

# **The Overcoming Christian Life**

# Introduction

Some Christians go to church, leave, and then go about their business of life never considering what their Christian life means in the light of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some believe that as long as they live free of popular sins, all is well. They say a prayer now and then, but is that what the Lord Jesus Christ wants of us? Is there a more splendid purpose for our Christian life that is being missed by some?

Some people seem to believe that if they're not a pastor or a responsible person in the church that there is no requirement for them. Others see themselves as having so many non-church activities that they feel exempt from accountability, but are they?

There is no doubt that most people today live very full lives outside the activities of church life. There is a need to understand where the line is drawn between what is our Christian life and what is our personal life. Some seem to believe that their Christian life is what they do in church, and as soon as the last amen is spoken, their Christian life is over until the next time they attend church.

I am sure that many, if not most Christians, understand that the Christian life is an on-going experience that never ends until we are called to the Lord's presence eternally. However, I am equally convinced that many Christians fail to consciously consider their walk with the Lord as being either acceptable or less than acceptable.

It was for this reason that the Lord addressed the seven churches of Asia in the Book of Revelation.

When many people consider their own walk with the Lord it is in the light of what they think God wants, or on the basis of what they have heard that God wants. No one can possibly know what God wants however, unless the Lord himself speaks to him.

Various passages of scripture in Revelations contain what I believe to be an overview of what God is looking for in our lives and churches. It is my conviction that the seven churches of Asia in the second and third chapters of Revelations were selected because they were representative of the most common conditions that the Lord was concerned about. Each church represented a unique condition that finds expression in both individual lives and church lives.

Some people see these different churches as being representative of seven church ages, and that they were prophetic in that way. I have no quarrel with that view. Equally, I realize that it is more than that, because, the principles apply, regardless of the time frame, when we see the same conditions existing; therefore, the reason for these churches and us receiving these messages apply to them and us equally.

Since each of these letters has as its theme, the overcoming life, any discussion of the overcoming life should include the content of these letters. The theme of each message was about what each church faced as a threat to the accomplishment of that goal. When we are lethargic, or unaware of the heart of God, we are not able to properly evaluate our condition before God. We therefore, need assistance in seeing how we measure up to divine requirements. It was for this reason that Jesus spoke to John with instructions to write these letters.

## The Text

### To the Church in Ephesus

2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

<sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

<sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

### **To the Church in Smyrna**

<sup>8</sup> “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

<sup>11</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

### **To the Church in Pergamum**

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

<sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

### **To the Church in Thyatira**

<sup>18</sup> “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come.

<sup>26</sup> To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations — ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ — just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

### **To the Church in Sardis**

3:1 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

<sup>4</sup> Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name

from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

## **To the Church in Philadelphia**

<sup>7</sup>“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

**T**hese are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars — I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

<sup>11</sup>I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

## **To the Church in Laodicea**

<sup>14</sup>“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

**T**hese are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

<sup>19</sup>Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

<sup>21</sup>To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

# **Chapter One**

## **To the Church in Ephesus**

### **Our Position, “In Christ”**

**I**f we were to go back in time to the day when Jesus gave the message in Revelations to John to write, and travel by boat north from the Mediterranean Sea through the Aegean Sea to the west shore at Ephesus.

Ephesus was an important city in the region being the provincial capital of what was known as the Supreme Metropolis of Asia.

Religiously it had a temple of the Greek Goddess Artemis or Diana as the Romans called her. There were thousands of priests and priestesses serving at the temple with temple prostitution as a part of their lifestyle.

The Lord Jesus is seen in the passage as one who walks among the lampstands. He is delivering messages to the Seven Churches of Asia. If we were to see ourselves as fellow travelers with the Lord, we would first observe what is happening here at Ephesus and then proceed onward with him until we finally arrive at Laodicea.

We begin our journey at Ephesus, the first church addressed in the passage. We remember that Paul sent the letter of Ephesians to them. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul repeatedly and in differing forms refers to our position of being “in Christ”.

As I begin reading in Ephesians chapter one verse three, I note that the theme appears quickly, as Paul tells us where our blessings are located as Christians. Our blessings are found in heavenly places in Christ. The giver of every spiritual blessing, we note, is the Father who chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world. There are differences of opinions as to how it came about that we are in Christ. The important point is that Christ is where we are to be so that we will be a part of what God is doing which is to make us holy and blameless in his sight.

Jesus gave us the means of entry in greatest simplicity when he said to believe in him and we will have eternal life. (See John 3:16-21) The point is very simple, “is my name written down in the Lamb’s Book of Life?” I have believed and do believe and, as a result, have been included in Christ. Hopefully, having said that, we can move on as one body in the unity of the spirit to let the Lord speak to us some vitally important truth.

Verse five teaches us that it is in love that he predestined us “in him” to be adopted as his sons; thus, the means is Christ Jesus which he has freely given us and is the One he loves. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul is seeking to establish the boundaries of this body of believers. First the boundary is “Christ”, and secondly, it is inclusive of the Jews and Gentiles alike.

Once more the theme teaches the boundary of being “in Christ”. We are in Christ by redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that is lavished on us, with wisdom and understanding. I love that word “lavished” that was selected by the translators to express this point, but it is with boundaries of wisdom and understanding! When we answer the call to come to Jesus so that we may inherit eternal life, the process has begun.

Putting it in an allegorical sense, I see the person called as standing with attention fixed upon the voice of the Spirit that called to him, and at once he sees a great wall before him, the wall of the City of God. The city in our thought is Jesus. The person standing there sees a very small gate, but looking about realizes that this is the way into the city!

There is no large gate for him to enter; he must pass through this gate. Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matt. 7:13)

In my mental picture there is an immediate problem that comes into view; the traveler has brought a lot of baggage with him. How can he pass through that gate with all this stuff? It’s only big enough for him if he takes all the excess baggage off and wiggles through! He must leave all the stuff of his former life on the outside of the gate. Never fear however, because, what is just inside is all the riches of heaven!

Isn’t forsaking all the selfism with its selfish pursuits and pleasures what repentance is all about? Why try to take the dirt and decay of this fallen world into an eternal abode?

One thing is certain, what is of the world is a foreign substance in the realm of the Spirit. The stuff of the world: the love of possessions, wrong relationships, fear, greed, lust, envy, bitterness, idolatry, covetousness, resentment, unforgiveness and unbelief are all irritants just as a grain of sand under an eyelid is. To take any of it into the city is to bring dirt into a very clean place. Most people do find a way to bring some of the stuff of the world in with them however. It is at this point that they are brought to the place of true cleansing, the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

### **Looking at the Tabernacle**

All this was symbolized in the tabernacle that Moses and the Israelites built in the wilderness. The tabernacle had three areas each with an entry point. Each entry point symbolized Jesus in a capacity that we must identify with in order to proceed on in our spiritual walk.

The first gate or door is where we begin our journey. It’s where we believe in him. Jesus himself is identified as the way (John 14:6), therefore; we must accept him by faith to proceed to the interior of the courtyard within.

Once in the courtyard there is room to roam about, but in order to proceed we must approach the brazen altar! The brazen altar was a fire pit so to speak, it had a grate over the fire and it was on this altar that the sacrifices were placed and burned. This is where things would get serious symbolically. This is where judgment must be satisfied, for, “the wages of sin is death.” This altar wasn’t intended to be

beautiful because on it a lamb, bullock or ram must die. These animals were given as substitute sacrifices, and therefore, represented the sins of the offerer.

As we come to the scene through the reading of the word and the drawing of the Spirit, we realize that if we were living in that time and making a sacrifice, it would represent us. It is at this point that we discover that it is a substitute sacrifice, but, because Jesus has already died on the cross, he is our substitute sacrifice; therefore, no further sacrifice is needed.

As we look back upon all that was done in type and shadow in this place, we discover it is now ours to experience! Once more we find that believing in him is the requirement! It is at this point that we learn an important spiritual lesson, we must enter into him, become one with him so that his death becomes our death, and his life is our life. As we proceed onward having become one with him, every step we take from this point onward must be in him, if he is to be pleased with us.

As we continue our walk of identification with Christ, he takes us to the laver, a specially constructed bowl of water. It is lined with mirrors so that when we look into it we can see our countenance. We can now see any residue of our former selves in the reflection in the water. The water speaks of the Word and now we know that he was the "Word made flesh." (John 1:14) We are now looking into that word, perhaps in written form, or by experiencing his presence with us, and thus learning what it is that he wants of us. As we contemplate the meaning of each word and experience we have in him, a work of cleansing is being carried out. It was to this laver that the priest would come to obtain water for washing, as they would carry out their duties of sacrificing.

As we dip into the living water, the word of God that the laver symbolized, we now are able to see clearly what it is that he wants of us. Jesus spoke to his disciples one day and said to them, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." As Jesus had been speaking to them, they were having a laver experience, the cleansing of the word.

As we proceed onward we come to another door or curtain, and we are invited to enter. It is a holy place and therefore, we could not enter before experiencing the altar and the laver. Even now we must bring some of the blood from the altar as an offering to God, symbolizing our continuing dependency upon the death Jesus died for us. Nothing is ever done in this holy place without dependency upon the shed blood of Jesus!

Once entering through the curtain that separated the Outer Court from the Holy Place a table of bread is waiting. The table was known as the table of shewbread and symbolizes Jesus as the bread of life. Feeding upon the word is a continuing process, and at times in our lives it is for cleansing, at other times it is for nourishment, and at other times it is to revel in the wonder of God's love.

Opposite the table is a candelabrum from which emanates light for the occupants to see by. This represents the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit as he enables us to begin to comprehend spiritual truths. The picture is of a believer coming to Jesus, the bread of life. He receives the word as he studies the scriptures and meditates upon their meanings, with the Holy Spirit providing the energy of light that enables him to understand and apply the truths.

We are now ready to proceed onward in him because everything here is symbolic of Jesus in one way or another. Everything, the curtain around the courtyard, the pillars, curtains, coverings, and even the colors, all speak of Jesus. We see ourselves in relationship to him and his continuing work in us.

As we stand here in the Holy Place having been to the table viewing the wonder of it all, our hearts are filled with worship as we see an altar before us where special incense is offered that represents our prayers! We are now qualified to "ask what we will" because our sins have been atoned for at the brazen altar. Our daily life has been cleansed by the washing of the word at the laver, and we have been nurtured in the principles of the word at the table, therefore, what we will now ask for in the light of all this, will be pleasing to the heart of God. By now all self-seeking and lustful pursuits, all greed and vengeance have been cleansed away. What we now ask for is what pertains to the Kingdom of God and the will of our King, Jesus.

Having made our petitions known to him, he invites us to enter beyond a previously forbidding curtain. This curtain represents the flesh of our Lord Jesus and was torn asunder when he died on the cross. (Mark 15:38, Heb. 10:20) While living among us in a human body, he was restrained by his body from being what he is now able to be through the Spirit. His body was necessary because we needed a sin sacrifice; therefore, his flesh became our sin sacrifice representing and taking the place of our sinful flesh nature and having died on the cross for us, his body was thus broken for us and became our very bread of life spiritually, and his blood was shed redeeming us.

The spirit of eternal life that was in the blood of Jesus has now become our source of eternal life. The energy of eternal life was temporarily transferred to the cup that he symbolically held in the upper room, on the night that he celebrated the Passover with his disciples. This transfer was made as he held the cup and said, "This is the cup of the New Covenant in my blood." Up to this moment the Spirit of eternal life had been in his blood and had set him apart from every other man. It was by this action that he transferred the spirit of eternal life that had been in his blood to the cup he held to be kept in a sort of escrow, until the appointed time when the contents would be poured out into the waiting believers on the day of Pentecost. (See Acts 2:1-4) From that time on the word declares that the Spirit gives life. What was once in the blood of Jesus was now made available to all by coming to him and receiving the promised Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit now performs the same functions in the body of Christ that the blood performs in a human body. The word declares that life is in the blood, thus the life that made Jesus who he was, the sinless one, was in his blood as a man.

This couldn't help anyone who was of Adam's descendents however, because Jesus was not their natural father; therefore a different delivery system was needed and that is where the Holy Spirit's ministry comes into play! For Jesus to be able to give the Spirit of life to another in a natural way he would have had to be their earthly father. When we are born again, the Holy Spirit ministers the life of Jesus into us, whereby we are being transformed into his image.

In all of known existence the only place new creation takes place is in the presence of life. This is true in the natural; it is also true spiritually.

After the initial creation where God created all things, a cycle began where new life feeds on the death and decay of life forms that preceded it. Where life is, newness results. When life ceases, decay begins again. Molecular structures are formed in the presence of life; after life is gone changes occur but always in a deteriorating mode. Molecular structures can be altered, refined, or purified, but every change occurs with some sort of loss, but where life is, new structures begin again.

Entry through this last curtain symbolizes our final commitment to the kingdom of God and our identification with the death of Jesus in an experiential way.

We are now ready to discover the true meaning of the Ark of the Covenant that will be fully revealed in the eternal kingdom yet to come. In this present life we begin to experientially function in the reality that the Ark represented.

It represented the coming Savior, Jesus, and that in him was committed the very priesthood of Aaron symbolized by his rod, the fulfillment of the commandments symbolized by the tables of stone, and the role of being the bread of life symbolized by a pot of manna.

