

EPHESUS COMMENDED

Rev. 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: ³And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

If you are familiar with these seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation, I wonder if you already might have them set into particular 'pigeon holes'. What I mean, for example, is that the church in Ephesus is remembered as the church who had lost their first love (v.4). Now we mustn't ignore verses five and six, but for to arrive at a more complete understanding of the fellowship we need to analyse them lovingly and graciously ... where we can. Perhaps the church in Ephesus has been unfairly treated because they have been defined merely as the backslidden church. But don't forget the Lord Jesus has had good things to say about them ... and if we are trying to be fair, we ought to pay attention to how He *commended* them ...

It is easy to condemn, of course. We can often see what is wrong in a person before we see what is right in them, - it is the way our society works ... and we are products of our society. ... So let's try to examine this church in a fair and balanced manner so we can learn from it, and also benefit from how the Lord directed His attention towards it.

First of all, - as I have already said, - our society and our environment do have a strong influence upon us. So, **what was Ephesus like in the first century AD?** ... And when we speak about Ephesus we are including the surrounding area, as well as the city.

Ephesus was tremendously influential. It played a significant role in the spread of Christianity. Ephesus and its citizens are mentioned more than twenty times in the New Testament. The believers there would have been very pleased Jesus mentioned them first because they liked to talk about their city as "the first city of Asia". It wasn't the capital city (Pergamum was), but they liked to think it was very important nonetheless. ... It's a bit like Glasgow and Edinburgh.

It had, - and has, - a beautiful setting. W.M. Ramsay describes, "The most impressive view of modern Ephesus is from the western side of Mount Pion, either from the upper seats of the Great Theatre or from a point a little higher. The eye ranges westwards over the streets and buildings of the Greek and Roman city ..., and across the harbour to the hill of Astyages: southwest the view is bounded by the long ridge of Koressos, along the front crest of which runs the south wall of the Greek city: northwest one looks across the level plain to the sea, full six miles away, and to the rocky ridge that projects from Mount Galliesion and narrows the

sea-gates of the valley: northward lie the level plain and the steep slopes of Galesion. ... northeast and east over the valley and the site of the great Temple of Artemis to the Holy Hill of Ayassoluk, which overhung the Temple, and to the piled-up ranges of mountains beyond.”

You can imagine such a city thronged with important officials doing business that affected the region and beyond. For the majority of them coming from Rome, the beautiful harbour of Ephesus was where they came ashore. This was the city from which they sent trade and produce all over the ancient world. It had huge warehouses and was a flourishing commercial centre. The city hosted the Asian games (similar to the games held at Olympia and Corinth).

Being such a busy place, - and with so much prominence, - idol-worship was everywhere. It had one of the most prestigious temples to Artemis (the Roman Diana). In fact, under the Romans, Ephesus thrived, reaching the pinnacle of its greatness during the first and second centuries of the Christian era. It actually *did* become the capital of that region under Emperor Hadrian’s reign (76 – 138 AD). Its multitude of gods very easily accommodated the arrival of the Christian God and His Son Jesus Christ ... As far as the worship of idols was concerned ... the more the merrier!

And, in fact, some of the new Christians were fairly ready to return the favour and look kindly upon certain aspects within idolatry. For example, there was a group of Greek Christians (431 AD) who had moved across to Asia Minor and were living in the mountains (in a village called Kirkindjii), just outside Ephesus, and they began to make an annual pilgrimage to a particular tomb in a place called Panagia Kapulu (on Mount Koressos). It was allegedly the tomb of Mary, the mother of Jesus who had accompanied John to the region of Ephesus (cf. [Jn. 19:27](#) *Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home*). On her death, her alleged home became a shrine ... and adapted many of the practices of pagan idolatry ... Christianity and idolatry intertwined. In fact, if we wanted to look into this further we would very clearly see, - I believe, - great comparisons of religious life in ancient Ephesus to religious life in twenty-first century Britain.

But there was, nonetheless, a very faithful church in the city. It was formed in Ephesus as the result of Paul’s preaching from the autumn of 52 AD to the spring of 55 AD. At that particular time, Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the world, with a population estimated at 250,000 people. Paul visited at the end of his second missionary journey and left Priscilla and Aquila there, before returning to Antioch (Acts 18:18-21). ...

Soon afterwards, Apollos preached in Ephesus and met Priscilla and Aquila who expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (18:26). ... When we look at the influence of this city, we see how significant Christ's words were to the church to keep its candlestick burning brightly, in order to witness to the reality of the one and only true God!

