup>] ... If they shall fall away [commit apostasy], 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).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Holladay Lexicon.

<sup>108</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>111</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>112</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



We are told that Christ died only once (Hebrews 9:28); He is the fulfillment and end of the Mosaic sacrificial system. This highlights the problem with the Catholic Eucharist (called the Sacrifice), for, within the Roman Catholic tradition, Christ dies during every mass – they continually sacrifice the One Who died only once. The Law of Moses prescribed that continual sacrifices were to be made because they could not ultimately make the person, who was offering the sacrifice, whole – there was no permanent dissolution of sin: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come ... can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect” (Hebrews 10:1). By contrast, “this man [Christ], after he had offered **one sacrifice** for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God ...” (Hebrews 10:12). Christ paid the price for man’s sin once, and that single payment is sufficient for the sins of all of mankind from Adam to the end of time. Therefore, when, by faith, we have accepted Christ’s purchase of our souls, and, subsequently, turn away from Him, we have rejected the one and only sacrifice that can bring an eternal cleansing.

We read of the Book of Life in Revelation 13:8 – “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the Antichrist], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” This verse so explicitly shows that the salvation of mankind was not an afterthought with God; He was not caught off guard by the sin of Adam – His perfect plan to purchase us out of sin was already in place. This verse speaks of the Antichrist and the following that he will have among all of the people of the earth, but only those whose names are **not** in the Book of Life. To those who have not placed their faith in Christ for salvation, or have rejected their faith in Christ (apostates), the Antichrist will appear to be their savior – the only one who can bring peace and safety. Those whose names are in the Book of Life will be the target of his anger – he “will make war with the saints” (13:7). Notice that it is the Book of Life of *the Lamb*; it is only through the Lamb of God that our names can be written in this Book. What did Jesus say? “I am the way, the truth and **the life** ...” (John 14:6).

Again, we are told of what those, whose names are not written in the Book of Life, will do in the future: “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend [is about to ascend] out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition [destruction]: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is” (Revelation 17:8).<sup>113</sup> Those who are not in Christ will marvel at the Beast – they will be mesmerized and enthralled with the Antichrist. We have seen two passages now where we are told of those who will be supportive of someone who will seek to set himself up as God; can this be right? “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness [deceit] of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not [absolute] the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10).<sup>114</sup> We must have a love (*agape*) for the truth in order to be saved; the Antichrist will come with great power and overwhelming manifestations of that power, and great will be the deception of those who are not secure in the Truth. Jesus said, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were*

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<sup>113</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>114</sup> Strong’s Online.

possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24); this indicates that it is possible for those who are in Christ to be led away from the truth by these mighty signs and wonders. Jesus spoke these words as a warning so that we, through the power of His Spirit, might be alert and prepared to withstand the allurements of Satan. Isaiah speaks of the Lord’s help in a “day of salvation” (49:8), and Paul refers to this in his second letter to the Corinthians when he declares, “now is the day of salvation” (6:2). The “day of salvation” will end; a day came when God shut the door of the ark (Genesis 7:16), and all who sought entrance after that died in the deluge.

The Book of Life, as it pertains to those who do not have their names written there, is mentioned once more – Revelation 20:12-15:

And I saw the dead [these are the dead who did not have part in the first resurrection – 20:6, those who either did not accept God’s provision of salvation or who apostatized], small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

How many will find justification in this final judgment? “...by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16); the unrighteous dead will be judged according to their works, but no one will be saved. Their names will not be found in the Book of Life and none of their works, which have been carefully recorded for this final review, will change that; their end will be to share the lake of fire with the devil and his angels. “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die ...” (Ezekiel 33:11). God’s desire has always been that man would seek Him, but there is a prescribed way to come to God that will meet His requirement for justice. Abel found that way, while his brother, Cain, missed it; Jacob came to know the pathway to God, even while Esau spurned it. The way has always been there, and it has always been available to everyone; faith in God’s promised Salvation (whether future or accomplished), followed by a life of obedience to His commands, is all that has ever been required (1 John 3:23-24).

The Book of Life is mentioned two more times, and, in both cases, it deals with those who have their names written within its pages. The only people who will enter into the New Jerusalem are those whose names are in the Book (Revelation 21:27) – those who have been cleansed, made holy, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The final mention is, again, a warning to those who have their names written in the Book of Life: “And if any man shall take away from [or remove (present tense)] the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away [or remove (future tense) – same Greek word] his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:19).<sup>115</sup> This is a significant warning against how the *words* of the book of Revelation are to be handled.

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<sup>115</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

As we have looked at the Book of Life, there are several things that have become very evident – things that are beyond question:

1. God is the Author of this Book; He is the One Who writes in it,
2. Not everyone's name will be in the Book when it is completed,
3. If our name is in the Book at the final day, then we will enter eternal glory,
4. If our name is not in the Book at the final day, then we will enter eternal damnation, and
5. Our name can be removed from the Book, for it is entered by faith and removed by faithlessness.

Looking at the overall thrust of Scripture, it seems clear that our name is entered into the Book when we place our faith in the finished work of Christ for our salvation and cleansing. However, there are sufficient warnings in Scripture for us to realize that our name is written by faith and that it will be removed if we become faithless (apostate). “Take heed [a command to be continually discerning (present tense)], brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [faithlessness], in departing [to fall away] from [speaks of separation from] the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).<sup>116</sup> “Watch ye [a present tense command to be cautious], stand fast [a present tense command to persevere, to persist] in the faith ...” (1 Corinthians 16:13).<sup>117</sup> To those who are victorious in Christ, Jesus states that He will not remove their names from the Book of Life; there is sweet assurance here for those who remain faithful to the Lord and His Word.

In addition, Jesus says that He will acknowledge (*confess*) the name of the one who is an overcomer before His Father, and the Father's angels. There are two variations on this idea given to us in the Gospels, the first of which we find in Matthew: “Whosoever therefore shall confess [declare openly] me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).<sup>118</sup> Jesus' confession of this person before the Father is conditional on him confessing the Lord before men. Notice what Jesus says next: “But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33). It has been duly noted that the ecumenical mind denies the Lord (whether forthrightly through heretical doctrine, or passively through joining with those who deny the Lord as the only way of salvation); in accordance, they will be denied by Christ before His Father. It is not a light thing to become entangled with those who are involved in ecumenism, which serves to support the Scriptural requirement that we have no part with them (Romans 16:17-18).

The second Gospel parallel is Luke 12:8-9 – “Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess [may declare openly] me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.”<sup>119</sup> Is there particular significance to being denied by the Lord before the *angels of God*? Scripture would indicate that there is. “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given [God's grace was given to Paul to proclaim the mystery of the Gentiles as being fellow-heirs (v.6)], that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all *men* see what

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<sup>116</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent [in order] that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* [the angelic hosts in the presence of God] might be known [to gain knowledge of] by [through] the church [*ekklesia*] the manifold [many-sided] wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord ...” (Ephesians 3:8-11).<sup>120</sup> By observing us (the *ekklesia* of Christ) in light of God’s working in and through us, the angels in heaven are learning about the many aspects to (*manifold*) God’s wisdom. As we remain faithful to the Lord, Jesus will acknowledge us before the angels in heaven – we will be among those whom He is using to teach the celestial beings about God’s immeasurable wisdom.

To those who are overcoming, Jesus promises that their names will remain in the Book of Life, and that He will acknowledge them before the heavenly Father, and before the angels in heaven. This blessed promise is to the spiritually victorious one; it is not for the professors of Christ, but only for the faithful in Christ. Jesus made exactly the same conditional promise during His earthly ministry: “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). It is little wonder that we are commanded so frequently in Scripture, to stand firm in the Lord: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ...” (1 Corinthians 15:58).



**<sup>6</sup> He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

Here is the repeated command to anyone who has a desire to hear (*ear*): understand (*hear*) what the Spirit of God is saying to the *ekklesias* of Christ. This should not be difficult if we are walking in accordance with the leading of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1-4).



**<sup>7</sup> And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and he that shutteth, and no man openeth;**

Jesus now turns His attention to the overseer, or elder (*angel*), of the assembly in Philadelphia. This city was built along the key trade routes through the region, and, therefore, was of some importance and quite wealthy. However, it was also very close to a fault line and was subject to damage from the many earthquakes that hit the region; in AD 17, it was so damaged by an earthquake that Rome gave it relief from paying taxes as it set about rebuilding.<sup>121</sup>

In typical fashion, the Lord, Who has some things to say to this messenger, begins by identifying Himself in a very specific way. He opens with the word *holy*. This is one of the many names ascribed to Jehovah: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy ...” (Isaiah 57:15); over thirty times He is described as the “Holy One of Israel.” The seraphim call to one another, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts ...” (Isaiah 6:3), and the living creatures of Revelation cease not to proclaim, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8) – a phenomenal declaration of the absolute purity of God! In our English KJV, we read, “... *he that is holy* ...” – a characteristic that is applied

<sup>120</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>121</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ala%C5%9Fehir>





Ruins of Ancient Philadelphia

to the Lord; in the Greek it reads: *this says He, the holy* – it is Who He is; He is the perfect expression of holiness.<sup>122</sup>

Likewise, He describes Himself as *true*. During His ministry on earth, Jesus said, “I am the way, **the truth**, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); the words (*true* and *truth*) are from different forms of the same Greek word: in our verse it is an adjective, in this one, a noun. Jesus is the truth; there is neither shadow nor hint of anything that would even remotely cast a doubt upon Him. It is His holiness and truth that come together in those who

have received the salvation that He has purchased: we are to put off the old man and put on the new man, “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). The Greek phrase translated as *true holiness* is literally, *holiness of the truth*; we have been created by God in the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jesus said, “I am ... the truth”; the same Greek word). As Jesus prepares to present His message to this elder, He begins by identifying Himself as *holy* and *true*.

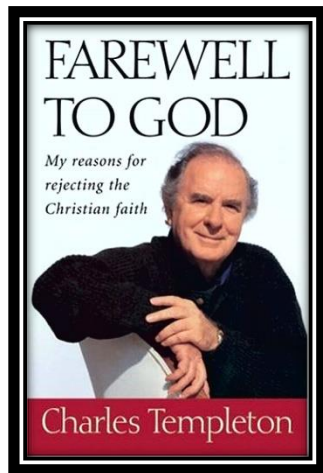
Jesus then goes on to state that He is holding the key of David. What do we read of David? He was the youngest of eight sons born to Jesse, who was of Bethlehem and a descendant of Judah (1 Samuel 17:12; Matthew 1:1-6). David was a shepherd whom Jehovah chose to lead His people, Israel; “Then Samuel [the prophet] took the horn of oil, and anointed him [David] in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13). The word *came* is a weak translation of the Hebrew; it speaks of the Spirit of God rushing, or coming mightily, upon David.<sup>123</sup> There are occasions when the exact same expression is used of the Spirit of God coming upon Samson and King Saul; however, what is unique with David’s anointing is that the Spirit came mightily *from that day forward* – this was not just an enablement for a specific situation, but, rather, the Spirit came to stay. As Samuel declared to King Saul that he had been rejected by Jehovah, he spoke of what the Lord was looking for in a leader: “Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God ... the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.” (1 Samuel 13:13-14). Saul, who had experienced the mighty power of the Spirit of God, was cast away by the Lord for not following His commands; he may have started well, but he ended badly – he permitted faithlessness to enter into his heart (Hebrews 3:12).

Once we acknowledge the Biblical reality of apostasy for the child of God, then other questions will often surface. What does apostasy look like? How does apostasy happen? Wouldn’t a God of mercy provide an opportunity for repentance to the apostate?

<sup>122</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>123</sup> Strong’s Dictionary.

In general terms, apostasy within the Christian realm, takes two forms: 1) the apostate who no longer wants anything whatsoever to do with Christianity, in any form, and 2) the apostate who will maintain a façade of Christianity, and might well appear to still be a “Christian”. Therefore, apostasy can sometimes be obvious but, more likely, it will be hidden and will require Biblical discernment to recognize it. We might be able to deceive all people some of the time, some people all of the time, but we cannot deceive God at all – He knows our hearts and knows who is apostate! We cannot see the heart of another person, which is why the final judgment of a soul rests securely in God’s hands; however, that does not provide us with an excuse to be accepting of everyone who declares himself to be a Christian.



Charles Templeton is an example of someone who turned away from everything that is Christian. Charles became a Christian in 1936, founded a church in Toronto in 1941, and joined with several other men to form Youth for Christ in 1946.<sup>124</sup> He held evangelistic rallies in Europe, the US, and Canada, worked with Billy Graham in crusades and was once considered to be a likely candidate to become the most popular evangelist in the US.<sup>125</sup> However, in 1948 he entered Princeton Theological Seminary and came out doubting his faith; in 1957 he proclaimed himself to be an agnostic.<sup>126</sup> He did not repent from his unfaithfulness but went on to write a book called *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*. Charles apostatized and left the Christian faith; moreover, it was evident for everyone to see.

However, it is much more common for apostasy to wear the garment of Christianity. In 1948, Harold Ockenga made a proclamation that resounded around the world and set Evangelical minds on a pathway to destruction. Reflecting on that day, he penned these words some 28 years later:

Neo-evangelicalism was born in 1948 in connection with a convocation address which I gave ... While reaffirming the theological view of fundamentalism, this address repudiated its ecclesiology and its social theory. The ringing call for a repudiation of separatism and the summons to social involvement received a hearty response from many evangelicals. ... It differed from fundamentalism in its repudiation of separatism and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day. It had a new emphasis upon the application of the gospel to the sociological, political, and economic areas of life.

Neo-evangelicals emphasized the restatement of Christian theology ... and the reexamination of theological problems such as the antiquity of man, the universality of the Flood, God’s method of creation, and others.<sup>127</sup>

Harold Lindsell made this observation: “... once inerrancy goes, it leads, however, slowly, to a further denial of other biblical truths.”<sup>128</sup> These words are taken from the same book for which Harold Ockenga wrote the foreword (from which I just quoted). Lindsell notes that if Biblical inerrancy is no longer accepted, then the denial of other doctrines will follow on its heels; it makes

<sup>124</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Templeton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Templeton)

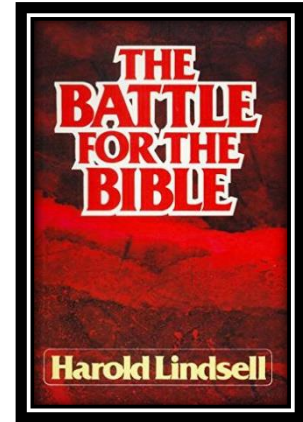
<sup>125</sup> <http://www.templetons.com/brad/cbt.html>

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ockenga.

<sup>128</sup> Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, p. 203.

you wonder if Ockenga read the book, for he outlines some of the doctrines that he was prepared to re-examine (and subsequently deny) because they were a problem to the Liberals! This is the mire from which modern Evangelicals have arisen; they have grown up on a diet of restated theology laced with a generous helping of confusion from all of the re-examined “problems.” Ockenga, and those of his generation who followed his lead, plunged headlong into apostasy (unless they repented of their error, and there were some who did), yet they retained a strong façade of being spiritually alive. Jesus’ words for Ockenga would be, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Revelation 3:1). Unfortunately, the next generation of Evangelicals would not have heard the unadulterated Gospel, and, therefore, many of them would simply be religious pagans who have been deluded into believing a lie. How easy it is for those who are truly born-again today to slide into Evangelicalism, and right into apostasy!



Where did it all begin?

“And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened ...” (Genesis 3:6-7a). This is the record of that fateful moment that God has preserved for us. When God placed Adam in the Garden, He commanded him, “... 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 2:17). When the eyes of Adam and Eve were *opened*, that was the moment when they died spiritually – their relationship with their Creator was broken. The Lord then implemented His plan of salvation by preparing coats of skins for Adam and Eve; through the shed blood of the animals, remission of sins was made and they could, through faith in the One Whom God promised would come to deal a death blow to Satan (Genesis 3:15), have fellowship with God again.

Today, we are saved when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – the One Who came in fulfillment of the promise that was made to the serpent. Through faith, we have a spiritual birth and a new relationship with our Creator. If we deliberately choose to sin after the pattern of Adam, then at that moment we have become faithless, and our spiritual life dies. God had prepared a Sacrifice for the sinless Adam when he chose to sin; if we purposefully sin after we have placed our faith in the Sacrifice Whom God had prepared, then we have intentionally turned away from the only Sacrifice Who permanently dealt with the matter of sin. The writer of Hebrews spoke specifically of just such an occasion:

For if we sin wilfully [intentionally, deliberately] after that we have received the knowledge of the truth [a precise and correct knowledge of the truth], there remaineth [continues to exist] [absolutely] no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain [only a] fearful looking for [expectation] 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 [greater] 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 [made holy], an unholy thing**, and hath done despite [insult] unto the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29).

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<sup>129</sup> Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

It could not be any more clear than this: if we turn away from the Lord Jesus Christ, then we have spurned the **ONLY** way of salvation, and there is no other way for us to be saved. As we consider the thrust of these words, we recognize the awful reality of apostasy and the terrible implications of it. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); this is the explicit definition of the narrow Way that leads to life. When we turn away (apostatize) from Him, there is no other means of salvation – we have lost **the only Hope** that there is. However, we are human, and so the question is often raised, “When does hope die for the one who sins deliberately?” Is there a time after deliberate sin takes place when repentance is still possible? To sin deliberately sounds like it should be an obvious and easily identifiable act – is it always?

Consider some lessons for us from the lives of the children of Israel. “And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done *somewhat against any* of the commandments of the LORD *concerning things* which should not be done, and are guilty; When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation” (Leviticus 4:13-14). This deals specifically with a sin of ignorance (as contrasted to what we have been looking at, a deliberate sin); however, when the sin is made known, then, immediately, they are to bring the appropriate sacrifice to be offered for cleansing. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9); God is faithful to forgive us when we confess our known sins to Him. As with Israel, we must keep short accounts with God; when we are aware of our sin, we must immediately come to Him for cleansing.

However, there is another lesson that we can learn from God’s instructions to Israel. “But the soul that doeth *ought* presumptuously [literally, with a high hand, in pride or arrogance], *whether he be* born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth [blasphemes] the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off [killed] from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity *shall be* upon him” (Numbers 15:30-31).<sup>130</sup> This speaks of someone who sins intentionally, and the judgment of that person was swift and with finality – he was to be killed. Just as faith in God was open to the non-Jew under the Mosaic system, so the penalties also applied to both with equality.

We have already seen the words of the writer of Hebrews on this matter, but do they stand in isolation within the NT or do we find the same teaching elsewhere? “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily [secretly] shall bring in damnable [utterly destructive] heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious [utterly destructive] ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter 2:1-2).<sup>131</sup> We are warned of false teachers appearing in our midst who will go so far as to even deny the Lord Who purchased their salvation. Those who are ecumenical find their fit right here. In order to be ecumenical, you must deny the Lord. For the ecumenical Evangelical to join with a Roman Catholic (for example), the Evangelical is denying the Lord in two ways: 1) he is disobedient to the commands of Scripture to have no part with those who teach doctrine that is not Biblical, and 2) even if he personally believes that Jesus is the only way to life, he must suspend that belief (in essence deny it) as he joins with someone who does not believe that (the Catholic will not change,

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<sup>130</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.



so the Evangelical must be accommodating). So, if the ecumenical are identified with the false teachers who will be among us, then where is the *swift destruction* that is promised? If we return to the passages that we have looked at in Hebrews 10 and Numbers 15, we then realize that at the very instant that the ecumenist deliberately sins against the Lord, God's judgment has passed upon him – he has apostatized; he is now without hope. He might well continue to preach and teach about Christian things, but the Spirit of God has left him, just like Samson of old (Judges 16:20). The spiritual judgment for apostasy comes immediately, even though the flesh might carry on as though nothing has happened. Sometimes the moment of spiritual death will be evident, many times it will not – either way, it is out of our hands. Nevertheless, we must recognize that God knows and will attend to the hearts of the lost; for our part, we must be discerning and vigilant so that we do not fall prey to these impressive, false teachers.

In all likelihood, the elder of Ephesus was unaware of the fact that he had left his first love – the Lord (Revelation 2:2-5). However, when the Lord Jesus expressed that this is a fault in him, He commands him to repent. If he chooses not to repent, then Jesus will come upon him quickly, and it will be in judgment; now he knows; now that he knows, he must repent.

Similarly, the overseer of the Sardis assembly is advised by the Lord that, although he has a reputation of being spiritually alive, he is on the verge of being dead (Revelation 3:1). Undoubtedly, he, too, did not recognize his spiritual failure; however, now that he knows, he is commanded to be watchful, to shore up the remnants of his spiritual life, and to repent! If he chooses not to repent, the Lord will come on him when he least expects it.

During His ministry, Jesus made this observation: “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke [excuse] for their sin” (John 15:22).<sup>132</sup> Couched within this comment is the reality that if we are learning new insights into what God desires of us, then we must also be examining our lives to ensure that we are applying these insights to our daily living. If we are sitting under godly teaching, then what are we doing with what we are learning? We must recognize that the more we learn of God's truth, the more He requires of us in our daily walk with Him. For each new truth that we learn, we are now without excuse for this to be demonstrated in our lives; while we were unaware of this truth, we could not recognize our failure to live it, but now that we understand it, we are defenseless.

After we were married, my wife and I attended a Canadian Sunday School Mission (CSSM) church where we were living. When we left that area and moved to Three Hills, we attended the Prairie Tabernacle (a part of Prairie Bible Institute at that time), and later became a part of Mt. Olive Evangelical Free Church. When the Lord began to open our eyes to truths that we had never heard within the Evangelical movement, we also started to evaluate our activities on the basis of these newly-found truths. We soon realized that we could no longer remain a part of Mt. Olive, so we withdrew our membership and began the difficult task of relinquishing our responsibilities. However, we could not return to the Prairie Tabernacle because it was no different; we found ourselves in a town with many churches, but the majority were unacceptable based on what the Lord was showing us from His Word. Most of the churches within the town, and even in the surrounding area, participate in the local ministerial – a loosely organized group that shares service responsibilities in the community, as well as holding an occasional joint service; this is the local expression of the ecumenical movement. If there had been a CSSM church in the area, we realized that we would not be able to attend that either, for that organization (now called One Hope Canada) is equally ecumenical. The point of this is that, as the Lord opened our understanding to the

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<sup>132</sup> Strong's Online.

exclusive nature of being His child, we were faced with withdrawing from the church that we had been a part of for some 13 years. Since we now understood His mind on this matter, we would have had no basis on which to justify our continued participation in such an assembly; in essence, our living had to change with our changing understanding of God's Word.

Jesus promised that when the Spirit would come, He would guide us into all truth (John 16:13); as He guides us into truth, we must be prepared to act upon it. As we consider our lives, if we cannot look back and see changes that we have made to align our living with the Scriptures, then we are faced with one of two things: 1) we remain as babes in Christ, and, despite the Spirit's desire to reveal His truths to us, we remain basically ignorant, or 2) we are now living in continual sin, and know it! If we are growing in our understanding of what God desires of us, then we must also be making changes in how we live so as to align ourselves more closely with His Word.

We have received a holy calling from God (2 Timothy 1:9) and we are admonished to be holy even as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15). However, God has not left us on our own to generate this holiness through our own efforts; He has provided the means for us to live in accordance with His desires. "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). We are to *put off* the *old man* (this is reckoning ourselves to be dead to sin), and we are to *put on* the righteousness and holiness that God has prepared for us; yes, both the putting off and the putting on are activities that we are to do. This is the essence of Romans 6:11, where we are told to account ourselves to be dead unto sin (putting off the old) and alive unto God (donning the new). The righteousness of Christ is our covering; as we remain in Him (John 15:4), our walk with Him will become closer to what He desires and will reflect the righteousness of His Law (Romans 8:4).

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5a). Here are two commands given to us: *examine* and *prove*; both are to be carried out as it has to do with our life before the Lord. The first, *examine*, speaks of testing to see results, specifically to ensure that we are not hypocrites; what we think and do are to be the same; *prove*, on the other hand, refers to scrutinizing in order to determine if we are genuine, with the expectation that we are.<sup>133</sup> These two work together, if our examination reveals that we are being consistent, then the proving will ensure that our heart, mind, and actions are in sync with God. Unfortunately, this is not something that Christians today are challenged to undertake, and, consequently, sound teaching will often fall by the wayside. We must hold our lives up to the light of God to ensure that our faith (our walk with God) is Biblical. The danger that too many fall into, is that they look to those who profess to be Christians for their standard; those who spend time "comparing themselves among themselves" simply do not understand what they are doing (2 Corinthians 10:12). It is only the Word of God that is an unshakable standard.

God will test our commitment to Him. Therefore, it is critically important that we study His Word carefully and continually so that we understand His desire for us (2 Timothy 2:15). This was true for the children of Israel, and they were forewarned:

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth [testeth] you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye

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<sup>133</sup> Strong's Online.

shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep [attend to (John 14:15)] his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn *you* away [apostasy] from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which *is* as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; *Namely*, of the gods of the people which *are* round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the *one* end of the earth even unto the *other* end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you. (Deuteronomy 13:1-11).

If the false prophet, who does miracles, calls you away from the Lord, you must not heed him; you must recognize his error and remain steadfast in the Lord. In the same way, if someone from your own family seeks to draw you into something that is forbidden by the Lord, you must resist. For the Israelite, not only was this meant to keep them from being seduced to do what was wrong, but they were also required to expose the one who set out to draw them into apostasy so that he could receive the death penalty! God is serious about our purity. Jesus said that it would be the members of our own family who will be our spiritual enemies, for they could work to make us compromise our commitment to the Lord (Matthew 10:34-38). We must be prepared to remain firm in our faith, walking according to the leading of the Spirit of God Who has come to abide within us (Romans 8:1-4).

We must repent of the sin committed in ignorance as soon as we become aware of it. We must guard our hearts carefully, lest we be caught in the snare of willful sin from which there is no cleansing (Hebrews 6:4-6). We all have children or friends who are not walking with the Lord as we might desire. However, we must not be consumed with trying to understand their spiritual position before God, nor can we influence them for what is right by compromising on the truth that we know; jeopardizing our place of sanctification before God will not help those whom we long to see come to know Him more fully.

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. 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 7:15-21). We are to be fruit-watchers, as a means of discerning a false prophet (a *wolf*) who is masquerading as a sheep. We must be alert to a person’s attitude, conduct, and his associations, so that we are able to discern with whom we are spiritually permitted to associate. Jesus says that as we observe, we will come to perceive who the forbidden ones are (*know*). However, that must not consume all of our time; our priority must be to know what the Lord requires of us, and then to

observe (Matthew 7:21-23); it is the one who is doing the *will of My Father* who will enter heaven. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to be in God's Word so that we will know that His will is for our righteousness and holiness of life! We will not always be able to discern the true heart of someone else, for they might well be carrying out many wonderful things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, our focus must be on the Lord (Hebrews 12:2), His Word (2 Timothy 2:15), and ensuring that our walk is according to the leading of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 13:5a). "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). What is our *work in the Lord*? In simple terms it is this: 1) focus on the Lord Jesus, 2) study His Word, and 3) do what He has commanded. Through this, we will learn to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40).

This principle was first established with Adam. In the Garden of Eden, Jehovah commanded Adam, "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 2:16-17). Adam was created to be a sinless being with a will; on the day that he ate of the forbidden fruit (in disobedience to God's command), he immediately died spiritually, and physical death set in. The principle is this: willful disobedience to what God has commanded will result in separation from God (i.e., spiritual death). Ezekiel described it this way: "when the righteous turneth away [active voice; the *righteous* is doing the turning (apostatizing)] 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).<sup>134</sup> The *righteous* in Ezekiel's day were those who had received cleansing from sin through faith in the promises of God; they were not restored to the sinless condition of the newly created Adam, but, through faith, they could enjoy a restored fellowship with their Creator. Jesus explained, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth [is doing, present tense] the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21); it is to the one who "shall endure [remain faithful to the Lord] unto the end, the same [this one!] shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).<sup>135</sup> We can learn two things from Jesus' words: 1) in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must be doing the Father's will, namely, living in obedience to His Word, and 2) our obedience must remain steadfast unto the very end. In turn, we must ask ourselves two questions: 1) do I know what God wants me to do, and 2) am I being obedient to His desires? Even if I only know of one thing that God wants me to be doing, or to stop doing, am I obedient in that one thing? "Examine [test to see if your actions align with your knowledge] yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove [examine to see if you are genuine in the light of Scripture] your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5a).<sup>136</sup> God will test our commitment to Him (Deuteronomy 13:1-11).