These items were all located under what was called the Mercy Seat because it is always by grace and grace alone we can have any benefits from a Holy God. As we move to this Most Holy Place and bow before Almighty God, his mercy allows us to experience the depths of understanding that associates with such glorious symbols. As we with deepest contemplation gaze upon the words of the Holy Scriptures relating to, not only who Jesus was in the flesh, but also who he really is in heaven now for us, we are eternally changed.

All of this is being done so that we might be to the praise of his Glory. The church of Ephesus had been blessed with understanding of the purposes of God and the wonder of his grace and at one time was filled with great love as a result. It was to them that the Apostle wrote,

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Eph. 1:17-23)

## **First Love Lost**

As time passed for the Ephesian Christians, what had been delivered to them by great teachers such as Paul and his co-workers had become a memory. The need to preserve the purity of the message caused

them to strive to preserve it. They did this persistently and laboriously and the cares of life began to bear in upon them. The wonder that caused love to fill their hearts began to grow cold, and it was for this reason that the Lord, in Revelations chapter two, spoke the message about losing their first love, a very serious matter.

I once taught a Bible study where there were some individuals who came seeking to learn from what I taught. They also sought knowledge through reading books and finally stopped coming to the studies. I was later told that the reason was that they had learned all they could from me, so they stopped coming. As I pondered this I realized that there is a difference between knowing and experiencing and it appeared that they were seeking knowledge rather than experience.

When one seeks knowledge without experience, the result is always a lost interest in the process. In spiritual matters, it is not what we know with our mind that counts, but what we have and are experiencing in Christ. If it is knowledge that is desired, the love and excitement that was found in its discovery will soon fade, as new information is no longer forthcoming.

Experience is an ongoing process that causes love to grow deeper and knowledge that was once heard with the ear to become reality of the heart. I have found that it is what is learned in the application of knowledge that is far more satisfying than what is learned by the hearing of the ear.

First love is the emotion felt when discoveries are made about the object of our love, thus it is the discovery of how knowledge works experientially that causes the excitement to continue. The people of Ephesus had apparently stopped growing in the Lord when the teaching of new truths stopped. It isn't that there is a shortage of exciting new truths to be learned in Christ, but when knowledge is what we seek, the Holy Spirit stops the process until experience catches up with understanding. If we don't recognize the problem, we will find our interests shifting to the things of the world.

The Ephesians were hard working people with reference to their faith, and were carefully guarding what they had received. They tested those who came to them to be sure they weren't teaching false doctrines and also tested those who claimed to be apostles to see if they were true or false. They persevered diligently, but in the process had lost their first love.

They were representative of a whole class of Christians who possess knowledge of God without a love that is growing and ever deepening. They were diligent guardians of the truths that had been delivered to them, but God doesn't want us to guard it, he wants us to experience it!

It is so easy to fall into this classification if we have allowed knowledge to precede experience. I have found that those who are seeking to grow experientially are always in a state of needing understanding, thus; when understanding is given they thrill at what is learned because it is immediately applicable. For such ones, love is a continual experience and only deepens as new experiences call for continued application of truths learned. Stagnation occurs when knowledge is not needed in the realm of application at the time it is given.

Mature teachers wait for the Holy Spirit to draw out teachings that are needed in the lives of those being taught. The teaching ministry is not to make the teacher look good, but rather to help the hearers in their lives. When teachers are seeking to impress an audience with new truths, errors often slip into the teachings contaminating the purity of the message.

The church of Ephesus had suffered hardships and persevered in them, this was to their credit; however; losing their first love was so serious the Lord was threatening to remove their lampstand from its place! I am struck with the language here concerning the loosing of their place. Apparently they had enjoyed a place of prominence and respect among the churches and were likely a role model to other churches. Loosing ones first love causes people to become lethargic and leads to complacency. This condition is intolerable when found in a role model church.

Love is vital to individuals in a church and the church as a whole because, Christianity is not about religion, but rather relationship to the Lord Jesus. Relationship is about love, and God is love and love without fervency soon loses its joyful appeal. The increase of knowledge should always be a part of the quest of love because, vital love must be nurtured or it will soon lose its luster. The warning concerning losing first love applies to all Christians who have a desire for excellency in Christ, a condition we should all desire.

Repentance is the cure and remembering the things we did in the beginning and doing them again is the prescribed remedy. Good relationships don't just happen; they are nurtured.

To the overcomers the Lord Jesus promises, "I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Rev. 2:7)



# Chapter Two

## Enduring Persecution Patiently

As we leave Ephesus, we journey north about forty miles to the beautiful seaport city of Smyrna. It had a population of about 200,000 people and had paved streets and several heathen temples along what was called the Golden Street.

As the Lord began addressing the church of Smyrna, he first addressed their definition of wealth. According to the standard of the world, these Christians were regarded as poor people, yet the reality is that they were rich.

One author I have read said that we could well afford to be poor in this world because we are so rich that it just doesn't matter.

Smyrna was a center of Emperor worship that was tied to the right of citizenship. It is believed by some that for those who refused to participate, economic hardship may have resulted. This could account for the poverty the members were experiencing.

The Lord reminded them that they were indeed rich as a result of their salvation. If you, therefore, are deprived of the luxuries of the world, don't grieve, look up; just beyond the horizon of this life are riches that stagger the mind! In reminding the church of Smyrna of this reality, we are also being reminded.

Are you experiencing persecutions in some form in your life? Many people do. In this passage of Scripture we are being assured that it does not go unrewarded. The Christians of Smyrna were poor people, yet they were rich! They were rich because the Jews were making every attempt to demonize them, yet they held firm.

Have you been in the situation where your faith and convictions were getting in the way of being able to interact with co-workers or fellow students? There are some employers who will pass up a Christian for advancements because, the Christian has convictions about such matters as wining and dining clients, shading the truth, or neglecting church services. Still others have difficulty socializing with fellow employees because their interests are so different and are therefore regarded as being out of touch with what is happening in the world today. Anytime we are pushed aside, looked down upon, shunned, or rebuked because we are different as a result of our walk with the Lord, it will be rewarded greatly in heaven.

The Christians in Smyrna were about to be persecuted in an even greater measure than anything past. The Lord presented himself to them as the one who had died, but was now alive, so when he admonished them to be faithful even unto death, he was speaking from the perspective of one who has experienced this very thing. What we are called upon to endure in life is nothing when compared to the glory that is laid up for us in heaven! The more difficult our journey here, and the more suffering we are called upon to bear, the greater the reward is at the end. We as Christians don't go about seeking suffering or persecution, but when it comes we are to rejoice knowing that we have a great reward awaiting us in heaven.

This wasn't the first time the Lord Jesus spoke of these matters; in Matthew we read,

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt. 5:10-12)

The power to overcome is part of the result of the impartation of divine life into us. We are given what is needed to live our life on earth victoriously.

Victorious living is not living a life that is free of sorrow, pain, poverty or deprivation; rather, it is a life of joy based on the knowledge of what is our eternal heritage. All feelings and emotions that are negative in nature come from the fallen nature, and therefore are not an acceptable part of the Christian experience. Specifically what I am speaking of is, unbelief, anguishing over the lack of or loss of earthly wealth, or lost relationships due to a spiritual stand you have taken, and many other such like conditions of life.

It is not outside the realm of acceptable Christian living to experience grief over lost loved ones or setbacks that are the result of the natural course of things in this world, but giving up our Christian joy over them is unacceptable! Things happen in life and they're not always easy to take, but peace, love and joy are our heritage in Christ, and we are privileged to live in them even in the most agonizing circumstances!

Isn't it better to live in joy than sorrow? I believe that it is! This is one of the paradoxes of Christianity, that a person can grieve over the loss of persons or property and still have joy! There is a natural grief and sorrow that even the most mature and spiritual Christians experience, but joy is not lost even in the midst of these emotions.

When love, joy or peace is lost, it is the result of a spiritual attack that is designed to drag us into despair. Despair and discouragement are inappropriate states of mind for any Christian. We are never without hope, but hope deferred makes the heart sick. The only time hope is deferred in Christians is when we fail to look up and see the eternal truths about ourselves and what God is to us.

The Lord Jesus spoke words of encouragement to this church without one complaint against them, but he was concerned that they understand that there is more to their existence than what is apparent in this world. Though he wasn't promising them relief, or scolding them for being human, or telling them that if they would just have faith things would be different, he was pointing out that all of this would result in eternal blessings.

The Lord Jesus didn't tell them that they would have to go through all of this because it was willed by the Father for them, but rather it is the result of the sin in the world around them. What he did say was that it would result in great eternal wealth!

Some Christians suffer because they seem to think that blessings are what happen in this world, but that idea comes from the Old Covenant, not the New Covenant. Under the Covenant of the Law, blessings were promised upon the temporal things of life, but the New Covenant is about our eternal life. The Lord reminded the Christians of Smyrna of this matter.

The message to Smyrna was a love letter to a persecuted church. It also applies to all Christians who suffer persecution or are suffering as a result of their faith in Jesus. Take courage, God is still on the throne and heaven is not on earth! This planet is cursed and our existence on it is not what heaven is like.

God often grants blessing in this life, but that is not the rule; it is a love gift from the Lord. Many are the grants that come to us in this life, grants of intervention, of healing, provision, manifestations of love and grace, but the real inheritance is yet to come.

The greatest things that have happened spiritually in this life, the experiencing of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his many manifestations, is only a taste of our eternal joy! The real meaning of salvation is yet to be experienced! What we presently have and experience is the down payment portion of our future inheritance in Christ.

The message to the church included a warning that some of them were going to be put into prison. In those days incarceration was done before a trial and a guilty verdict resulted in death. It was probably for this reason that the Lord promised them a crown of life with the assurance that they would not experience the second death.

Jesus ended the message to Smyrna with the encouragement, "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." (Rev. 2:11) How fitting that Jesus would give them such an assurance! Don't worry; everything is going to turn out all right! In the end you will see. It takes strong faith to believe in the face of such threats!

No matter what it is that we face as Christians, Jesus already knows and is prepared to see us through it.

## Chapter Three

## **To the Church in Pergamum**

### **Extreme Doctrines Denounced**

Leaving Smyrna, we travel about sixty-five miles north to Pergamum along the fertile valley of the Caicus River. It was an important political center also known for its wealth and beauty. It had a large library and was also deeply involved in idol worship.

Jesus introduced himself to the Church of Pergamum as the one with the sharp, double-edged sword! Ouch! Now that's an attention-getter!

Where do you live, in a ghetto full of violence and death? Maybe it's in a neighborhood where people of many false religions reside, or where sexual sins are being openly displayed and practiced. What was Pergamum like?

We are told that Satan resided there! To me, that means that evil was being manifest at every possible level. It isn't easy to live victoriously in the midst of profound evil. The temptation is either to compromise, or to overly recluse. Such was the condition in Pergamum.

Sexual sins must have been prevalent because the sin of Balaam was mentioned. He was the one who told Balak to entice the Israelites to eat food offered to idols by tempting them with the young women of the land. Balak gathered the prettiest young women of the land and had them go near the camp of Israel. When the eligible young men came out to see them, they enticed them to worship their idols and commit fornication with them.

Idol worship in the days of Pergamum included festivals where people would gather and celebrate. They would drink wine and commit fornication freely.

Some in the church of Pergamum thought it was all right to eat food offered to idols and thought it harmless to "let their hair down" as it were, and celebrate with the idol worshippers. Paul addressed this problem in Romans fourteen where it may have appeared to some that Paul was sanctioning eating food offered to idols, because they could have reasoned that the idol is nothing, however, the Lord Jesus was not so generous, and the circumstances were quite different.

In many of these cities food was systematically offered to idols much like we might bless the food before eating. If a person went to the market place and bought food, he might not know whether the person who sold the food was an idol worshipper or not, thus the food could have been offered before an idol before the Christian bought it. This shouldn't be cause for condemnation, but to go to an idol temple and eat and drink with the revelers and to commit sexual immorality was without question condemned. Separation from the world involves separation from the sorts of activities that lead to sinful living.

When the men referred to in the story of Balaam's teaching to Balak were led into sin, it brought judgment upon them because, not only were they committing sexual sin, but also more importantly, they were compromising their faith in God.

There were some in Pergamum like Balaam, teaching that it was okay to do these sorts of things. I don't know their total rationale, but I suspect that they might have taught something like, "go have fun but just don't bow to the idol."

More and more we are being faced with similar decisions in our society. Where do we draw the line of behavior? On the one hand we understand that we are in the world, but not of the world, but how do we apply that teaching? Then on the other side we are taught not to even touch the unclean things of the world, how do we apply that teaching?

The message to Pergamum also had a reference to the Nicolaitans, as did the church at Ephesus. According to Eusebius an early commentator and historian, one of the first deacons of the early church was a man named Nicolas. (Acts 6:5) He, according to some early writers, was said to have had a very beautiful wife and for some reason, perhaps a misunderstanding of the sanction of marital sex, felt condemned concerning his wife that he loved jealously. According to the account, he then brought her into the presence of the Apostles and offered her to any man who wanted to have sex with her. It was further noted that his two daughters remained virgins and that his son remained chaste. Whether there is any validity to this is not known.

It was a serious enough matter, however, to warrant the attention of the Lord even though the cult was apparently very short lived. If this wasn't the truth concerning the Nicolaitans, then nothing is known about them.