On his third journey, Paul spent more than two years in Ephesus teaching and preaching in the synagogue and in the hall of Tyrannus. The success of his preaching at Ephesus, however, triggered a riot led by the silversmiths who feared they would be put out of business because of Paul's stance on their making of idols (Acts 19:24-41). ... This turned out to be a good church, - well blessed by God. ... Let's look more closely at them, as described in Rev. 2:2-3.

THEY SERVED

This wasn't a lack-lustre fellowship. They had been established on good sound theology. They were confident in what they believed. What they believed affected how they lived ... and their faith in Christ was their life. They were true and genuine servants of God. They loved Him and served Him. They would have enjoyed reading Paul's epistle, teaching them of their great legacy in the Lord Jesus. They would have 'hung on his every word'. They would have read it over and over again. It was precious to them. They shared it with fellow-believers throughout the region, as they shared their faith in Christ.

Yes, indeed, the Lord Jesus knew all about their commitment to Him. The word He used to describe their 'labour' is the word κόπος, and it means 'toil that results in weariness', - they put everything into their work for the Lord. And the word for 'patience' (ὑπομονή, or 'endurance') is the New Testament term that describes the character developed through the trials of life. These are words that display to us the calibre of the faith belonging to the members of this church ...

... Labour and achievement for the Lord ... Endurance and commitment in His service. The church in Ephesus had been counted second-to-none in its faithfulness to the Word. Travellers such as the intellectual Apollos drew aside from their journey to meet with them. ... If you were 'looking for a good church' on the Lord's Day, you would have made your way to this church, and you would have enjoyed God's presence among His people. You would have heard a good word! ... And Christ clearly commended them ... He fixed His attention on them and spoke graciously with Divine approval, **v.2 I know [οἶδα]** ... And you can feel the tenderness, the affection, the gentleness, and the fondness as He spoke to this church in Ephesus.

Ignatius, the bishop/leading elder of Antioch, had been a student of John the Apostle and he lived towards the end of the first century AD and into the early second century. He described how the road to Rome passed through Ephesus, and how it was known as “the highway of the martyrs” ... He spoke of the faithfulness of that Ephesian church! He had a tremendous love and affection for them, he wrote, “I ought to be trained for the contest by you in faith, in admonition, in endurance, in long suffering ... for ye all live according to truth and no heresy hath a home among you; nay, ye do not so much as listen to any one if he speak of ought else save concerning Jesus Christ in truth”. ... And indeed, this leads us on to our second consideration ... **They served** and ...

THEY SAFEGUARDED

To continue with Ignatius, he also wrote to them, “I have learned that certain persons passed through you from Syria, bringing evil doctrine; whom ye suffered not to sow seed in you, for ye stopped your ears ... you were ever of one mind with the Apostles in the power of Jesus Christ.” Such faithfulness in guarding the things of God! The Ephesian church was a Bible-preaching and a Bible-teaching assembly! They knew they were privileged to belong to Christ, and they conscientiously upheld the doctrines concerning Him. And it was not merely a head-knowledge ... they *lived for Him* in front of their fellow-citizens.

And with labour and patience they fastidiously upheld the truth of God. Godly wisdom and hard work sustained and maintained their ministry. This also meant they kept their eyes wide open for any signs of heretical or idolatrous infiltration. They belonged to the Lord, and they were proud of their position in Him! Their worship was Biblical worship ... with no expressions similar to the practices of idolatry. These were people who loved the Lord and sought only to do that which was in keeping with His holiness ... They would have heeded Paul’s earlier instruction, Eph. 4:17 walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, ¹⁸Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: ¹⁹Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. ²⁰But ye have not so learned Christ. ... 5:6 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. ⁷Be not ye therefore partakers with them. ... 6:10, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. ¹³Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The church at Ephesus knew the difference, because their faith was firmly built upon sound Biblical truth. They had read and re-read the epistle of Paul, and they shared its message with other believers. Paul knew them as, Eph. 1:1 *the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus*. They were one with him in the Gospel, and in the Lord's work. The moment a heretic came in amongst them and began speaking, they knew he was wrong because they had studied carefully and were familiar with the Scriptures. They wouldn't put up with those whose practice didn't match their profession!

They were not to be polluted with the teachings of men ... they loved the Lord, and they desired to be faithful to Him. And the Lord noticed ... *because He was looking (v.2)* ... And so, - in a city where idolatry influenced every strata of society, - the angel commended them, *v.2 thou canst not bear them which are evil*. ... What an *commendation!* ... *v.2. thou has tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars* ...