David was not without sin; nevertheless, the Lord provides us with this tribute: "David did *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). However,

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<sup>134</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>135</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>136</sup> Strong's Online.



through the assistance of the Spirit of God Who came to abide with him, he was able to establish Israel as a nation and to bring a time of peace from the oppression of his enemies. At the end of his life, David gave Solomon, his successor, a very significant exhortation: “Keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel” (1 Kings 2:3-4). In keeping with God’s conditional promise to David, we know that in one generation (immediately after Solomon) the kingdom was split, and David’s work was quickly undone; we also know that during the time of the Babylonian captivity, and for many years since then, Israel did not have a king on their throne at all – they were not even a nation so as to have a king. However, Jews of all subsequent eras have considered King David to be their crowning glory, and the coming Messiah is often likened to him. When the angel came to Mary, as the chosen one to bear the Messiah, he spoke concerning Jesus: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus, the Promised One, would be the eternal Ruler over Israel; the promise, given to those who have placed their faith in Him, is that they will reign with Him during the thousand years that He will rule over the world (Revelation 20:4).

As Jesus describes Himself to the overseer of Philadelphia, He says that He is holding the *key of David*. A *key* is generally considered to be a symbol of authority and power; the Greek word so translated, comes from a root meaning to shut.<sup>137</sup> The one who holds a key for a property has the control of that property; they can lock the doors so that no one can enter, or they can open the doors to permit access. In this case, Jesus says that He holds the *key of David* and that what He opens will remain open, and what He closes will remain shut. We saw that David was the only king of Israel who historically brought peace to the nation and ruled over them with integrity. Solomon followed David and began his reign on the coat tails of his father; however, he retained peace only through massive compromises with pagans, and his spiritual integrity plummeted throughout his lifetime, to the extent that, upon his death, the kingdom, which his father, David, had brought together, was split. Jesus, in keeping with the beloved king of Israel, David, will exercise authority over a people in peace and complete sovereignty; He holds the *key*, the authority and responsibility as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

As Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah, he said, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder ... Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” (Isaiah 9:6-7); Jesus, the promised Redeemer and King, will bear the right and responsibility of ruling from the *throne of David*. He, who holds the *key of David*, will rule and reign over this world from Jerusalem. “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots ... And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins [waist], and faithfulness the girdle of his reins [loins]. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and

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<sup>137</sup> Strong’s Online.

the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:1, 5-6).<sup>138</sup> There will be peace among men and tranquility among the beasts during the time of Jesus’ reign over the earth – a reign that will last for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4), and, after the removal of all who are not found in the Book of Life, His reign will continue for eternity in the new heaven and new earth (Daniel 7:14; 2 Peter 1:11).

Jesus is the One Who opens and no one (*no man*) can shut, and shuts and no one (*no man*) can open. We find the parallel to this in Isaiah 22:22 – “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” In this passage, Shebna (meaning *vigor*, or *growth*), the treasurer to Hezekiah the king of Judah, builds for himself a tomb in a high place, indicating that he considered himself to be very important (v. 15-16).<sup>139</sup> However, Jehovah proclaims that Shebna will die in captivity, and that He will give his responsibilities to His servant, Eliakim (meaning *God sets up*), the son of Hilkiah (meaning *my portion is Jehovah*).<sup>140</sup> Jehovah will lay the *key of the house of David* upon the shoulder of Eliakim, and he will open and shut as he determines; in similar fashion, we have already noted that Jesus, the promised Messiah, will bear the *government* (rule) of His kingdom upon His shoulder (Isaiah 9:6-7). When God shut the door of the ark (Genesis 7:16), the fate of those on the outside was sealed; likewise, when Jesus snatches His faithful ones away from the earth, thereby completing the mystery of God and closing the times of the Gentiles, the fate of all those not numbered among the faithful will be sealed. When God opens the Book of Life to judge the unrighteous according to their works, their condemnation is equally sure (Revelation 20:12 and Galatians 2:16); when God shuts the door of opportunity, it is closed.

Jesus comes to this overseer and reminds him that He is holy and true, and assures him that He is also the Ruler and the Judge. Because of Who He is, there can be the assurance that His governance and judicial decisions will be perfect.



**8. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.**

Jesus begins addressing this elder using exactly the same pattern as with the previous messengers: *I know thy works* – I have complete knowledge (*oida*) of everything that you have done.<sup>141</sup> In this simple statement, Jesus reminds this elder that He is omniscient – He knows all things, there is nothing hidden from Him.

Having just identified Himself as being the One Who opens and no one can shut, and shuts and no one can open, Jesus now tells this elder that He has placed before him an open door that no one can shut. Jesus calls for the attention of the overseer: Look! See! Here is something of which I want you to be aware! He says that He has set (perfect tense – an action taking place once, never needing to be repeated) in front of him (*before*) an opened door (perfect tense; passive mood – the *door* has been opened for him, and is opened only once).<sup>142</sup> In other words, Jesus has placed before

<sup>138</sup> Strong’s Dictionary.

<sup>139</sup> Strong’s Online; Strong’s Dictionary.

<sup>140</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

this messenger an opportunity to move forward; there is no hindrance, the door has been opened by the Lord!

Interestingly, the devil, who loves to counterfeit what God does, promised Eve that if she would eat of the forbidden fruit, her eyes would then be *opened*: “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened [perfect tense – this would happen only once, never to be repeated], and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). The Liar (John 8:44) accuses God of lying! The eyes of Adam and Eve were opened, just like the devil said, but, too late, they recognized their error. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 16:25); the devil will open many seemingly good things before us, but they will be contrary to what God desires for us. Consider the ecumenical mind



of Evangelicals today: they exult in their freedom, they acclaim their wonderful fellowship, they hold great pride in their all-embracing love, and yet they refuse to see that their thinking is from the devil, that it runs contrary to God’s Word, and harbors spiritual death! Not every open door is from the Lord, and we must know the Word of God so that we, in the light of His truth, can effectively evaluate what comes our way. Like Timothy, we must *study* (give diligence) so that we can learn to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). We, who have been born-again by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have received the Spirit of God Who will guide us into all truth (John 16:13); however, the Spirit’s leading will not be effective if we refuse to follow Him (when



we are born-again, the Lord does not remove our ability to choose). Notice carefully what we read in Romans 6:11: “... **reckon** [account, consider] ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin ...”; it doesn’t say that we **are** dead unto sin, but that we are to consider ourselves to be

dead unto sin. The ecumenical Evangelicals claim to be born-again, yet, at the same time, they refuse to separate from those who are in spiritual darkness; we must understand God’s prohibition of such activities so that we can avoid being caught by the devil in such accommodation. The devil loves religion, especially when it is close to the truth; “... mark [keep a watchful eye on, watch out for] them which cause divisions and offences contrary to [*para* – alongside of] the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid [turn away from] them” (Romans 16:17).<sup>143</sup> Rest assured that organizations that may have been Biblically solid 20 or 30 years ago are not as solid today (it’s possible, but highly unlikely); therefore, in order to be obedient to God’s Word to us, we must be prepared to continually evaluate with whom we are involved. Two examples from my life are Prairie Bible Institute and Briercrest Biblical Seminary. My wife and I were on staff at Prairie for over eight and a half years, and I received my Master’s degree from Briercrest; however, both have departed so far from the Biblical Standard that we must all use for our guide, that neither would ever receive either my endorsement or support. Both schools are promoting the experiential heresies of the Emergent Church movement and both have entered into agreements with secular educational institutions contrary to 2 Corinthians 6:14. We must be prepared to *turn away from* those who are no longer concerned with obedience to the narrow truth of God’s Word.

<sup>143</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

Jesus goes on to provide this overseer with three reasons as to why He has placed before him this open door: 1) he has a little (*mikros* – small, insignificant) ability (*dunamis* - power), 2) he has attended carefully to (*kept*) the word of the Lord, and 3) he has absolutely not denied the Lord.<sup>144</sup> Let's take a moment to consider each of these in turn.

Jesus has placed before this elder an open door because he has very little ability; that runs contrary to what we would normally think, and, once again, we must remind ourselves: “For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8). We have just been reminded that what may seem right to us could well be a pathway that leads to eternal destruction (Proverbs 16:25). When Paul, who was known to provide healing to many people, sought the Lord three times to remove his *thorn in the flesh*, the Lord's response was: “My grace is sufficient [enough, satisfactory] for thee: for my strength [*dunamis* – power] is made perfect [complete] in weakness [feebleness, frailty]” (2 Corinthians 12:9a).<sup>145</sup> The Lord did not want Paul to become strong in himself, lest the power of the message of the Gospel might be overshadowed by the man. To this overseer, Jesus says that He has placed an open door before him because he is an adequate vessel to be used as a means of demonstrating the power of God. God will use our inability as the conduit to accomplish His purposes because it will show His ability; in essence, this is the expression of the spiritual gift/s that God imparts to each one of us, and not the manifestation of our own abilities. To this elder Jesus says that, because he does not possess great personal abilities, He has given him opportunities that no one will be able to take away.

The second reason for this *open door* is that this elder has *kept*, or has attended carefully to, the word of the Lord. During His earthly ministry, Jesus told us plainly that if we love Him, we will demonstrate that love by being obedient to (observant of or attending carefully to) His commands (John 14:15).<sup>146</sup> This observation, made by Jesus, is in the indicative mood – it is a simple statement of fact.<sup>147</sup> Our obedience to the commands of God is a serious matter: “He that saith, I know him [I have known God (perfect tense)], and keepeth not [is not carefully attending to (present tense)] his [God's] commandments, is a liar [one who breaks faith, a faithless man], and the truth is not [absolutely not] in him” (1 John 2:4). Therefore, it is essential for us to understand what God requires of us, and equally important that we do it. What are the basics from which we can begin to build a relationship of obedience to the Lord?

If we are willing, the Word of God tells us where to begin. “For by one offering [Christ made ONE offering for sin] he hath perfected [made complete (perfect tense)] for ever them that are sanctified [being continually made holy (present tense)]. *Whereof* the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us [John 14:16]: for after that he [Jehovah] had said before, This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put [am giving (present tense) – bestowing for our benefit] my laws into [upon] their hearts, and in [upon] their minds will I write [inscribe] them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember [*I will absolutely not remember* – subjunctive mood along with the two Greek negatives *ou* and *me* makes this the strongest Greek negative] no more”

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<sup>144</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>145</sup> Strong's Dictionary.

<sup>146</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.



(Hebrews 10:14-17).<sup>148</sup> Let's not jump ahead of ourselves with this passage, and land on the Evangelical doctrine that says, "I've prayed a prayer for salvation and God says that He will never remember my sins again!" We live in a day when it is not popular to have to work, or expend effort, in order to accomplish something, and this Evangelical doctrine reflects that mindset. Our first observation is that Christ, through His one sacrifice, has made all of those complete who **are being made holy** (*sanctified*); if we are not presently being made holy, then we are excluded from this amazing statement of fact (*perfected* is in the indicative mood). The sanctification process must be presently ongoing; it is not good enough to have experienced it in the past, nor to plan on permitting it in the future – it must be happening now! Jesus told His disciples: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you [future, fact] another [*allos* – another of the same kind; Jesus was their Comfort at this time] Comforter, that he may abide with [may be remaining with (present tense – a continual abiding, subjunctive mood – He is willing to abide, but it is not a surety)] you for ever ..." (John 14:16).<sup>149</sup> At the moment that we place our faith in Christ for salvation, the Spirit of God comes to abide within us; if we do not have the Spirit, then we are not in Christ (Romans 8:9). If the Spirit is abiding within us, then He is a witness to what Jehovah declared through Jeremiah: upon our hearts He has placed His Laws (the Ten Commandments), and upon our minds He has inscribed them (Jeremiah 31:31-33). Two things come together at the moment of our salvation: 1) the Spirit of God abides within us, and 2) God places His Ten Commandments on our hearts; therefore, we would expect "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk ... after the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). However, God does not override our wills in this matter; if we are walking (present tense) in accordance with the leading of the Spirit of God, then we can expect God's righteousness to be lived out through us. It is a matter of whether we are willing to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness [holiness of the truth]" (Ephesians 4:24);<sup>150</sup> notice that we cannot put the new man over top of the old man (Ephesians 4:22) – we cannot simply add Christ to a worldly life and call it good. As we permit the Spirit of God to work the Law of God into our daily living, and as we endure in that place of obedience, then the Lord says that He will not remember our sins and iniquities. We must be careful not to follow the Evangelical pattern in this: claim the promise, while ignoring the conditions upon which it is based.

The overseer of the *ekklesia* at Philadelphia has been obedient to the Word of God, and he has remained faithful in his walk with the Spirit of God. Even more, Jesus says that he has absolutely not denied His name. We can deny the Lord in word, and we can deny Him by our actions. The first might appear to be most readily evident; perhaps it would be in order to give some consideration to what it means to deny the name of the Lord, so that we can be forearmed.

Consider the Greek word that has been translated as *deny* (*arneomai* [*ar-neh'-om-ahee*]): literally, it means to contradict.<sup>151</sup> Within the context of Revelation 3:8, it means to abrogate (rescind), to forsake, to renounce<sup>152</sup>; to reject, to refuse to accept.<sup>153</sup> Careful consideration of the

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<sup>148</sup> Strong's Online; [https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive\\_uses.pdf](https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive_uses.pdf).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>151</sup> Vine's, "deny."

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Strong's Online.

word *deny*, as we now see it, shows us that it refers to a deliberate turning away from, or rejection of, the name of the Lord. We might immediately think of Peter who denied the Lord when He was taken by the religious leaders: “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75). The Greek word translated as *deny* here is different (*aparneomai* [ap-ar-neh'-om-ahee]), and means to affirm that you have no acquaintance or connection with someone.<sup>154</sup> Peter did not forsake the Lord, rather, he caved in the face of being linked to Jesus in light of His arrest; when he became aware of what he had done, he immediately repented and went on to give his life for the Lord Jesus Christ. The word that Jesus uses with this elder expresses the condition of Hebrews 3:12, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from [to withdraw from (a denial of) – active voice] the living God.”<sup>155</sup>

Jesus said that “whosoever shall deny [*arneomai* – may deny (subjunctive)] me before men, him will I also deny [indicative – a statement of fact] before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33); if we *deny* (forsake or refuse) the Lord Jesus Christ in this life, then He will reject us in the life to come. As Jesus issues this warning, He goes on to provide a context within which we are not to *deny* Him. The situation in which we will be tested is summarized this way: “And a man’s foes *shall be* they of his own household” (Matthew 10:36; Jesus quotes from Micah 7:6, where the conclusion that follows [v.7] is: “Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.”). The test that Jesus presents is this: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). The word *worthy* (from the Greek, *axios*), literally means *bringing up the other beam of the scales, equivalent*;<sup>156</sup> Jesus is saying that, since He is our Savior (the one side of the scale), should it not be fitting for us to choose Him over our parents and children (the opposite side of the scale)? Are we prepared to choose the Lord Jesus Christ over our family relationships? Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep [attend carefully to<sup>157</sup>] my commandments” (John 14:15); therefore, if we desire to not deny the Lord, then we must place our obedience to His Word ahead of maintaining harmony with our parents and children. Do we try to bend what the Lord has commanded us in order to keep peace with our family? We cannot bend God’s commands; if we are not obedient to them, then we have broken them. Do we submit to the will of our family members when we know that it is a transgression of what the Lord wants? Jesus’ conclusion is this: “And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38); placing the Lord Jesus Christ ahead of our family’s desires is called a cross; this will not be something that is easy, but it is what He has asked us to bear. Jesus bore the cross upon which He died; likewise He calls us to bear a cross – a denial of our old man (sin). This is faith: doing what He has said, and committing the results to Him. Do we deny the Lord before our families? If so, we must repent and seek the Lord’s cleansing!

Be aware that if we understand the Word of the Lord concerning a matter, then we cannot violate His command in ignorance – it now becomes a matter of deliberate sin. We must be very

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<sup>154</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

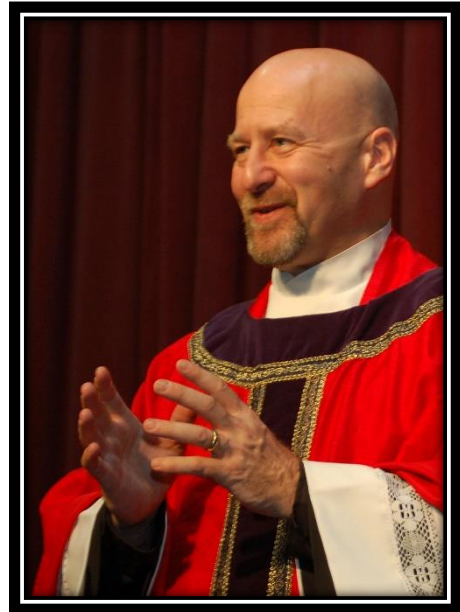
<sup>156</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>157</sup> Strong’s Online.

careful here. If we have done something for years and then learn that the Lord forbids it, we are no longer able to continue doing that thing without being guilty of deliberately transgressing the Lord's command. With understanding comes responsibility to grow in the Lord – to change our behavior in keeping with our growing understanding of His commands.

There is another area where we must be on guard so that we do not deny the Lord, and that has to do with our spiritual relationships with those who are ecumenical and those who refuse to separate from that which is ecumenical. A moment's review is in order. Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). We have already noted that the commands of God cannot be bent, nor can they be redefined, reworded, or remolded to become anything other than what He has proclaimed – His Laws are either followed, or they are broken. Jesus expressed it this way: "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, no fence to straddle, and no flexibility in "thus saith the Lord." The Roman Catholic Church is a significant participant in the ecumenical movement (both locally and globally), and they deny that Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Although not part of their official dogma, for many centuries the Roman Catholics have claimed that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a co-redeemer with Him. "We believe Mary's role continues because we insist that she was not simply a neutral channel for God to come into the world. ... Instead, her cooperation installs her into an eternal relationship with God for the salvation of the world."<sup>158</sup> This was written by Dwight Longenecker, who was raised as an Evangelical and graduated from Bob Jones University; he went on to study at Oxford University in England, was ordained as an Anglican priest, and, when he saw a fracturing of his relationship with the Anglican Church, he and his family were accepted into the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>159</sup> In 2006 he returned to the home town of Bob Jones University and was ordained as a Catholic priest, under the special provision that the Catholic Church has extended to ordained former-Anglican clergy.<sup>160</sup> We might think that Dwight should have known better, but is he so different from Evangelicals who refuse to part from contact with ecumenism?



Dwight Longenecker

What happens within an ecumenical relationship when there is a Roman Catholic, who is part of an organization that promotes Mary as being co-redeemer with Christ, sitting alongside of an Evangelical, who purportedly claims that Jesus is the only way of salvation? Based upon Jesus' own words, this Catholic doctrine must be recognised as being a great heresy. There is no longer any point of trying to deny that Catholics ascribe to Mary virtues and powers that the Scriptures

<sup>158</sup> <http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/mary-mother-of-salvation>

<sup>159</sup> <http://www.catholic.com/profiles/fr-dwight-longenecker>

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

do not – the last several popes have all professed their allegiance to Mary, and John Paul II and Francis have openly prayed to her. There can be no denying that what the Catholic Church embraces is completely contrary to God’s Word; so the question remains: how can an Evangelical, who must acknowledge this as being blasphemy, cultivate a spiritual relationship with such a blasphemer (Catholic)? Since the Catholic’s salvation is dependent upon his relationship with the Church, he will not deny what the Church proclaims; therefore, it is up to the Evangelical to ignore his belief that Jesus is the only way of salvation. However, God’s Word doesn’t permit such a casual attitude to such a central doctrine. “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). Based upon this verse alone, it should be evident that we are to have no spiritual relationship with those who hold to a doctrine that does not find complete support in Scripture. It doesn’t matter who is proclaiming a teaching that is contrary to Scripture; we are to *avoid them*. So what happens if someone is a member of a church that participates in ecumenical activities, or that brings in an ecumenical leader? “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you ...” (2 Corinthians 6:17). The Lord has promised to receive us if we separate from, and have no part with, the unclean (in this case, the ecumenist, and those who sit with the ecumenical); the promise is sure, but it hinges upon our obedience to the Word of God. Whom do we fear more, the one who violates God’s Word, or the God of Scripture Who tells us to have no part with them? Experience tells me that we typically have a greater fear for the man whom we can see, than for the God of all creation Whom we cannot see. The elder of Philadelphia received the commendation that he had not denied the name of the Lord Jesus Christ – may it be our desire to be so acclaimed as well.



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

For the first half of this verse, it is difficult to know exactly what the Lord is saying to the elder of the Philadelphian assembly. The phrase *will make*, is from the Greek word *didomi* (*did’-o-mee*), which means *give*; however, the word is also in the present tense, not future tense as our English translation would suggest. Perhaps this is one of the open doors that the Lord is setting before this faithful overseer; He says, “I am giving (you those) from the synagogue of Satan.”<sup>161</sup>

The Lord is giving to this elder those who are from the assembly, or synagogue, of Satan (literally, Adversary).<sup>162</sup> Jesus, when speaking to the elder of Smyrna, acknowledged the blasphemy of those who were of the assembly of Satan (2:9), the same kind of people who are also in Philadelphia. These people are saying that they are Jews, when they are not, and they are lying. They might well have been of the physical lineage of Abraham (i.e., descendants of Isaac and Jacob who received the promise given to Abraham), but we must not forget that not everyone who calls himself a Jew is truly of Abraham; “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly ... But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly ...” (Romans 2:28-29). This is founded upon the reality of what made

<sup>161</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>162</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



Abraham a righteous man before God: “Even as Abraham believed [persuaded to be true and, therefore, to trust] God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” (Galatians 3:6).<sup>163</sup> Abraham’s belief in God was expressed through his actions – he obeyed the Lord; it was this expression of his belief that provided the evidence of his living faith in God, and, because of this active belief, he is considered righteous before God. Abraham is a living example of the truth of James 2:17, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” *Believe* (from the Greek *pisteuo* [*pist-yoo’-o*]) is a verb, an action word that means to be persuaded of the truth of something/one; *faith* is a noun (*pistis*) that speaks of the presence of the conviction of the truth of something; believing is what we do, faith, or belief, is what we have. What is required to be a Jew, in the eyes of God, is an active faith in Him. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me ...” (Matthew 12:30); there are no varying degrees to being accounted as one of Jesus’ disciples – we are either for Him (we are living with an active faith in Him and His Word, which is evidenced by obedience to Him), or we are against Him (that active faith is missing). There are only two spiritual forces at work in this world: the Spirit of God and the spirit of Satan; the former is present in those who are faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the latter is active in everyone else (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Therefore, when Jesus speaks of those who are of the *synagogue of Satan*, He is referring specifically to those who do not have a living faith in Him. They may well be Jews after the flesh, and they did assemble in synagogues (a Jewish place of worship and instruction), but they are of Satan. What is missing in them? Faith! It is not sufficient to simply believe in God (to be persuaded that He is true), but we must also have a faith that, based upon our believing, is expressed through actions that are in accordance with God’s requirements. James tells us, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19); clearly, being persuaded of the truth of God is not sufficient for salvation. The devils are convinced that God is Who He says He is (they believe) and they tremble because of that knowledge, yet they remain the minions of God’s Adversary, Satan. Evangelicals often like to refer to someone as being a *believer*, by which they mean that they consider them to be saved and on their way to heaven; unfortunately, they have failed to grasp the exclusive nature of God’s accepted narrow Way to life (Matthew 7:14; John 14:6). A *believer*, within the context of Christianity (broadly speaking), is someone who will find acceptance within the ecumenical movement – someone who could be of the *synagogue of Satan*; however, if they are not *in Christ*, then they must be numbered among those who are *against* Him. “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); here Jesus expresses the difference between simply believing and having a living faith. The one who believes is saying, “Lord, Lord,” but the one who is living by faith in the Lord is doing the will of God. The former might well be doing many wonderful things that they say are for the Lord (Matthew 7:22), but the latter will be living in obedience to the Word of God (John 14:15).

Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Doesn’t this mean that believing is sufficient? If that were true, then the devils would be saved because they believe (James 2:19). The critical phrase in this verse is this: *whosoever believeth in him should not perish*.

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<sup>163</sup> Strong’s Online.

*Believeth*, as we have seen, comes from a Greek word that means to be persuaded of, but, within this context, it is also in the present tense and active mood, which means that we are to be continually persuaded of the truth of Jesus Christ. The error for most Evangelicals is that they are convinced that being persuaded needs to only happen once, and it is then good for all time – even if their present persuasion has fallen away. Their premise is that if they have prayed a prayer for salvation at some time in their lives, they are then destined for heaven even if there is no present evidence in their lives that they continue to be so persuaded. This is a lie of the Devil to lull people into a false sense of security. Unless we are presently actively believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have absolutely no basis for claiming eternal life. However, even if we are presently actively believing in the Lord (as per John 3:16), that still does not assure us of heaven. Jesus said, “... he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13); in other words, if we remain faithfully in Christ until our end, **then** we will be saved! John 3:16 tells us that whoever has an active belief in Christ *should not perish*; we must notice that Jesus did not say *will not perish* (despite the efforts of most popular, modern translations to claim it). This continual persuasion of Christ and what He has done for us forms the foundation for a living faith, which, if we endure in that faith to the end, will bring us to heaven. However, we are warned: “Wherefore let him that thinketh [present tense] he standeth [perfect tense – something done once, never needing to be repeated] take heed [present tense - watch] lest he fall [may fall away, be lost – subjunctive mood, a possibility]” (1 Corinthians 10:12)<sup>164</sup>; i.e., if we are of the opinion that we are permanently steadfast in our faith, then we need to be alert to the possibility of actually becoming faithless, and, ultimately, apostate. Eternal security, as it is commonly referred to by Evangelicals, is a myth. “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the [*epignosis* – a precise and correct] knowledge of the truth, there remaineth [absolutely] no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for [expectation] of judgment [condemnation] and fiery indignation, which shall [is about to] devour the adversaries [those opposed to God]. 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 [spurned, treated with neglect] the Son of God, and hath counted [considered] the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified [made holy; indicative mood, a statement of fact!], an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto [insulted] the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:26-29).<sup>165</sup> Did you catch it? The one who sins willfully, after being made holy by the blood of Christ, is destined for condemnation, and there is absolutely no other sacrifice available to save him; he has forsaken the only way of salvation – the Lord Jesus Christ. In simple terms, this means that if you become apostate, your eternal destination in the lake of fire has been confirmed.

This is not a new teaching; we find exactly the same instruction in the OT. “And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement ... and it shall be forgiven him. Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, *both for* him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them” (Numbers 15:27-29). There was forgiveness available for the one who committed a sin in ignorance (without intent); what is noteworthy is that this cleansing was open to both the Jew and the non-Jew. God’s desire was never only for the Jew; His longing

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<sup>164</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

was for the Jews to be a nation of priests to draw all men to Him (Exodus 19:6). What is significant to our study is what follows: “But the soul that doeth *ought* presumptuously [literally, with a high hand; in pride or arrogance – willfully], *whether he be* born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth [blasphemes] the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off [killed] from among his people. Because he hath despised [to regard with contempt] the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity [guilt] shall be upon him” (Numbers 15:30-31).<sup>166</sup> Even within the Mosaic Law, with its many sacrifices and rituals, there was no provision for the forgiveness of sins that were committed willfully; as a matter of fact, the death sentence was to be imposed! We have just looked at the very same situation expounded in Hebrews 10: the born-again one who sins willfully can only expect condemnation from the Lord – his only hope for cleansing has been spurned by deliberately turning away from the Lord. If we refuse to live in obedience to the Lord’s commands, then we demonstrate our disdain for Him; Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep [attend carefully to] my commands” (John 14:15).<sup>167</sup>

Peter also wrote of this matter. “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge] of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled [interwoven] therein [in the *pollutions of the world*], and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known [to know thoroughly] the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them [see Hebrews 10:15-17]” (2 Peter 2:20-21).<sup>168</sup> He says that it would have been better for them not to have known the Lord, than to know Him and then turn away from Him. There is a finality to apostasy. What he is alluding to is the condemnation that is reserved for those who deliberately choose to go their own way after knowing the Lord. The doctrine of eternal security (once-saved-always-saved) finds absolutely no support from the Word of God.