Whether he actually did this with reference to his wife or not, it seems that the idea that total condemnation of sexuality probably was what was the focus of attention by the Lord. If that was in fact the case, then what we have are the two extreme ideas about sex that they had to deal with. One side being that of a no-boundaries approach to sex and the other being total condemnation of all sexuality.

I don't see either side in great acceptance in Christianity today, however; among some sectors of Christianity there are those who tolerate even sinful expressions, saying that grace covers their sins. Individually, however, we see that some are playing around with sexual sins, and on the other hand we see some who, having been hurt by sexual sinners, want to renounce all sexual expressions. God is the author of human sexuality, and Satan is the tempter and seeks to pervert sexual behavior because it leads to all sorts of difficulties.

Not only are wrong sexual attitudes the cause for alarm, but also any extreme teaching that tends to bondage and the loss of joyful living. I see the spirit of the Nicolaitans still alive and well. The spirit of the Nicolaitans may not be being expressed today in sexual matters, but rather in extreme separation from other legitimate enjoyments of life.

I was raised in a church culture where it seemed that everything enjoyable was condemned. Now I certainly see and believe that much of the teaching about separation from the world had some wisdom, but making them law tended to bondage and death.

What we must understand is that on the one hand there really is a spirit of worldliness, and on the other hand there is a spirit of condemnation of everything that brings pleasure in this present life.

Liberty from the law doesn't mean "no limits" on behavior, nor does death to the carnal nature mean that we can't enjoy life on earth. In a quest for spirituality some deny every sort of pleasure, thinking that anything that is enjoyable is therefore sinful. They fail to see that legitimate activities are opportunities of worship in the practical matters of life. Love, joy and peace are the heritage of the Christian, and what enhances and enables these to be expressed in purity should be viewed as part of the blessing of being a Christian.

The early church seemed to struggle with the proper balance between liberalism and asceticism. Somewhere between these extremes is the truth. I really don't think it is so difficult to understand after all, because we have the direct teaching of the Lord to draw upon. If our heart is right before God, it will be manifest in our manner of living as well.

To illustrate the point, we can look again to the reference to the doctrine of Balaam, we might say that worship is not bad, but the worship of idols is! The doctrine of the Nicolaitans says in effect, worship that is enjoyable is bad, because the heathen do sinful things in their hilarious worship of idols. Hilarious worship of God, on the other hand, is not only acceptable, but also desirable! We don't imitate the heathen because what they do is sinful, but we don't let what they do hinder us in true worship either. The Holy Spirit is enabling us to sort all this out and keep our worship pure. We are to walk in the Spirit of truth and maintain a heart that is free to worship God in every legitimate way.

The message to the church of Pergamum begins with the description of the Lord as being the one with the sharp double-edged sword. In Hebrews chapter four, insight is given of what is meant by the sharp double-edged sword.

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Heb. 4:12-13)

Again we see the sword coming from the mouth of Jesus,

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was **a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.** His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and **his name is the Word of God.** The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. **Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword** with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

### **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "**Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.**"

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But **the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet** who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. **The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.**

**The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.** (Revelations 19:11-21)

This passage of Scripture is one that can be seen in two different lights depending on the reader's point of view of the Apocalyptic Scriptures. My personal perspective of the messages in the book is first to see the spiritual lessons and then to see the possible historic or prophetic implications.

First I note that the rider on the white horse is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who is Jesus without a doubt. Second I note the sword is coming from his mouth, not held in his hand or tied to his side. His eyes are the same as the eyes John saw at the beginning of the book, blazing fire. On his head were many crowns, indicating that many heads of government were sponsoring him. He was dressed in a robe that had been dipped in blood. (I believe this represents the blood of martyrs who laid down their life for him. Wearing it was his credential for the judgment to come.) His purpose is to judge and make war, and what he judges is the flesh of man. He has as his immediate purpose the breaking of the cycle of satanically inspired human corruption and rebellious rule over the hearts and souls of humanity.

The beast and false prophet are undoubtedly Satan and his false religions that have exercised authority over unwitting humanity. Their doom is about to come upon them. They will be stripped of their authority; this is, in most cases, accomplished by the revelation of truth. They are going to be thrown alive into the lake of burning sulfur, right where they belong! They wrecked so many lives through their appeal to the fallen natures of humanity, the flesh, that when Satan is finally dethroned and exposed, the cleanup task is enormous.

No flesh nature is exempt from the judgment to come as revelation power exposes what is false and sinful. No one is exempt from judgment, no matter what the status of the person, kings and generals, rich or poor; their flesh will be slain by the power of the Word, the sword coming from the mouth of the rider of the white horse.

The birds of the air are the ones that eat the flesh and dispose of it, symbolic, of course, in the context of what is being said here. Birds have been said to represent the lofty thoughts and a reference to the birds cleaning up the mess could refer to the renewing of the mind that is the method of transformation referred to in Romans 12:2. Every false motive, thought or intent must be judged and what is not of the Spirit of the Holy God will be consumed in the light of truth. Finally truth will win over corruption and evil.

How, when and where? The answers are both now and at the appointed time. The rider of the horse has ridden into my life to judge all that is not of the Spirit of Life and Truth. Every lofty idea and motive is being called into judgment. Every false love and desire, every concept that had its origin in the heart of the serpent, every deed not of love, all self-will and rebellion against the Lordship of the Lord of Lords, I must bow to the crown of him who wore the thorns upon his brow. Nothing of the fallen sin nature, nothing of the deceptive lies of Satan can be permitted to remain; all must be exposed and cleansed. The army of heaven is called upon to assist in this task. When Jesus comes with fire in his eyes, you know your flesh will die, and your life will be cleansed of all that is corrupted by the sin and death that has lived there so long. The vultures (flesh eaters) will come to clean up the mess when your flesh finally dies.

Satan has had his day. What he has done to humanity through corrupting the nature of man through the fall is incalculable. He once wore seven crowns on seven heads with ten horns, but now the crowns are on the head of the rider of the white horse. Satan had seven heads, but only one is needed, Jesus. The horns of Satan were symbols of his power, but all were lies. Jesus has one symbol of power, the sword coming from his mouth! That sword, the word of truth, judges everything. All that exalts itself against God is seen to be false in the brightness of the light that comes with truth. Jesus is the truth and the word of God is the fine print. No flesh will survive judgment on that day. He has come and is yet to come.

Have you seen him lately? Are you being judged, that is, is he exposing what has been hidden from view? Cleansing is the goal, and it will be accomplished. The redemptive work of the cross will be manifest in the final death of all fallen natures of those who will be permitted to live with him in his kingdom. Death will come to all who possess fallen natures, for some it will be eternal death called the second death, for others it is submitting to the sword of the Lord in the here and now and allowing that sword to slay the wickedness in us.

The message to Pergamum included the promise that to those who overcome will be given some of the hidden manna along with a white stone inscribed with a name known only to the one who receives it. There is an element of the personal in the relationship of every believer. We are a part of the body of Christ, the Church, and as such are members together with him. We are to love one another, and to look after the unity of the body and yet, in all of this we are also to remember that we are separate individuals in the heart and mind of God. We have a relationship with the Lord known only to him, very personal and exclusive. He gives us hidden manna, and an endearing name!

It's rough out there, living where Satan lives, but overcoming is not only a possibility, it is a must! The reward is well worth the effort involved, so perseverance is justly required.

## **Chapter Four**

### **To the Church in Thyatira**

#### **Get Rid of Jezebel!**

Thyatira was located forty-five miles east of Pergamum. It was a less important city but still a center of commerce for the region. It was known for wool, linen, apparel, dyed stuffs, leatherwork, tanning, and excellent bronzework. All these cities of this region had idol worship as central to their way of life. Prominent in their lifestyle was labor guilds or unions. Each of these unions had a patron deity with feasts, and seasonal festivals that included sexual revelries. The importance of the city to the Lord Jesus was not because it was a religious center, but rather because, it was a place where a problem existed that needed to be dealt with.

The speaker is the Spirit; the message delivered is from Jesus, the Son of God, though his name is not given here. The whole book of Revelations is called "the revelation of Jesus Christ." When Jesus came into the world in the flesh, he came as the Son of the Father and revealing the Father to us. There was a transparency about Jesus because he didn't come to reveal himself. Now in this book we have portraits that reveal various aspects of Jesus in his role as the head of the Church. These qualities were not always visible while in the flesh with us. It is the Spirit's mission to reveal Jesus to us first as Savior, and then as the head of the Church and finally as judge of the whole world.

Jesus is described to Thyatira as having eyes like blazing fire, and feet like burnished bronze. These were familiar figures to the people as bronze work was one of the industries of the region. Working bronze requires furnaces of blazing fire to consume the dross. When the Lord was described as having eyes of blazing fire, they could relate to that as being what prepares the metal for change.

The feet represent the lowest parts of the body of Christ, but they too, glow with the heat of the furnace! The people of Thyatira may not have seen themselves as being very important, but they were still a vital part of Jesus' body the Church. They were being exposed to the heat of the furnace of his eyes so that the heat would consume the dross in their midst.

The church of Thyatira was experiencing spiritual growth as was testified to in verse 19, "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first." (Rev. 2:19) Nevertheless, there was a spirit of tolerance in their midst that was not acceptable in the manner it was being applied. They had in their midst a woman referred to as Jezebel (Whether her actual name or only figurative is not known.) but they undoubtedly knew who she was. Tolerance is sometimes necessary when dealing with the world and when bringing people to Jesus because, they often have sins, addictions, or are a part of a lifestyle that is not acceptable in a Christian society, yet space is given for change and repentance. It is quite a different matter when such individuals reject change and continue in their sins, and encourage others to do likewise.

This woman considered herself a prophetess and was encouraging others to participate in her sins. She was much like Jezebel, the heathen wife of King Ahab, king of Israel. When he married her she brought her heathen Gods with her. Though the nation was already idolatrous she soon led them into even greater idolatry, as her idol priests were prevalent in the land.

There are those who see tolerance as some sort of virtue, but it is only a virtue when associating with the spirit of evangelism. The words of Jesus come to mind when dealing with the woman taken in adultery, “go and sin no more.” There are some individuals who work with the down and outers of our society and have to be very tolerant of many rather gross conditions. It takes special grace to reach out to individuals who, due to sin, have become very unattractive people.

This woman “Jezebel” was not being tolerant of sin; she was practicing sin. Not only that, but she was also teaching other leaders to sin. This theological approach to grace unfortunately is still alive and well in some sectors of Christianity. Grace is seen by some as being so profound that it doesn’t matter what you do; it is covered. Others see people who have sinful lifestyles or appetites as being in need of validation and think it is the place of the church to validate them. People need validation, but not sinful lifestyles.

The argument we hear is “they can’t help it, they were born that way.” I agree, but that is why we need to be born again! Everyone is born with a predisposition to some sin or other. Whatever the predisposition may be doesn’t alter the fact that repentance is where change of heart begins. It doesn’t matter what the predisposition is, whether it is sexual perversion or some other kind of sin or just a negative disposition, Jesus came to bring us into the liberty of children of God. Accommodating a condition doesn’t equal growth; however, bringing about change does.

There is a holy life that Christians are called into. It’s not a life of weirdness, but it is a life of purity. We are called to live a life that is unspotted by the world, and yet, not so far from the world that we can’t be a testimony to them. For most people weirdness is not the problem, that is, being so “holy” that no one can even associate with them. What seems to be the greatest problem is that there seems to be very limited understanding of what it means to live in the Spirit. I find that many who think themselves to be spiritual, are full of anger, jealousy, bitterness and unbelief. They often are lacking in love and are quick to find fault with everything and everyone. No wonder Jesus appears as having eyes of fire.

I remember that while being raised in a Pentecostal home, I had somehow acquired a strange view of what was meant by living in the Spirit. I don’t blame anyone for this, because those around me probably thought I understood it, but I didn’t. I had the idea that living in the Spirit was the same as living in the anointing (that special endowment or presence sensed while functioning in a ministry). I had trouble understanding how this could be because, though I knew what it was like to function in the anointing, I couldn’t relate to the idea that this could be a constant condition. It seemed to me that, some people were struggling to make this experience a constant condition, and being unable to, lived in guilt.

The remedy for this condition began one day when I was driving along pondering a situation that I had experienced as a building contractor. I had been wronged and being very upset desperately wanted to take revenge. I felt justified and had no thought that what I felt was wrong.

It was at this point that the Holy Spirit, the great teacher, began to reeducate me about what it means to walk in the Spirit. Initially I felt a strong rebuke from the Lord for what I felt. Then later additional understanding was given as I learned that what we are called to when told to walk in the Spirit is to walk in *pneuma not dunamis*. (*Pneuma* means wind or atmosphere, while *dunamis* means power)

The power of the Holy Spirit is manifest in many ways, through ministries, such as preaching, teaching, witnessing, and manifestations of supernatural gifts. Enablements for life and service also come under this category of thought.

Jesus began to give us insight into this truth while talking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council.

“He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.’

In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’

‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’

Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (the *pneuma*). Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (*pneuma*). You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.” The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’” (John 3:2-8)

In this passage we are introduced to the concept that the Spirit is the Holy Spirit, and that he is the Spirit of eternal life. Jesus also promised him as the gift given by the Father to those who will ask for him. When we are told to walk in the Spirit, we are being invited to walk in the atmosphere or breath or wind of the Spirit.

As I began to grasp this concept, I began to understand that living in the atmosphere of the Spirit implies living in harmony with the Spirit. Then the distinction began to emerge that living in the Spirit has to do with the character and heart of God, rather than the manifestations of ministries and gifts. It was at this point that I began to see that what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit are as different as day is from night. I also began to see that whatever I was entertaining in my heart was either coming from my flesh (the old fallen nature) or my spirit (the new nature given by the Lord Jesus Christ). I began to understand that all feelings for vengeance, hate, unforgiveness, and all other negatives came from my flesh and not my spirit.

I also learned that the only way to walk in the Spirit was to have the Spirit actively present in my life. One cannot walk in what he does not possess. Thus, we cannot walk in love unless the love we walk in comes by the Holy Spirit. There is a fallen nature love, and there is a new nature love. Some people have a lot of fallen nature love, but not much new nature love. It takes spiritual understanding to know the difference.

I also had to come to the understanding that the fallen nature has within it the residue of the divine nature that we were given before the fall when Adam was created in the image of God. We didn't lose the capacity for goodness in the fall, but it was corrupted by the presence of sin. This has confused the issue in a lot of people's minds, because they see good people that aren't Christians doing more good than most Christians do.

It isn't easy to come to the understanding that doing good deeds or embracing good character is not the same as living in the Spirit. When we are born again the goodness that is seen in us should be the result of the life of the Spirit in us.

Some well meaning Christians have tried to rehabilitate the fallen nature and take great pride in their new attitude of life. They may do quite well, but is that what is being spoken of in the scriptures? Is it rehabilitation or is it renewal? There is a sense in which it is both. First we must receive the Spirit of life, and then the Spirit within us must rehabilitate the natural life experiences. There is a difference between the natural life and the fallen nature life.

Perhaps it would be helpful to think of sin as like unto the introduction of disease into a body. The natural body has all natural functions working properly and is healthy before the disease. Then comes the disease. The disease begins to reorganize bodily functions to suit its nature. Then comes the doctor, if he doesn't have the cure, the best he can do is treat the symptoms. The goal is rehabilitation at this point. If a cure appears, then rehabilitation is abandoned for renewal.

It is the job of the Holy Spirit to restore us into a pre-fall relationship with God. The manifestation of this pre-fall condition is being restored as we abandon all the effects of the fall that occurred in our lives. We call this process repentance and renewal. As we fellowship with God, we soon begin to discover characteristics of behavior that are no longer compatible with our new natures. Abandoning these manifestations is not only desirable, but also necessary, as they can become a source of disruption in fellowship with the holiness of God.

Christians sometimes refer to feeling convicted about some activity or attitude. This is different from guilt because, guilt takes away our joy and peace, but conviction leads us to repentance that leads us to the abandonment of a behavior, desire or thought resulting in peace and joy. Satan is the author of guilt, but God is the author of forgiveness and joy.

Jezebel brought a false religion into Israel and the result was the loss of blessing and the introduction of judgment. Likewise, the introduction of a false religion into the life of any individual only complicates the problem that person already has. The problem that all people have is that they are dead because of sin and need the impartation of the spirit of eternal life. Fixing the dead body is not the goal of salvation, but rather, the impartation of life and the resultant changes that life brings.

Get rid of Jezebel because she is hopelessly corrupt, God has judged her and he will judge anyone who participates in her sins. God wants people who desire a pure walk with him and who are allowing the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth.

For the people of Thyatira, life was no doubt hard. Perhaps the Lord could have pointed out some other failings, but he chose not to, the most he wanted for them was to hold onto what they had. There



are times when holding on is all one can do. Human strength, even with divine intervention is still limited. In fact, if God doesn't impart divine strength, we will surely fail. If we will successfully get the Jezebel spirit out of our hearts and midst, that is the best that can be done.

The Lord then invites the people of Thyatira to the overcoming life. For them and us, it is to do the will of the Lord until the end. This will result in being given authority over the nations, to dash them to pieces like pottery with an iron scepter.

An iron scepter speaks to me of power and force. For those who will be overcomers authority is given over the nations, (nations are sometimes symbols of systems of sinful indulgences). Iron scepters are appropriate symbols when seen as being used against these evil influences that are against us.

Such is not the scepter in the kingdom of our Lord, however. For those who are a part of the body of believers, a reed symbolized the scepter of the Lord. Unlike the scepter of iron, the reed is suggestive of a unit of measurement. A teacher pointing out truth to her students could also use it. The style of rule in the body of Christ is to point out truth to the believer and we, having measured our hearts desires and our conduct by it, readily apply it. Within the kingdom of the Lord there are no references to armies, governing bodies, police forces enforcing the laws because, the power of the Lord toward his people is love.

When we see the armies of heaven assemble, it is to execute judgment against the rebelliousness of man. The enemy of God is the fallen nature, and he battles against it at whatever level is needed. I have a sense that the people of Thyatira needed the authority of an iron scepter to do battle against the Spirit of Jezebel. The tone of the passage at this point is looking forward to the day when all human authorities must bow to the authority of the Lord Jesus. An iron scepter will be the symbol of power because rebellion will demand such.

For the believers, however, this scepter is not against them, it is given to them along with authority to rule just as the Father gave authority to Jesus. Always remember that judgment is only against those who refuse to repent. The Lord has a special prize waiting for the faithful overcomers; in this case he will give them the morning star.

If we have an ear to hear, let us hear what the spirit is saying to the churches.

## **Chapter Five**

### **To the Church in Sardis**

#### **Wake Up!**

From Thyatira, we journey southward about thirty-five miles to the militarily strategic city of Sardis. Its location brought trade from the Aegean Islands and the military road that passed through the important Hermus River valley. Sardis had a long and grand history going back several hundred years. It was an easily defended location with a natural fortress that though under frequent sieges was only penetrated a couple of times. It had a history of prosperity and wealth, but had become complacent. Its life style was supported largely by the wealth and history of the past. As is often the case, this sort of complacency leads to deterioration and thus the city had deteriorated from its former glory.

The spirit of complacency and lack of interest in maintenance was carried over into the church. The church like the city had once been full of life, but once having become established found a comfort zone and became lethargic.

It has been suggested that the church had made peace with the society of the city and perhaps had gained their respect. When a church enjoys respect from the community in which it is located, it often loses some of its evangelistic fervor. There are too many examples of this, both at the present time and historically to even begin to enumerate. Sardis stands as an example of many churches that started out with an evangelistic fervor, but later began to live on the glory of the past.

I wonder about many denominations that live on the glory of their past. If we were to take from them all the members that are members because their families were members, how many members would they have? In economics we sometimes refer to old money, meaning money or wealth that has past from generation to generation. So it is with organizations, they too live on past accomplishments. This is not to say that living churches should not have a membership that moves from generation to generation because if the parents have done what they are supposed to do this will be the case. I only point this out as an indicator that unless new blood is being won to Christ, there is likely a spirit of complacency.

Economics plays into this to some degree, because churches are supported by the tithe of the membership, and when there is ample financial supply, the catalyst of evangelism sometimes is lacking. It is entirely possible that the Lord allows trouble and division to arise at times to stir up the spirit of evangelism.

The Lord began his message to Sardis by pointing out the condition of complacency with a warning that it is time to wake up because what remains is about to die.

The Lord is introduced as being the one holding the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Now we know that the seven stars represent the angels of the churches. Some believe that this is a reference to the pastors of the churches but it could also represent literal angels assigned to look after the affairs of the churches.

The seven spirits of God are somewhat less understood because the passages that referred to them assume understanding. In pondering this point I first listed, for my own edification what I knew of God with reference to his character and qualities of his personhood, and came up with a list of seven characteristics that I thought represented God in his fullness.

This list was not conclusive of course, but served as headings under which many attributes could be listed. The idea, though probably imperfect, was, I believe, in general correct. Later the Lord gave me insight into Isaiah 11:1-5 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—

1. The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
2. The Spirit of counsel and of power,
3. The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
4. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
5. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
6. Righteousness will be his belt and
7. Faithfulness the sash around his waist.”

I wrote a book entitled “Seven Healing Streams”. In it I enumerate and identify these seven characteristics or spirits of Christ. I wrote about each of these categories showing how we must identify with them in the process of coming back from the land of bondage to our flesh, into a place of love and peace with God, one another, and ourselves. Whether these are precisely what are being symbolized in Revelations as the seven spirits of God, I can’t say for sure, but it is a thought. I am totally confident that each of these is applicable to what was needed in Sardis.

In brief, what is taught in the seven spirits as seen in Isaiah eleven verses one through five is:

1. That the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and there can be no real understanding without first a full acknowledgment of him.
2. Then the spirit of counsel is needed to enable us in the application of wisdom and understanding, and having come into the understanding of what is needed to bring about the proper change; power is needed to enable us to do what human resources alone can never accomplish.
3. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, has to do with what we do with the knowledge that God gives to us, and how it is that this fear is more the fear of ourselves and how we might offend his love for us, than a fear of judgment.
4. At this point we begin to understand the true meaning of justice, and how it is that God knows what man cannot know. He always judges by the true facts of every matter and not by what we perceive them to be.

5. In Revelations we see the sword of the mouth of the Lord striking what is temporal, earthy and wicked. In this passage it is the rod of the Lord striking out against that old fallen nature that has such misplaced values and desires. In each case the sword or rod is in the mouth symbolizing the word of the Lord.
6. The belt of truth has to do with the proper role of our reproductive capacity. Truth must govern what we do, how we do it, and with whom we do it. This understanding was vital in the environment of the world this letter was sent into. It is vital today as well.
7. Faithfulness and accountability to our commitments should be worn as a sash around our waist.

When we are exposed to knowledge from the Lord, we must be cautious to apply the knowledge according to truth. There were some faithful people in Sardis who hadn't compromised nor did the words of the rebuke apply to them. Had the speaker given an altar call these people likely would have been the first to respond, but it wasn't for the ones who come forward at every call wanting to please the Lord; it was for the ones who normally don't come. These tenderhearted faithful people will be dressed in white along with the overcomers. From this statement we see that overcoming is not a soldier term, but rather a repentance term. Overcoming has to do with hearing the message of truth and applying it in obedience.

There are still some points we need to look at in this message. The Lord warned them that he could come to them at any time, ready or not. The comings of the Lord are usually when we expect him the least. This is the remedy for slumber. If we fear the Lord we will want to be ready for his coming.

What did he mean by come to them? Was that a reference to the final call to the Church? I don't think so. I personally have experienced the Lord coming to me at different times and for different reasons. We sometimes refer to special visitations of the Lord. These can be for the purpose of judgment, or they can be times when the Lord desires to bless us in a special way.

Some people are so fixated upon the Second Coming of the Lord that they miss these special comings of the Lord. The Lord will come for his church one day, but between now and then there may be many comings of the Lord. The eminency of the coming of the Lord is realized in his coming to individuals in real life situations and for individuals through death. It is far more realistic to live in the expectancy of that reality, than to worry too much about the Second Coming of Christ for the church.

The Second Coming of Christ for the church is a one-time event in all of history, but the coming of Christ for individuals has been going on ever since the church has been in existence. When I was young I heard the message of the eminency of Christ's coming, but while waiting for that event, I have preached many funerals. Jesus warned the people of Sardis of the reality of his sudden appearing. Never think it is for a future time and that it's okay to play around with the world and sin, he may come to you or for you suddenly so wake up!

In the day of the writing of this message to Sardis, there was a civil threat that was held over the people. If they were accused of misbehaving sufficiently toward society they could lose their citizenship. They would be blotted off the role of citizens.

The Lord assures the people of Sardis that obedience to the terms of this letter would result in a relationship of confidence in their status with the Lord. He would never blot their names out! The fear that resulted from their cultural teachings didn't apply to their relationship with the Lord. For those who live in obedience to the Lord, applying the word of truth, with repentance toward dead works, and living for the Lord, there is no fear of the loss of salvation.

There were some individuals, the Lord said, who were already overcomers who had not soiled their clothes; they are promised that they will walk with the Lord dressed in white. Hope, however, is not lost for those found wanting. Repentance and obedience will result in the same prize. There is a saying, "while there's life there's hope", and I believe that is true. Procrastination, however, may result in disastrous results because, we don't know the day or the hour of his call or return.

He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 3:5-6)

# Chapter Six

## To the Church in Philadelphia

### About Standing Firm

Philadelphia was located about twenty-five miles southeast of Sardis along the Hermus River valley on a high plateau and derived its name from king Attalus II who called it Philadelphus meaning “brother lover” because of his great love for his brother. To the northeast of the city was a vine-growing district that along with textile and leather industries contributed to the wealth of the city.

The city had been virtually destroyed in AD 17 by an earthquake, but had been rebuilt by Tiberius and for a time was known as Neocaesarea in appreciation. Flavia along with Philadelphia was its name through the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. Christianity survived in Philadelphia until 1392 despite the pressure of the Moslems from Turkey.

Philadelphia was located on the main highway to the eastern regions giving the church an open door of opportunity and importance as a Christian witness. As is the case with cities located on main arteries of travel, those engaged in commerce would pass through. In those days where the news media was largely word of mouth, these travelers would carry news from place to place and so, when the message of the gospel was properly proclaimed to them, they could spread it as well.