However, God has not left us without hope. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish [subjunctive mood along with the two Greek negatives *ou* and *me* makes this a strong negative], neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).<sup>169</sup> The incredible promise of Jesus is that absolutely nothing, or no one, can snatch us out of His Father’s hand. Notice, however, that the snatching would have to be done by something outside of us; the promise is that **no one/nothing** can take us away from the safety of God’s hand, and, according to Jesus’ words, the promise of eternal life/never perishing is only extended to those who are hearing His voice (present tense) and following Him (present-tense obedience). Paul reiterated this wonderful promise: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). Once again, there is nothing external to our lives that can come between the Lord and us – we are

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<sup>166</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> [https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive\\_uses.pdf](https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive_uses.pdf)

ably protected by the Lord. However, we also read this: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). Despite God’s promise of our complete protection from all outside forces, we are warned to guard our hearts against turning away from God. Our shield of protection from outside influences is impenetrable because it is ordered and designed by God; however, we have choices to make, and what we choose will come with its own consequences. How do we guard our hearts? “... whoso keepeth [to attend to carefully] his [God’s] word, in him verily [truly] is the love of God perfected [made complete]: hereby know [understand] we that we are in him [God/Christ]” (1 John 2:5).<sup>170</sup> Continual obedience to the commands of God (beginning with the Ten Commandments that God has written upon our hearts) is our only antidote against a heart of unbelief. Herein is the great Evangelical disaster: they have created a new gospel (devoid of life) that begins with disobedience to God’s call for separation from all that is unclean, and ends with good deeds that create an aura of being Christian (the very situation that brought Jesus’ condemnation upon the Pharisees – Matthew 23:25-28). It has been handcrafted by Satan to fit anyone where they are at; unfortunately, many, who should know better, have been caught in his web and do not recognize the spiritual disaster that they are courting.

Within the city of Philadelphia, there were those who professed to be among God’s chosen ones, yet they remained firmly entrenched in the assembly of Satan; today we have those who profess to be in Christ (God’s chosen ones – Ephesians 1:4), yet they live in defiance of God’s desires for them (the ecumenical, for example) – they, too, are members of the synagogue of Satan. They have allowed themselves to become the tools of the devil in his efforts to deceive the righteous into permitting faithlessness (*unbelief*) to enter into their hearts (Hebrews 3:12). We must be continually vigilant lest we fall for the alluring bait of deception that Satan will surely dangle before our eyes. Peter, addressing his epistle to the *elect* (those who are in Christ), declares, “Be sober [calm and collected, i.e., able to think clearly], be vigilant [watchful, cautious]; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour [drink down, overpower, destroy]: Whom resist [oppose] steadfast [immoveable] in the faith ...” (1 Peter 5:8-9a).<sup>171</sup> We must be alert lest the devil destroy us (the elect), not through external attack, but through subtly tempting us away from the truth of the Scriptures (it is so easy to rationalize our way into faithlessness to the Lord); this is the warning as given in Hebrews 3:12! “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12); there is no room for any self-assurance that eternal life is guaranteed – unless we remain faithful to the Lord and His Word unto the end, we will fall short of what God requires. “And ye shall be [a fact – indicative mood] hated of all *men* for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to bear up courageously in the face of suffering<sup>172</sup>] unto the end, the same [this is the one who] shall be saved [a fact, indicative mood]” (Mark 13:13).<sup>173</sup> We must be prepared to judge righteous judgment (not by appearances only) lest we be deceived by those who proclaim themselves to be Christians when they are not (John 7:24; 1 John 4:1). To the Corinthians, Paul said, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Corinthians 12:12), thereby

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<sup>170</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Vine’s “endure.”

<sup>173</sup> Strong’s Online.



declaring that miracles and amazing things were the distinguishing marks of an Apostle. However, Jesus also said, “For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders [the same words that Paul used], to seduce [lead away from the truth into error], if *it were* possible, even the elect” (Mark 13:22).<sup>174</sup> We must be prepared to discern truth from error, when it is very possible that the outward appearances may be similar; this is accomplished by permitting the Spirit of God to open our eyes to see the truth of God (John 16:13). Are we attentive to the Spirit’s guidance? Are we obedient in those things that the Spirit of God has revealed to us? We must choose to be obedient! If we are grieving the Spirit through disobedience, then we cannot expect Him to protect us from error. The Spirit’s presence does not remove our responsibility to study the Word of God – it simply heightens the effectiveness of our study. “Study [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).<sup>175</sup> Our salvation is all of God (it is a gift from Him), but our sanctification requires us to expend our efforts to ensure that we do not succumb to a heart of faithlessness. “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall [perish] from your own steadfastness. But grow [present, active, imperative] in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:17-18a).<sup>176</sup> “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).

Jesus goes on to tell the overseer of Philadelphia that He may make, or cause, those of the synagogue of Satan to come and prostrate themselves before him. They will not *worship*, or bow, before the man as they would before God, but there will be an acknowledgement of his godliness; although they will not submit themselves to God (for they remain under Satan’s control), they will recognize the presence of the Lord within this elder. They will not only be aware of the Lord within this man, but they may also come to understand that the Lord has placed His love upon him. Does this mean that the Lord has no love for the sinners who are within the synagogue of Satan?

As we have seen, Satan’s synagogue is filled with those who are not *in Christ*. To the Ephesians, Paul explained, “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were **by nature [born] the children of wrath**, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins [while we were still *children of wrath*], hath quickened us together with [made us alive with] Christ ...” (Ephesians 2:1-5). The marvel of God’s gift of salvation is that He loved us even while we were *dead in sins*; through Christ, we have been transformed from death to new spiritual life in Him. We have left behind our heritage as *children of wrath*, and, as we remain **in Christ**, we are free from God’s condemnation: “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*, who walk [are walking] ... after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).<sup>177</sup> Contingent upon living

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<sup>174</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>175</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>176</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

in accordance with the leading of the Spirit of God, we are now free of condemnation – no longer children of God’s wrath.

We are also told that God desires “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4); “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14). From the very beginning, man has had to choose whether to serve the Lord or not; it was Adam’s choice to disobey the word of the Lord that caused us (his descendants) to be born as children of wrath. After Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, he ensured that they understood the choice that faced them: “choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). The choice is the same today; God has provided the means of salvation for everyone, and, if it is our desire to be found to be *in Christ*, then we, like Joshua, must place our faith in Him to do what He has promised. Salvation has always been provided freely by God, and it has always been accessed by faith in Him.

Despite all of this, we are often troubled when we read, “As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Romans 9:13); how do we put this together with God’s desire that everyone should be saved? About Jacob and Esau, we are told that “the boys grew [up]: and Esau was a cunning [skillful] hunter, a man of the field [the home of beasts]; and Jacob was a plain [sound, wholesome] man, dwelling in tents” (Genesis 25:27).<sup>178</sup> Interestingly, in this verse we are told what Esau could do and what Jacob was like; what we can understand from this, and from what we read of Esau’s life, is that he was not *sound* or *wholesome*: after all, he rashly sold his birthright, as the eldest son, for a meal (Genesis 25:30-34; Hebrews 12:16). Esau made choices that did not cultivate faith in God; he lived for the moment, sought adventure, and married into the pagan culture around him (Genesis 26:34; 28:8-9); God did not force Esau’s hand – he chose, and his choices led him away from the God of his fathers. “According as he [God] hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world ...” (Ephesians 1:4); the Lord’s chosen ones are those who are *in Christ* – “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). We read that Abraham “believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3); “By faith Abraham ... obeyed” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham believed God (he was persuaded that God spoke to him words of truth), and he obeyed, which is faith – living in accordance with what we have been persuaded to be the truth. Those of Abraham’s lineage who do not have faith in Christ, the Vine, are broken off, and we, not of Abraham’s descendants, have been grafted into Christ by faith (Romans 11:20). Esau chose unbelief and faithlessness, and was broken off from the promises given to Abraham and Isaac. The Psalmist wrote, “For thou *art* not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest [the same Hebrew word as is used in Malachi 1:3 of Esau] all workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:4-5). Esau is the personification of the *workers of iniquity*; he did not choose the Lord and so remained under God’s wrath. Jacob, despite his many failures, chose to follow the Lord and continued among those who stood in Christ by faith.

The Spirit of God, through Paul, commands the husband to love his wife even as Christ loves His called-out ones (Ephesians 5:25), yet Jesus said that we are to hate “father, and mother, and

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<sup>178</sup> BDB.

wife, and children” if we desire to be His disciple (Luke 14:26). I am reminded of Abraham who was asked of God to travel three days to an appointed place where he was to sacrifice his only son, Isaac (Genesis 22:2); Abraham obeyed God rather than withhold his dearest child from the Lord. Did Abraham hate Isaac? On the contrary, he loved him; yet he made his love for his son subject to his obedience to the Lord – you could say that, at that moment, he loved the Lord and hated his son. Our first allegiance and obedience must be to the Lord, and to that extent we are to *hate* our loved ones; unless we are that completely committed to the Lord, we cannot be His disciple.

We must understand that God’s love is extended to all of mankind, inasmuch as He has provided salvation for everyone, but His love will only find expression in the life of the one who chooses to place his faith in Him for salvation. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son [this is His love expressed for everyone through the salvation accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ], that whosoever [everyone who] believeth [is believing - persuaded] in him should not perish [*should* is correct; this is something that the *everyone* brings upon himself – either perishing or not perishing (it is in the middle voice)], but have [may have] everlasting life” (John 3:16).<sup>179</sup> God has made full provision for our salvation – the choice is ours. “The Lord is not slack [slow or to hesitate] concerning his [of the] promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering [patient] to us-ward [toward us], not willing [desiring] that any should perish [be destroyed – bring destruction upon themselves (middle voice)], but that all should come to [should make room for; active voice, this is an action that God desires *all* to take] repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).<sup>180</sup> It was not the desire of God that Adam should sin, yet, in His foreknowledge, He knew that he would; in the same way, it is not the will of God that men should be destined for eternal punishment, yet, in His omniscience, He knows who will embrace His provision of salvation, and who will not.



R.C. Sproul, Jr.

We must be careful to guard against equating *foreknowledge* and *predestination*, which is the pitfall into which Calvinists have fallen. *Foreknowledge* means to know something beforehand; *predestination* means to determine something in advance.<sup>181</sup> The Calvinist says that God knows all things before they happen because He has determined everything that takes place: “God wills all things which come to pass.”<sup>182</sup> If this were true, then God predetermined that Adam would sin, which, in reality, means that Adam really did not have a choice, and the culpability for sin, then, rests with God. This is farther than most Calvinists are prepared to go in defending their position on original sin, but if you take the teachings of Calvinism at face value, then this is the only conclusion to which you can come. R.C. Sproul, Jr. is one who has

taken this extreme position, which is unpopular even among his Calvinistic peers, and he has gone

<sup>179</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>180</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>181</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>182</sup> R.C. Sproul, Jr., *Almighty Over All*, p. 35.

so far as to say, “I am not accusing God of sinning; I am suggesting that he created sin.”<sup>183</sup> Sproul has stated what most Calvinists will deny, even though their teachings, properly extrapolated, will lead directly to this conclusion; most will relegate the origin of sin to one of the mysteries that we will never understand. Interestingly, Calvinism has been growing in popularity among Evangelicals in recent years; it seems that its ability to divest much of the responsibility for sin away from man provides a measure of solace for the sinful heart. Combine this with them ascribing to God a pre-determinism, and you have a fatalistic religion, unless, of course, you cut some Calvinistic corners.

Perhaps you are familiar with the Calvinistic TULIP that is used to describe their core doctrines: **T**otal Depravity, **U**nconditional Election, **L**imited Atonement, **I**rresistible Grace, and **P**erseverance of the Saints. Total depravity – man is not only born a sinner, but is totally helpless and cannot even exercise his will to accept God’s gift of salvation; unconditional election – God has chosen, individually, all those who will be redeemed; limited atonement – Jesus did not die for the whole world, but only for those who have been predetermined to be saved; irresistible grace – if you are among God’s chosen ones (according to the terms of unconditional election), then you will not be able to resist His call to salvation; perseverance of the saints – if you are among the elect, then you will never fall away because God has predetermined your redemption. Do you recognize the fatalism in this? If you are among those whom God has chosen, then Jesus died to pay for your sins and you will be in heaven because nothing else is possible; however, you can never know for sure that you are among the elect. On the flip side, if you are not among God’s elect, then Jesus did not die for your sins and you are destined for eternal damnation – and there is nothing that you can do to avert that end. If there was ever a religion that favored “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” it would have to be Calvinism! God has predetermined your destiny: if you’re among the elect, then you will be saved no matter how you live, so live it up; if you’ve not been chosen, you may as well enjoy life now because your future misery in the lake of fire has also been determined. Nevertheless, Jesus said, “Whosoever will come [active voice] after me, let him deny himself, and take up [active voice] his cross, and follow [active voice] me” (Mark 8:34).<sup>184</sup> Jesus’ words contravene the very essence of Calvinism.

Before we leave the subject of foreknowledge and predestination, it is important that we consider what the Scriptures say about the predetermination of God and how we are to understand it. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30). As already noted, we must not fall into the Calvinistic trap of equating *foreknowledge* (knowing something in advance) and *predestination* (determining something in advance). When the Scriptures declare that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (1 Peter 3:9), we understand that He has not predetermined some people for eternal destruction, otherwise this would be a lie. It is also stated that He “will [desires to] have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy

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<sup>183</sup> Sproul, p. 36.

<sup>184</sup> Strong’s Online.



2:4). These two Scriptures alone destroy Calvinism's concept of God's predetermined election of all men to either salvation or destruction.<sup>185</sup>

What, then, does *predestinate* mean; how are we to understand it within the context of Romans 8? To the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "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 and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted *in the beloved*" (Ephesians 1:3-6). From this we learn that we are *chosen* from *before the foundation of the world in Him*, that is, in Christ! It is as we place our faith in Christ as our Savior that we are numbered among the *chosen* who are *in Christ*; whoever comes to faith in Christ is counted among those who are chosen by God from before the world was created – not according to God's individual predetermination, but because they are now found to be *in Christ*. When we are *in Christ*, we learn from Ephesians 1:5 that God has predetermined that we are to be His adopted children through Jesus Christ. What we read over and over again in the first chapter of Ephesians, is that all of these marvelous things are ours because we are *in Christ*. For those who are in Christ, God has predestined many things; however, Scripture is very clear that the salvation that is procured through Christ's sacrifice is open to everyone.

Returning to Romans 8, we read of those whom God did *foreknow*; placing this within its context, we must recognize that Paul is speaking of those "who are the called according to [God's] purpose" (Romans 8:28). When he began this letter to the Romans, he addressed it specifically to the *called* and the *holy* (*called* to be *saints*, both are adjectives<sup>186</sup> – Romans 1:7) – those who have been chosen *in Christ*. In His foreknowledge, God knows those who will be numbered among His chosen ones in Christ, but that must not be construed to mean that God has predetermined who they will be. Within our finite understanding, it is a stretch to wrap our minds around this. Concerning Adam, we can understand that God knew that he would sin, yet He permitted him to freely exercise his choice. In the same way, God's foreknowledge tells Him who will become apostate, yet it remains within the individual to freely choose to depart from God. Within this understanding, we can see that it is those who are *in Christ* whom God has before ordained that they should be made like unto the *image of his Son*. God's predetermination applies to those who have placed their faith in Christ as their Savior, as opposed to who is saved and who is lost. "For we [those who are saved by faith in God's Gift] are his [God's] workmanship [the work of God], created *in Christ Jesus* unto [for the purpose of] good works, which God hath before ordained [prepared beforehand, predetermined] that we should walk [subjunctive mood – we may or may not walk according to what He has prepared for us] in them" (Ephesians 2:10).<sup>187</sup> Notice this: even though God has prepared *good works* for those who are *in Christ Jesus* (i.e., He has predestinated

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<sup>185</sup> The Calvinist will continue to defend his theology by claiming that these Scriptures are addressed to the elect, and, therefore, do not refer to all of mankind. However, this is only accomplished by using skewed exegesis rather than permitting the texts, and their context, to declare the wonderful truth of God's mercy.

<sup>186</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>187</sup> Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

us to walk in these good works), whether we will walk according to His plan, or not, is still our choice.

If we take nothing else away from this study, I trust that we have learned that God's predestined activities apply to those who are already **in Christ**. In other words, God is very concerned with how we live after we have placed our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; He has prepared a work for us that complements His work of grace in our lives. However, even in this (His predetermination for us), God permits us to exercise our will to choose obedience, or to walk contrary to His Word. Do not miss this: when you compromise God's Word, that is your choice! However, what you do not get to choose is the consequences of your choice. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, we read that God "gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). Today we face ecumenism at every hand; God's clear instruction (His predetermination) is that we are not to have any part with it – not sitting under their teaching, not joining their meetings, and certainly not supporting their work. If we rationalize a small compromise of, perhaps, joining a small prayer group, that is our choice – what we do not get to choose, is the spiritual leanness that will be ours as a result. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth [may sow], that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7);<sup>188</sup> if you sow to compromise, rest assured that you will reap the reward for disobedience. The word *sow* is in the subjunctive mood – we have a choice as to what we will sow; *reap*, on the other hand, is in the indicative mood (a fact) – what we reap is promised to be in accordance with our sowing.

Jesus says that those who are part of the synagogue of Satan (those who are not the children of God) may come to understand (*know*) the love that He has for this overseer. The Lord will use this elder to demonstrate His love to those who are living under His wrath (the children of disobedience – Ephesians 2:2-3). What they will do with what they see, and, perhaps, even understand to some degree, will be their choice. The choice that they will make rests in the foreknowledge of God; nevertheless, the choice remains theirs, and we cannot accuse God of predeterminism.



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

Jesus continues to address the faithful overseer of the *ekklesia* in Philadelphia. *Kept* comes from the Greek word *tereo* (*tay-reh'-o*), which means to carefully attend to.<sup>189</sup> We've seen this word used to underscore the need for us to walk in careful obedience to the Lord's commands (John 14:15). Jesus now uses this word to identify the manner in which this elder has attended to *the word of my patience*, or the teaching of the endurance of Me.<sup>190</sup> This speaks of more than simply Jesus' teaching on the need for us to endure through difficulties (Matthew 10:22); rather, it points to the perseverance demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ as He faced the cost of purchasing salvation for everyone in the world. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our*

<sup>188</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Strong's Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

[the] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured [in Greek this is the verb form of *patience*] the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).<sup>191</sup> This verse expresses the attitude of this overseer; as his focus centered on the Lord, he gave careful attention to how Jesus endured His afflictions and was subsequently raised to glory. Clearly, this became his model for faithfulness and his inspiration to hold fast through the trials that he faced. The word *kept* is in the indicative mood – it is a statement of fact!

The elder’s faithfulness in the matter of endurance (not surrendering in the face of trials) becomes the basis for what Jesus says next. Since (*because*) you have remained faithful, therefore *I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation*. It is important that we understand this statement correctly; the temptation might be to use this as a confirmation that the Evangelical doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture is correct – however, that would be a temptation that we must resist.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, the model prayer that He gave to them included this: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil [*poneros*] ...’ (Matthew 6:13a)<sup>192</sup>; a Greek transliteration is: *and not may Thou lead us into testing, but to rescue us from the evil*.<sup>193</sup> These two are placed in contrast to one another; Jesus taught us to pray that we may not be tested, **but** (that signals the contrast) that we would be rescued from that which is evil. *Temptation* (the Greek noun *peirasmos* [*pi-ras-mos* ‘]) speaks of a testing, or a proving, as in God trying us to see if we will remain faithful to Him.<sup>194</sup> The model prayer that was given by Jesus asks that we not be led into such a time of testing, and, in contrast, petitions the Lord to save us from evil. At this point, it is important to consider Jesus’ words on the matter of evil: “For from within, **out of the heart of men**, proceed [come forth] evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye [envy or greed<sup>195</sup>], blasphemy, pride, foolishness: **All these evil things** [*poneros* – same Greek word as used in the Lord’s model prayer] **come from within**, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23).<sup>196</sup> From this we understand that our petition is that we might be rescued from the evil that abides within us. Peter wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial [*purosis* – burning] which is to try [*peirasmos* – in the Lord’s prayer as *temptation*] you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 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 4:12-13). As we bring these together, what we see is that trials, which will test our mettle, are to be considered a normal part of life; however, does the Lord lead us into these trials, do they simply happen as a part of life, or do they arise because of our sinful nature?

If we consider James’ words, then it appears that the temptations in life are a result of our own weaknesses, and are a part of life: “Blessed is the man that endureth (*hupomeno* – persevere<sup>197</sup>) temptation (*peirasmos*): for when he is tried [is approved (*dokimos*)], from the root meaning to be

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<sup>191</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>192</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>193</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>194</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>195</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>196</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>197</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

examined and found genuine], he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted [*peirazo* (*pi-rad'-zo*), the verb form of *peirasmōs*], I am tempted of [from] God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man [*and He, Himself, tempts in no way*]: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:12-14).<sup>198</sup> However, we also read, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham ..." (Genesis 22:1); is this a contradiction? James says that God does not tempt, and from the context we understand this to mean that God does not tempt anyone to do evil; this is affirmed by James' explanation that we are enticed by our own illicit lusts to do evil, and further confirmed by Jesus' words that evil comes from within us. When we read that God tempted Abraham, it was not a test to see if he would succumb to some sin but, rather, to prove his faith in the Lord. In the same way, God proved the Israelites in the wilderness to determine whether they would live in obedience to His commands (Deuteronomy 8:2); He presented them with opportunities to exercise their faith in Him, and their failure to do so resulted in God's judgment on several occasions. By contrast, the evil that is around us is a constant source of testing our faithfulness to the Lord's commands by enticing us to do what is wrong, but that is not God testing us with evil – that is routine life, which, according to Peter, should not surprise us. When God proves us, we are faced with a test of our trust in Him, and not a test of our ability or inability to refuse evil; God's test will be for the purpose of determining if our faith in Him is genuine. God's tests will be significant to our spiritual progress in Him – are we sufficiently persuaded to do what He has asked and leave the results to Him? "Commit [roll] thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established [directed aright]" (Proverbs 16:3);<sup>199</sup> if we live in obedience to the Lord, then our inner motivations will become increasingly righteous (the seat of evil will become subject to the Lord). As we walk according to the leading of the Spirit of God, the righteousness of the Law of God will be expressed through us (Romans 8:4).

Therefore, as we consider the Greek word *peirasmōs*, we must remain alert to the context in which we find it. Are we looking at God's testing of our faithfulness, or the allurements of the devil that may resonate with the evil that is within us, and, consequently, will lead us into sin? Jesus goes on to say to this elder that this time of proving is about to come upon all of the world for the purpose of testing to see how everyone will respond – out of which the Lord promises to keep this elder.

We may never truly comprehend all of what Jesus had in mind for this elder, in order to provide a better basis from which to ponder this reality, it is important to keep in mind what was taking place in the world at the time that Jesus dictated these words to John. Even though there is some variation as to the date when the Revelation was written, the greatest consensus places it at about AD 95 to 97.<sup>200</sup> We must also remember that John was on the island of Patmos by the decree of Rome because of his Christian faith. Patmos was a secure place where Rome sent those whom it desired to take out of circulation; it was a place of exile.<sup>201</sup> Since AD 64 when a part of the city of Rome was burned, for which Emperor Nero held the Christians responsible, the attitude of Roman

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<sup>198</sup> Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>199</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>200</sup> [http://www.freebeginning.com/new\\_testament\\_dates/](http://www.freebeginning.com/new_testament_dates/)

<sup>201</sup> <http://www.greeka.com/dodecanese/patmos/patmos-history.htm>



leadership toward Christians had declined. Although empire-wide persecution was still some time away, localized persecution was common place and local governors were not dissuaded from carrying out such action. By the time the Revelation was written, Christians had been targeted for some thirty years; John refers to himself as being a *companion in tribulation* with those to whom the Lord addresses this revelation (Revelation 1:9). During this time, the Jews were accepted and saw little persecution; even though they refused to worship the Emperor, they did have their own sacrificial rituals and customs, and, because they were ancient, they were tolerated. Christians, on the other hand, were a new phenomenon and were considered to be a superstitious lot who worshipped in secret (away from the general public) and carried out strange practices (like communion, which speaks of eating flesh and drinking blood). Under Emperor Trajan (AD 98 – 117<sup>202</sup>) it was punishable to be a Christian; even though they were not specifically sought out (as in an inquisition), if they were accused of being a Christian they would then be tested to see if it was true. The test that was most commonly administered was to order them to make a sacrifice to the gods of Rome and curse Christ; compliance meant life, refusal often meant death – for those who were not Roman citizens, this frequently resulted in dying by wild beasts, which became somewhat of a public spectator-event.<sup>203</sup>



Emperor Trajan

Therefore, it would seem that the Lord will protect this elder from facing the proving that was about to become common place. I cannot apprehend the extent of what this means; however, we can be assured that this overseer has already faced tribulation and has remained faithful to the Lord throughout. What is equally clear is that we cannot take this as a promise that we will not face oppression and trials; there is no basis here for saying that Christians will escape the coming tribulation of the Antichrist. The trials that Christians would face over the next two centuries under Rome would become increasingly oppressive, why should we think that we will escape such suffering? “Beloved ... 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 4:12-13).



**11. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.**

Jesus now commands the elder to give particular attention; *behold* is in the imperative mood and second person, singular form: *you, the elder of Philadelphia, take note* – I am coming (*come* is in the present tense) quickly. We found the same words, directed toward the elder of the *ekklesia* in Pergamos, preceded by the warning to repent (2:16). In this case, there has been no

<sup>202</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Roman\\_emperors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Roman_emperors)

<sup>203</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution\\_of\\_Christians\\_in\\_the\\_Roman\\_Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire)

word of correction, and so there is no need for repentance; Jesus simply calls his attention to the fact that He is coming, and His coming will be without delay.<sup>204</sup>

Even though this overseer has received no word of correction or condemnation from the Lord Jesus Christ, we still find a significant warning here. The warning is that he must continue firmly (*hold that fast*) in what he is holding – to keep carefully and faithfully to his present state.<sup>205</sup> Whenever we see one of these warnings to *hold fast*, we must not fail to realize that this means that it is possible to relinquish our hold – otherwise, why would there be such an exhortation? Paul urged the Romans to be cautious because “if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee” (Romans 11:21); he explained that they (individually) are in Christ by faith, and, if someone was to become faithless, then he (that faithless one) would suffer the same fate as the faithless of Israel – he would be broken off and destroyed. Jesus said, “If a man abide [remain] not in me, he is cast forth [thrown out] as a branch, and is withered [dried up]; and men [they – probably the angels (Matthew 13:37-40)] gather them [gather up the cast off branches], and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned [it (the branch that has been cast forth, withered, and gathered up) is being burned]” (John 15:6).<sup>206</sup> Jesus also provided us with the illustration of the rich man who, when he died, found himself in *hades*, being tormented in a flame (Luke 16:22-24); here is a broken-off branch who has been gathered up at the end of his days and cast into the fire of *hades* where he is being burned. The one who becomes faithless is no longer abiding (remaining) in Christ, and, as a result, he faces the same certainty of torment in *hades* upon death as the one who has never expressed any faith, and then an eternity in the lake of fire – the ultimate destiny of *hades* and those who are in it (Revelation 20:14-15). Therefore, we must be vigilant to hold tenaciously to the Lord Jesus Christ, to remain faithful to Him, and to walk in obedience to His Word. “Take heed [look at, or to contemplate carefully], brethren, lest there be in any [one] of you an evil heart of unbelief [faithlessness], in departing [become apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).<sup>207</sup> There lies within each one of us the potential for apostasy; even this overseer, who heard no word of correction from the Lord, is warned to be alert and to persevere in his walk in the Lord.

It is possible for apostasy to take hold in a dramatic, single crisis event in which the born-again one turns and departs from the Lord. However, I think that it more frequently occurs very gradually, and that the person involved might not even be able to identify the specific moment when they turned away from the Lord, or, perhaps, the deception is so subtle that they don’t think that they have departed from the faith. It’s a little like the frog in the gradually heated water – it doesn’t recognize the danger of what’s happening until it is too late. In this case, the apostasy might begin with a seemingly innocent compromise (an easily justified action) or accommodation (it’s so unloving to judge); nothing so significant as to be jarringly noticeable, just a small shift in focus that is very easily rationalized. However, even the most innocuous act sets a precedent for other more offensive actions, and so the downward pattern is set. Keep in mind that that first, ostensibly justifiable departure is sin – it is a violation of a clear teaching of the Lord, and, as such,

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<sup>204</sup> Friberg Lexicon; within the context, there seems to be a time-element involved, hence – *without delay*.