Their effectiveness was mainly opposed by the Jewish sector of the city population referred to by Christ as the synagogue of Satan.

The speaker, Jesus, begins his message of encouragement to the church addressing them as the one who is “holy and true” and has the key of David. This was important because there was a constant pressure being exerted upon the early believers to incorporate the teachings of the law and conversion to Judaism as a necessary part of the Christian experience.

There were also those of the Jewish synagogue who blatantly rejected Jesus as the Christ. They are the ones referred to as the synagogue of Satan. During the earthly life of Jesus he had also referred to the Pharisees as being of their father the Devil. There is one way to the Father and that is through Jesus Christ, God’s one and only Son. Rejection of Jesus results in rejection from the Father. The understanding that teaching any other means of entry into heaven is a doctrine of the devil, needed to be strengthened and expounded upon.

There are events in the lives of non-Christians that seem to suggest that God answers their prayers and therefore, they think, the claims of Christianity are too narrow. I am convinced that God works on many levels, but that ultimately what determines salvation is faith in Jesus Christ.

Scientific inquiries are now being conducted into the connection of faith to good health and healing. It is being found that where there is faith in God, there is a profound effect upon health and healing. The God being referred in these inquiries is inclusive of any concept of God so long as faith is involved.

As I listened to a discussion of this study it suddenly made a lot of sense to me because like truth, many if not all non-Christian faiths have a lot of good solid truth involved with them. Having truth, however, doesn’t mean that the truth is coming directly from the real source of all truth, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have used the illustration of Satan as having a large mirror standing in the opposite position to where God is. He then reflects the light that comes from Jesus Christ the source of light and truth. He may at one time be using the label of Buddhism, and at another time he uses Islam, or may refer to himself as the Great Spirit, it doesn’t matter, any label will do, so long as the worshipper aren’t looking directly to Jesus. Even in the realm of so-called Christian religions, he substitutes an emphasis upon membership in a denomination or a special creed to distract people from a pure faith in Jesus Christ. Keeping people looking at any of these sources rather than Jesus serves his purpose well.

Satan knows full well that there are powers that are available to humanity for use. He understands all about the intricate workings of the mind, body, and spirit of man. There are all sorts of powers at work that most people are unaware of, powers within the human body and mind, and powers without in the spiritual kingdom that surrounds us all. The great battle that rages is an effort on Satan’s part to keep people away from pure faith in Jesus Christ. His first goal seems to be to destroy humans—body, soul

and spirit. If he can't destroy people through destructive lifestyles, then he will try to destroy them through counterfeit spiritual experiences.

The idea that all healing comes from God is a correct one; however, not all healing comes directly from God. Just as Satan takes the light of God and reflects it at us from a position away from God, tricking us into looking at him instead of God, so not all faith results come from looking to the real source of healing, Jesus Christ.

We know that healing power is resident within the human body, and that it works with or without an active faith in Jesus. What I am speaking of is the power that is seen in the body to heal itself when injured or attack by a disease germ or virus. What happens within the body is really quite phenomenal, but is it coming to us as a unique action of God?

I am convinced that God placed many laws into existence at creation that work completely outside the realm of a direct divine intervention. Healing is one of these. I am now seeing that faith as well works as a spiritual law in much the same way. Faith is like a doorknob that when turned allows entry into the realm within. The problem is that there are two doors, and are on opposite sides. One leads directly in the direction of God through Jesus and the other that is the popular one, leads away from Jesus. The result seems to be the same at first, and probably is because like truth, it works regardless of who is working it. Satan is a thief and has stolen the focus of man away from God using powers that God created and misdirecting them to deceive humanity. God is not the generic god that is so popular today. That one really is Satan in disguise.

I am not surprised that science is finally coming to the recognition of the existence of faith as a helpful element in the healing process. It is the connecting link with the supernatural realm; the only question is, which supernatural powers are at work here? Satan's side of the debate says, "it doesn't matter," but the Jesus side says, "Indeed, it does matter." Both may heal you but what then? Does a supernatural event prove anything?

In the last days, we are warned, that signs and wonders will accompany Satan's efforts to deceive the world. God uses signs and wonders, and always has, but it takes more than the supernatural manifestations to bring eternal salvation to man.

When asked for a sign while among us, Jesus said that it was the sign of Jonah that has already been given that was the only sign that would be given. What he referred to was the redemptive work of the cross. That's the only supernatural event that has the power to redeem fallen humanity and was symbolized by Jonah being three days and nights in the belly of a great fish. Indeed, Jesus did do many miracles and all of them were supportive evidence of his claim to being the coming one, but it was his redemptive role that is the only hope of lost humanity.

People who look in the wrong direction for spiritual help will go on in their sins and never find eternal life, but they may have many supernatural experiences along the way. The synagogue of Satan denies that Jesus is the Messiah, a fatal mistake. It is no different today, though the face of the lie has changed and will continue to change so that the vast majority of people will believe the lie.

The truth will always remain; Jesus is the only hope for a lost world. What he did on the cross in paying the sin penalty for all humanity is the only way out of this cursed existence. That is why Satan works so hard to distort the facts. He is not the source of truth, healing, or love, he just wants people to believe that it is coming from somewhere other than through Jesus.

Those who resist Satan's deceptive work and remain faithful to Jesus are the ones who will inherit the kingdom, and David's king will rule them! Why are so many being deceived? Is it not because they want what appeals to their fallen natures? The message of the cross is a message of self-denial. Jesus promised that those who lay down their life for him—would find it!

Jesus spoke to the church of Philadelphia as the one who is holy and true. This is what makes Jesus different from all other men. Holiness was a quality he possessed in unmarred clarity. His life among us was totally unmarred by any sin whatsoever. This is what qualified him to be the Savior of the world. It was the result of divine life (eternal life) within him. This life became transferable upon his resurrection and subsequent offering of his sacrifice to God the Father in the heavenly tabernacle as referred to in the book of Hebrews. Having completed his high priestly role, the power of the life of Jesus was poured out upon the waiting believers, and is now available to all who will receive him.

Jesus spoke lovingly to those who were suffering from the pressure of the attacks and commended them for their faithfulness.

He assured them that they would never lose their crown, that is, their rightful place in his kingdom.

He gave them credit for their “little strength” and promised to make them pillars in his temple, a position requiring great strength. The day will come when those who have opposed these saints, will come and fall down before them and acknowledge that the Lord has loved them.

Then comes a great promise that they would be spared the great trial that was coming upon the whole world to test them. Was that referring to rising opposition from the government in Rome or was it the trial that the world is experiencing even now? There are divided opinions, nevertheless, we are currently suffering the onslaught of deception that is sweeping over the world, that seems bent on destroying the faith of the elect.

Jesus concludes his message with these words,

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 3:11-13)

## Chapter Seven

### To the Church in Laodicea

#### Mediocrity Condemned

Laodicea was located about forty-five miles farther southeast of Philadelphia and is about due east of Ephesus, our starting point on this journey of letters. We have moved from place to place in a sort of arch; each city is mentioned in its natural geographical order as one would travel. Whether there is any sequential order of thought or whether the sequence of thought is incidental is for the reader to decide, but each seems to be representative of such common conditions of life on earth so as to serve the purpose of this communication very well.

The city, like Philadelphia, was located on the Roman highway and therefore was a city that received traffic of commerce and people of political power and cultural influences. The city wasn't known for any particularly outstanding characteristics, but rather was comfortable to all. It had great wealth and a wealthy bank. It apparently gained wealth mostly from trade though there were some local products. It was the location of a school of medicine and also manufactured some ointments.

As the speaker, Jesus, begins his statements to the church that was located there, he refers to himself as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

The use of the word Amen is instructive of the fact that he is the last word. There need be no other. He is the true witness; no more are needed. Jesus is the word made flesh and is the ruler of God's creation. He not only is the ruler, but he is the creator as is set forth in John and also in Colossians. Any attempt to make Jesus less than the manifestation of God on earth is a fatal heresy of the worst kind.

Millions of people have been caught in the web of the deceiver who seeks to steal the hearts of humanity away from the only hope of eternal salvation, the life and death of Jesus Christ in his redemptive role.

Laodicea was located in a very strategic location and was given the opportunity to be a powerful influence in the propagation of the Gospel message, but they were self-satisfied and complacent.

The church of Laodicea could relate to the expression, cold or hot or being lukewarm because the water in Laodicea was just that, lukewarm. It was brought into the city through an aqueduct and was not very cold. There was no way to cool it so drinking lukewarm water was evidently a common experience. When Jesus referred to wanting to spit it out, they no doubt understood completely. He went on to explain that they were just like that to him.

In Romans twelve, we are told not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but to think with sober judgment. The problem is that it is a human characteristic to over evaluate one's worth.

I remember one gentleman who came to me for counsel and upon hearing his story; I became aware that his problem was an inflated view of his personal worth, though he appeared to have an inferiority complex. All his life he suffered mental anguish that had at its root a sense of personal worth that he alone could see. He always felt that everyone around him was selling him short. I don't doubt that it was true; however, when we as an individual harbor feelings of that sort, we are always looking for validation, and because we want it, it never seems to come. People who are at peace with who they are don't need validation, so they go on just being who they are, and those around them validate them.

The church of Laodicea had a distorted view of themselves. They evaluated their spirituality on the basis of what the world saw as success—wealth. “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” (Rev. 3:17)

Such is the case when we, like Lot of old, looked down instead of up to find real values. Lot looked down to find what he thought he needed, worldly wealth, and wound up at the lowest place on earth! We are warned about such pursuits because those who seek wealth are struck through by many sorrows. Jesus too warned us not to lay up treasures on earth where rust and moths corrupt but to lay up treasure in heaven where thieves can't break through and steal them. (See Matt. 6:19-21)

In this passage he admonishes them to buy gold from him, “gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich.” (Rev. 3:18) Those with spiritual understanding readily understand that gold refined in the fire refers to spiritual qualities that are developed in us as a result of living an active Christian life. You can't live fervently for Jesus without feeling the heat of persecution or contempt.

Real values in the Kingdom of Heaven are not measured by worldly success. For too long we have been taught to measure our spiritual life by outward deeds rather than the development of Christian character.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with what are known as the beatitudes or “be-attitudes.” These are not called the “does” but rather the attitudes. Jesus was concerned with the real person becoming right and because we can't do it in ourselves, he is our enabler. Deeds, in the Christian view, should always be the result of what we are, the byproduct, so to speak, of the be-attitudes of our heart relationship to Christ.

Living in the Spirit is living in these be-attitudes that are taught to us by the living Christ and ministered into our very hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who are in Christ Jesus walk spiritually on streets paved with gold. That is to say, that gold is under the feet of the body of Christ. Its proper role is to be walked on or used as a building material, not hoarded, under feet, not in the pockets! It is a building material in the kingdom of God, not a measurement of worth. If you are a person of financial means, that is not a measurement of your spiritual worth, but it can become a means of your expression of Christian character as you use it as one uses building materials. Your spiritual worth will still be measured by what you are in Christ.

The church of Laodicea had it all wrong. The world around them had contaminated their sense of values. They had become rich, but in the acquiring of wealth, they had become poor, in fact, wretched, and such is often the case for those who make money, careers, possessions and positions their goals. What you are in the eyes of the world means nothing in the eyes of God.

In the first chapter of Isaiah we read the account of what Israel looked like in the eyes of God because they had become rebellious against him. He had been causing trouble to come upon them in judgment but to no avail. God could see that adding pain-to-pain wasn't going to change anything as far as their hearts were concerned. He went on to reveal that even though they were doing all the religious things they were supposed to do, it was not worship from their hearts. They didn't love God or want to live for him, only to appease him.

It's no different today when people go to church to do their religious duty as a sort of pay off, so they can go back to their sins feeling like they have bought favor with God. Some people feel that as long as worship is lively, and the preacher says what is pleasing, then God is cool and everything is fine, never mind the sins that are still going on among the people.

What God sees and what man sees are often very different. Until our hearts yearn to know him and worship him not only in Spirit, or attitude, but also in the practical everyday kind of application of truth, we cannot please him.

Israel, in the above reference, was a very religious nation and was doing the religious thing that God had commanded them to do, but now God was sick of it. Activities that were meant to be a means of expression of love and worship had become in their minds a means of satisfying God's desire to have

obedient subjects! God was a burden to them that had been trust upon them, and they would have preferred to have never known him.

Some people feel that way today. They love sinning but fear God, so when they sin they are miserable. When they don't sin they're bored. They don't love God really, but they don't want him mad at them either. That seems to be a good description of Israel in the days of Isaiah too.

God's remedy was a call to come to him and reason things out. Maybe if they could understand where he is coming from, things would be different. The desire in the heart of God was to change their hearts and to cleanse their wounded spirits—spirits that had become infected with the sin virus making sin seem desirable to them. It's not normal to desire sin, though the desire is in everyone, seemingly from birth. Not everyone desires the same sin expression, but all sin in one way or another until we come to God and receive healing of our souls.

The church of Laodicea had been blinded by their wrong concept of what pleases God, and didn't realize that they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

The expression, naked is instructive of a condition of having ones flesh showing. Often these terms are used in a symbolic sense to help us comprehend a truth. Sin has brought us an awareness of the need for a covering and one has been provided, the righteousness of Christ.