<sup>205</sup> Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

<sup>206</sup> Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>207</sup> Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

it will drive a wedge between us and the Lord unless we repent of it (1 John 1:6-9). Or, perhaps we are unwilling to relinquish something that we have done for years, either because someone or a group has shifted their position away from the Lord, or because we are now aware that this activity is not approved by the Lord.<sup>208</sup> This is much more subtle, and probably more difficult. Over the years, my wife and I have supported many individuals in mission work, and Christian groups involved in such work. However, as the Lord began to open our eyes to the narrow truth of His Word, we were faced with the necessity of evaluating who and what we were supporting in light of what He was showing us. When we had determined that an individual (or group) no longer met the criteria of God's Standard, we faced the daunting task of advising them that our support would end. For organizations, this was relatively simple and painless, but for individuals with whom we had developed a rapport, it was tremendously difficult. Nevertheless, the Word of God is clear that we are to have no part with those who are not adhering to the teaching of the Lord; those who hold to doctrine that is alongside of the truth of His Word, we are to avoid spiritually (Romans 16:17-18). We must be observant of what individuals and organizations are doing, with whom they are associating, and what they are saying. For the one who is growing in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, it cannot be business as usual.

In most cases, apostasy will be a protracted series of events, each one serving to further erode the foundation of faith in the Lord. It will probably begin with a time of vacillation, either weighing the matter and considering the pros and cons, or looking about to see how other "Christians" are handling such a situation. Unfortunately, during these times, you can rest assured that the devil will downplay the negative side, and will exaggerate the positive in order to make the forbidden fruit appear to be as desirable as possible; i.e., he will twist the truth to make good appear to be evil, and evil to be good (Isaiah 5:20). It is through these early days that there is an opportunity to shine the light of the Word of God on the matter; there is time to discern the truth and to choose what is right – to make a Biblical decision. During these days of spiritual reflection, before the deception becomes too great, that repentance is possible, and when cleansing and God's forgiveness are still available (1 John 1:9). However, we may not be aware of the moment when we cross from being a child of God, struggling with a choice of right and wrong, to being an apostate who no longer fears the Lord, and for whom an eternity outside of God's presence has now been sealed. We have chosen to disobey Him rather than to choose Biblically and change; we have become comfortable with our rationalization for violating the commands of God.

In our day, probably the most significant red flag to which we must be alert is the flag of ecumenism – there is nothing that is quite as pervasive among Christians today and nothing that can appear to be so normal and unassuming. The deeper that ecumenism becomes entrenched in Evangelicalism, the less likely that we will notice its stench – and it is very deep! We must be alert and vigilant to the encroachment of the enemy so that we do not become entangled in his web of error. "Everyone is doing it" must not become our basis for determining what we do or do not do. How do we identify something that is so pervasive and such a chameleon? Should we spend our energies trying to determine the many faces of ecumenism?

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<sup>208</sup> For my wife and me, this meant returning to the exclusive use of the KJV (mostly me), a withdrawal from pagan celebrations (Christmas and Easter being the primary ones), keeping the Lord's Fourth Commandment, and cutting ties with "Christian" organizations that were not honoring the Lord (Evangelical Free Church, Prairie Bible Institute, Briercrest Biblical Seminary, Focus on the Family, Radio Bible Class, etc.).

There are three things that need to be a part of the life of every Christian who truly desires to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. First, we must set our focus on the Lord; “Looking unto [focus only on] Jesus the author [founder] and finisher [perfector] of *our* [the] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful in the face of adversity] the cross, despising [showing disdain for] the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).<sup>209</sup> This is such an important place to begin. Counterfeiters are always working to introduce their bills into a country’s circulating currency; the advice is: “If you know your notes, you’ll be able to detect a counterfeit at a glance and protect yourself from fraud.”<sup>210</sup> You do not protect yourself from accepting counterfeit bills by studying the techniques used by the fraudsters because they will always be changing; rather, you become intimately familiar with the real thing, and then the fakes will become evident. So, too, for the Christian who desires to live a life of spiritual purity and holiness before the Lord; we must turn our attention to the Lord Jesus Christ – become intimately familiar with Him and what He has done to save us. Our focus must be fixed on the Lord. “Look unto [turn and look to] me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is none else*” (Isaiah 45:22).<sup>211</sup> That was the charge given by the Lord Jehovah through Isaiah the prophet, and it is not changed for us today. As we turn our attention to the Lord, we will come to understand more completely Who it is Who has purchased us from sin; when He is our singular focus, the allurements of the world and ecumenical fellowship will grow increasingly dim.

Second, we must immerse ourselves in the Word of God (very similar to what we just looked at). Paul’s charge to Timothy, his young protégé, was, “Study [make every effort] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing [literally, to cut a straight road through difficult terrain; to teach accurately] the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).<sup>212</sup> *Approved* (*dokimos*) comes from the Greek word translated as *prove* (*dokimazo*) in 2 Corinthians 13:5;<sup>213</sup> God’s approval, or acceptance, will come because it has been determined that we are genuine before Him. “In the ancient world there was no banking system as we know it today, and no paper money. All money was made from metal, heated until liquid, poured into moulds and allowed to cool. When the coins were cooled, it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges. The coins were comparatively soft and of course many people shaved them closely. In one century, more than eighty laws were passed in Athens, to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money changers were men of integrity, who ... put only genuine full weighted money into circulation. Such men were called ‘dokimos’ or ‘approved.’”<sup>214</sup> Their approval came because they turned out genuine, full-weight coins; we will be so approved by God if we are doing His will.

It will be through immersing ourselves in the Word of God that we will learn what God has commanded us to do. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse [keep pure] his way? by taking

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<sup>209</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>210</sup> <http://www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/counterfeit-prevention/>

<sup>211</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>212</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>213</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.



heed *thereto* according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9);<sup>215</sup> it is through God’s Word that we come to understand how to live in purity and holiness before our Savior. “Thy word have I hid [treasured] in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11); again, it is through the Word of God that we learn the importance of obedience. “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly [guilty of sin; their sin has not been cleansed], nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful [boastful]. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate [think, ponder] day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).<sup>216</sup> Happy is the one who does not live in disobedience but who takes pleasure in continually reflecting on the Law of Jehovah. As the Word of God fills our minds, there will be less time spent pondering the things of life that can crowd in around us; ecumenical error will become increasingly obvious and odious, and we will avoid it as God said that we must.

Out of immersing ourselves in the Word of God, there will flow the third: we must live in obedience to the commands of God. The Psalmist said that the one who continually ponders God’s Word will be happy; however, what is obvious is that he meant this to be more than simply a mental exercise (Psalm 119:11). Out of the perpetual meditation on the commandments of the Lord, there must come a life that is being lived in accordance with those perfect Laws (Psalm 19:7; Romans 7:12). The Law of God is expressed in the Ten Commandments, the first four giving us instruction on our relationship with God, and the last six providing guidance in our relationships with other people. Jesus summarized the Law of God this way: “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. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). How we are to express our love for the Lord is delineated in those first four Laws: to have no other gods before Him, not to make an image to worship, not to use the name of the Lord without purpose, and to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy unto the Lord (Exodus 20:3-11); likewise, our love for our neighbor is expressed by honoring our parents, not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not lying about others, and not lusting after what they have (Exodus 20:12-17). Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep [attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15)<sup>217</sup> – the Ten Commandments provide us with a framework on which we can hang our obedience to the Lord. It is like an outline that we are to flesh out in our daily living through the guidance of His Spirit living within us. The ecumenist breaks the First Law in that he denies the Lord Jesus Christ through his forbidden associations (spiritual fornication), and thereby he erects the false god of unity, and bows down to it (breaking the Second Commandment)!

As we turn our attention to the Lord Jesus Christ, as we take time to continually ponder His Word, and as we attend carefully to obeying His commands, we will discover the reality of holding fast to the truths of God. To this overseer, who has received nothing but praise from the Lord, Jesus gives the warning to hold fast so that no one may deprive him of his crown. “And if a man also strive for masteries [may be competing], *yet* is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully [may

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<sup>215</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>216</sup> BDB; Strong’s Online.

<sup>217</sup> Strong’s Online.

compete in accordance with the rules]” (2 Timothy 2:5).<sup>218</sup> Appearances can be deceiving; too frequently an athlete has lost his crown, title, or medal because he failed to adhere to the rules of competition. That is Jesus’ warning to this exemplary elder: *hold fast* so that no one may remove your crown; it is the Lord Who gives, or withholds, the crown. This is why it is so important that we examine our spiritual lives (2 Corinthians 13:5); others might think that we exude an aura of spiritual vitality when the reality might be that we are in the final throes of spiritual death (Revelation 3:1). Jeremiah proclaimed, “Let us search [test] and try [examine thoroughly] our ways, and turn again to the LORD” (Lamentation 3:40). Are we guilty of sins of ignorance? We might not know (otherwise they would not be done in *ignorance*), however, when they are brought to light (perhaps through a thorough spiritual self-examination), we must immediately repent and seek cleansing from the Lord (Leviticus 4:13-14; 1 John 1:9).

What *crown* would this elder lose if he failed to remain steadfast in the Lord? Within the context of crowns that we might receive, we read of three: the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, and the crown of glory. It is important that we all recognize that these crowns, which the Lord is preparing for His faithful ones, must not become our focus in this life. Such a selfish focus could result in not only losing a crown but, possibly, even forfeiting the eternal life that the Lord has prepared for us (Ephesians 4:17-24; 1 John 3:1-3).

“I have fought a good fight [the words speak of a contest; Paul has not only endured, but has participated according to the rules of the game], I have finished *my* course [the race that he has completed], I have kept the faith [he has attended carefully to the faith]: Henceforth there is laid up [reserved] for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love [have loved] his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).<sup>219</sup> It is notable that Paul did not say that he prayed a prayer for salvation and now there is a crown of righteousness awaiting him; rather, he adhered carefully to the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, he completed the race that the Lord had prepared for him, and he competed in accordance with the rules of the contest. Jesus said, “Take heed that no man [no one] deceive [may lead away from the truth (*deceive* is in the subjunctive mood)] you ... But he that shall endure [to remain faithful under opposition] unto the end, the same [this one!] shall be saved” (Matthew 24:4, 13). As already stated, our focus in this life must be on the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2) and on guarding our hearts so that we remain faithful to Him to the end of our days. As we abide steadfastly in the Lord, we will be among those who look forward with anticipation to the coming of the righteous Judge, the Lord Jesus; if we live carelessly, then we should live in fear of His coming. However, the deception within Evangelicalism is very deep; many Evangelicals are looking forward to the Lord’s coming even though they are living in contradiction to His Word. How can this be? They have swallowed the lie that a simple prayer for salvation will ensure them a place in heaven, and so they blindly look forward to that which they should fear; they have been persuaded by (believed) the deception of the devil, which they have accepted as the truth of God.

Jesus often used physical things in order to illustrate spiritual truths. In Matthew 6:22-23, He said, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single [sound, healthy], thy whole body shall be full of light. [Here is the transition from a physical illustration to a spiritual

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<sup>218</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>219</sup> Strong’s Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

application] But if thine eye be evil [wicked], thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness!”<sup>220</sup> Jesus begins with the physical illustration of the eye; it is through the eye that we learn what light is. If our eyes are functioning properly, then light is something that we experience on a daily basis. The spiritual application is that if we are filling our minds with spiritual light, then that light will fill every aspect of our lives. However, if we fill our minds with that which is contrary to the light of God, then, even if we think that we are observing light, we are truly filled with darkness. Evangelicals have accepted the notion that if they pray for salvation, then they are permanently fitted for heaven; to them this deception appears to be light, but, because it is a lie from Satan, what they perceive to be light is in reality a darkness that permeates their being – they have been spiritually blinded by the enemy of their souls. John tells us that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5b); Jesus proclaimed, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30). As we bring these two together, we discover that there are no shades of grey with God – we are either in His light, or in darkness; we are either for Him, or we are against Him. Evangelicals have sought to blur the line between the world and the Lord; however, we must permit the Spirit of God to work the light of God’s truth into our hearts.

It is as we walk faithfully in the light of God’s truth that we will, in glory, receive a crown of righteousness – a crown that will perfectly match the garments that we are to be wearing now. “... put on [clothe yourself with] the new man, which after [in accordance with] God is created in righteousness and true holiness [*holiness of the truth*]” (Ephesians 4:24).<sup>221</sup> We are to be abiding in Christ now; as we abide in Him, His righteousness becomes ours – that is the new man whom we are to be wearing! The crown of righteousness, which God will give to his faithful ones, will be a perfect match with the garment of the righteousness of Christ.

James writes: “Blessed *is* the man that endureth [*hupomeno* – to bear courageously] temptation [trial]: for when he is tried [*dokimos* – approved, found genuine], he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love [are loving] him” (James 1:12).<sup>222</sup> There is only one other mention of the crown of life, and that is to the elder of the *ekklesia* in Smyrna: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt [about to] suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried [*peirazo* – tested, examined]; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death [an enduring faithfulness], and I will give thee a [the] crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).<sup>223</sup> Two things come together for the crown of life: suffering and faithful endurance. We have been promised suffering in this life (Philippians 1:29; 1 Thessalonians 3:4; 2 Timothy 3:12), and we are required to endure it in an attitude of faithfulness to the Lord. However, we must be careful as to the kind of “suffering” that we are enduring with patience; is it distress brought on by our own blunders or abrasiveness, or is it due to our commitment to the Lord? “For this is thankworthy [that which brings God’s favor], if a man for conscience toward God endure grief [affliction], suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted [beaten] for your faults [sinning], ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well [do what is right], and suffer

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<sup>220</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>221</sup> Gingrich Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>222</sup> Strong’s Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>223</sup> Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable [finds favor] with [in the sight of] God” (1 Peter 2:19-20).<sup>224</sup> Our endurance must be in faithfulness to God and His Word, and not in response to our own sinfulness; we are called upon to reckon our sin natures as having been crucified with Christ, and we are to walk in newness of life in the light of the guidance of the Spirit of God (Romans 6:4,6,11; Romans 8:1). That which is contrary to God’s Word is to be reckoned as being dead to us; our perseverance must be in obedience to the Lord, committing the response of our friends and family to the One Who endured the cross for us. It is then that we can hold the promise of a crown of life.

The phrase *crown of glory* appears several times through Scripture, but as something that is given to another, it is found only twice. The first reference is Proverbs 4:9 – “She [wisdom] shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.” Wisdom is personified in the early chapters of the Proverbs, but it must not be construed as being a human wisdom. The foundation of this wisdom is revealed in the words of the Psalmist: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...” (Psalm 111:10); it is a wisdom that is the expression of Jehovah. As the wisdom of the Lord graces our lives, we will reflect the glory of the Lord; namely, “... the righteousness of the law ... fulfilled in us, who walk ... after the Spirit” (Romans 8:4).

The other reference to receiving a crown of glory appears in 1 Peter 5:4 – “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” In this passage, Peter speaks to the elders of an assembly to carry out their responsibilities in humility and with meticulous care. To the elders who fulfill their roles with integrity, Peter states that the Lord, our chief Shepherd, will provide a crown of glory. Jesus encourages the elder of Philadelphia to hold fast to what he has so that no one may take the crown away that is being prepared for him. This is the only crown mentioned in Scripture that is specifically given to a faithful elder, and so it could be this crown to which Jesus is referring.



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

Once again, Jesus addresses the one who is overcoming – that one who is living victoriously in Him; this is someone who is a spiritual conqueror, not as a spiritual captive, nor in a state of spiritual naiveté. A spiritual captive would be someone who has been taken in by a particular theology and has no desire to evaluate it against the Word of God. I am reminded of the Calvinist who was fit to pull his hair out because I could not fathom how he could so skew the Scriptures in order to support his theology; in his mind, it all fit together so perfectly – how could I not embrace it! He was a *captive* to his Calvinism.

The Evangelical problem is this: they say that they will do (some of) what God has commanded, but they will keep their other traditions as well. The Spirit of God condemned the Galatians for doing this very thing (Galatians 3:1); they were adding Mosaic traditions to their

<sup>224</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.



faith in Christ – traditions that had been established by God at Mt. Sinai, but removed by Christ at the cross. Evangelicals add pagan traditions to their faith in Christ (perhaps not as a part of salvation, but still considered to be essential), and yet they expect to be approved by God? We have been made new creatures in Christ so that we can **do** the *good works* that God has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10) – will these works include participation in pagan festivities under the guise of Christianity? NO!! We are commanded to do three things: to come out from among the worldly, to be separated unto the Lord, and to not cling to what is unclean; it is then, when we have been obedient in these three areas, that the Lord says, “I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17).

We read of the spiritually simple in Hebrews: “Of whom [referring to Christ as our High Priest after the order of Melchisedec] we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered [not easy to make clear], seeing ye are dull [sluggish or lazy] of hearing. For when for the time ye ought [are under obligation] to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat [solid food]. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in [unacquainted with] the word of righteousness: for he is a babe” (Hebrews 5:11-13).<sup>225</sup> The writer states that he has many things that he would love to explain about our High Priest, but he cannot; even though they should be teachers because of all of the instruction that they have received, they cannot handle anything beyond the milk of the Word of God (they remain satisfied with a condensed version of the Gospel). This is a sad state, much like a twenty-year-old child who never got past a diet of milk and baby food. In the physical realm, there may be a reason, but, within the spiritual realm, the tone of this passage makes it clear that there is no excuse. It is on these spiritual infants (whether legitimately infants, or through laziness) that those who use smooth words and polished rhetoric are able to work their deception (Romans 16:18). As the Lord began to open my eyes to His truth, I recall speaking to a fellow about what I was learning; his response was that he was content with the simple gospel; his understanding of the Gospel made no demands on how he lived – that is NOT the Gospel! We must be gaining spiritual victories in our lives, or we are losing the battle and will soon become a captive or a casualty (2 Peter 3:18).

Spiritual naiveté speaks more to a state of mind than to one’s lack of understanding the Gospel. There are people who are trusting of everyone – to be discerning never seems to enter their minds. As a result, gullibility is their downfall; they are easily impressed and, without question, demonstrate a willingness to accept what someone says – particularly if that person is someone who is generally respected (perhaps Billy Graham, Robert Schuller, Rick Warren, et al). Strictly speaking, this is an innocence that leads to a vulnerability to false teaching. “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well [is discerning] to his going” (Proverbs 14:15).<sup>226</sup> The real danger for such a person is that they are much more like a flag that moves to the direction of the wind, rather than a flagpole that remains firm through the storms that come; within them, there is a strong tendency to follow the latest celebrity and to flip-flop from fad to fad – they have not anchored their faith in the Word of God.

After changing churches once again, someone said that they were so happy now because they could relax and take in what was being taught without having to be on guard – this is willful

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<sup>225</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>226</sup> Strong’s Online.

spiritual naiveté, which is really disobedience. “Be sober [clear-headed], be vigilant [watchful]; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour [swallow up, destroy] ...” (1 Peter 5:8).<sup>227</sup> Here are two of God’s commands that this person was violating to their own spiritual destruction. Along with such a head-in-the-sand simplicity comes a blindness that will bring its own form of selective gullibility – they openly accept anything that is presented to them by their approved source(s), which, in turn, frequently leaves them unaware of the truth of God. Horses are often fitted with blinders to keep them from being spooked or distracted by what is not directly in front of them; such individuals wear spiritual blinders that prevent them from seeing anything except what they have predetermined. Each of these (the spiritual captive, the spiritually simple, and the one who dons spiritual blinders) has a common problem: their focus is on man and they do not allow the Spirit of God to open their eyes to the truth of God (John 16:13), and, consequently, they stand in jeopardy of being destroyed spiritually. Do not be unduly impressed with men; keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, cling to the Word of God, and live in obedience to it!

Jesus says to His overcoming one that He will make him to be a *pillar in the temple of my God*. We must note, first of all, that Jesus refers to the *temple* of God, and not to the *tabernacle*; therefore, we must consider what is said here in light of Solomon’s temple, rather than Moses’ tabernacle.

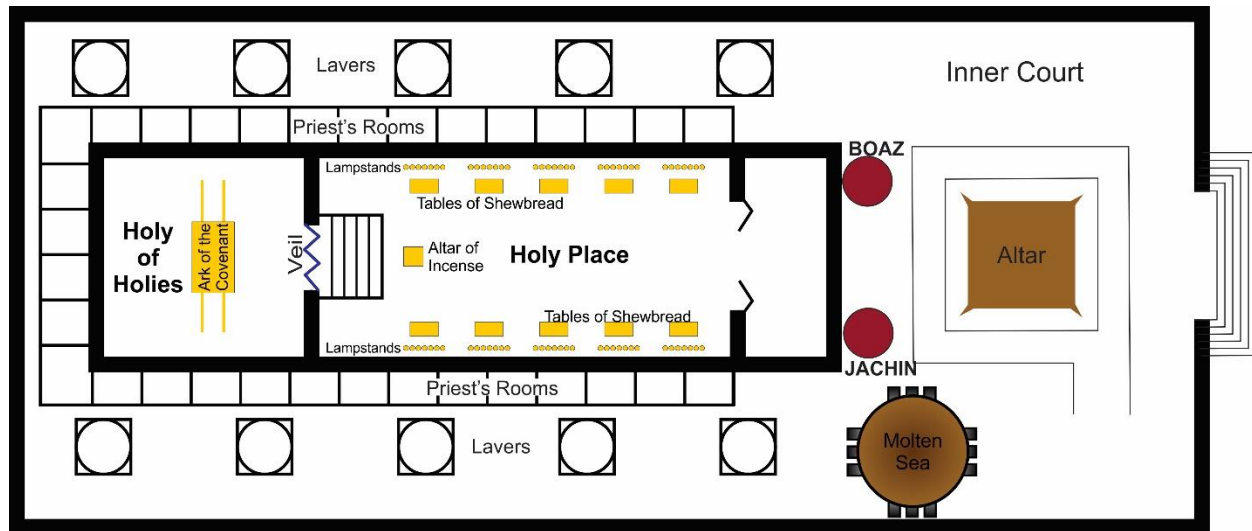
When Solomon constructed the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, he did so according to a pattern given to him by David, his father (1 Chronicles 28:9-11). We are told that David provided gold (about 112 tons) and silver (about 262 tons) for the construction of the furnishings and tools of the temple (1 Chronicles 29:4-5); in addition to this, the people contributed 187 tons of gold, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of brass (bronze), and 3,750 tons of iron (1 Chronicles 29:6-7).<sup>228</sup> Tucked away in all of the details of this section is this: “All *this*, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by *his* hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern” (1 Chronicles 28:19); from this we discover that David drew the plans for the temple with the guidance of the Lord. The temple, like the tabernacle before it, would be patterned after the heavenly reality (Hebrews 8:5). The pattern for the temple followed the design of the tabernacle, particularly when it came to the inner sanctuary and the Holy of Holies. However, there was one significant difference between the two as it relates to the *pillars* (within the context of our verse): the tabernacle, because it was portable, included numerous pillars to support the many curtains that became the wall of separation that surrounded the inner sanctuaries. The temple, on the other hand, included only two pillars. Within the temple, these two pillars were in the inner sanctuary on either side of the entrance to the Holy Place; Solomon’s temple was constructed of stone and wood, and there were no supporting pillars used in its construction. These two pillars served no structural function for the temple, in fact, they were free-standing with decorative tops (2 Chronicles 3:15-17) and bore the names Jachin (*Yakiyn* – He will establish) and Boaz (in strength).<sup>229</sup> The pillars, so named, were a

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<sup>227</sup> Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

<sup>228</sup> This is based on 75 pounds per talent (<http://www.biblestudy.org/beginner/bible-weights-and-measures.html>), although there is much varied information on this.

<sup>229</sup> BDB; Strong’s Online.



Solomon's Temple

reminder to the people that they were dependent upon the Lord. When Josiah, king of Judah, re-established the covenant of the Lord with the people of Judah, a covenant that they had neglected, he stood by one of these pillars (2 Kings 23:3) – a reminder that it is the Lord Who will establish with strength.

To the one who is living in victory in Him, Jesus promises that he will be a *pillar* in the temple of God, not supporting the structure, but as a reminder to everyone who enters that it is the Lord Who establishes – it is not through our strength that we are overcomers. However, unless we are willing to stand for the Lord (live in obedience to His commands and leave the results to Him), the Spirit of God has nothing to work with, and He will not force us to be obedient. Israel serves as an example that the Lord will not impose obedience; they wandered for 40 years in the wilderness because they refused to do His bidding – God did not compel them to do His will, but, having once chosen to disobey, they were obliged to live with the consequences of their choice (Psalm 95:10-11). As we determine to willingly do His bidding, He will work in us and through us to His glory.

To the overcoming one, Jesus further promises that he absolutely will not go out any longer.<sup>230</sup> During His earthly ministry, Jesus said, “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure [to hold fast to our faith in the Lord in the face of trials] unto the end, the same [this one!] shall be saved” (Mark 13:13).<sup>231</sup> The *overcoming one* will be the one who faithfully endures in the Lord through difficult times; this is the one who will be numbered among the saved! “Then we which are alive [living] *and* remain [surviving – faithful in the midst of trials] shall be caught up [snatched away (indicative mood – a fact!)] together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and **so shall we ever be** [indicative] **with the Lord** [we will NOT go out!]” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).<sup>232</sup> If we remain faithful to the Lord (living in obedience to His commands) throughout our lives on earth, then we can anticipate being with Him for eternity. We must be diligent to guard our hearts against anything that would lead us away from the Lord (Hebrews

<sup>230</sup> This phrase includes the Greek double negative *ou me*, which in combination with an aorist, subjunctive verb (in this case *go out*) makes this the strongest negative possible – it will never happen!

<sup>231</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

3:12) – this is our vulnerability; Jesus has promised that nothing outside of us can remove us from His hand, but an unfaithful heart will accomplish this removal in a flash. Our salvation is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9), but it is a conditional gift that is dependent upon our obedience to Him (Ephesians 2:10; John 14:15). The overcomer is someone who receives God’s marvelous gift and then lives his life attending carefully to His commands; we are told to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” – that is what this is (Philippians 2:12). Evangelicals are quick to snatch-up God’s free gift, but seem blind to their subsequent obligation to walk faithfully with the Lord. “And [Jesus] said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23); there is no easy salvation; it requires a determined commitment to be an overcomer.

Jesus promises more for the overcomer. He will also write upon this victorious one three names: *the name of my God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and His own new name.*

The first name that Jesus mentions is the *name of my God*. This scratches at the mystery of the triune God. How can Jesus, Who is eternal God, speak of *my God*? While on earth, Jesus said, “I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:30). The Psalmist wrote: “I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psalm 2:7). The word *LORD* (in all capitals) is a substitution for the name of God that we know as *Jehovah*, which is from the Tetragrammaton YHWH – the name of God that the Jews will not speak, and for which *LORD* (Adonai) has been substituted. The Psalmist prophesied of the coming Messiah when he wrote that He would be the *begotten* of Jehovah; yet Jesus, the promised Messiah, said that He was one with the Father (the One of whom He was *begotten*). Jesus clarified for us that God is a spirit (John 4:24), and Messiah Jesus became a man (was *begotten*, took on the form of man) in order to qualify to pay the price for our sins. However, Jesus remained no less eternal God; “For in him [Christ, the Messiah] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9) – the Begotten of the Father, Jesus, was fully God within the body of a man. Jesus, eternal God, took on a body of flesh, and so was *begotten* as the Son of God; even as we are begotten of our parents, so Jesus was born of Mary, His mother after the flesh, and the Spirit of God, His eternal spiritual Father (Luke 1:35). Jesus remained entirely sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21), for it is through Adam (the man) that we are born in sin (Romans 5:12). Therefore, Jesus, eternal God incarnate, can speak of Jehovah as being His Father because He took on a body of flesh.

Of the children of Israel, we read: “Ye *are* the children [showing relationship] of the LORD [YHWH – Jehovah] your God [*Elohim*]: ye shall not cut yourselves [like the prophets of Baal, 1 Kings 18:26-28], nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead [a sign of mourning for the dead]. For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people [valued property] unto himself, above all the nations that *are* upon the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:1-2).<sup>233</sup> David refers to Jehovah Elohim as being a “father of the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5), a sign of His mercy and compassion even in His holiness; however, none of these speak of being *begotten*. It is not until you enter the realm of the Messianic promises that you come to a specific *Son* (a begotten One) Who bears the characteristics of Jehovah. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty [a word attributed to Jehovah (Psalm

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<sup>233</sup> BDB.



24:8)] God [*El*], The everlasting [a word used to describe the reign of Jehovah (Exodus 15:18)] Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Although Jesus typically does not carry the name *Father*, it is not unusual to find the descriptions of Jehovah applied equally to the Lord Jesus. For example, Isaiah 41:4 states: “Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I *am* he.” When John heard the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ behind him, the first thing he heard was this: “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last ...” (Revelation 1:11); there can be no denying that Jesus and Jehovah are one and the same. “I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:30), said Jesus, to which the Jews responded by taking up stones to kill Him; they understood the implications of what He had just stated.

Interestingly, the name YHWH carries no gender and no number (singular or plural),<sup>234</sup> and the most appropriate meaning would be: *I AM* (Exodus 3:14). The eternal Jehovah identifies Himself as *Elohim* in Genesis 1:1, a word that is both masculine and plural, and means rulers or judges; it holds no connotation of being either good or bad, and can refer to God, the Creator, His angels, human rulers, pagan deities, etc.<sup>235</sup> It frequently appears in the OT along with *LORD* (as in *LORD God*), which would be *Jehovah* (pronounced as *Adonai* by the Jews) *Elohim*. John declared, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word [the *Logos*, the begotten of the Father; John 1:1,14], and the Holy Ghost: and these three are [present tense, indicative mood (a statement of fact)] one” (1 John 5:7).<sup>236</sup> This is a summation of the tri-unity of God that the devil has succeeded in removing from almost every modern English translation in use today; only two of the top nine English-language Bibles sold in the USA in 2012 still included this text.<sup>237</sup>

In a very unique way, YHWH (Jehovah) is the God of Jesus; they are one, yet Jesus continues to bear His glorified body of flesh – an eternal reminder of the sacrifice that God made to purchase salvation for all of mankind, and a declaration of His incarnation. For all of eternity, the faithful will be reminded of the price that God (Who is spirit) paid for their salvation, for they will be in the presence of Jesus, God incarnate, and will bear His name written by the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ! This is the promise that is given to those who are overcomers in Christ. This is the first of three names that Jesus will write upon the victorious ones.

The second name mentioned is that of *new Jerusalem*, the city of Jehovah that is descending from heaven. “And he [an angel] carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God ... And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof. And the nations [multitudes] of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings [leaders] of the earth do bring their glory and

<sup>234</sup> BDB.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>237</sup> <http://thomrainer.com/2013/03/19/top-ten-bible-translations-in-the-united-states/>; based on units sold, the order is: New Living Translation, New International Version, King James Version, New King James Version, English Standard Version, Common English Bible, Holman Christian Standard, New American Standard Bible, and New International Reader’s Version.

honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations [peoples] into it. And there shall ... enter into it ... they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:10-27). The New Jerusalem will be our habitation and its name will be written upon those who are victorious in the Lord.

The third name to be written upon the overcoming one is Jesus' new name – a name that we do not know. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes from heaven to establish His millennial kingdom on this earth, we are told that "His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself" (Revelation 19:12). He bears a name that no one knows; this name will be written upon the overcomer.

The one who remains faithful to the Lord will bear the name of Jehovah, the name of the eternal city, which we will call home, and the new name of Jesus, which is yet unknown to us. A name is a means of identification, and our eternal identification will be with the One Who bought us.



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

To the one who has understanding, the command is given to know (*hear*) what the Spirit of God is proclaiming to the assemblies in Asia Minor. Here is a word from God for us, and we must be careful to heed the warnings that are issued to the elders of these seven assemblies. This is repeated for each of the messages given, which indicates that they are all equally applicable and important for everyone who hears the word given.



**14. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;**

Jesus now turns His attention to the overseer of the last *ekklesia*, which is located in Laodicea.



**Ruins of Ancient Laodicea**

In typical fashion, the Lord begins by identifying Himself in a very specific way to this individual.

The One Who is speaking is *the Amen*. *Amen* comes from a transliteration of a Hebrew word that means *verily* or *truly*; at the end of a discourse, it is generally accepted to mean *so be it* or *let it be true*.<sup>238</sup> Isaiah wrote: "... he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth [Amen]; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth

<sup>238</sup> Strong's Online.

[Amen] ...” (Isaiah 65:16).<sup>239</sup> Within our experience, *amen* only appears at the end of a prayer or as an affirmation of something; however, within the Gospels, it is the word that is translated in the KJV as *verily*, and was used extensively by the Lord as He spoke with people in order to emphasize that what He is saying is true.<sup>240</sup> To His disciples, Jesus identified Himself as being *the truth* (John 14:6); to the overseer of Philadelphia, He describes Himself as being *true*; now He refers to Himself as *the Amen*, the One Who speaks truth! He is the One Who emphasizes that what He speaks is the truth (*verily* or *truly*), and concludes with *let it be so (amen)*; He is the beginning and ending of truth.

Jesus then identifies Himself as *the witness*; *martus*, one who declares what he is persuaded to be true, whatever the cost.<sup>241</sup> It is from this that we get our English word *martyr*. Jesus, during His earthly ministry, was a witness to the purposes of God for the salvation of those who are repentant, and it was because He testified that He was God incarnate that the religious Jews orchestrated His crucifixion (Luke 22:70-71) – His witness to the truth of God sent Him to the cross where He relinquished His life in order to pay the price for our sins. He was God’s *Martus* Who remained faithful in all things (Hebrews 3:1-2), and called Himself *the Truth* (John 14:6). The Greek phrasing is identical to Revelation 1:5: *ò martus ò pistos (the witness the faithful)*.<sup>242</sup> Here Jesus couples the word *true* (real, genuine) with *faithful* to describe Himself; He used the same Greek word (for *true*) to the elder of Philadelphia and coupled it with *holy* (v.7). With the Lord, there is no changing (Hebrews 13:8), for He is both faithful and true.

His last identification is that He is *the beginning of the creation of God*. *Beginning* is from the Greek word *arche*, which means that by which anything begins to be, the active cause.<sup>243</sup> “All things were made [came into existence] by him; and without him was not any thing [absolutely not even one] made that was made” (John 1:3).<sup>244</sup> Jesus (the eternal Logos Who would one day take on the form of man) was the Creator of all things. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote of mysteries that were being revealed; “... from the beginning of the world [the mysteries] hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ ...” (Ephesians 3:9). We must understand Jesus’ words to this elder to mean that He, as God, is the Creator, not that He was created by God, which our English could be construed to indicate.

As Jesus comes to the elder of Laodicea, He emphasizes that the words that He is about to proclaim are the truth (*Amen*), that He is unchanging (*faithful*), true, and the all-powerful Creator.



**15. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.**

Consistent with all of the other elder’s reports, Jesus begins by saying that He has complete knowledge (*oida*) of what this elder has been doing, and He immediately describes what

<sup>239</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>240</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>243</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

He knows to be true. Jesus describes this elder as being *neither cold nor hot* (again, these challenges are made directly to the singular overseer, and not to a group). The Greek word translated as both *neither* and *nor* bears the absolute negative – he is absolutely not cold or hot! The city of Laodicea was a natural illustration of the spiritual state of this elder. The city was built in proximity to trade routes rather than to natural resources that are essential for city development – like water. Laodicea had two sources of water: they had access to a hot water spring about six miles away and a cold water spring about ten miles away – either way, the water that arrived in the city was neither hot nor cold.<sup>245</sup>

Since this elder is described as being *neither cold nor hot*, what does this mean and how does it express itself? Let's consider *cold* first. The Greek word so translated is *psuchros* (*psoo'-chros*'), which is the adjective (appropriately in its neuter form) used by Jesus to describe the drink given to a little child (Matthew 10:42). Here, in similar fashion, the word (in its masculine form) is used to describe what this overseer is not. Note Jesus' use of the verb form of this word in Matthew 24:11-12 – “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold [*psucho* (*psoo'-'kho*)].”<sup>246</sup> As the wickedness of the people increases through the influence of the false prophets, their love (*agape*) will become cold (greatly diminish).<sup>247</sup> We understand this word, as it is used in reference to a person, to be negative. Rather than being refreshing and invigorating (like cold water to drink), this reflects a condition of compromise with purveyors of iniquity; there is a turning away from righteousness toward error. Therefore, spiritually speaking, *psuchros* would indicate a state of lifelessness or indifference, in similar fashion to a lifeless body being cold and unaware of what is around it. Jesus' assessment of this elder is that he is **not** indifferent (*cold*).

However, he is also absolutely not *hot* (*zestos* [*dzes-tos'*]).<sup>248</sup> Used for describing the temperature of something, this Greek word means boiling hot; when used in reference to a person, it speaks of their zeal, and, within this context, specifically refers to spiritual fervor, or passion. Within the NT, this word is used only in reference to this elder; it is not found anywhere else. This elder is described as being neither indifferent nor passionate, and this is an apt description of most Evangelicals today – they have some interest in spiritual things, but they are certainly not passionate about the things of the Lord. They seem to have settled for a middle-of-the-road Christianity: sufficiently religious to suppress their fears of being destined for hell, but not so zealous as to be considered narrow-minded. Jesus' response to this elder is: *I would thou wert cold or hot*. The phrase *I would* comes from the Greek word *ophelon* (*of'-el-on*), which expresses a fruitless, or unattainable, wish, and could also be rendered as *if only*.<sup>249</sup> Jesus' desire is that this overseer would be either cold or hot, but equally evident is the implication that this elder's present spiritual state is not good.

It is important that we understand that this condition (being neither cold nor hot) is frequently couched within the life of the religious. We just referred to most Evangelicals as fitting into this

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<sup>245</sup> <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/CGG/ID/251/Water.htm>

<sup>246</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>247</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>248</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>249</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



description; they have been deluded into believing the devil's lie that they are on their way to heaven without any regard for the requirements that God has placed upon those who are truly His (Ephesians 2:10). To the Pharisees, Jesus said, "But woe [an exclamation of grief] unto you, scribes [someone well versed in the Mosaic Law, consulted as an interpreter of difficult passages, and a teacher of the Law] and Pharisees [those who appeared to be religiously zealous], hypocrites [strictly an actor; a pretender]! For [because] ye shut up [obstruct] the kingdom of heaven against [in front of] men: for ye neither [absolute negative] go in [are entering] yourselves, neither [absolute negative] suffer [permit] ye them that are entering to go in [enter]" (Matthew 23:13).<sup>250</sup> Jesus openly proclaims that these leading experts of the Mosaic Law (the scribes and Pharisees) are not entering His kingdom; therefore, it should not come as a surprise to us that Evangelicals are, likewise, missing His kingdom. The scribes and Pharisees were not only not entering the kingdom of God, but they were hindering those who desired to enter; they accomplished this by substituting works for faith. In the same way, Evangelicals hinder others from entering the kingdom of Christ by proclaiming a false gospel that is devoid of the saving truth of God. In both cases we have the religious, those who lay claim to knowing God, standing as an affront to the Lord Jesus Christ – such is the one who is *neither cold nor hot*, and such is this elder.



**16. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.**

Jesus has described what this messenger is not (*neither cold nor hot*); He now says what he is: *lukewarm*. Spiritually, this describes someone who tries to live in the middle-of-the-road, to perch on that imaginary spiritual fence: he is not totally dead or indifferent, nor does he have any passion for the Lord. These people are concerned enough about spiritual things to attend a church, but not sufficiently interested to know the Word of God and to live in obedience to His commands. This is someone who has been lulled into a state of spiritual complacency where he feels confident that he is destined for heaven, yet is far too indifferent to look beyond his "assurance" to confirm that it is well placed.

For example, consider the following article:

Pastor Rick Warren has called on non-Catholic Christians to join with Pope Francis and the Catholic Church in pursuit of their common goals. ...

Pastor Warren was among the speakers in November 2014 at Humanum [Latin for to err is human<sup>251</sup>], the Vatican's International Religious Colloquium on the Complementarity of Man and Woman. Humanum brought together faith leaders from both Christian and non-Christian religions around the world, to examine and propose anew the beauty of the relationship between man and woman in marriage. ...

Warren acknowledged that there are still real differences which separate Catholics from other Christian denominations. He envisions Catholics and Protestants working together, not with a structural unity, but rather, with a unity of mission [this is

<sup>250</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>251</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/humanum?s=ts>

Ecumenism 101; contrary to 2 Corinthians 6:17]. "If you love Jesus," he said, "we're on the same team" [contrary to John 14:15].

Pastor Warren's remarks were polite and well reasoned, and were well received in the Catholic community.<sup>252</sup>

However, Jesus states that it is because of this condition of mediocrity that He is about to (*will*) vomit this overseer out of His mouth.<sup>253</sup> Clearly, Jesus finds this lukewarm spirituality to be nauseating; even being spiritually cold is preferable to being lukewarm. This might seem to be somewhat surprising. Someone who is cold toward the Lord will not hold any illusions of being bound for heaven; they will recognize that they do not have a relationship with the Lord and hold no expectations of mercy from Him. However, someone who is in this *lukewarm* state will not only have visions of arriving in heaven someday, but will be sure to include some spiritual rituals in their daily life; they hold an expectation of an eternal reward that is based solely upon their own delusions (James 1:22).



Rick Warren and Pope Francis

As Isaiah recorded the words of Jehovah to Judah, we find a similar situation: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats" (Isaiah 1:11). Jehovah asks why the people are making so many burnt offerings and shedding the blood of so many animals; undoubtedly, their response would have been that this is what He requires of them according to the Law of Moses. Yet Jehovah declares that He is filled to the point of being sickened (*full*) by the sacrifices that the people of Judah were making (which should have been for the remission of their sins).<sup>254</sup> The people were busily carrying out the prescribed sacrificial activities according to the Mosaic Law, yet they were not being cleansed from their sins (v. 15 – "your hands are full of blood"), and they are commanded to "put away the evil of your doing [a pretense of obedience to the Lord: sacrifices made with no heart commitment (faith) to obey His commands] from before mine eyes" (v. 16). They were including the rituals of sacrifice in their daily living, but it was an empty façade; clearly they had an interest in religious activities, but it is just as apparent that their interest did not go beyond the external busyness that they practiced – they were *lukewarm*.

To the Thessalonians, Paul pointed out that those who are perishing have refused to accept a love for the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Jesus declared openly that He is the Truth (John 14:6) and that everyone who loves Him will be carefully obedient to His commands (John 14:15). Those who have refused a love for the truth of God have actually rejected the Lord! To the Pharisees,

<sup>252</sup> <http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/warren-megachurch-pope-francis/2014/12/20/id/614231/>

<sup>253</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>254</sup> BDB.

who loved to be occupied with the minutia of the Mosaic Law, Jesus' advice was to "cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:26); i.e., if the heart has been cleansed, then the life must and will reflect that cleansing! The Pharisees loved to appear as righteous before men, even while their hearts were far from the Lord (Isaiah 29:13 – this includes a warning against liturgy). Today's Evangelical, like the elder of Laodicea, holds a non-life-changing interest in religion; they know the language and routine well enough to be seen as a follower of Christ, yet they refuse to walk in obedience to His commands lest they should be considered narrow-minded or divisive, or perhaps they do not want to be inconvenienced. They are not cold toward the things of the Lord for they desire to be in heaven one day, and they are not hot lest they lose friends and family whom they hold dear. They desperately try to cling to both worlds (to ride that imaginary fence), and they permit the false teachers of the day to convince them that they have it all. Unfortunately, it is those who are caught in this place of being not cold/not hot who will be spit out by the Lord to Whom they hold a modicum of allegiance. Jesus did not hide the cost of being His follower: "If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). What cannot be missed in this is that following the Lord acceptably cannot be accomplished through a half-hearted effort or commitment; you simply cannot pray a prayer and then coast into heaven. Heaven is at the end of an upward climb (Philippians 3:14), not a downward slide. Unless our lives reflect a commitment to carefully following the Word of God, we must not be so presumptuous as to claim to be anything more than lukewarm, which is an abhorrence to the Lord.

Evangelicals today have made themselves easy targets for the ecumenical movement; they are typically open-minded and accepting, they are reluctant to judge (even the righteous judgment that we are commanded to practice [John 7:24]), and they love to exude an aura of religious piety – all of which fits very nicely with the ecumenical philosophy of life. The ecumenist does not forsake his religiosity, he capitalizes on it and uses it to deceive those who are not vigilant and discerning. The late Robert Schuller was a star among Evangelicals for many years, yet he stated to the Imam



of the Muslim American Society that "if he [Schuller] came back in 100 years and found his descendants Muslims, it wouldn't bother him so long as they weren't atheists."<sup>255</sup>

Clearly, there was no power of the Spirit of God in his Hour of Power; in obedience to Romans 16:17 we must not sit under the teaching of men like Schuller, even though they will not always say things that are obviously heretical. Prior to his death, Robert H. Schuller tried handing the leadership of Hour of Power over to his son, Robert A. Schuller, but that lasted only about three years; now it is under the direction of Bobby (Robert V.) Schuller, Robert A.'s son. Has the ship changed course since the bankruptcy of Crystal Cathedral Ministries and the changes in leadership? In a word, "No!" Bobby is the leader for the Hour of Power, the Shepherd's Grove congregation (from where the Hour of Power is broadcast, meeting Sundays at 9:30AM), as well as the Tree of Life Community church (which meets in the

<sup>255</sup> <http://www.thebereanall.org/content/april-1998-news>

same building at 11:15AM); it sounds impressive, but he's really only preaching in two services Sunday mornings. Why do I say that nothing has changed? Consider what he says about what he is doing: "And practically every week we **talk about our values of spiritual formation**



Robert H.

Robert A.  
Schuller

Robert V.

**and discipleship**, connecting with others in **relationship**, and **living missionally**<sup>256</sup> as sent people to the places God has us planted ..." (emphasis added).<sup>257</sup> He goes on to say that they (as a congregation) "choose to live in communion with the Spirit of Jesus for the **renovating** of our hearts" (emphasis added).<sup>258</sup> All of these terms are characteristic of the Emergent Church (EC), but, make no mistake, they can be defined in such a way as to deceive the unwary. Let's consider this for a moment as the implications are very broad and we will all face them at some point in time.

It is important to note that Schuller says that they *talk about* their values; this is not a Bible study as we might like to think, rather, it is people looking at each other and discussing spiritual topics, or the preacher is talking, but not teaching. What this does not mean is individuals looking into the Scriptures to determine what God desires concerning a particular matter. It is more important to participate in a dialogue than it is to understand what God requires, and to speak soft words of encouragement, than to challenge. This should not be surprising to us. New Evangelicalism began with a separation from the commands of God in Scripture and an emphasis upon dialogue with the Liberals of the day. After more than 65 years, nothing has changed (except that we have become more comfortable with it); the emphasis is still upon dialogue, and the EC movement is taking it to a whole new level, which the pioneers of New Evangelicalism could never have imagined.

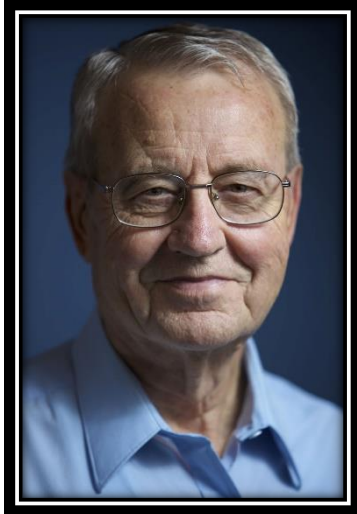
*Spiritual Formation* is a phrase that is used by many today, but it is more than we might understand at first glance. We might call to mind Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are called upon to put off the old man and to put on the new man of righteousness and true holiness. That might well sound like *spiritual formation* and that it is Biblically acceptable, but that is not what *spiritual formation* has come to mean. Dallas Willard, a recommended author within Emergent teaching, says, "Sometimes we think of spiritual formation as formation by the Holy Spirit. ... That's

<sup>256</sup> This is an Emergent Church term that means to work to improve this world without regard for heaven or hell (<http://www.apologeticsindex.org/297-emerging-church-glossary>); this fits well with Reconstructionist or Kingdom-Now people who are essentially endeavoring to build the church and its influence in the world so that Christ can eventually come to take over.

<sup>257</sup> <http://treeoflifeoc.org/beliefs/#toggle-id-2>

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.





Dallas Willard

essential. ... [but] We have to recognize that spiritual formation in us is something that is also done to us by those around us, by ourselves, and by activities which we voluntarily undertake” (underlined emphasis in the original).<sup>259</sup> He speaks of the formation being done *by the Holy Spirit*, but that’s really a red herring meant to relax the minds of any discerning Christian who might be listening. He goes on to say, “There has to be method,” and goes on to say that *method* “may involve counseling, certainly involves the ministry of the word [another inclusion to deceive], and certainly involves worship,” but, even the way that this is phrased, tells you that there is more.<sup>260</sup> If you can sense the “more” in his words, then you would be right; the methods “that look more ‘Catholic,’ like solitude, silence, and so on, we’re not so good with those. And usually I find they deal with the areas where our deepest problem lies.”<sup>261</sup> There is the essence of spiritual formation: delving into the practices of the ancients (the monastic heretics of the early Roman Catholic Church), like emptying the mind in order to hear the voice of “god.” These practises often begin in a benign way, but, because they are not based upon the Scriptures, they will lead ever deeper into mystical and Eastern religious exercises. This is the bridge that Christians have used to embrace the Hindu practice of yoga; Willard is a significant conduit for Evangelicals wanting to move into the EC community – he knows the language and definitions of the past, and uses smooth words to make the new-look more desirable (Romans 16:18). Nothing has changed; the devil still seeks to change “thus saith the Lord” into “yea, hath God said?” (Genesis 3:1-6).

Bobby Schuller speaks of *renovating* the heart; again, this is an Emergent term that takes into account, not the working of the Spirit of God, but the ancient practices that are deemed to enhance our spirituality. It is through the approved *methods* that the heart is renovated into something that is different from what it was. As I’ve said before, the devil’s words are not all lies, and this is no less the case here. There will be a renovation of the heart, but the result will be far from what God desires for us. Dallas Willard wrote a book titled, *Renovation of the Heart*, in which he details how we can raise our spirituality, despite the abysmal record among most professing Christians. He draws from many sources to make his case – from the Scriptures (where they might seem to support his argument), and from heretics of all persuasions. God says, “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17); this is a transformation, not a renovation, that will be worked out in us as we permit the Spirit of God to be our Guide.

Satan will ensure that his tools (like Willard and Schuller) will speak enticing words in order to attract the undiscerning (Romans 16:18; Matthew 24:24-26). Unless we are willing to exercise spiritual discernment and vigilance, we must either limit our exposure to God’s Word alone, or be prepared for the consequences of being deceived. “Let no man deceive [*apatao* (*ap-at-ah’-o*) –

<sup>259</sup> <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58>

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

mislead or cheat] you with vain [empty of the truth] words: for because of these things [activities that will block our way to heaven] cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.” (Ephesians 5:6-7).<sup>262</sup> If we permit ourselves to be taken in by empty words (taken from a place of faithfulness to unbelief), we are, in fact, cheating ourselves of life eternal, for thereby, we have joined with the children of disobedience and have become the targets of the wrath of God. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). “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] ...” (Hebrews 10:26-27a).<sup>263</sup>

When Jesus spoke to His disciples about the days that were coming for them (and us), He warned them against being deceived: “Take heed that no man [may] deceive you” (Matthew 24:4); “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many [a statement of fact]” (Matthew 24:5); “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:11); “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if ... possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).<sup>264</sup> In each case, the same Greek word (*planao* [*plan-ah'-o*]) is translated as *deceive*, meaning to lead away from the truth.<sup>265</sup> If the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ were warned to be vigilant lest they be led away from the truth, then it would only seem appropriate that we give Jesus’ words careful attention. When Satan is released after his thousand year confinement in the bottomless pit, we are told that he will immediately seek to *deceive* (*planao*) the inhabitants of the world in order to incite them to rise up against the Lord Who has been ruling for a thousand years in peace and prosperity. We are told that those who will join him will be “as the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:8). Despite living under the righteous rule of the Lord for a millennium, the people will flock to the smooth words of the devil and rise up against the Lord in battle (Revelation 20:9).

If we would give heed to the warning of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must then be alert to the alluring call of the ecumenical voice. Their message is warm and inviting, a message of love and acceptance that is couched in a pious yearning for unity in the Lord; after all, “*There is one body, and one Spirit, ... One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*” (Ephesians 4:4-6). They are so loving and so convincing, and how can we argue with Scripture? We must discern that the Spirit of God will NEVER contravene the Word of God. Therefore, when Jesus says, “For there shall arise false Christs [*pseudochristos*], and false prophets [*pseudoprophetes*] ... and ... shall deceive [lead away from the truth] the very elect” (Matthew 24:24)<sup>266</sup>, we must recognize that these propagators of false teaching will sound very convincing, which means that they will frequently make use of the Bible in an attempt to justify their actions or claim that the Lord showed them their doctrine. However, we must be equipped<sup>267</sup> to hold their words and actions up to the light of the Word of God so that the Spirit is

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<sup>262</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>263</sup> Strong’s Online.

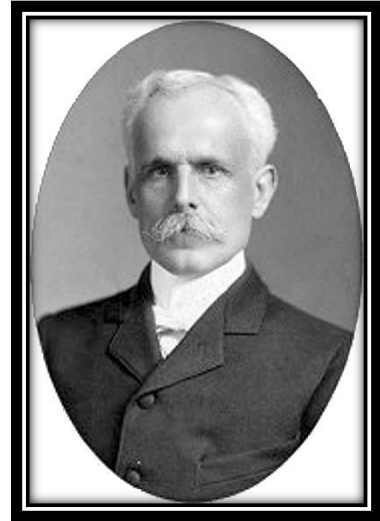
<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> How are we *equipped*? 1. Focus on the Lord; 2. Study His Word; 3. Obey His commands.

then able to show us their deception and departure from His truth. There truly is only one body and one Lord, but unless we are cognizant of the fact that the ecumenist is not part of that *one body*, we stand in jeopardy of giving ear to his propaganda. Measure the ecumenist against God's Word (1 John 4:1), and then avoid him, for he will certainly NOT measure up (Romans 16:17-18) – do not cling to what is unclean in God's eyes (2 Corinthians 6:17). The promise of the Lord is that those who are *unclean* will have no part in His eternal kingdom (Ephesians 5:5); the *clean* become *unclean* by contact with what is unclean. Why would we desire to expend our energies in participating with them in their *unclean* works? Why would we desire to fill our minds with their literature when we hold the Word of God in our hands? Why would we cling to those whom the Lord Jesus Christ declares to be completely unpalatable? We must cultivate an eternal perspective in the choices that we make; we must choose to serve the Lord in obedience to His Word (anything less than complete obedience is not service to Him), and leave the consequences for our Biblical choices to Him.



John Sammis

John Sammis wrote the popular Gospel song, *Trust and Obey*. It is based upon the words of a new Christian who didn't understand much of what was ahead, but who said that he was committed to trusting and obeying the Lord.<sup>268</sup> The chorus states, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey"; the reality is that there is no other way to *remain* in Jesus but to trust and obey. Unless we remain faithfully committed to the Lord (which will be evident through a life of trust and obedience to His Word), we will not continue to abide in the Vine (Hebrews 3:14). Take heed, lest a seed of unbelief be permitted to grow in your heart; "Examine [test] yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove [examine to ensure that you are genuine] your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5a). If you are *in the faith*, then your life will exhibit obedience to the Lord (John 14:15); a simple test, to begin this spiritual self-examination, would be to review your life in light of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17).



**17. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:**

Jesus is preparing to give this overseer some fitting advice about how he is living, and He begins here by laying the groundwork for that instruction. First, He presents the elder's evaluation of his own position: *I am wealthy and have an abundance, and am needing no not one thing (nothing)*.<sup>269</sup> This man sees himself as being completely satisfied and content with life; in his own eyes, he is on top of the world. Jesus, during His earthly ministry, spoke to this very matter: "And he [Jesus] said unto them [those who were listening to Him], Take heed [watch out!], and beware of [be on guard against] covetousness [greediness]: for a man's life consisteth [is] not in the abundance [abounding] of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them,

<sup>268</sup> <http://www.lectionary.org/HymnStories/Trust%20and%20Obey.htm>

<sup>269</sup> Strong's Online.

saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow [gather] my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease [rest], eat, drink, *and* be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:15-21).<sup>270</sup> In both cases (the elder of Laodicea and the rich man), there is an attitude of contentment, not in the Lord, but in the abundance of earthly wealth.