We are encouraged to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, but how can we do that? In what manner can we wear him? The answer is logical—in the visible expressions of our hearts, words and deeds. For our words and deeds to be right, our hearts must also be right, but since we were born with a sin nature, cleansing is required; a cleansing that has now become available through the blood sacrifice of Jesus for us. The power released as a result of his all-sufficient sacrifice has the power to cleanse even the most wicked heart. All that is required is that we come to him and repentantly seek him and give him access to the inner region of our hearts and minds.

The people were encouraged to come and buy gold refined in the fire and to put on white clothes to cover their nakedness, symbolic of the righteousness that is by Jesus Christ, and to get salve for their eyes.

Interestingly, there was an ointment being manufactured in Laodicea for eyes! This made the application of thought understandable to them, but we also have another picture to look at, the story of a blind man that Jesus made clay to put on his eyes. After putting it on his eyes, he told him to go to the Pool of Siloam and to wash his eyes there.

The symbolism is that Jesus put some of the earth on his eyes, symbolic of what blinds people to spiritual understanding, and told him to go to the Pool of Siloam that means "sent" and to wash. When we wash the earthiness out of our eyes, we can then see, as God would have us see. Sent is the response when a person begins to see correctly. Participation in "sent" is how we keep the world out of our eyes! It is the eye-salve that is needed.

The world waited just outside their door, but could they see them? Can we?

## **Chapter Eight**

### **The Overcoming Life**

We have been viewing the overcoming life through the pictures brought to us from the seven churches of what was called Asia at that time. Actually it is the upper Mediterranean region that is Turkey today. We were taken on a quick journey beginning on the coast of the Aegean Sea at Ephesus and moving northward. We looped around and finally headed southeast to our last destination Laodicea. Along the way we were shown Christ as he related to each condition encountered. We learned about the strengths and weaknesses of each individual church and saw ourselves in them as well.



It's not easy, being an overcomer! The reason it's not easy is that we must stay focused upon what is our correct goal at all times. An overcomer lives every moment in the light of eternity. An overcomer never depends on anyone, himself, or anything; he puts his full trust in God. An overcomer recognizes his part that is essential in every minute detail of life, but also recognizes God's part and never excludes God from anything.

There was a song back in the early seventies that comes to mind that illustrated the point quite well, I confess I don't recall the words correctly, however the essence of it was that the singer referred to his life as being like a person driving a car. When things were difficult he would let the Lord do the driving and he would get in the back seat, but when things were pleasant he would take the wheel again. He couldn't seem to let the Lord do all the driving!

Whereas, we are to always be participants in our life with the Lord, yet he is the one who is the primary doer. Our role though active is passive, that is, we let him lead, guide, counsel, teach and enable. Our role is active in that we do the living out of what he is indicating and enabling us to do.

Sometimes we are pictured as a part of a church body, and at other times a soldier in battle. When a soldier is in battle he must obey the commands of his commanding officer. He uses the weapon supplied him and with the aid of the entire fighting force, engages the enemy. A good soldier always fights as one who is a part of the whole, never trying to go it alone. Individuals fight wars having learned to work as a part of the whole army and victories belong to all. After great battles special awards for outstanding performances are given, and in the heavenly kingdom it is the same.

Overcomers are individuals who never allow distractions or preoccupations to limit their ability to perform. When in training, a soldier learns about what can be expected to happen on the battlefield.

A good training program will teach discipline to each soldier. He will be required to do tasks that are distasteful to his nature. He will have to learn how to be patient and persevere even when there is no apparent reason for it. He must learn to obey unquestioningly even when there is no apparent logic to a command. If he is assigned a post of duty, he must be faithful to it and remain alert even when there is no apparent threat or need. Complacency is a weakness that any enemy will seek to exploit! If these are truths in the natural, how much more are they truths in the spiritual?

The Christian must always remember that though we are at war, our war is against Satan and all that is evil. We are not at war with one another, nor are we at war against the unregenerated people of the world. Jesus came to save the people of this world and rescuing them is our assignment. It is not their flesh and blood that we are against; it is the spiritual force of evil that is holding them captive that is the enemy. When they are being used to attack us, we recognize the real enemy and love the sinner. This is the Jesus way. This is the way of the overcomer.

### **When the Enemy is Within, What Then?**

This is where the battle gets ugly. Many Christians have become aware that they are struggling with something that is bigger than they are able to deal with themselves. Can it be that there really are demonic spirits that afflict Christians? Some people take great comfort in the thought that Christians can't have a demon. If that is so, then where do the fierce battles that rage in people come from? Some argue that the struggles we battle with in our own selves come from the carnal nature or sin nature, and that demons are not the reason. Others seek to blame all their problems on demons and look for someone to cast a demon out to solve their problem. Still others deny that any of our problems come from the demonic, and that all problems of mind, heart, or emotions come from some chemical disorder.

If sin were a problem of chemistry or genetic disorders, then fixing it would be a task for scientists not ministers. I for one, however, recognize that there are demon spirits. Jesus too recognized demons and cast them out.

The extent of influence upon people and what it is that they are able to do is a point where disagreements usually are based on experiences.

I like to look at the scriptures to determine what is correct. What I find there is that the scriptures recognize the presence of evil spirits in human experience. Our problems began when Satan appeared to Eve as a talking serpent in the book of Genesis. That was a demonic influence upon the affairs of humanity. Eve was not "possessed," but what does that matter? The result of that encounter is with us to this day!

When I approach this subject, I recognize that there are many opinions about what we are talking about. I like to take the Biblical one as being the safest ground to stand on. Deliverance in the New

Testament is not a subject that involves many exorcisms after the ministry of Jesus. The focus of attention is upon the repentance of the sinner and his acceptance of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The presence of struggle with sin remains in focus even after a person has received the work of salvation in his life. What I have personally come to understand is that as long as we are ignorant of our need, the problem will likely remain. To try to absolve oneself of some defect before the light of the Holy Spirit is put upon it, is likely to result in a great deal of frustration. When the time is right and the Holy Spirit is involved, deliverance comes according to the pattern set forth in the scriptures.

A passage in the book of James is very helpful in this regard; after discussing the internal battle that rages in the carnal Christian's heart with sinful desires and duplicity, (James 4:1-6) James gives us these words of instruction.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:7-10)

What we see here is the process of change laid out in language that all can understand. First, we are to in humility submit ourselves to God. Next, we are to resist the devil. Having done that, we then come near to God. Notice the involvement of the person in the process: submit, resist, come near, wash, purify, grieve, mourn, wail, stop laughing, it's no laughing matter, be gloomy for awhile, humble yourself before the Lord and having done all that he will lift you up!

The reason people struggle with the forces of evil is that they have never participated in or submitted to the process! Looking for a quick fix is easier, some people think. Go forward for prayer, have some spiritual giant pray, or someone cast a demon out, but does it work?

I am a believer in the gifts of the Spirit—faith, miracles, discernment of spirits, and healing. I am also aware that many people have been set free from problems miraculously not having gone through the process outlined in James, but for the rest of us, the process remains the necessary means of growth and deliverance. Even for those who have received what I call a miraculous conversion where the shackles of sin are seeming all taken away as a result of committing themselves to the Lord Jesus, there still remain battles with such things as lust, pride, selfishness, and such like. It seems that the Lord Jesus always takes enough out of the way in our lives initially so we can go on with our Christian life, but leaves elements of the old nature so that the process of growth and cleansing will continue.

Why doesn't God do everything in the process of our spiritual development miraculously? Why must we become involved in the process? I believe it has to do with God's eternal plan for human beings. We were created in the image of God, but we fell into sin. God has made it possible for us to return to what we were prior to the fall. It was participation with Satan that caused the fall, is it then unreasonable that we must participate with God in the restoration process?

The part that demons play in the struggle we have with sin is that they are always trying to gain power over us. They do this through deception, enticements, misdirected desires and doctrinal misunderstandings. Demons work well where there is denial of their presence or influence.

What needs to be understood is that demons don't need to "possess" a person to influence them. Prayer and the exercise of authority against an evil spirit need not imply that the person is "possessed." It isn't important to identify where a demon is or how he is working whether from inside or outside, so to speak, but rather if a demon is involved in a person's struggle, just get rid of the demon—cast it out—is another way of saying get rid of it. In trying to figure out how a procedure fits into a person's theology is to complicate a simple matter. Where demons are concerned, if you discern their presence, get rid of them.

Regarding the future of man, we see only vaguely into God's eternal plan. What he has in mind for us is veiled from view. Sometimes it is helpful to look at a past record to predict a future possibility. When we see all that God has done, and the great care he has taken in its creation, I feel certain that we can expect that there is much more to come. If that is the case, perhaps what we are going through now in this world is preparatory to what God has in his plan for us in the future.

### **If Grace Covers All Our Sins, Why Overcome?**

Jesus Christ is the head of the church; therefore we are subject to him. He is also the head of the body, therefore we are a part of him; thus, what affects one part of the body effects all. The purpose of

grace is not to allow for sin, but rather to provide a legal remedy for us since we are all violators of the law of righteousness.

When we come to the subject of the lost condition of humanity and why it is important to God that we live apart from sin, we need to be reeducated because life in this world is full of violations of known laws. When we drive our cars, we rarely obey all traffic laws. We may try hard to obey, but we go too fast, or we fail to stop fully at all stop signs, or we fail to make a signal.

A normal attitude is that most laws are there as guides, and if we break some of them, so what, so long as it didn't result in an accident or we didn't get caught. We know we shouldn't eat too much or stay up too late, and on the list goes, but do we always obey? No one does. What this has taught us is that some laws are serious laws and some are good suggestions, or at least we take them to be that way.

When we come to divine laws on the other hand, if it is a law, it is to be obeyed absolutely. This is where the human laws and rules and divine laws differ. We live in a realm where blends are normal and good choices are based on good judgment. When we come to sin, we sometimes take the attitude of "oh well" if it didn't hurt anyone what is the big deal? It's hard for us to understand that God wants to teach us about purity of heart and mind.

The age of grace is different from the age of law in that there is a little more latitude for a person to make choices without fear of violation of an exact law. The prevailing law is love. The Law of Moses serves to give us vital information concerning the character of true righteousness. In many instances we are left to the delicate task of deciding what is more important, obeying a known law or doing the thing that love demands. Which one, after all, is the higher righteousness?

To use an example, if you have an individual in your care who is in vital need of medical assistance and you are driving a car to the hospital; do you obey all traffic laws or do you go as quickly as possible yet maintaining an acceptable level of safety? It would be foolish to worry about every detail of law in a situation like that, so long as you don't jeopardize someone else's life in the process.

Another example of how righteousness is properly applied is to take a ball and throw it into the air. God has developed a whole system of laws that govern the natural world around us and each of these laws is absolute in nature. Gravity is an absolute and pulls everything within its reach toward the earth, but a ball thrown away from the earth goes up in defiance of gravity. Gravity is no less a law, but another law has now come into play, the law of thrust. As long as the law of thrust is greater than the law of gravity, the ball moves away from the earth, but as soon as the law of gravity is greater, it falls back to the earth.

This is what we are talking about when we talk about grace. In this age God is giving us more responsibility to make decisions without guilt, so long as we stay within the spirit of the laws of righteousness. We now understand that love must be factored into every decision and action.

Grace doesn't mean reckless. Grace provides an opportunity to grow up in understanding, to learn what is and is not acceptable, and to consider all the factors before making decisions. God didn't set out to create robots when he created human beings. What he wanted was a being that was like him. God gave man the same characteristics that he possesses with reference to his personhood. He didn't make us to be "Gods" but to be like he is in matters of his personhood. From the weight of scripture, it is evident that God wanted man to be like he is in matters of character. This requires that we be given certain choices so that we can develop and utilize the ability to think, reason, plan and decide upon matters of moral and spiritual concern. God knows that too much legalism stifles growth and therefore a provision has been made whereby people can be permitted to err without fear of eternal judgment.

This provision was never intended to allow for abuses against the heart of God. What God apparently wants is a people who are desperately in love with him, desiring to please him, yet knowing they will sometimes err because they have so much to learn. The educational process is built upon the understanding that lessons learned are not always going to be properly applied, but when a bad grade results, corrections can be made.

The overcomer is a person who is striving to get it right in the face of opposition, distractions, and limitations. The churches addressed in Revelations, were churches that had received some of the finest teachings possible. They knew the ways of the Lord, but they were faced with challenges that were overwhelming some of them. Some of these challenges were coming from individuals who were professing some new insight and were leading some astray. Others were being persecuted and some were just being stressed by difficulties heaped upon them. Keeping focused is always a challenge, but we can do it.

What we see here in Revelations is a picture of Jesus occupying in a position of absolute wisdom, understanding, power and authority. He is like a coach who is with his team while a game is in progress. He observes what they are up against and knows their limitations. He is sending in instructions to his team and thus enabling them to win in the struggle. Some of them needed correction, others encouragement, and some had to adjust their view of themselves. This was the case in Laodicea, they thought they were wonderful, but the coach said, "you are like lukewarm water, wake up or I'll pull you out of the game!"

Too much or too little confidence ruins the effectiveness of an athlete. They need a balanced view of themselves. Understanding ones weakness is an expression of wisdom. Seeking to overcome a weakness is to strengthen one's ability to play the game. Confidence based on proper development of abilities and techniques is a quality to be embraced.