In our day, Evangelicals love to bask in the luxuries of life. The very popular Joel Osteen unabashedly promotes a life of pleasure and ease: “Don’t let yourself have a barely-get-by mentality. Jesus came so that you can live an abundant life! That means an abundance of joy, an abundance of peace, an abundance of health, **an abundance of finances**” (emphasis added).<sup>271</sup>



Joel Osteen

Joel has taken his own words to heart; he and his wife live in a 17,000-square-foot, \$10.5 million mansion in Houston, Texas.<sup>272</sup> Joel’s Lakewood Church publishes an outline of “Biblical Confessions for Financial Prosperity,” which includes in its seven points: “My Heavenly Father gives me power to get wealth,” and “The Lord has commanded me to be blessed; therefore, I am blessed and cannot be cursed. I am the head and not the tail. I am above only and not beneath. I will lend and not borrow.”<sup>273</sup> How does he justify this? Quite simply, he abuses Scripture! For the first point (“My Heavenly Father gives me power to get wealth”), he manipulates 2 Corinthians 8:9 – “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye

through his poverty might be rich.” Jesus was rich in eternal glory as God, yet He stooped to take on the poverty of created man so that through His payment for sin, we might enjoy the glories of heaven for eternity; yet Joel chooses to read temporal prosperity into this. Paul wrote, “...I have learned, in whatsoever state I am ... to be content. I know both how to be ... full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Philippians 4:11-12). Clearly, according to Joel’s philosophy, Paul was missing out and had it all wrong. Joel is one among many of today’s preachers who is scratching the itching ears of Evangelicals with the lies of the devil (2 Timothy 4:3-4), and he receives a tremendous hearing.

Paul warned that “the love of money [covetousness, avarice] is the root of all evil[s]: which while some coveted after [to give oneself up to the love of money], they have erred from the faith [led from truth into error], and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy

<sup>270</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>271</sup> <http://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/MessageViewer.aspx?date=2014-03-20>

<sup>272</sup> <http://houston.culturemap.com/news/real-estate/07-04-10-after-move-to-river-oaks-joel-osteen-wants-to-sell-tanglewood-land-for-11-million/>

<sup>273</sup> [https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/.../LC\\_FinancialProsperity\\_Card.pdf](https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/.../LC_FinancialProsperity_Card.pdf)



6:10).<sup>274</sup> The elder in Laodicea was a living example of someone who had no time for the truth because of the lure of affluence. The problem does not lie with the money or wealth, but with his attitude toward it – so, too, with the rich farmer in Jesus’ parable (Luke 12:16-21); the difficulty was not with the abundance of his crops, but with him embracing his material wealth without a thought for God as the provider, or for his eternal soul.

As Jesus prepares to give this overseer some pointed counsel, we have seen that He begins by laying a foundation of what he (the overseer) has been saying; He now goes on to tell him what he does not know.

The Greek word translated as *knowest* is *oida*, and speaks of a present knowledge; when used of God it speaks of a completeness of knowledge.<sup>275</sup> This word is then combined with the Greek absolute negative (*ou*) to show that this man had absolutely no idea about his actual spiritual condition before the Lord. Jesus summarizes his condition in five words: distressed (*wretched*), pitiable (*miserable*), destitute (*poor*), *blind*, and *naked*. If this man had used five words to describe his condition, none of these would have been his choice. He has wealth, influence, comforts, and, undoubtedly, was dressed in the finest; being wealthy, others would seek his counsel – he would have been numbered among the movers and shakers of Laodicea. Within our day, his name could easily be Rick Warren. Rick is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (a highly influential group of the elite in the world whose goal is a New World Order),<sup>276</sup> he meets with top Islamic leaders and consults with the pope of Rome, he prays in the name of a false god (Isa),<sup>277</sup> and yet, despite all of this, he considers himself to be a Christian who is doing the Lord’s work, and his followers are undeterred. The ecumenical mind thrives on such a broad acceptance; Rick Warren, like the elder of Laodicea, basks in a spiritually exhilarating position – at least in his own estimation, and in the eyes of the thousands upon thousands from around the world who follow him. Yet, before the Lord, he is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

Despite the broad acceptance and influence that this elder would undoubtedly have enjoyed, Jesus says that he is *wretched*. The Greek word (*talaiporos*), so translated, comes from two: a scale or balance (*talanton*) and a test (*peira*),<sup>278</sup> and means to be afflicted or enduring a test. However, we must not forget that this overseer did not feel *wretched*; it is the Lord Who says that he IS *wretched*. Like Belshazzar of Daniel’s time, this messenger has been weighed and found wanting, yet has remained blissfully unaware of his desolate condition until the Lord points it out to him (Daniel 5:22-24). For Belshazzar, the day that his prideful heart was laid bare was the day that he was killed (Daniel 5:30); we read nothing of his repentance before God.

Jesus also declares this elder to be *miserable*; he is one who is to be pitied.<sup>279</sup> For the one who says that he is in need of nothing, Jesus says that he warrants our sympathy. As Paul explained to the Corinthians the vital importance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, he said: “If in this

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<sup>274</sup> Gingrich Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

<sup>275</sup> Vine’s “know.”

<sup>276</sup> <http://www.cfr.org/about/membership/roster.html?letter=W>

<sup>277</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2009/january/rick-warrens-inaugural-invocation.html>

<sup>278</sup> Strong’s Dictionary.

<sup>279</sup> Strong’s Online.

life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19). There were some among the Corinthians who said that there was no resurrection of the dead; clearly, they were thinking that believers were not resurrected, and had not considered the impact of such a belief on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Paul does not mince his words in telling them that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not raised to life; if He was not raised, then Paul’s preaching is vanity, their faith is empty, they remain in their sins, and those who have died, believing in Christ, are forever destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:14-18). His summarizing statement is that if we only have hope in Christ during this life, then we are to be pitied (*miserable*), for, really, what hope is that? As Jesus considers this elder of Laodicea, He looks beyond his worldly affluence to an eternity of condemnation. This one, who has heard the truth of God and should know better, has succumbed to an easy life with no regard for God’s truth. How many Evangelicals hold the Word of God in their hands, yet live ecumenical lives of “love and unity” with absolutely no regard for the Law of God, nor the consequences of ignoring His commands. In the same way, they, too, are to be pitied.

The caution for us is this: are we following the Lord faithfully, or are we simply deceiving ourselves into believing that we are spiritually fine? This elder, as well as the ecumenist, would say that he is spiritually all right. Do we cut corners on the “thus saith the Lord” of the Scriptures, looking around us to justify our “minor indiscretions?” Do we fill our minds with ecumenical thinking, instead of spending time in the Word of God? “Be not deceived; God is not mocked [to turn the nose up, or sneer, at]: for whatsoever a man soweth [may sow], that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).<sup>280</sup> Cutting corners with the commands of the Lord is sneering at God! Do not be deceived; do not be led away from the truth by sowing seeds of unfaithfulness, which will only lead to a harvest of eternal condemnation! You might well fool all of the people some of the time, and some people all of the time, but you will never fool God at any time! “Examine [test] yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove [check to see if genuine] your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5a); if you are cutting corners in your “obedience” to the Lord’s commands, then your *self-test* will show that those rationalized indiscretions are, in reality, blatant disobedience.

Jesus goes on to identify this man as being *poor*, destitute of wealth, influence, position, and honor.<sup>281</sup> Whereas this man says that he has need of nothing, Jesus declares that he has nothing. This stands in contrast to Jesus’ words to the elder in Smyrna: “I know thy ... poverty (but thou art rich) ...” (Revelation 2:9). Consider this illustration from the ministry of the Lord Jesus: “And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none *is* good, save one, *that is*, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept [guarded] from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly [with difficulty] shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” (Luke 18:18-24). Here was one who had great wealth, lived a godly life as it

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<sup>280</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

related to his fellow man, yet he recognized that there was still something missing in his life (Matthew 19:16-22). However, he was unwilling to part with his wealth in order to follow the Lord and secure eternal life. His prestige, power, and comfort held his heart captive; the cost of discipleship was too great for him.

In the parable of the soils, Jesus explained this another way when He spoke of the Seed (the Word of God) falling among the thorns: “And some [Seed] fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked [*apopnigo* (*ap-op-nee’-go*); this is the same Greek word that is used in Luke 8:33 to speak of the pigs that ran into the sea and drowned] it. ... And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth [to pursue the journey that one has entered], and are choked [*sumpnigo* (*soom-pnee’-go*) – to choke utterly] with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:7,14).<sup>282</sup> This is someone who has heard the Word of God (they have received the *Seed*), they have understood (*heard*) it, and committed to it (they have begun to walk in the narrow pathway that leads to life – *go forth*), yet they are overcome by life – it’s pleasures, wealth, and its anxieties. They began well, but then they lose their focus on the One Who has promised to be with us through it all (Hebrews 12:2; 13:5). Clearly, this elder had allowed the comforts and pleasures of this life to drown any spiritual commitment that he may have had to the Lord. Jesus summarized this matter this way: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13; this is a violation of the First Commandment). This was exemplified in the life of the rich young ruler who ended up sorrowful because he could not bring himself to part with his wealth, even for the eternal life that Jesus promised him if he would become His follower. Jesus made it abundantly clear that we cannot focus our lives on both this world and on Him. Like the rich young ruler, this elder had committed himself to this world and its pleasures, and was judged as being *poor* before the Lord.

The elder is also called *blind*. This one, who would have been consulted by the socially elite of Laodicea for his wisdom and insight, is condemned as being without sight. The Greek word *tuphlos*, translated as *blind*, is derived from *tuphoo* (*toof-o’-o*), which literally means “to raise a smoke, to wrap in a mist,”<sup>283</sup> and by application speaks of someone who is stupid “from a sense of one's own importance.”<sup>284</sup> “There is no smaller package in all the world than that of a man all wrapped up in himself.”<sup>285</sup> In his own eyes, this man was a fountain of keen understanding and wisdom, but, before God, he was wrapped up in the mist of his own delusion. “For if a man [any one] think himself to be something [or someone], when he is nothing [or no one], he deceiveth [is deceiving] himself” (Galatians 6:3). It is clear that this elder was doing just that. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Corinthians 3:19a); that which the worldly consider to be profound, the Lord looks upon as being nonsense. This is probably best illustrated by those who tenaciously cling to, and proclaim, the theory of evolution as the foundation for all geological and anthropological science, despite it being contradicted by the evidence. The wisdom of this world seeks to leave God out of their philosophizing, and, therefore, they will never lift themselves to

<sup>282</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>285</sup> William Sloane Coffin, Jr.; <http://thelittleyellowdiary.tumblr.com/post/27923390278/there-is-no-smaller-package-in-all-the-world-than>

any level of wisdom other than foolishness before God. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom [human wisdom, not God’s wisdom] knew [come to know or understand] not [absolute *not*] God, it pleased God by [through] the foolishness of preaching [proclamation of His truth] to save them that believe [are believing]” (1 Corinthians 1:21).<sup>286</sup> This elder has been amazed by his own acumen but has no concept of the wisdom of the Lord; “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him” (Proverbs 26:12).

Last of all, Jesus declares this elder to be *naked*. Obviously, this is not to be applied physically, for undoubtedly this man would have been decked-out in the finest that the world had to offer. However, the Scriptures speak of a different covering. Isaiah wrote: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth *herself* with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10). Isaiah speaks of the *garments of salvation* and the *robe of righteousness*; even as a bride and groom are dressed in their finest, so the child of God is clothed with salvation and righteousness, which are provided by the Lord, his Savior. Jesus says that this elder is *naked* – he is not wearing the garments that the Lord provides for His own. The thrust of this is that this elder has not been cleansed from sin; he has learned to speak the language of the saved, he knows the routine of the righteous, and he wears the mask of piety with great dexterity – nevertheless, he remains spiritually unclothed.

When Adam and Eve transgressed the Law of the Lord, they knew that they were naked before Him. Their attempts to cover their nakedness were without effect. It was only when Jehovah shed the blood of the animals, which were sacrificed in order to make coverings for them, that, through faith, they became clothed before God. The Lord is the ONLY provider of salvation (Genesis 3:21), and that is through Christ, the promised Savior (Romans 8:1). Our best efforts to cover our sinfulness (represented by the fig leaves sewn together – Genesis 3:7) is totally unacceptable to God; He provides the only covering that can restore our relationship with Him: the Lord Jesus Christ Who paid the price for our sins. When we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the One Who shed His blood in payment for our sins, the eternal God pours out His spiritual blessings upon us, for we are now found to be *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3). Jesus said, “Abide [*meno* - remain] in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).<sup>287</sup> If we do not remain in the Lord Jesus Christ, we then become dried up, and are tinder for eternal flames (John 15:6). It is as we are *in Christ* that we have protection from the condemnation of God (Romans 8:1); He is our covering – as God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Christ, rather than our sinfulness.

However, we must not become lax in such a marvelous salvation. Yes! – as we are *in Christ*, we are no longer under the wrath of God that will be poured out upon the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2-3). Nevertheless, we, who are called brethren, are warned that it is possible to again come under God’s condemnation. “Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [faithlessness], in **departing from** [to fall away from] the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).<sup>288</sup> For the one who turns away from the Lord, there is a certain end: “For if we sin wilfully

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<sup>286</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.



after that we have received the knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge] of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment [only a terrible expectation of condemnation] ...” (Hebrews 10:26-27a)<sup>289</sup>; a willful, deliberate transgression of God’s command leads to a permanent state of condemnation before the Lord (Hebrews 6:4-6). Jesus clearly said that someone who does not abide in Him (this includes the one who becomes faithless) will be burned – he has forfeited his freedom from condemnation for a return to God’s wrath (John 15:6). This is not a new teaching: “... when the righteous turneth away [a self-initiated act of apostasy] 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).<sup>290</sup> Who is righteous? It is the one who places his faith in the promised Savior Whom God had prepared before Adam was created; when God made skins for Adam’s covering, that was the implementation of His plan of salvation – it was a covering that was accepted by faith in the One Who was promised to come to complete the cleansing from sin and to destroy the works of Satan (Genesis 3:15). Therefore, Ezekiel writes of the one who has placed his faith in the Lord (the *righteous* one), and when he then turns away, is lost forever.

We must not miss, unlike most Evangelicals today, the purpose that God has for all those who are *in Christ*. “For we are his [God’s] workmanship [the work of God – 2 Corinthians 5:17], created in Christ Jesus unto [for the purpose of<sup>291</sup>] good works, which God hath before ordained [prepared beforehand] that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).<sup>292</sup> We have become new creations in Christ for the express purpose of the *good works* of God, which can be nothing other than living in obedience to the commands of the Lord! God has prepared these good works in advance so that we may walk in them – we are not saved unto ourselves, but rather, we have been purchased in order to live righteously before God. We are to clothe ourselves in the “new man, which after [according to] God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).<sup>293</sup> God, in His mercy, has not left us to our own devices and efforts to don this godly clothing – we have His Spirit within; however, neither will He force us to wear these garments – **we** must be willing!

God has gifted people within His *ekklesia* to provide us with what we need to be adequately equipped in order to live in accordance with His pre-determined design for us (Ephesians 4:11). Through the ministry of others within the Body of Christ, we will be stabilized in the face of the storm of teachings around us (Ephesians 4:14), and we will, thereby, increase in Christ, Who is our Head (Ephesians 4:15). The problem that is so prevalent among Evangelicals today is that they refuse to be discerning as to who is truly a part of the Body of Christ and who is not, and, therefore, they fall prey to many who proclaim the false doctrines of ecumenism. Just because someone says, “I am a Christian,” does not make it so; similarly, saying, “the Lord told me thus,” or “the Lord showed me this” does not make it so (Matthew 7:15-16, 21). The mantra of the day is “don’t

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<sup>289</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>290</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>291</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>292</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

judge!” Jesus said, “Judge not” (Matthew 7:1), which Evangelicals take at face value, but the context is that we are not to judge hypocritically; do not judge someone else if you are doing the very same thing! However, Jesus also commanded, “Judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24), by which we understand that we are to judge Biblically. We do not go around casually pointing to people as being either in Christ or not; nevertheless, we are called upon to exercise thoughtful, Biblical discernment (1 John 4:1). Jesus challenged the Pharisees to clean the inside of the cup so that the outward would reflect that inward cleansing (Matthew 23:26). Therefore, we must be sufficiently well-versed in the Scriptures so that we can measure the words and actions of professing Christians (that outward expression) against the standard of the Word of God in order to determine if we will accept their teaching or not. The question to which we seek an answer is this: is their outward expression of Christianity in keeping with God’s Word? The problem that too many “Christians” face today is that they are so “blessed” and “encouraged” by the words of those who are ecumenical that they are reluctant to apply the litmus test of the Scriptures lest they be forced to face what they already intuitively suspect: they must forego the apparent blessing and encouragement in favor of living in spiritual purity and obedience before the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 16:17). Or, in their efforts to support their unwillingness to be discerning (which is disobedience to the Lord!!), they feign a false humility by saying, “Who am I to judge – I’m not perfect.”

“Beloved, believe not [do not be persuaded by] every spirit, but try [test to determine if they are genuine] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).<sup>294</sup> Unless we are prepared to take the very unpopular position of measuring all things against the standard of God’s Word, it is merely a matter of time before we will fall for error; capitulation to error typically will not take place in an instant – it is more common to court error for a long time before finally succumbing to its poison. If the Lord would strike us dead at the moment that we strayed to follow error, then we would have a greater motivation for applying the Word of God; nevertheless, we must be that diligent in guarding against error. We must be continually alert lest we accept people at face value (for what they say), and we must recognize that not everyone who names the name of Jesus is His child (Matthew 7:21-23). This is the core problem with the modern ecumenical movement: if someone professes to be a Christian, then they are accepted without question; if an individual speaks the name of Jesus and seems to ascribe some honor to the Bible, then they are automatically included within the embrace of their fellowship. We must recognize that to be *in Christ* involves a completely unique relationship that cannot be attained through mere appearances and religious words. The Spirit of God will only abide in those who have placed their faith in the work of Christ (Romans 8:9), and He will only continue to abide in those who remain faithful to Him (Hebrews 3:12; John 14:15). *In Christ* we have all that we need to remain faithful: we have the Spirit of God within, and both the Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ are interceding with the Father for us (Romans 8:9, 27, 34). Our task is to guard our hearts against falling for error that might well come to us in a garment of some truth, or singing the siren song of our favorite Evangelical leader. As we see in this elder, it is possible to be in a place of spiritual leadership and responsibility without being clothed in salvation. If it is our desire to walk faithfully with the Lord, then we must be wearing the robe of *righteousness and true holiness* that God has created for us (Ephesians 4:24) – the garment of His salvation (Isaiah 61:10). Only then

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<sup>294</sup> Strong’s Online.

will we be able to walk in the good works that God has prepared for all those who are *in Christ* (Ephesians 2:10) – good works that the ecumenical know nothing about!



**18. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.**

After describing the truly deplorable condition of this overseer, Jesus now advises him that there are three things that he can do to deal with his spiritually nauseous state. There is hope for this one who has ignored his soul. Once again, we must recognize that the Lord desires all men to be saved; as with the Pharisees whom Jesus confronted during His earthly ministry, He provides advice on how this man can remedy his situation.

The decisions that we make in life often carry long-term results. John the Baptist came as the herald of the coming Messiah, Jesus, and he preached to the Jews a new message of repentance, and baptism unto repentance, before God (Matthew 3:11). When Jesus came, He openly declared that He was come to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13); John prepared the way by proclaiming the need for repentance, and he would baptize those who were willing to turn (repent) and commit themselves to the Lord. The religious leaders of the Jews took offense at John's message and baptism; they interrogated him as to who he was, but they did not believe his message nor did they repent. As Jesus taught the people, we read: "And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans, justified God [acknowledged Him as being righteous], being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Luke 7:29-30). These religious Jews recognized that they had rejected the message of John the Baptist (Mark 11:30-31), and, because they had rejected the herald of the coming One, they were also unable to accept the message of Jesus, their promised Messiah. They refused to repent before God when John called for repentance, and this laid the groundwork for their rejection of Jesus, their Messiah and the Son of God. Did they set out to reject their Messiah? No, of course not; they were eagerly anticipating His coming. However, Jesus did not come according to their expectations, and they were not prepared to re-examine their understanding of the OT prophecies in light of what was taking place before them; they were held captive by their theology and could not break free to accept the very Son of God! Unless we are prepared to hold commonly accepted Christian traditions and theologies up to the light of God's Word, we might well be following the example of the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus' day.

The Psalmist in Psalm 73 declares that he almost lost his way because he looked upon the prosperity of the wicked with envy (vs. 3-5). However, when he met with the Lord he could see the ultimate end that the godless will face (v. 17). As he begins to get his perspective on the world into godly order, he declares, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me *to glory*" (Psalm 73:24). The elder of Laodicea is about to hear the counsel that the Lord has for him; will he permit the Lord to guide him?

The first thing that this elder is to do is to *buy gold* from the Lord Jesus Christ, yet Jesus has just proclaimed him as being *poor*. This seems to be a passage with conflicting thoughts. Isaiah wrote: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye,

buy [buy food], and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price [hire]. Wherefore do ye spend money *for that which is* not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness [abundance]” (Isaiah 55:1-2).<sup>295</sup> The words of Isaiah speak of acquiring sustenance without money; clearly, this is to be applied spiritually, for the next phrase is: “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live ...” (Isaiah 55:3a). He is not speaking of physical food to be purchased without money, but, rather, the acquisition of spiritual life! Indeed, spiritual life cannot be purchased with money, yet it is neither cheap nor without cost! It required the sacrifice of the innocent: millions of perfect lambs through the OT history, and the perfect Lamb of God as the final sacrifice for sin – the price was high! Jesus said, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will [may intend to] save his life shall lose [destroy] it; but whosoever shall lose [may destroy] his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain [may acquire] the whole world, and lose [may forfeit] his own soul?” (Mark 8:34-36).<sup>296</sup> We understand that the salvation of our souls is a free gift from God (Ephesians 2:8), and that it does not come through silver or gold (1 Peter 1:18). However, we must not misconstrue the Scriptures to mean that, because salvation is a free gift from the Lord, we can simply accept the gift and then coast into the eternal presence of the Lord. This is what the Evangelicals promote as eternal security – once-saved-always-saved.

Despite the fact that the salvation that God has for us is free, it must never be misunderstood to be a free ticket to heaven; it is free in that there is nothing that we can do to acquire it, we can ONLY willingly accept it. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus counselled that it is important that we count the cost of becoming His disciple, lest we begin well but are not able to finish (Luke 14:28-33). It is as God’s free gift of salvation becomes ours that the cost of following the Lord comes into play. Jesus said that we must *deny* ourselves, *take up* the cross that He has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10), and then we are ready to *follow* Him (Mark 8:34). This is affirmed in His parable of the soils: “They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe [are persuaded], and in time of temptation [proving] fall away [withdraw from, become apostate]. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth [to pursue the journey one has entered], and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection [maturity]” (Luke 8:13-14).<sup>297</sup> It is possible to accept God’s free gift of salvation, and then lose it; Jesus said that the one (the branch) who does not bear spiritual fruit is removed (John 15:2,6). For this one who becomes apostate, there is no recovery (Hebrews 10:26-29; Ezekiel 18:24); it is very important that we remain faithful unto the very end, for it is only by doing so that we will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

Jesus’ first counsel to this elder is that he buy pure gold from Him – gold that has been purified through fire. We read that “the judgments [*mishpat* – ordinances] of the LORD [the decrees of the Lord that govern our daily living] *are true and righteous altogether*. More to be desired *are they*

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<sup>295</sup> BDB

<sup>296</sup> Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.



[they are more desirable<sup>298</sup>] than gold, yea, than much fine gold [refined, or pure, gold] ...” (Psalm 19:9-10).<sup>299</sup> Again, the Psalmist said, “Therefore I love thy commandments [*mitzvah* - commands] above gold; yea, above fine gold [refined, or pure, gold]” (Psalm 119:127). This elder declared, “I am rich”; gold would have undoubtedly been one of his most treasured commodities. Jesus tells him of his need to have a desire for His decrees and a love for His commands; this is *gold* from the Lord that would see him become spiritually rich. His present poverty proclaims that this elder has no love for the Word of God and certainly no regard for anything that the Lord requires of those who are born anew by His Spirit. “For we are his [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto [for the purpose of] good works, which God hath before ordained [predetermined] that we should [may] walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).<sup>300</sup> When we become *in Christ* by faith, we are made new for the purpose of walking according to what God has predetermined for all those who are in Christ; included within that predetermination is a love for the commands of the Lord and a desire to walk in obedience to Him (Romans 8:1). This elder had none of these things; he was wealthy by the world’s standard, but, as we have seen, he did not wear the garment of salvation.

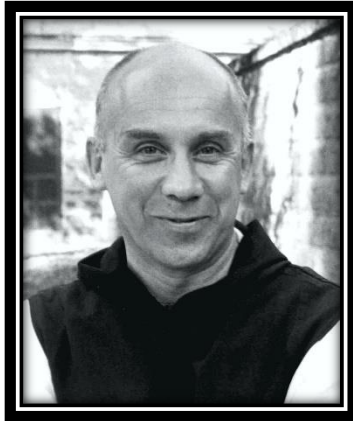
The second thing that this elder is to buy from the Lord is *white raiment* so that he might be clothed. This man who was opulently dressed, yet declared by the Lord to be naked, is now counselled to acquire a covering from the Lord. Again, we must reflect on the words of Isaiah: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness ...” (Isaiah 61:10). This is what this elder was missing from his wardrobe! He had no robe of righteousness to cover his naked sinfulness. When Adam and Eve sinned, their first response was to make something to cover their shame, yet their fig-leaf garments, like the lavish robes of this elder, were unacceptable before God – their sinful shame was on open display before Him. All the finery that this elder wears does not hide his sinfulness from the Lord; it is only the robe of righteousness that comes by faith in Christ that can cover our sin before the holy God to Whom we must all give an account. “*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). The message is truly simple, but it runs contrary to the philosophy of the day that says that it doesn’t really matter, you can do it your way. The ecumenical mind seeks to embrace both this worldly philosophy and the Word of God by accommodating what they should be avoiding, and by being selective in their use of the Scriptures. The purveyors of the Emergent Church (EC) philosophy hold disdain for both the Biblical Christian and the ecumenist, and focus their spirituality on experience – truly an expression of Frank Sinatra’s “I Did it My Way.” Despite the EC’s contempt for the ecumenical movement, they are really nothing more than the natural progression of the ecumenical mind; the ecumenist endeavors to create a unity around a loose acceptance of the Scriptures, while the EC seeks a much broader unity by embracing a spirituality that focuses on the mystical. The ecumenical mind retains somewhat of a traditional view of God, which permits them to accept all forms of “Christian” denominations, as well as welcoming Muslims and Jews (we see this exhibited in Rick Warren). The shift that has taken place with the EC is that they now freely enlarge the tent of their fellowship even more to include the Hindus, Buddhists, animists, and anyone from any religion, or no religion,

<sup>298</sup> Jacob Chinitz, Ten Terms in the Torah, p. 4. (PDF version).

<sup>299</sup> Strong’s Online; BDB.

<sup>300</sup> Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

who embraces spirituality. Even the humanists and atheists will find a home within this community, for truth becomes subject to an individual's experiences and absolute truth is scoffed at.



Thomas Merton

Dallas Willard was one of those who worked to draw Evangelicals into this new mystical freedom; Thomas Merton was a Roman Catholic who did much to open the Catholic mind to the mystical through his adoption of Buddhism as an acceptable expression of his Catholic faith. Since the EC is highly subjective in their approach, it is becoming a melting pot for modern spirituality, defined as “a process of personal transformation ... oriented on subjective experience.”<sup>301</sup> Evangelicals are vulnerable to the EC philosophy because of their acceptance of the ecumenical mind and their distrust of those who are Biblically oriented. Jesus, as the only way to salvation, does not fit well with this subjective religious experience; from Jesus' words, we realize that this elder of Laodicea

needed to don the garment of salvation – to be clothed in the white raiment of Christ's righteousness. His subjective evaluation that he was in need of nothing, like that of the EC and ecumenist, did not change his spiritual nakedness before the Lord.

When Jesus was transformed before James, John and Peter, we are told that his clothing became as *white as the light* (Matthew 17:2). The clothing that this elder is to acquire of the Lord is just that white (the Greek word is the same in both cases). When the angel descended from heaven to open the tomb where Jesus had been, his raiment was as *white as snow* (Mark 16:3). When the elders are seated around the throne of God in heaven, they, too, are *clothed in white raiment* (Revelation 4:4). This is a heavenly color that speaks of purity and holiness; for us, it means garments that have been made “white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). “... Put on the new man, which after [according to] God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24); this *new man* is that garment of purity!