We as Christians are in a life and death struggle and winning is essential. We have the playbook and we have good trainers. Losing is out of the question; it is unacceptable.

The enemy is the fallen nature that doesn't want to practice, that is lazy, disinterested in the process, has bad habits and thinks it knows everything. The fallen nature is disqualified to win any prize in the heavenly scheme of things. It has sinful desires, is arrogant, haughty, boastful, proud and feels totally self-sufficient. These attitudes and ideas and indeed the very nature is what must be deemed dead.

When we are willing to lay down our life, we will then be able to find the newness of life that comes from the Lord Jesus. He is the source of eternal life.

### **One Final Picture**

In the Book of Revelations, we have another reference to the overcomer. In chapter 21 is the account of the New Jerusalem. It is described as being a bride beautifully adorned for her husband. In this passage it is sometimes hard to distinguish between whether it is a city, or the church, the bride of Christ, that is being described in symbolic language.

As was the case in the earlier description of Babylon that was a picture of the fallen sin nature of men, so this description is also not only a city, but also a description of the occupant's new natures and character. I don't wish to limit the interpretation of this passage to mere symbolism, nor do I wish to limit it to physical characteristics of a city.

This city is unlike the city of Babylon that was a description of conditions that have found expression at various times in many places, cities, nations, and religions. It is my personal belief that it is both an actual city and a spiritual description of the occupants of the city.

The promise that is addressed to the overcomers is that they will inherit all this,

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:3-4)

When we view the city of Jerusalem, we see a city that has foundations. It had twelve layers of familiar precious stones found in this earthly realm. As near as I have been able to identify these various stones, one common characteristic seems to emerge, they are all stones that have resulted from the pressures that the crust of the earth has been subjected too and the resultant fracturing. I admit limited knowledge of geology, but from what I have learned, when fracturing of the structures of the earth occur, solutions bearing chemicals flow upward through the fractures. When certain rock formations are exposed to solutions bearing the necessary minerals or chemicals, precious stones result of various sorts. The value of these stones and metals reflects upon the process of their creation.

In like manner, when people experience the pressures of life experiences causing fracturing within their spirits, the resultant pain is exposed to the divine flow of the Holy Spirit's power creating eternal qualities of character like unto precious stones.

The other day I was pondering why I was seeing several young men going through very trying times, some are just now emerging into a new promise of better days. I asked the Lord why this was, was it because they had done something so bad that they had to go through all of these sufferings?

The Lord responded to me that it wasn't that they were bad but rather that they were so good that these things happened. He showed me that when he finds a person of exceptional character he then purges them so that they will come forth with an even greater glow than was seen before.

My attention then went to my hobby of polishing rocks. When selecting rocks to polish, I look for something about them that deserves being seen in the best possible light. I then put them in the polisher and subject them to the motion and substances that will polish them. This is what is happening to many people who have a capacity to be special.

The architect of this city chooses stones for the foundation that come from this process. Not only is there a practical purpose in this, but also they are beautiful to behold! Each layer is made of a unique type, and each layer ascends to another layer of a different quality and beauty. This continues until all twelve layers are complete, and then a wall stands boldly upon it!

I will not venture to name qualities of character that result from this process in real life terms, but I once read a sermon concerning the twelfth layer, amethyst. The writer related how amethyst was used to make chalices from which wine was drunk in days of old. There is a legend that states that when wine is drunk from a vessel of amethyst, it will not intoxicate. The writer then went on to express how comforting this is to all that have suffered in life as a result of alcoholism.

This was very insightful to me, stimulating my curiosity as to what these stones might represent. I have concluded, at least for now, that they are representative of the process described above, and therefore represent various qualities.

Next, the number twelve catches our attention as we look at the foundation layers. Looking at the use of the number twelve in the scriptures we frequently find it in a governmental setting. The twelve tribes of Israel were one such instance where divisions helped facilitate governmental order in the nation. These were natural boundaries that were useful in governing much like many nations are divided into states or provinces. Also I have observed that churches and denominations are likewise natural divisions in the body of Christ to accommodate various needs in the lives of members. This is only bad when there is a failure to see that though many and differing in characteristics, we are still all a part of the same body the church.

The names of the tribes of Israel vary in different lists, but the number twelve remains constant. It seems to be symbolic of governmental perfection. Good government is the foundation upon which the city is built and the qualities of character that have resulted from the process of living life victoriously are the building materials. The first layer of the foundation and the wall of the city were made of what appeared to be jasper as clear as crystal, and the city was made of gold. The streets of the city are paved with gold, the appropriate place for gold in the life of the overcomer! In this city, gold is a building material, not a symbol of wealth! Overcomers are people who use gold, or what it symbolizes, but do not indulge in the pomp and pride that the world associates with it.

In this passage the New Covenant promise is given and elaborated upon,

“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. **He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.** (Rev. 21:3-7)

Whereas the description of the city is instructive about the character of the bride, the church, what is given here immediately following is a vital part of the message. There are some individuals and conditions that are excluded from the city.

“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” (Rev. 21:8)

This list of those who are excluded from the city and the future plan of God are just as important to the subject as those who are a part of it. They stand in sharp contrast to those who have become partakers of the promises of God through repentance and perseverance in faith and Godliness. They are instructive to the overcomers and stand as warnings against those who presume upon the grace of God, while continuing in a life of sin.

God is not through with his eternal plan. What is now will soon be replaced with a new creation. Literally we are told that God will create all things new, the old will be gone, just as it was in the life of the believer who turned to the Lord by partaking of the redemptive work of Jesus. The old life with its

pain and destructive life style was replaced with a new and living way, a life of peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This entire realm of cursed substances is scheduled for destruction, but what has been created here that has divine and eternal qualities will be included in the new creation. Nothing will be lost that is of the right stuff.

It is from this realm of suffering that the gems of his kingdom are gathered! They are called the elect, the people of God, the bride of Christ, his body, his beloved, his temple **and the overcomers.**

What God has in his future plans for his people is not fully revealed. What is revealed is that those who overcome will be a vital part of all he does. Just what that will mean in real life terms is the part that we can't fully see at this point, but what we know of the past causes us to respond with great optimism regarding the future.

God is good and all he does is good. He is love, and all who join in with him through repentance and faith will experience that love in full measure, but for those who reject the message, their future is gloom, despair, misery and pain.

How tragic it is that anyone would reject such love for such pain! Tragically many do. They live their lives oblivious to the end result and never reach for the answer that is theirs in Christ.

## Chapter Nine

### The Fallen Nature

If we are to ever really understand the walk in the Spirit, we must fully understand what constitutes the fallen nature. We are instructed to deem the sin nature dead in our lives, and to receive the life of Jesus as our new life.

Some people use methods of judgment such as using the saying, "What would Jesus do." That is obviously a great way of judging a matter, but the weakness of it is that we don't all know what Jesus would do. Our concept of righteousness comes into play, and if it is faulty, we will err in the process.

What is difficult for many to understand is that the fallen nature will often try to mimic life in the Spirit. In brief, the life in the Spirit is a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. This manifestation is seen in the behaviors that result from his presence. The Holy Spirit influences what flows through the mind and heart of the believer resulting in behaviors that can be approved as godly.

One can't walk in what he doesn't possess, therefore, before anyone can walk in the Spirit he must be filled with the Spirit. Individuals who desire to be spiritual people, but who have never been filled with the Spirit are the ones who are always trying to live in the Spirit, but fail because living in the Spirit isn't a learned behavior. They see the behavior, and try to be like that, but what results is a counterfeit. It is a result of effort and is more like law than grace.

As a teacher of the Word, I am aware that when I seek to describe what the flesh or fallen nature is like, or the life in the Spirit, that the student will make the mistake of trying to obey the principles of righteousness without seeking the presence and power of the Spirit. True righteousness flows from the source, the Holy Spirit, and our lives are the manifestation of his presence.

When the Holy Spirit is not the source, and a behavior is a godly one, it is flesh as much as a bad behavior! Illustrating the point is not difficult as we all know individuals who aren't Christians but behave as well or better than Christians do. Good behavior, in and of itself, is not proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The presence of sin, however, is proof of the presence of the fallen nature.

When we come to the point in our lives where we clearly understand what the fallen nature is like, we are then able to turn from it. What we turn to is not a new behavior, but rather, the person of Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit ministers him to us. **Thus we see that by turning to Jesus, new behaviors will result, but it's not the new behaviors that we seek, it is Jesus!**

The reason we need definitions of what each is like is so that we can look upon our life and determine whether we are living in the Spirit or living in the flesh. Wrong behaviors need correction, but **we must never substitute correction of a behavior for correction in our connection with Jesus.** I like to think of sinful behavior as being a symptom of the lack of a vital relationship with Jesus.

If we seek to correct the behavior and make no effort to restore our fellowship with Jesus, we have fallen short in the process. What is needed is more than correction, though correction is still part of the process. As James put it, submit to God first; then resist the devil. The devil's flight from us results from restored fellowship with Jesus.

When Jesus came down from the mountain where he had been transfigured, he found the disciples trying unsuccessfully to cast an evil spirit out of a boy. Jesus then told them to bring the boy to him. The lack of faith necessary to cast the spirit out had to do with their lack of a meaningful connection of prayer. Some manuscripts from which translations are taken say prayer and fasting. It isn't my purpose to decide whether it is simply prayer or prayer and fasting that is needed, but both are correct when done as a means of connecting with Jesus.

As we peruse the scriptures for insights to help us understand when we need to press in with greater intensity, we learn that manifestations of the flesh when seen are: sexual immorality, impure sensuality, falsehood, theft, bitterness, rage, anger, slander, brawling and malice, drunkenness, greed, love of the world, lust of the eye, pride of life, divisiveness, contentious debating, joining factions, selfishness and sensitivity to criticism. We are, however, to be sensitive toward God, full of love for one another, always seeking the unity of the spirit.

Whenever we see ourselves becoming lustful, angry, bitter, greedy, touchy, cliquish, judgmental, contentious, selfish and always quick to debate issues, we can be sure we have lost connection with the head Christ Jesus. None of the above are a part of the mind of Christ! The head is where the mind is, and we are not the Head!

It is not my intention to limit the role of choice in this matter of behavior as we definitely see that we have a responsibility to turn away from evil and to do what is right. The intent is to help us see the importance of seeing bad behavior as evidence that something is lacking in our relationship with Jesus.

When we see a lack, the appropriate thing to do is to first reaffirm our commitment to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We then repent of whatever behavior we see as evidence of our lack, and we then resist the devil so that the power of the Spirit can move against him causing him to flee. The power of the Spirit is released against Satan when we speak in the authority of Christ using words spoken in faith against Satan's power and presence.

Some find it useful to speak concerning the blood of Jesus because; it is by his shed blood that we stand in the authority of Christ. Resisting Satan is never to become a preoccupation of a Christian; it is simply what we do when we sense that we are being opposed in our relationship with Jesus.

When we come to the Lord Jesus there is a process of learning that must take place. Those who are connected to Christ are able to see the truth and apply it as a part of their growth in him. Teaching ministries help give good definitions and instructions assisting in the process, but they never take the place of direct connection of each individual to the head, Christ Jesus.

Even the Holy Spirit himself, does not take the place of Jesus in our lives. His role is to make Jesus real and personal to all of us. Just as human teachers are not to ever become to people what Jesus is, so the Holy Spirit doesn't either. His role is that of a teacher, leading us into all truth.

The Holy Spirit is however, more than a teacher, he is an enabler! He never does for us what we are to do, but he teaches us and enables us, sometimes comforting us, but always leading us to Jesus and the Father.

People who are walking in submission to Jesus will see behaviors that are wrong and will seek to change the behavior. In some cases, seeing a truth is all that is needed while in other cases, deliverance from a binding power is needed. Binding powers can be addictions, lifestyles, or demonic strongholds, no matter; all are to be overcome and can be by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **Chapter Ten**

### **The Gift of the Holy Spirit**

We have been talking about living a victorious Christian life and all the while speaking of the Holy Spirit in his ministry to us as believers. It is therefore fitting that we should talk a while about the subject of how it is that we come to have a relationship that involves the Holy Spirit at all. In Luke 11:9-13, Jesus, while teaching his disciples about prayer, gives us the following instructions:

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

In this passage we are instructed to ask, seek, and knock referring to prayer. We are then told that even as we who are fathers know how to give good gifts to our children, so our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. Is then the Holy Spirit a gift given? The tone of the passage as translated suggests that is true. In studying the meaning of words in the Greek there is a problem that comes into view. The translators say “the Holy Spirit” where the Greek says holy spirit or Holy Spirit (Capitalizing Divine names is not in the Greek, therefore, capitalization is supplied by the translators). The question then is if it is “holy spirit”, if so then does it refer to the Holy Spirit or what he gives? E. W. Bullinger in his book entitled *Word Studies on the Holy Spirit* found that there is a distinction in the Greek that is identified by the use of the article “the”. When the article is not present in the Greek, the meaning is, in his view, the gift or what the Holy Spirit gives or does. He also notes that power from on high is the gift that is given and that the Holy Spirit gives various manifestations of this power called holy spirit (pneuma hagion). Since the study examines all the passages in the New Testament where pneuma occurs the pattern is consistent.