Jesus' final instruction to this elder is that he must put salve on his eyes so that he may be able to see (to recover from his state of spiritual blindness). Within Laodicea was a school of medicine that was known for its production of an eye salve, made from a local Phrygian stone, which was purported to provide relief from some eye problems.<sup>302</sup> This elder lived in a city known for a product that helped people with their eyesight; Jesus commands him to anoint his eyes so that he may see the truth of his spiritual plight.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of blindness and seeing: “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And *some* of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:39-41). The Pharisees considered themselves to be the elite among the religious Jews of the day; they knew the Law of Moses and, outwardly, they kept it with meticulous care. Jesus explained that He did not come to call the righteous to repentance, but

<sup>301</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirituality>

<sup>302</sup> <http://www.biblelandhistory.com/turkey/laodicea.html>; Laodicea is the only assembly within the province of Phrygia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phrygia>).

sinner (Matthew 9:13); in their own eyes, the Pharisees were righteous. Therefore, when Jesus said that He was come so that those who were blind (*see not*) might gain their sight, the Pharisees asked Him if they were blind also, phrasing their question in such a way so as to anticipate Jesus' response that they were not blind.<sup>303</sup> However, Jesus tells them that if they were blind, then they would not be clinging to (*have*) sin (for they would have received spiritual sight), but because they self-righteously declare, "We see" – their sin remains firmly in place. Even in their question to Jesus they revealed their spiritual pride, thereby placing themselves among those whom Jesus did not come to call to repentance (the self-righteous).

Jesus told a parable of a Pharisee: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself [the Pharisee, standing by himself, thus he prayed:<sup>304</sup>], God, I thank thee, that I am not [an absolute] as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other ..." (Luke 18:11-14a). This elder, who saw himself as someone who was in *need of nothing* (v.17), would have easily identified himself with the Pharisees of Jesus' day; his life was wonderful – he had it all together. Despite this, Jesus' advice to this man is that he acquire spiritual gold, the garment of salvation, and medicine for his spiritual blindness.

As I spoke of the need for Biblical separation from error with a fellow, he reminded me that a man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still; in other words, he was telling me that even if I presented him with flawless reasoning supported by Scripture, he would not change his mind. This elder must come to the place where he desires (an exercise of his will) a spiritual relationship with the Lord in order for Jesus' advice to become effective. The feel-good, happy-time unity of the ecumenically minded will often serve as a shroud, or veil, that prevents the individual from seeing the truth and finding salvation in the Lord. "Beware lest any man spoil [lead away from the truth] you through philosophy and vain [devoid of truth] deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Jesus has placed His challenge before this elder; will he accept the Lord's counsel? Are we prepared to follow the Lord and leave the world, the ecumenical, and anything that does not align itself with the Word of God (Romans 16:17), behind? Are we spiritually rich, or poverty stricken? "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5a).



**19. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.**

This is the point where there is a shift in the focus of Jesus' words. Up to now, He has been directing His observations and instructions specifically to the elder, or messenger, of the assembly in Laodicea. However, now He broadens His comments to include everyone in His audience. The *as many as*, in this case, can be rendered as *whomever*.<sup>305</sup>

<sup>303</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Strong's Online.

The word *love* that Jesus uses here is *phileo*, which speaks of tender affection,<sup>306</sup> approval,<sup>307</sup> or to be a friend to<sup>308</sup>; however, it is also in the subjunctive mood, which adds the aspect of possibility but not necessarily certainty (expressing Jesus' desire). This indicates that He is speaking of those whom He may approve of, or to whom He may be a Friend. We might well wonder why this isn't *agapao* (the verb form of *agape*), in keeping with: "For God so loved (*agapao*) the world ..." (John 3:16). It is important that we understand what Jesus is saying here because the modern mantra of Evangelicals is that *God is love*, by which they mean that God's love transcends all of His other attributes, which, in turn, permits them to create a tolerant god that imposes no demands upon them. *Agape*, as we might recall, speaks of love expressed as an act of the will (via the intellect); *phileo*, on the other hand, is an expression of love by the emotions (it is passionate).<sup>309</sup> Therefore, when we read, "But God commendeth [demonstrates] his love [*agape*] toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8), we understand that God showed His determined love for mankind in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. What we do not, and must not, take from this is that God is tenderly affectionate toward sinful mankind and that He is their Friend, which is precisely how the Evangelicals have twisted God's love to be.

God's *agape*, as it is expressed toward mankind, is consistent, but it is balanced by His justice and holiness. The prophet Jeremiah declared, "*It is of the LORD'S mercies [kindnesses] that we are not consumed [brought to an end], because his compassions [tender mercies] fail not [are not at an end]*" (Lamentations 3:22).<sup>310</sup> As long as we are in this life, we experience the merciful kindness of Jehovah, for it is through His mercy that He does not give us what we deserve; it is by His grace that He provides us with the opportunity to bow before Him in repentance. However, when death comes for us, our fate before the Lord is then sealed; for "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). If we have remained in faithful obedience to the Lord to the end, then we will be saved by Him (Matthew 24:13); otherwise, we will stand before God, the same God Who now expresses *agape* toward all men, and His eternal condemnation will be pronounced (Revelation 20:15). God's *agape* for men does not supplant His perfect justice, nor does it cloud His holiness so as to permit sinful mankind to abide in His presence for eternity. God's *agape* sent the Lord Jesus Christ to earth to complete Their predetermined, saving plan for mankind, but His *agape* does not automatically save all of mankind, for that would contravene His perfect justice. It is through His *agape* for us that He has provided a means of salvation.

Nowhere do we read that God has *phileo* for mankind in general. Jesus, addressing His disciples, said, "... the Father himself loveth [*phileo*] you, **because** ye have loved [*phileo*] me, and have believed that I came out from God" (John 16:27). Here are two reasons why Jehovah will look upon us with tender affection and approval: 1) we hold a passionate affection for the Lord Jesus Christ, and 2) we have been persuaded that Jesus is Who He says He is. God's warm,

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<sup>306</sup> Vine's "love."

<sup>307</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>308</sup> Strong's Dictionary.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> BDB



approving love is reserved for those who love the Lord and abide in Him. God holds no condemnation for those who remain *in Christ* (Romans 8:1); however, should we permit our belief in Jesus to fail, then we have departed from the Lord, we are no longer *in Christ* (Hebrews 3:12), and we will face the condemnation of God (Hebrews 10:26-27). Do not be deceived by the persuasive arguments of Evangelicals that God has an approving love for all of mankind – that is reserved for those who are faithfully abiding in Christ.

As we look at these two forms of love as expressed by God, we can see that His first love for mankind is *agape*; it is as we respond to His *agape* appropriately, that we will then experience His expression of *phileo*. To the lawyer who desired to know the greatest command, Jesus said, “Thou shalt love (*agapao* – verb form) 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 (*agapao* – verb form) thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).<sup>311</sup> The love that we are to express to the Lord and to our neighbor is *agape* – a love that finds its source in the mind as an act of the will: “I **will** love God, and I **will** love my neighbor.” However, God has not left us in a vacuum as to how that determination will be worked out. His Law (the Ten Commandments) provides us with an outline of how that love (*agape*) is to express itself: the first four Commands guide us in how we are to love God (do not have any other gods, do not make an object for worship, do not use the name of the Lord carelessly, and keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy unto the Lord); the last six Commands provide us with guidance on how we can be loving toward our neighbor (show honor to your parents, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie about your neighbor, and do not lust after anything that is your neighbor’s). God does not ask us to begin by expressing a warm and compassionate love for Him, but He does ask that we activate our will to love Him. In our western minds, we think of love in terms of a warm, fuzzy feeling, but the love that we are to have for God and our neighbor does not begin with our feelings. We have been made in the image of God, and the freedom to exercise our wills is one aspect of that *image*; therefore, we are called upon to *agape* God and our neighbor, and not worry about the warm fuzzies. In like manner, Jesus said, “If ye love [*agapao*] me, keep [attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15). This is very practical; if we, by an act of our will, are loving the Lord Jesus Christ, then how we show that love is very simple: we carefully live in obedience to His commands – this is the essence of the Christian life! Jesus clarified for us: “If ye [may] keep [attend carefully to] my commandments, ye shall abide [*meno* - remain] in my love [*agape*]; even as I have kept [attended carefully to] my Father’s commandments, and abide [*meno* - remain] in his love [*agape*]” (John 15:10).<sup>312</sup> It is possible that once we have faithfully remained in the *agape* of Christ that we will also have *phileo* for Him and His Word (we certainly will when we are in His presence); however, that is not where the commands of God focus our attention! We must *agapao* God (first of all), and learn to abide faithfully in Him by living in obedience to His Word – beginning with the Ten Commandments. The promise of Jesus is that those who are living in obedience to His commands will abide, or remain, in His love; this is a wonderful promise, but we must consider it carefully for it also tells us that if we are not living in submission to Him, then we are not abiding in His love.

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<sup>311</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

Jesus is about to speak of those whom He may approve of, those who may be the recipients of His tender affection. It is these, Jesus says, whom He rebukes and chastens. Wow! That's not how we think. If we hold *phileo* for someone, then we extend privileges to them and try to make life easier for them. Jesus says that whomever He desires to approve and bring into close friendship, He is rebuking and chastening (both are in the present tense). Therefore, our response to His rebuking and chastening will determine whether or not He will express *phileo* (an approving, passionate love) toward us. Based on this, it is important that we endeavor to understand these two words.

Although, in many ways, these words (*rebuke* and *chasten*) are very similar, there is a subtle difference that we need to detect. *Rebuke* means to reprove (reprimand, admonish), confute (point out error), and correct (call to account), with such actions potentially going as far as overt punishment.<sup>313</sup> *Chasten* holds an underlying premise of instruction and training; even though it might well lead to punishment, the overall tone is instructive. The former emphasizes pointing out the error or fault, the latter includes a concern for personal growth through the experience of being corrected.

A couple of examples showing the application of the word *rebuke* should help us to understand its meaning. Jesus taught, "... if thy brother shall trespass [may sin] against thee, go and tell him his fault [rebuke him] between thee and him alone: if he shall hear [may hear] thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Matthew 18:15).<sup>314</sup> This is simply pointing out the sin of another with the hope of their repentance; they might well learn from the situation, but that is not central to the rebuke. The thrust of a rebuke is to point out an error, fault, or sin, with the hope that the conscience of that person will be motivated in order to deal with the problem in a positive way.

When the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman whom they had caught in the very act of adultery, their question to Him was: "... Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" (John 8:5). Clearly, these religious leaders had an agenda and were looking for a reason to condemn the Lord; yet they should have realized that they had a problem (after all, they were supposed to be experts in the Law of Moses). The command that they referred to was this: "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, *both* the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel" (Deuteronomy 22:22). Since this woman was suddenly caught (*taken* – v. 3) in the very act of adultery, where was the man? These religious legalists had inadvertently fallen back to their own traditions where the sin of the man involved in adultery was basically ignored.<sup>315</sup> However, Jesus provides them with an opportunity to stone this woman by extending this judgment to the man among them who is without sin. They, being rebuked (*convicted*) by their consciences (v.9), left the scene one-by-one, beginning with the oldest – the one who could look back the longest on a life with many sins. The conscience of each of these men pointed out their own failure before the Law of Moses, and, thus rebuked, they left the scene. Did they learn from this incident? Clearly not, for the scribes and Pharisees continued to seek occasion to condemn the Lord and

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<sup>313</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/865-adultery>

have Him put to death. Nevertheless, they were *rebuked* within their own minds, even though the Lord did not *chasten* them, since there was no instruction.

For *chasten*, let's look into an extended passage in Hebrews. Prior to this passage, we are called to patiently run the course that has been laid out for us, with our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. "For consider him that endured such contradiction [hostility] of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood [shed by violence], striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children [those who are in training, a pupil or follower], My son, despise [make light of; this is quoted from Proverbs 3:11-12, where the Hebrew word means to reject or refuse] not thou the chastening [discipline] of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked [the Hebrew means corrected] of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth [rebukes (in Hebrew)], and scourgeth [chastises] every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with [acts toward] you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without [apart from] chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected [were chastisers] *us*, and we gave *them* reverence [respect]: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure [at their own discretion]; but he [God] for *our* profit [advantage], that *we* might be [to be (no doubt suggested)] partakers of his holiness. 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 [trained] thereby. Wherefore lift up [strengthen] the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way [in order that the lame may not be turned aside; dislocated]; but let it rather [may] be healed" (Hebrews 12:3-13).<sup>316</sup> This deals with the subject of chastisement quite thoroughly. The core of this passage is that, if we consider ourselves to be truly born of God, then we must be prepared to endure the training that the Lord has for us. Refusing to accept the discipline that God, as our loving heavenly Father, has for us will render us to be illegitimate children, and absolutely *not sons*. In essence then, our rejection of God's discipline means that we have also rejected God from being a Father unto us; in other words, if I refuse to accept the chastening of the Lord, then I have rejected God and stand in jeopardy of becoming apostate (no longer His child). We are called upon to endure (to remain faithfully steadfast) the discipline that will come from the Lord, and, as we do so, we can be assured that it will bring forth His righteousness through us. This is the uncomfortable aspect (discipline) of our faithful walk with the Lord; the other part, however, is no less challenging, for it focuses on the righteousness that will be lived out through us. These are the two sides of our faithful walk with the Lord. "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk ... after the Spirit ... [so] That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us ..." (Romans 8:1,4). Two promises of God are sure: 1) "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12); 2) "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works [righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24)], which God hath before ordained that we should [may] walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).<sup>317</sup> For the world, there are two things that they view with certainty: death and taxes; for the faithful child of God, there are two things that

<sup>316</sup> Strong's Online; Gingrich Lexicon; BDB.

<sup>317</sup> Strong's Online.

are even more sure: suffering for the Lord, and having His righteousness expressed through our lives. Chastening is what the Lord uses to strengthen us against all that we will face; if we refuse to accept His chastening, then we will wither and fail. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away [is cut off]: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it [make clean, prune], that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2).<sup>318</sup> The purging (or chastening) is used to increase our expression of the fruit of the Spirit of God: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22-23).

Jesus explains to the elder of the assembly at Laodicea that those to whom He desires to hold a tender love, He points out their failures and disciplines them. Jesus said, “I will build my church [*ekklesia*]” (Matthew 16:18); this is a declaration of divine intent! “... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify [to make holy] and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot [stain, fault], or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Throughout Christ’s building process, He never loses sight of the holy and faultless assembly that will be His when He is finished. This is accomplished by the *washing of water by the word*, and we might like to think of a gently flowing stream. However, we all know that some stains will only come out with vigorous scrubbing and water under pressure; so the chastening of the Lord is used to instill His holiness into our faulty beings so that we might reflect His righteousness. We do not mind contemplating being holy some day in glory; it’s growing in His holiness now that might cause us to pause. However, our present growth in the holiness of God is an absolute essential if we would call ourselves His (Ephesians 2:10, 4:24; John 15:2,6; 2 Corinthians 6:17). We must be careful to accept and learn from the Lord’s chastening; it is only through His careful training that we will learn to endure faithfully, and it is only through our faithful endurance that we will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

After stating that He is about to spew him out of His mouth, Jesus pointed out this elder’s failures (*rebuke*), and counselled him on what he needs to do (*chasten*), thereby affirming that He desires to have a tender love for this overseer. There is still a small window of opportunity for this elder to rectify what is almost lost, not unlike the elder in Sardis (3:1); yet these two are very different in this one thing: the elder at Sardis has some spiritual life remaining, while the elder of Laodicea has nothing. Jesus now turns to this elder, and commands him: “Be thou zealous.”<sup>319</sup> He has already declared him as not being zealous (*hot*, which metaphorically speaks of passion or zeal), but now, because He has just revealed His love for him through His correction, He commands him to become zealous, which demands the expenditure of energy. In other words, if this elder is going to obey the Lord in this matter, he will need to forsake his luxurious living, bear his cross, and follow the Lord (Matthew 16:24). Jesus gives him two commands: be *zealous*, and *repent*!” The first (*zealous*) is a command to passionately pursue the counsel that has been given. *Repent* literally means to understand after,<sup>320</sup> and, as a result of that new understanding, to change one’s mind; the second command will require the elder to forsake his lifestyle to this point in time, and to follow the Lord. Repentance will only come if he is prepared to accept the Lord’s evaluation

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<sup>318</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>319</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>320</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



of his state: he is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. Jesus said very clearly, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). The *righteous* (like this elder) feel no need of repentance; after all, they live uprightly, honestly, and generously – of what would they repent? The self-righteous are those who proudly proclaim, “We see!” (John 9:39-41). They are confident that they exhibit a righteousness of which the Lord will approve, even while they refuse to accept that only Christ’s righteousness is able to cover their inherited sin. Their carefully stitched fig-leaf coverings will not hide their sin from the gaze of a holy God, nor will their filthy rags provide them with one glimmer of righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).

The significance of repentance is that it is based on an acceptance of the reality that our present situation is not going to produce results that God will find acceptable. This elder, in his lukewarm state of religious piety, liturgy, and luxury, would have to recognize his hopeless sinfulness before he could repent. The difficulty that he faced was this: while basking in his wealth and prestige, would he be willing to accept the fact that he was just a common sinner before the Lord? Recall the young man who came to Jesus wanting to know what it was that he lacked in his desire for eternal life; even though he had kept the Mosaic Laws with integrity, he still felt that something was missing. Jesus told him that all he had to do was to sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Him (Matthew 19:21); on hearing this, he walked away. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man [*plousios* (*ploo’-see-os*), wealthy] shall hardly [with difficulty] enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier [comparatively easy] for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man [*plousios*] to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23-24).<sup>321</sup> When we hear these words, we, like Jesus’ disciples, would exclaim, “Who then can be saved?” (Matthew 19:25b). The phrase *rich man*, appears in the Greek here simply as an adjective (*plousios*), which means *wealthy*; this places an emphasis upon the role of wealth in the life of this person. Matthew, the former tax collector, describes Joseph of Arimathea as being rich (*plousios*), but the adjective in this case, is combined with *anthropos* (a person), and so he describes him as being a person who is both wealthy and a disciple of the Lord (Matthew 27:57).<sup>322</sup> Clearly, Joseph’s affluence was not predominant in his life, unlike the *rich man* whom Jesus said would have greater difficulty getting into heaven than a camel would have going through the hole of a needle. In other words, as long as someone is bound by their worldly possessions (wealth, power, and prestige are all included), they will not enter heaven. The difficulty that the wealthy face is their need to forsake their possessions, power and prestige as they bow before the Lord in humility, and exclaim, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). The rich young man recognized that Jesus had the words of life, for he left sorrowful, yet he lacked the faith to commit his life to the Lord. The ground at the foot of the cross is level; the powerful do not hold an advantage over the poor when coming in repentance before the Lord – actually, Jesus says that it will be more difficult for them. Jesus calls upon this overseer to release his grip on his cushy life in this world and discover what He has for him that will lead to the glories of heaven.

The eternal perspective includes being faced with our faults and the errors that we all make, and it includes instruction and training so that we will grow in our walk with the Lord. We like to

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<sup>321</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>322</sup> Strong’s Online.

consider ourselves to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, but seem to forget that *disciple* (pupil, follower) and *discipline* (teaching, instruction) bear a common root; we will not be a disciple of the Lord unless we are prepared to accept the cross (discipline) that He calls us to bear as we follow Him (Mark 10:21).



**20. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.**

Again, Jesus is addressing a broader audience than just the elder. However, the word translated as *behold*, which is a word used to draw attention to what follows, is always in the second-person, singular format in the Greek. This could indicate that this command (it is in the imperative mood) to pay careful attention is directed, first of all, to this complacent and careless elder, and then to us as well. The command is this: “you, the elder of the assembly in Laodicea (or, you, the reader), look!” Jesus calls this overseer (and you and me, as readers) to pay particular attention to what He is about to say; it is an individual call to an open invitation!

Jesus says, *I have stood at the door and I am knocking*.<sup>323</sup> *Stand* is in the perfect tense, which means that it happened once in the past and that it will never be repeated.<sup>324</sup> Based upon what we have read about this elder, it can only mean that Jesus is standing outside of the life of this self-indulgent man, and that He is knocking. Jesus will not break the door down to have fellowship with anyone, and the latch is on our side. To this elder, Jesus is saying that He has presented him with a clear picture of his spiritual condition, and He has assured him that He will chasten those for whom He desires to have a tender affection; now it is up to this man to determine what the future will hold – Jesus is knocking, but He will not force His way in. To His disciples Jesus said, “If a man [someone] love [*agape* – present tense] me, he will keep [attend carefully to – future tense (FT)] my words: and my Father will love [FT] him, and we will come [FT] unto him, and make [FT] our abode with him” (John 14:23).<sup>325</sup> The abiding presence of the Lord will be with those who say, “I am loving the Lord, and from now on I will do what He has said.” To this lukewarm, religious elder, Jesus presents Himself as patiently knocking, and awaiting his zealous and repentant response.

With this final call to this rich and religious elder, Jesus now turns to a broader audience, carrying forward the metaphor that He has just used. *If anyone may hear my sound*. The word translated as *voice* does not exclusively refer to the human voice, but more generally to any sound that is produced “to convey significance” or meaning.<sup>326</sup> Within the context of this verse, it refers to the sound of knocking that Jesus is making; He is standing at the door and He is knocking, not calling out. However, rest assured that there is no doubt in the mind of the owner of that door as to Who is doing the knocking.

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<sup>323</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>324</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

If we accept the fact that there are only two forces at work in this world (the devil and the Lord), then we will recognize why it is that the Lord is standing at the door, knocking, and seeking entrance. When Adam sinned, he chose to align himself with Satan; since then, everyone is born in sin, and the devil (*the prince of the power of the air*) is working in us (Ephesians 2:2). He doesn't have to knock to gain access to our hearts, we are already his; unless we, by faith, accept God's Provision for our salvation, along with the changes that that must bring, we will remain under Satan's control. "Be sober [clear-headed], be vigilant [alert]; because your adversary [continually hostile] the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour [completely overpower]: Whom resist [to be unyielding] stedfast [strong] in the faith ..." (1 Peter 5:8-9a).<sup>327</sup> Notice the struggle that it will be to keep the devil out of our lives; we must be immovable in our faith in the Lord. It is necessary that we expend energy to keep the devil at bay, for he will be continually trying to regain control of what was once his territory. To Timothy, Paul said, "Study [make every effort] to shew thyself approved unto God ..." (2 Timothy 2:15).<sup>328</sup> These might seem to be two different areas where we need to expend our energies (against the devil, and in remaining approved by God), but the reality is that it is only one. Let me explain. As we direct our every effort to remain accepted before God (this is NOT salvation; this is the requirement that we work out our salvation [Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12]), that same working will result in our standing firmly against the onslaught of the devil. What we must recognize is that our focus must be on the Lord (Hebrews 12:2), for it is as we are strengthened in our relationship with Him that we will also be strengthened in our resistance of the devil's ploys. Our singular focus must be on the Lord, not on doing battle with the devil; as we grow in the Lord, we will be strengthened in our faith in Him, and, through that strengthened faith, we will resist the devil more effectively. Do not be taken in by those who preach of the need to be engaged in spiritual warfare with the devil; unless our eyes are fixed on the Lord, we will be destined to failure.

Consider Paul's words to the Ephesians that give us insight into this thought. He tells us that Jesus gifted individuals within His *ekklesia* "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in [attain to] the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge] of the Son of God, unto a perfect [mature] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight [trickery] of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive [in craftiness unto the cunning of deception]; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted [held together] by that which every joint [ligament] supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every [individual] part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:12-16).<sup>329</sup> In this passage, we catch just a glimpse of the amazing working of Christ as the Head of the Body, His *ekklesia* – all those who are in Him by faith and walking according to the plan that God has for His own (Ephesians 2:8-10). We (those who are in Christ) have been placed within His Body for the purpose of encouraging growth in those around us who are also in Christ; this growth will increase our oneness in the true faith of Christ, it will expand our understanding of

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<sup>327</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>328</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>329</sup> Strong's Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

Who Jesus truly is, and it will bring us to a place of maturity in Christ (something that will be completed in glory when we will be like Him [1 John 3:2]). This growth, however, will not come to pass without effort on our part; we must make every effort to be found genuine before God (2 Timothy 2:15). We will not glide into spiritual maturity! The good works that God has prepared for those who are in Christ will instill spiritual growth in us, first of all, and then in others as well – these are the works of sanctification (if you want a theological term) with which we are to be occupied. We are to have an unwavering focus on the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2) and His Word (Psalm 119:105), and we are to walk in obedience to the commands of God (John 14:23). As we grow in Christ (strengthening our connections [*ligaments*] with Him), we will be steadied as we face the winds of false doctrine that will blow our way. Jesus said that, if they are able, the false prophets will lead even those who are in Christ into error and away from the Lord (Matthew 24:24), for they are doing the bidding of their father, the devil; focusing on Christ, His Word, and our obedience to Him will strengthen our walk with the Lord, and provide us with a basis for rejecting the bleating of the wolves (Matthew 7:15) – those false prophets who will come under the guise of proclaiming God’s truth.



**A deceived wolf looks in the mirror and sees a sheep!**

An obedient walk with the Lord, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is so critically important for the child of God. Rest assured that there are many wolves who are convinced that they are sheep; the deceived will often not recognize that they have been deceived – the wolf looks in the mirror and sees a sheep! After all, if you knew that you were being deceived, wouldn’t you do something about it? So why don’t they? They have broken the First Commandment by placing something, or someone, ahead of God’s Word. A Calvinistic acquaintance of ours was so totally enamored with the writings of the Puritan fathers that he couldn’t interpret Scripture without first consulting his idols. Another friend of ours, who has become a victim of Reformed theology, went into it because of

John MacArthur – he attended his seminary and drank deeply of his teachings. “But evil men and seducers [imposters, deceivers] shall wax worse and worse, deceiving [leading astray], and being deceived [being led astray]” (2 Timothy 3:13).<sup>330</sup> We are warned that if we desire to be received of the Lord, then we must not cling to (*touch*) that which is unclean (2 Corinthians 6:17). Much of what is about us today, speaking specifically of what is so often deemed to be Christian, is *unclean*. Anyone who participates in ecumenism is unclean (we have noted earlier that ecumenism is spiritual fornication); therefore, we must not put ourselves into a situation where we are sitting under the instruction of someone who is ecumenical (whether overtly so, or simply tolerant of ecumenism, they are ecumenical and *unclean*). In our community, we must be alert to the fact that virtually all of the churches in the area participate in the local ministerial association (which brings together Evangelical, Catholic, Charismatic, Anglican, and United Church people). Consequently, we cannot attend the services of any of these groups, or any of the joint services that they might

<sup>330</sup> Friberg Lexicon.



hold, but, even more particularly, we must avoid sitting under the teaching of anyone from any one of these groups. We might well shun sitting under the teaching of an Anglican or Catholic, but, if we do not practice the same avoidance with the Evangelicals, then we are no less guilty of joining with the *unclean*.

We must exercise the same spiritual care when it comes to “Christian” organizations. Locally we have Prairie Bible Institute, which has violated the Scriptures in so many ways: they have joined themselves with secular groups (2 Corinthians 6:14), they are ecumenical (they deny the Lord Whom they claim to love by being a part of the local ministerial and embracing those who are spiritually corrupt), and they accommodate and promote many modern philosophies when we are commanded to avoid them (Colossians 2:8). In our town, we also have the provincial office of One Hope Canada (formerly the Canadian Sunday School Mission); along with their new name, they have also stripped from their website the revealing statement that they “respect and seek to work with local churches,” which sounds a lot like ecumenism.<sup>331</sup> Even though it has been removed from the One Hope website, that does not mean that they have corrected their strategy – nothing has changed, they have only changed their name. A former Alberta director being free to lead a funeral service alongside of a Catholic priest is indication of the deep-seated ecumenical bias of One Hope Canada. Why is it important to have no part with these groups, or anyone from within them? By sitting under their teaching, no matter how innocuous it might seem to be, we are potentially exposing ourselves to teaching that is not in accordance with God’s Word. Will everything that they teach be wrong? Of course not, but that simply heightens the danger; their ecumenical bias will infiltrate whatever they teach, and, by sitting under their instruction, we are opening ourselves to spiritual dangers (not to mention being disobedient to the Lord!). We might be concerned about possibly damaging our testimony by doing something about which Scripture makes no specific demands, when our greater concern must be about expressing our approval of an ecumenical man by sitting under his instruction! This latter scenario is specifically forbidden by the Word of God, and it is very clear that, in order to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ (Who must be our first allegiance in all things) we must have no part with those who are ecumenical. As we live in obedience in this matter, it does two very important things: 1) it speaks of a heart of obedience to the Lord, His Word, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and 2) it prevents us from ingesting teachings that God does not want us to have in our minds. The same approach must be taken regarding the literature and the radio or TV programs from such individuals or groups. Jesus is building a **holy** *ekklesia* (Ephesians 5:27), and therefore, as His children, we must desire to live according to His holiness and righteousness, wearing the garment of salvation and righteousness that can only come from Him (Isaiah 61:10; Ephesians 4:24).