We might say it this way, the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead is here having been sent as a result of Jesus’ sacrifice of his life on the cross. He has been sent into the world to fulfill the will of the Father, and that will is to reveal Christ to the world in general and to the Christians in particular. I personally have come to believe from my studies of the scriptures, that the Holy Spirit is vitally a part of the life of every believer, and has been even before receiving Jesus. That doesn’t imply that a person is “saved” before receiving Jesus, but it does mean that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to draw him to Jesus. It is his ministry to convict us of sin and rebellion, and to convince us of the provision of salvation by faith in Jesus. It is his mission to convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The mission of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, in coming brings guilt upon all that disbelieve in Jesus. He is here to reveal Jesus to all that will come to him, and to condemn all that reject him.

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” (John 16:7-11)

It is evident that all that happens to us spiritually is part of the work and mission of the Holy Spirit. In my life, the Spirit drew me to Jesus. He was the means of the impartation of the energy, or the spirit of eternal life, referred to as the new birth. He has been and is my teacher, counselor, comforter and enabler. He has revealed Jesus to me and has made him real to me as my constant companion. His work will never be finished until all that he was sent into the world to fulfill has been fulfilled. I do not possess him; he possesses me. I am his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works. It is the Holy Spirit in my life that is the source of power I received from on high. This power was given on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 and was received into my life at an early age. When he came to me, he enabled me with gifts as he saw fit to assist me in the fulfillment of the call of God upon my life. He clothed me with power (dunamis) to fulfill the purposes of God.

There are a variety of views concerning the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit. Some believe that the experience of the new birth is what is being referred to; others see a separate and distinct experience. Since it was Jesus who referred to an experience called the baptism of the Spirit, the question seems to be, exactly what sort of experience was Jesus referring to?

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:4-5)



In this passage again the article “the” is not in the Greek. It is the teaching of E.W. Bullinger that if it is not present then we should see it as what the Holy Spirit gives rather than being a reference to the Holy Spirit himself. The passage goes on into a discussion about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, but the Lord returned their attention back to the subject of the Holy Spirit and his mission.

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power (Dunamis) when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7-8)

From this we see two things come into view, one is that the Holy Spirit was going to be given, and secondly, that he gives power when he comes. Further study reveals that the power referred to is manifest in such gifts as speaking in tongues, prophecy, miracles, healing, and such like. Other manifestations are special abilities to govern, serve, special enablements and ministries.

Again, are believers baptized into the Holy Spirit or are they baptized into power from on high? I don't suppose the subject warrants any controversy since the important issue has to do with both having the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the manifestation of the power of the Spirit. It also has to do with receiving from him what he wishes to impart to us. The theology of the matter is not the important issues, in my mind, so much as, is the Holy Spirit actively working in our lives and are we experiencing the reality of the power that we are to be clothed with? I suggest that if we find a deficiency in our lives that we ask, seek and knock because, our heavenly Father will give the gift he has promised.

In one sense the gift is both the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Holy Spirit. I therefore take no issue with the translators. I only point this out for the sake of stirring our thinking concerning the importance of keeping our experience alive and active with all the tools available. The work to which we are called is an important one and we need to be empowered for the task.

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **The Life of the Overcomer**

When we speak of the life of the overcomer, what sort of picture comes to mind? How would we portray such a person?

There are some who would immediately point to a person who is weird, a sort of recluse who never has any interaction with anything that is not directly considered to be spiritual. This person would always be carrying a Bible around, quoting scriptures and praying constantly. The person would never participate in any activity such as sports, would never read a secular book, and never watch television. The overcomer in their view would be oblivious to the political process, and would be suspicious of everyone who is less “holy” than they. Since their idea about the life of Jesus is that he was that sort of person, they think that they are a good imitation of him.

Is such a picture accurate in any way? Lets say for the sake of discussions that that is not at all like what is being spoken of, then what is?

There are some who seem to believe that since salvation is by faith in the finished work of the cross that their life on earth as a believer has no relevancy to their spiritual destiny; therefore, how they choose to live out their earthly life is of no consequence so long as they have faith in Jesus. This position is easily refuted though the part about the finished work of Jesus on the cross is totally correct.

It is my belief that Satan has worked hard and long to confuse our thinking about how our behavior fits into our standing with God. Obviously, behavior is a big part of our Christian experience. What confuses some people is that salvation is never based on the behavior of a Christian because we are not saved by works. We are saved by faith in the finished work of Jesus when he took our place on the cross and paid our debt resulting from our sins. Salvation is based on what he did, not on what we do.

Then what part do works play? None is the answer. The things we do as Christians are expressions of our love and gratitude to Jesus. If a person works, he can expect pay, but we don't do what we do as work, but rather as expressions of our love. We seek to allow the life of Jesus to be lived through our

attitudes, actions and affections. We desire to be accurate reflections of his character, and to live according to his will. He owes us nothing; we owe him everything!

Again, Satan has been working long and hard to confuse our thinking by throwing accusations at us that is behavior related. Any picture that is incomplete is a distorted picture. Those who see the finished work of the cross as the total means of salvation are correct as far as the picture goes, but to assume that behavior is not important is a total distortion.

Those who place emphasis upon being spiritual in conduct are also correct, but many carry it to incorrect applications. The idea that after a person has been born again he is now a new creation in Christ Jesus has somehow escaped them. They fail to see that the changes are expressions of their new life in Christ. "Spirit of life" generated changes are not the same as law generated changes. The difference is as vast as day and night. Spirit of life generated changes flow out as a natural expression of what is happening internally, whereas law generated changes are imposed upon the person.

One day as I was resting during the day, the Spirit said to me, "I didn't create you to be an angel." I think that I had a subconscious idea that being a good Christian was being rather angelic in application.

What the Spirit was calling to my attention was that what the will of the Father is concerning us is that we become what he created us to be, humans in every sense of the word only sinlessly. The entrance of sin has brought an enormous distortion in the realm of our character, and now that Jesus has come and has brought to us reconciliation with power from on high, we can now live lives free of the evil result of the fall.

The picture that now emerges is one where all human relationships are filled with an element of the divine nature, love. This is totally non-sexual, non-exploitive and always pure. The person who is born again becomes an aware person appreciating goodness, and is readily discerning of evil. He clings to the good and hates the evil. He is in the world, participating in the just processes of everyday life, spreading joy, love and peace. He sees Jesus as the most misunderstood man of history, because what the world seems to think of him is totally incorrect.

Jesus was and is the Prince of Peace. His righteousness was not weirdness, but rather what the word implies, right-ness. Righteousness means, always doing what is the right thing to do. Righteous thoughts are thought processes that always lead to a correct conclusion. Those who possess the mind of Christ are people who have developed a relationship with Christ that has resulted in thought processes that are totally righteous in content and conclusion.

Because our relationship with Christ is supernatural in nature, some see every aspect of our Christian life as supernatural. This is true, but not to the extent that it takes away the natural life of the person. God made us to be human. Just as Jesus had a natural life—he ate, slept, walked from place to place, and in general did all the same sort of things other humans do. He was different in that he had faith in the power of his Father, to not only live free of sin, but also to reverse the effects of sin in the lives of those he encountered.

As humans he wants us to also see the eternal connection we have with him and his kingdom. God wants to remove from us the interference of sin and what sin has caused. What sin has brought into our life experiences are such things as, greed, lust, deceitfulness, covetousness, anger, hate, rage, murder, and a host of other complications that hinder our abilities to live in peace, love and joy. God wants to restore what Satan has destroyed by bringing us into a relationship with him and those around us where righteousness is the code of conduct and his supernatural power is able to work in restoration and healing.

Satan has sought to misdirect the natural drives that our creator placed in us into unnatural desires and to misdirect us into pleasure seeking rather than joyful living. Joyful living results when we see that every restraint that God has placed upon us is for the purpose of redirecting us into a way of life that is superior in both content and result. We are then able to appreciate God as a benevolent benefactor rather than as cruel and sadistic out to destroy our lives of pleasure.

I am convinced that God is not against us having pleasurable lives, but he hurts for us when he sees us going down a road of life that leads to destruction both here and eternally. Too many chose a life of the pleasures of sin for a season, only to be deprived of the joys of life in the here and now and eternal life that is coming to all who believe in him. The overcomer is a person who lives in the now with eternity in view! When there is a conflict between some temporal pleasure and an eternal value, the eternal value always wins!

In short God wants humans to love him, honor him, and to obey him because they appreciate his love and care for them. It is a pleasurable experience for God and us, when we humans finally come to the

place of joyful obedience based upon a realization of our inadequacy and his adequacy. It is when we come to the place where we can truly say from our hearts, "Father knows best," that joy follows. This joy is both God's and ours because he knows that if we follow that course we will always be in the place of blessing. God is not a scrooge! Never has been and never will be, however; to those who are rebellious and unbelieving he is an austere judge, unbending in his judgments.

The day of grace is now, the Day of Judgment follows. This is the day for us to decide, do we want the wonders of heaven to be our future or do we want to continue a life of sin and destruction.

Receiving Jesus as Savior is as simple as asking him into our hearts. If you have never received Jesus there is no better time than now. You may pray this prayer or ask someone who is a Christian to pray with you:

Dear Lord Jesus, I accept you into my heart acknowledging my need because I recognize that I am a sinner. Therefore, I ask you to forgive me for every sin I have ever committed. I ask you to forgive the sins that I didn't know were sins as well as the ones I deliberately committed.

I hereby renounce any and all claim, hold, or tie that Satan has on me, and vow to serve Jesus as my Lord from this day forward.

I recognize my need for guidance, power and strength to do this, therefore, I ask you to fill me with your Holy Spirit and to change my heart. Please come into my heart and begin a work in me that will result in eternal life.

Thank you for coming into my heart, and I ask you to write my name down in the Lambs Book of Life. Please wash my heart clean and give me new desires to fill my heart. Please be with me constantly from this moment onward, and give your angels charge over me to guard and protect me. I thank you for doing this for me this day,

All this I ask in the name of Jesus, Amen.

If you prayed this prayer in sincerity and faith, you can expect changes to begin in your life. Changes come as a result of the entrance of the Holy Spirit into your hearts; however, it is necessary to focus your heart upon Christ and to earnestly seek daily impartations of his power.

If you don't have a Bible, please get one, and read it often, as it is a source of encouragement, revelation, instruction, and comfort. It is God's words given for your instruction and reading them prayerfully will result in renewed spiritual strength.

Church attendance in a good Bible believing church is vitally important, but care should be given to find the one that God wants you to attend. When you find one that is right for you, you will have a feeling of comfort about being there. Ask yourself, "Is there genuine love here? Is Jesus the center of attention in the services? Do they preach from the Bible or is their preaching political or philosophical? Will I be feed and encouraged by coming here or will I be coming out of obligation?"

If you have attended a church in the past that has left you feeling empty, pray before returning, perhaps you need to find a different church, one where the life of Jesus is clearly manifest. If we ask for guidance, God will give it. Your life in Jesus is a new life, so start fresh and grow in the knowledge of his love and grace. Be careful not to allow your past to effect your present. You are no longer obligated to past friendships, clubs, gangs, or even family ties, if those ties are contrary to your life in Jesus.

If you were raised in a denominational church, pray about your affiliation with them now that you have received Jesus. Denominations are neither good nor bad, but they can become bondage if they're not right for you. You have one supreme obligation at this point in your life and that is your new relationship with Jesus. If you came to this point of acknowledgement of your need to be born again as the result of church attendance or the witness of a friend or family member, then continuing on this path is likely the correct one for you. As you continue with Christ you will encounter the need for adjustments in many areas of life, but praying for guidance is always the key to receiving what is needed.

May God grant you an abundant provision of his love, grace and guidance in your life in him.

## Summary

What a journey we have taken! We have, with the aid of the one with eyes like blazing fire, hair as white as snow, feet like bronze fresh out of the refiners fire, traveled from Ephesus to Laodicea. We have made stops along the way, each stop providing insights into what is expected of us and what we are up

against. The essence of the message is to keep our focus on what we are called to do. Each place had its own unique challenge, but all were instructed to overcome.

We have taken time to look at the city that is coming down from God out of heaven. We have learned, not only about the city, but also the occupants of the city. We also note that there are people who are not permitted entry into the city because they were found to be sinners!

Just because God is love doesn't mean he is a fool. If God let unregenerated sinners into heaven, then heaven wouldn't be heaven after all! Sin must be judged and those who practice sin will find their place in the place described as being a fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death, a horrible fate to be sure.

We have also pondered what the fallen nature is like so that we can adequately turn from it. We have also learned that it is not so much turning from the fallen behaviors as turning to a new relationship with the Lord Christ Jesus himself.

We have also learned that we cannot live in what we do not possess, therefore; the Holy Spirit is active in this matter of relationship and life in the Spirit. So vital is the link between Christian behavior and Christ that we cannot have one without the other.

We cannot have Christ without the Holy Spirit because; the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The way this works is that the Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus, and Jesus takes us to the Father! The role of the Godhead is now complete, and we enjoy fellowship with God as it was intended. Sin has been atoned for, and sin has been judged. We have been instructed in the process and have found liberty as a result. We are now free of the power of sin and sinful habits, and have been filled with power from on high. We are now able to live the life of an overcomer, dressed in the robe of the righteousness of Christ and made ready to receive the crown of righteousness.