As Jesus begins to address His comments to more than just the elder of Laodicea, it is notable that He speaks to *any man*. This is an inclusive term; if *any one* may hear the sound of His knocking and open the door, then fellowship will begin. One of the pillars of Reformed theology, which has taken root in the minds of many Evangelicals, is that Jesus did not die for all men, but only for those whom God has predetermined to be saved (i.e., those who have been chosen by God). Nevertheless, God’s invitation to salvation has always been open to everyone, but not everyone will respond positively to His calling (or, in this case, His knocking). God “will have [is desiring] all men [everyone] to be saved [God’s work – in the passive voice], and to come unto the

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<sup>331</sup> Although this statement has been removed from the One Hope Canada website, it is presently still visible on the Miramichi Valley Bible Camp website (a One Hope ministry), just as it was on the old CSSM website; <http://miramichivalleybiblecamp.com/about-us/>.

knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge] of the truth [our work – in the active voice]” (1 Timothy 2:4);<sup>332</sup> God’s longing for everyone to be delivered from sin was ultimately expressed in Jesus Christ, Who “gave himself a ransom [the means of deliverance] for all [everyone]” (1 Timothy 2:6).<sup>333</sup> God’s provision for salvation is adequate for everyone who has ever been in the world, is now in the world, and who will yet come into the world. Hell is not being populated because God’s plan of salvation was inadequate; through Adam, mankind came under the control of the devil, and God’s pathway to life eternal is decidedly narrow and is not easily found while in the hustle and bustle of the broad road, which most people find to be more in keeping with their sinful nature (Matthew 7:13-14). It was the righteousness of Noah, in his generation, that provided salvation for eight people out of the millions who would have filled the earth at that time (Genesis 7:1); Noah preached the righteousness of God to the ungodly of his day (2 Peter 2:5), yet, evidently, with no response. However, we are assured that “at this present time also there is a remnant” (Romans 11:5); when Jesus returns, He will find true faith, but it will be present in the hearts of a very small *remnant*. God’s desire is that you, individually, yet numbered among the *any one*, would walk faithfully with Him throughout this life; Jesus said, “He that shall endure [remain faithful through trials; active voice – we must endure] unto the end, the same [this is the one who] shall be saved [by God (passive voice)]” (Matthew 24:13).<sup>334</sup>

Jesus’ promise of fellowship (which He is about to make) is extended to anyone who may hear Him and *open the door*. Both *hear* and *open* are in the active voice and subjunctive mood; this means that these actions **may be taken by anyone**! Reformed thinkers do not believe this; they believe that everyone has been completely impacted by sin: “... his thinking, his emotions, and his will. Not necessarily that he is *intensely* sinful, but that sin has *extended* to his entire being” (emphasis in the original).<sup>335</sup> We might well agree with them to this point; however, by this reasoning, they cling to total depravity as being their foundational doctrine, and, within their thinking, it would more accurately be called *total inability*.<sup>336</sup> I believe that the Scriptures teach the total depravity of man – namely, that he is totally incapable of restoring his relationship with his Creator on his own; there is nothing that man can do that will bring him salvation! Within Reformed theology, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is doing something; therefore, what they really believe is that unless God chooses who will be saved, no one will be saved. When the Philippian jailor fell down before Paul and Silas and asked them what he could do to be saved, their response was not that there was nothing that he could do because God will choose those whom He will save; NO, they proclaimed: “Believe [active voice – he must do the believing; imperative mood – it is a command!] on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). This is not a works-salvation, but simply being persuaded that God has done what was necessary to provide us with salvation; believing (being persuaded) is not working, but merely an act of the will – even though we are sinners, we still bear the image of God, which includes a will (James 3:9). The words that we find in our text also contradict this Reformed error: Jesus says that whoever (*anyone*) may *open* the door in response to His knocking. This is not *total*

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<sup>332</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>333</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>334</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>335</sup> <http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/>

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

*inability*; this indicates that if we are willing, then we are able to respond to the Lord's desire to enter and bring us His salvation.

When Jesus proclaimed the parable of the Seed and the soils, He provided us with a glimpse into this reality. "A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. ... Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe [be persuaded of the truth – active voice – **they**, through their own wills, are persuaded] and [may] be saved [passive voice – God does the saving]" (Luke 8:5,11-12).<sup>337</sup> The devil snatches the Word away lest they should be persuaded of (believe) the truth of what they hear, and be saved. Clearly, the believing is not done by God! "But as many as [whoever] received [active voice] him, to them gave he power [right or ability – includes choice] to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe [present tense, active voice] on his name ..." (John 1:12).<sup>338</sup> *Whoever*, in this case, refers to the ones who *receive*, or accept, the Lord, and whom He then enables to become the *sons of God* – namely, those who **are believing** on His name. In response to those who asked what they could do to work the works of God, Jesus said, "This is the work [activity] of God, that ye [may] believe [active voice] on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29). The activity of God is providing everyone (*anyone*) with an opportunity to exercise their will to *believe* on Jesus Christ based on what they have heard (Romans 10:14); God does not *believe* for them, nor does He force them to *believe* (the subjunctive mood indicates that they *may* believe, but also allows that they might not). The enemy of our souls (the devil) will do his best to ensure that the truth of God is removed from our minds as quickly as possible, or, failing that, he will mix the truth of God with error so that it is no longer the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16) – this is the essence of ecumenism. Believing that Jesus Christ is the narrow way of salvation is something that we are called upon to do; that is not a work on our part, it is simply opening *the door* at the sound of His knocking. We are persuaded that Jesus is the only way of salvation, and, through that persuasion, God saves us by His grace; however, we must then faithfully retain that persuasion lest we become faithless, and be cut off from the Savior of our souls (Hebrews 3:12). "He that saith, I know him [have known God], and keepeth not [is not obedient to] his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth [may be obedient to] his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (1 John 2:4-5). We will know that we are in Jesus Christ as we live in obedience to His Word.

Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth [prunes] it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean [pure] through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide [a command] in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He [important switch to singular] that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without [apart from] me ye can do nothing. If a man [may] abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men [they – the angels (Matthew 13:41)] gather them, and cast them into the fire [hell – Matthew 13:42], and they are burned [it (the withered branch) is burning]"

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<sup>337</sup> Strong's Online.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

(John 15:1-6).<sup>339</sup> There are many things here of which we must take note. We will not remain in Christ if we do not produce the fruit of abiding in Him (the fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23). If we are producing the fruit of the Spirit, then we will be pruned to bring forth more fruit; pruning will involve the chastening of the Lord (instructive correction) – we are not promised a life of ease. Jesus commands us to abide in Him; if we do not continue to abide in Him, then we will be cast aside and ultimately find our place in the fires of hell. “And because iniquity [wickedness] shall abound [increase], the love [*agape* – a willful love] of many shall wax cold [wane]. But he that shall endure [remain faithful to the Lord in the midst of trials] unto the end, the same [this one!] shall be saved” (Matthew 24:12-13).<sup>340</sup> We must not only be persuaded and open the door to the Savior, but we must then retain a continual belief in the Lord (an ecumenical Evangelical no longer holds a belief in the Lord as the ONLY Savior, no matter what they may say); it is not good enough to believe for a while – the gates of heaven will not swing open for a belief that is no longer being held. The Scriptures teach of the reality of apostasy, and relinquishing our grip on our persuasion of Who the Lord is will drop us into apostasy.

We have just reviewed the words of Jesus in the early part of John 15, where He speaks of the one who is abiding in Him and He in that individual (v. 5). To the one who opens the door to Jesus, His promise is that He will come in to him and they will share a main meal together. *Sup* is translated from the verb form of a Greek word for *supper*; for the Jews this was the main meal, which was taken at the end of the day (early evening). It is the most relaxed meal of the day as the toils of the day are over; if there would be a time for quiet fellowship with food, then it would be at this evening meal. To the one who opens to Him, Jesus promises personal fellowship. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another [with each other: i.e., God and the one who is walking in the light], and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth [is cleansing] us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7).<sup>341</sup> While we are having fellowship with the Lord (walking in the light), we are being cleansed from all sin. How do we remain in the light of God and His fellowship? “And he that keepeth [is attending carefully to] his [God’s] commandments dwelleth [abides] in him [God], and he [God] in him” (1 John 3:24a).<sup>342</sup> Fellowship with the Lord begins when we open the door to Him; it remains through a life of obedience to His commands.



**21. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.**

Once again, Jesus directs a comment to the one who is living victoriously in Him – the one who is living in faithfulness to His commands. To His disciples, Jesus said that it was the one who is enduring (remaining faithful) in the face of trials who will be saved (Matthew 24:13). Is it

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<sup>339</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>342</sup> Strong’s Online.



important for us to walk in obedience to the requirements of the Lord? It is critically important! However, there are two things that will influence how we view our walk according to the holy calling that we have received of Him (2 Timothy 1:9). The first is that if we understand what God requires of us in a particular matter, then we are without excuse – we must be obedient. Anything less than compliance would express our disdain for the Lord and His Word. Jesus said, “If ye love [are loving] me, keep [attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15).<sup>343</sup> The second is that there is cleansing with God for the sins of ignorance. We might think, ah-ha! I will remain as ignorant as I can about what God wants of me, and then there will be cleansing for me – my disobedience will be because I don’t know what He wants of me.

Let’s consider this a moment, since, if it is a legitimate position to take, it would find a tremendous fit among Evangelicals today. The underlying thought is that if I do not make the effort to understand what God desires of me, then I am freed from the requirement of doing what He really wants of me (because I won’t know); if I don’t know, then my disobedience will be done in ignorance and I qualify for cleansing. To begin with, this means that my love for the Lord, Who purchased my salvation with His own blood, is so small that I really do not want to do what He commands; I want to be saved from the fires of hell, but I do not want it to cost me anything. This reasoning (if it can be called that) is flawed on so many fronts, and yet it appears to be the Evangelical standard. First of all, Jesus was not shy about telling us what the cost of discipleship really is; unless we are prepared to place Him ahead of everything else that will come into our lives, then we are not being His followers; if we are not His followers, then how could we ever expect to arrive in heaven (His dwelling place) some day? “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* [anyone] will [is desiring to] come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross [a symbol of dedication to, and suffering for, the Lord], and follow [obey] me” (Matthew 16:24).<sup>344</sup> Unless we are prepared to pay the price for following the Lord Jesus Christ, then He is not our Lord. There was a time in my life, as I began to become better educated in Evangelical thinking, when salvation appeared to be two-tiered: you could have Jesus as your Savior, and, if you wanted to be more committed and appear to be more spiritual, then you could ascend to the next level and have Him as your Lord as well. The understanding was that, in both cases, your eternal destiny was the same – all that was impacted were some rewards. You find nothing in Scripture that would even remotely support this premise. Peter declared suffering to be a normal part of the Christian life (1 Peter 4:12-14), and Paul explained to the Thessalonians that facing trials was something for which they needed to prepare: “For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should [are about to] suffer tribulation [be afflicted]; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thessalonians 3:4). In essence, there is no “fire insurance” salvation (no option for Jesus to be our Savior only), therefore, to remain in ignorance about what God desires of me does not work in my favor; it will actually exclude me from being *in Christ*, and rob me of heaven because it demonstrates my lack of love for the Lord (John 14:15; Revelation 2:4-5). Unless I am totally committed to the Lord (and retain that commitment to the end – Hebrews 3:14), I will not find myself in heaven with Him, because my religion, which asked nothing of me, will give me nothing in return.

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<sup>343</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>344</sup> Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

The silver lining in all of this is that if I am completely committed to following the Lord and have placed Him as my highest priority in life, then two things will happen: 1) I will be walking faithfully with Him even when I do not understand all things properly or completely, and 2) the Spirit of God, Who will be effectively at work in me, will expand my understanding of His truth so that I will be growing in my walk with Him (John 16:13; 2 Peter 3:18). If I am willing to learn more of the truth of God's Word, and also willing to act upon what I am learning, then I will be living without condemnation before God, for then will I be walking according to the leading of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1). I may still be ignorant of many spiritual things, but my walk will be in accordance with the things that I do understand, and my love for His truth will grow and keep me moving forward in the Lord.

However, if I will not do what I know to be the Lord's will in a matter (whether we call this compromise or something that we seek to justify through pragmatic rationalism), then I can also expect two things: 1) I have entered into the area of sin for which there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 10:26), and 2) the work of the Spirit of God in my life has stopped (Ephesians 4:30). What could be more offensive to the Spirit of God than for me to exercise my will and not do that in which He has given me understanding? If I do not recognize my sin of disobedience for what it is, then I can expect the Spirit of God to work to shine His light on my darkness. However, the moment that I recognize my actions (or inactions) as sin, I must repent; like the elder of the assembly in Ephesus, I must repent or I will be removed from my place in Christ and find that I am, once again, under the burden of God's condemnation, except now without any hope of recovery. "For *it is impossible*<sup>345</sup> for those who were once enlightened [imbued or filled with saving knowledge; passive voice – this is the saving act of God], and have tasted [come to know or experience] of the heavenly gift [the first heavenly Gift is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 6:32); the second is the Holy Spirit (John 15:26)], and were made partakers [passive voice; it is God Who imparts the Spirit into the hearts of those who are believing] of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted [come to know or experience] the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come [the coming age], If they shall fall away [and having committed apostasy; no *if* in the Greek], to renew [restore] them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify [are crucifying again] to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame [holding *Him* up to contempt]" (Hebrews 6:4-6).<sup>346</sup> If we, who are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, **choose** to disobey the Lord's commands, then we show contempt for the Lord and His Word, and demonstrate a greater commitment to our own desires – we then make our convenience, or happiness, or family, or security into a god that is more worthy than Jehovah (Exodus 20:3).

Then there are those who understand many things about the life of faith and what the Lord has done; they like to appear as being good Christians, but they remain mired in spiritual immaturity and have become adept at deflecting the commands of the Lord onto others. They are spiritually stagnant! When they hear the truth of God's Word, they apply it to someone whom they know;

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<sup>345</sup> *Adunatos* (impossible), when applied to people, means weak, difficult or impotent, but when speaking of things, it literally means impossible, not able. Young's Concordance applies the meaning without discrimination, and, therefore, leaves the impression that it is merely difficult for the one who falls away to be renewed to repentance; the reality is that it is impossible (Analytical Concordance of the Holy Bible, by Robert Young; Vine's "impossible"; Gingrich Lexicon).

<sup>346</sup> Strong's Online, Friberg Lexicon, Gingrich Lexicon, Stephanus 1550 NT.

failing to make a personal application, they do not grow in their submission to the Spirit of God (for, in truth, they are not submitting to Him). They hide their lives as much as possible within their self-constructed cocoons, and challenging Biblical truths are quickly applied to someone else; the thus-saith-the-Lords of Scripture always seem to be aimed at others. Such spiritual stagnation is not new. “For when for the time [because of the time that has passed] ye ought to be [are obliged to be] teachers, ye have need that [some] one teach you again which *be* the first [basic] principles of the oracles [sayings] of God; and are [you have] become such as have need [having a need] of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth [who is partaking of] milk is unskilful [inexperienced] in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe” (Hebrews 5:12-13).<sup>347</sup> This speaks of someone who, as a part of the Body of Christ, owes it to the rest of the Body to be a teacher because of the time that they have been in Christ. However, they are still sipping on the milk of the Word and have insufficient understanding to handle the deeper truths of God’s Word. There has been a problem in how they have learned the basic elements of what God desires of those who trust in Him – they need to be taught all over again so that the necessity of spiritual maturing enters into their thinking.

As I reflect on my time within Evangelicalism, this is an apt description; I sat under many Evangelical teachers for most of thirty years, and, after all of that time, I still knew virtually nothing of what it meant to be a Christian! Whether some of them understood the deeper truths of God’s Word or not, I don’t know; perhaps I was blinded by the errant Evangelical theology that I had been taught. We cannot coast through our life in Christ, yet there was nothing in all of the teaching that I had received to demonstrate to me that this was the case! One of the fundamental errors of Evangelical theology is their conviction that if they have prayed a prayer for salvation, then they have secured a place in heaven – THAT leads to an attitude of simply coasting into heaven. Do not be deceived! Ephesians 2:10 was never properly explained to me. God’s desire for each one who places his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation through His shed blood, is for him to walk in His righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24) – that is what we have been created in Christ Jesus to do! “Therefore if any man *be in Christ*, *he is a new* creature [creation]: old things are passed away [a statement of fact]; behold, all things are become new [also a statement of fact, but in the perfect tense – it only happens once!]” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Paul calls the Corinthians *carnal* (fleshly) because they were so focused on who had taught them that it was causing divisions among them (1 Corinthians 3:1-3); their focus was on the teacher rather than on what they had been taught. Evangelicals have become adept at using *carnal* as a label for those who have either professed to be a Christian, and, according to their daily living, remain securely in the world, or for someone who is simply less “spiritual” than they consider themselves to be. Whatever the case, within their way of thinking it is not a matter for great concern; after all, the *carnal* Christian’s salvation and access to heaven has been eternally secured – no need to worry, all that they might lose are a few rewards. What such a person is saying is that they have God in their back pocket even while they live it up in the world. However, according to God’s Word, being *carnal* is a matter for great concern. “For to be carnally minded [the thinking of the flesh] is death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind [the thinking of the flesh] *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed

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<sup>347</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

can be [is it able to be]” (Romans 8:6-7).<sup>348</sup> Clearly, if our way of thinking and our aspirations in life are governed by the flesh, then we are in grave spiritual danger and need to repent immediately! The *carnal* person is headed for hell, for their mind is *death* and *enmity against God*. It is the Evangelical’s delusion of eternal security that causes him to remain passé about carnality; within God’s sight, carnality carries the eternal death sentence.

Take a moment to consider the rich, young ruler again. Here was a young man who had lived a most godly life before his peers (Matthew 19:20) yet he recognized that something was missing. He came to Jesus in quest of how he could ensure that he would have eternal life, and he came prepared to do something for it (Matthew 19:16). Jesus’ advice was simple and explicit – sell everything that you have, give to the poor, and “follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). He came to Jesus ready to *do* something; he departed from Jesus unwilling to *do* what Jesus required. Did he secure eternal life that day? Absolutely not! He was not willing to follow the Lord Jesus Christ; his wealth and possessions had a strangle hold on him and he could not bring himself to part with them. This man was *carnal* (he could not get beyond what was in this world) and he fell short of obtaining eternal life. In the parable of the soils, Jesus said that the riches of this world, if they are permitted to flourish, will choke the spiritual life out of even those who have begun to follow Him (Luke 8:14); we must be alert and guard our hearts against the lure of the visible – it is often easier to compromise our commitment to the invisible Lord of all, than to stand against the enticement of what is before us. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon [riches]” (Matthew 6:24b). The Ten Commandments (the Law of God) begins with: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3); if we cling to the wealth of this world, if we remain *carnal* in our thinking, we have then placed another god ahead of the Lord Whom we might well claim to love and serve. God is not peddling fire insurance policies as salvation; if we desire to enter the glories of heaven after this life, then we must be prepared to bear our cross and follow the Lord Jesus Christ now (Matthew 10:38)! Salvation only comes when we place our faith in the Lord; it only remains when we, in turn, endure in faithfulness to Him to the end of our days (Matthew 24:13).

There is no harbor for our souls in either burying our heads in the sands of ignorance, or bearing the label *carnal*. The only harbor that we have is in Christ; we come to Him by faith, and we remain in Him through faithfulness. If we live in a state of ignorance about what God desires of us, then we are not following the Lord Jesus Christ, and we stand in jeopardy of being counted as apostate (if we ever truly believed), or we are numbered among the deluded pagans who have inappropriately placed their faith in a theology or a preacher. If we do not have a hunger for the truth of God, then we would do well to question whether we are truly saved; if we profess to have such a hunger, then we must be prepared to change our behavior to line up with His Word. Those who will follow the Antichrist are said to be perishing “because they received [accepted] not the love of the truth, [so] that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10);<sup>349</sup> if we have been purchased by Christ through faith, then we **must** have a love for God’s truth! We are commanded to “grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge [understanding] of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18a).<sup>350</sup> If we are not growing in our understanding of what the Lord desires of us, then we

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<sup>348</sup> Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>349</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.



are living in disobedience to the Lord, we are grieving the Spirit of God, and we are becoming stagnant, which can only lead to falling away from Him. To the elder of the *ekklesia* in Ephesus, Jesus said that he had left his *first love*, and the antidote for this was **immediate** repentance (Revelation 2:4-5). To be counted as *him that overcometh*, I must be following the Lord faithfully – in loving obedience to His Word.

To this victorious one, Jesus promises that he will sit with Him in His throne, even as He was victorious and sat down with His Father.

The difficulty, as we consider passages such as this, is that we have such a limited understanding of what the heavenly realm, considered to be God's dwelling place, is really like. Being finite creatures, it is easy for us to lose sight of the fact that God is a spirit, and, as such, He is not confined, or limited, to a particular location. We attach the word *omnipresent*, but, as good as that sounds, we are still stretched to try to place that into a proper perspective. When we read of the *throne* of God, the visual image that undoubtedly pops into our minds is that of a fancy chair as used by earthly ruling monarchs. Yes, that is a *throne*, but, when it comes to the eternal God Who is a spirit, that is a woefully lacking image. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus dealt with the matter of making an oath: "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself [either to swear falsely, or to break one's oath], but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool ..." (Matthew 5:33-35). Within this context, we must understand *heaven* to mean our visible universe (for the *earth* is where He places His feet). We visualize a monarch's throne, where they sit above those over whom they rule, and it may include a footstool for their additional comfort. The picture here is that God is sitting upon the created universe (for He is much greater than this universe) and is using the earth as a footstool. The universe, as it was created by God, rests within the element of time; it had a beginning (Genesis 1:1), and we are told that it will also come to an end (2 Peter 3:10). However, God is without time – He is eternal; time is a little bit like a yard stick – it has a beginning, is progressive, and has an ending, but eternal God completely surrounds that finite measurement of time; He is operating within time, but He is not limited to time.

When the angel came to Mary to announce that she would be the mother of the Messiah, he said this concerning Jesus: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the **Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David** ..." (Luke 1:32). Will God give Jesus the physical throne upon which David sat to govern? Obviously not. What we must understand from this is that Jesus will receive sovereignty over the nation of Israel like His earthly forefather, David. *Throne*, in this case, refers to the object of rule rather than to the seat of the sovereign. Does Jesus' comment, which we are looking at, then draw the overcoming one into ruling with the Lord? As John began to write about the Lord Jesus Christ, he said that He has "made us kings [one possessing royal authority] and priests [one who serves God] unto God and his Father ..." (Revelation 1:6).<sup>351</sup> We are also told that as kings and priests, "we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10). Those who are redeemed by faith in the finished work of Christ, and are included in the first resurrection (which means that they have remained faithful to the Lord to the very end), will reign with Christ on earth during the millennium (Revelation 20:4).

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<sup>351</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

After the Lord had led Israel out of Egypt, He made this proclamation: “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom [realm] of priests, and an holy nation [separated people]” (Exodus 19:6a).<sup>352</sup> A priest is generally understood to be someone who acts as an intercessor between God (or god) and man, and has the ability to, and responsibility for, performing religious rites.<sup>353</sup> As Jehovah looked upon the children of Israel, His desire for them was that they would be a people of intercessors between the world, in general, and Him. His longing was for them to fill the role of priests, with Him as their High Priest – a people who were separated unto Himself. Looking at the history of Israel, we can see that this never happened; the priestly responsibilities were given to those of the tribe of Levi, and even their performance of the assigned priestly duties deteriorated quite rapidly (1 Samuel 2:12).

In Peter’s first epistle we find something similar, except this does not refer to the physical descendants of Israel but to the spiritual children who are in Christ: “But ye *are* a chosen [in Christ – Ephesians 1:4] generation [a family], a royal [kingly] priesthood, an holy [separated] nation [people], a peculiar [an acquired (we are bought)] people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God ...” (1 Peter 2:9-10a). We are a chosen people, not because of our forefather, but because of the faith that we have that the shed blood of Christ has purchased us from sin! Through a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have become the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7-9,13-14); not his physical descendants, but children of the same faith in God by which Abraham was declared righteous (Galatians 3:6). Therefore, when Jesus says that the overcoming one will sit with Him in His throne, we must understand this to mean that those who are abiding faithfully in Him will be granted responsibilities in the oversight of what He will rule, beginning with His millennial reign (Revelation 20:6). However far Christ’s kingdom will stretch, that’s how far the victorious ones will be assisting Him in His rule.

Our rule with Christ will follow the pattern of His victory that was accomplished on earth, and His subsequent rule will be with the Father in heaven, where He is now interceding (Romans 8:34) and preparing a place for us (John 14:2). Christ came to earth for one primary purpose, and that was to complete the salvation offering for the sins of mankind. When the angel announced to Joseph that Mary would bring a Child into the world conceived by the Holy Spirit, he said, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Of His ministry, Jesus declared, “Think not that I am come to destroy [do away with, annul] the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy [same Greek word], but to fulfil [fill up or complete]” (Matthew 5:17).<sup>354</sup> We must consider this very carefully. Jesus did not come to remove the Law, but to complete it. What Law did He complete? – certainly not the Law of God, which is a permanent, moral Law to which there is no end; rather, it was the Law of Moses, which was filled with that which foreshadowed the coming of the Promised One (Galatians 3:19; cp. Deuteronomy 18:18 and John 12:49-50). “[Christ] having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances [the rules and requirements of the

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<sup>352</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>353</sup> <https://carm.org/dictionary-priest>

<sup>354</sup> Strong’s Online.

Law of Moses<sup>355</sup>]; for to make in himself of twain [Jews and Gentiles] one new man, *so* making peace ...” (Ephesians 2:15); “... blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us ... nailing it to his cross ...” (Colossians 2:14). The Law of Moses, replete with statutes, ordinances, and sacrificial requirements, pointed the faithful observer to the day when the Promised One would come to put an end to the burden of continual sacrifices for atonement. Jesus came for the purpose of establishing salvation through fulfilling the OT practices that were prescribed through Moses. “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands [the holy place in the temple], *which are the figures of the true*; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place **every year** with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now **once** in the end of the world [completion of the ages] hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:24-26).<sup>356</sup> When Christ ascended to heaven (after completing His earthly ministry), several things were completed: 1) the final sacrifice for sins had been made, 2) the Law of Moses was fulfilled (*nailed* to the cross) and set aside, 3) Satan’s defeat was established (the Savior’s heel had been bruised, but a death-blow had been dealt to Satan [Genesis 3:15]), 4) Satan and his hosts were cast down to the earth (Revelation 12:12), and 5) paradise was emptied as Jesus took the spirits of the faithful, who were in paradise (Luke 16:20; 23:43), into glory to be with Him forever (Ephesians 4:8; 2 Corinthians 5:8).

What we see in Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promise to bring about the defeat of Satan and to provide salvation for all people. “[Christ] being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image [exact representation] of his person [God’s essence (Colossians 1:19)], and upholding all things by the word of his power [Colossians 1:17], when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ...” (Hebrews 1:3).<sup>357</sup> The culmination of Christ’s earthly ministry was His return to the glory of the heavens; He laid aside His glory to join His creation in order to pay the price for our sins. He is now, once again, in His rightful place in glory, sitting with the Father in sovereignty over all things. Not all things have been completed yet, but the end has been confirmed by His victorious presence in heaven. He, as God come in the flesh of man, overcame, and is now seated with His Father in glory. Jesus proclaims that the overcoming one (the one who is living in faithful obedience to His commands) will, in like manner, be seated with Him some day.



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

Whoever has understanding, give heed to what the Spirit of God is saying to everyone in the assemblies. We’ve seen each of these homilies directed specifically to the messenger, or overseer, of each assembly, and that provides us with the primary application; however, we must not miss the broader application that is also intended. Each of the seven notes to the elders included something for a more general audience who has been identified as the one who is overcoming. Jesus says that for the one who has understanding (*ear*), let that person listen carefully to the

<sup>355</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

message that the Spirit has for the attentive one within His *ekklesia*. The Spirit of God is sent into the life of the one who is believing for the express purpose of opening their eyes to the truth of God (John 16:13), so that they might no longer live unto themselves, but in accordance with the leading of the Spirit of Truth (Romans 8:1). However, the Spirit will not force us to accept the truth of God; we must willingly give heed to His leading in all things or we will grow cold (Matthew 24:12), and the Spirit will depart (Revelation 2:5). May we learn from the instruction that Jesus gave to these seven elders, so that we may be numbered among those who are *overcomers* – living faithfully, obediently, and victoriously in Christ!