Yes, this church in Ephesus endured against all the opposition that tried to enter it! They had proved themselves as a *serving* church, - *thou hast borne, and hast patience*. They were a *sacrificing* church, - *and for my name's sake hast laboured, (v.3)*. They were a *separated* church, - *v.2 thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars*. They were a *steadfast* church, - *and hast not fainted*.

You see, the Word of God to them was like the rudder that steered the ship! ... Isn't it appropriate to stop for a moment and ask ourselves the question: is that how the Word of God is to us? Is it, - as the psalmist described, - a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105)? Are its teachings, its instructions, its doctrines determining our behaviour and our conversation? Yes, God requires His people to live according to its standards ... and this church in Ephesus had gone a good way in satisfying those criteria! And, as a consequence, they not only faithfully **served** and **safeguarded**, but also ...

THEY SUCCEEDED

They just didn't say all the right things, and put up a good 'show' in their 'church's front window' ... They didn't simply 'talk the talk', but they also 'walked the walk'. They expelled the heretics and those who relaxed the doctrines of their faith. They guarded their pulpit. They weren't afraid to offend the enemy, - they *hated* the deeds of the Nicolaitans (v.6) and put them out!

And there were also others who came along to their meetings ... and they were kept out as well. I could imagine what was said about this church by others, and

it wouldn't have been too complimentary! ... Nevertheless though, they guarded the truth of God faithfully and unashamedly. As a consequence, God blessed their efforts and rewarded their labour. They had borne patiently all the opposition the world had thrown at them because they dared to stand for Christ ... What a legacy for future generations of that church at Ephesus to maintain!

CONCLUSION Yes, based on all the proper Biblical criteria, this had been a successful and a faithful church that had met in Ephesus, - it had started off well ... not only in the eyes of God's people throughout that region but, - more importantly, - in the eyes of God. As He examined them He clearly *commended* them, - they **served** Him faithfully and regularly, they **safeguarded** His truth and their witness before the ungodly, and they **succeeded** in carrying out the work God, - under Paul, - had established in that city.

Now, I know, - and I know *you* know, - what the Lord Jesus says in the next verse (v.4) ... and how this church came to be remembered as the church who had lost its first love ... But, to be fair to them, we have to acknowledge they were well-spoken off by the Lord, at the commencement of this letter. ... And there is much here to teach and encourage us ... We'll move into the remainder of this letter to the Ephesians in our next study, but, for the moment, remember Christ had many good things to say to these people! Indeed, they had previously enjoyed the blessings from God as they served Christ in the faithful old-fashioned way ...

In examining ourselves ... how intimidated are we by what others might say about us? How prepared are we to stand confidently in the things of God? We sing, "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, Or to defend His cause; Maintain the honour of His Word, The glory of His cross" ... That's what the Ephesians were faithful in doing ... in those early days.

And it is no less than what God expects from His people today. He *expected* the believers in the church at Ephesus to continue to bear witness to the truth He had imparted to them ... What a responsibility! What a commitment God requires from His people, - not *requests* from His people, but *requires*! ... And to make it even more serious, He stands in the midst of us and He tells us, v.2 *I know thy works*. ... *I know* whether you take seriously or not your faith ... *I know* how important it is, - or it isn't, - to meet with your brothers and sisters ... *I know* if you put store or not on coming to the place of prayer ...

I know if you read and take seriously My Word ... *I know* what you truly think of Me, and how it shows itself in your relationship to your brother and sister in the faith. ... Yes, there *are* some He commends ... and if this church in Ephesus had taken greater care, verses four and five would not have been necessary.

So, I trust you see how this church *had* known God's blessing for indeed He did have a people there whom He loved ... a people in that great city for whom His Son had shed His precious blood, and died, and rose again. They had been firmly grounded and established in the Gospel of Christ and it was their life's work to present it and to uphold it ... regardless of the cost.

... They would have been a lovely people ... and as we look at them, they *are* a lesson for us. **They served, they safeguarded**, and yes, - to a noticeable degree, - **they succeeded**. The Lord Jesus *commended* them. As we know, the tone of the letter is about to change, - and we shall look at that in our next study, - but, just for now, consider these practical lessons in verses two and three, so that we would strive to faithfully maintain our witness for His glory's sake! Amen.

EPHESUS CONFRONTED

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. ⁵Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. ⁶But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. ⁷He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God

In our previous study we considered verses two and three under the title, *Ephesus Commended*. We noticed they were a *serving* church, v.2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience. They were also a fellowship that *safeguarded* the truth of God's Word. John witnessed the angel commending them, v.2 thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars. We concluded our study by pointing out how they *succeeded* in their ministry, v.3 and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. This, indeed, was a church to be *commended*. Any faithful church would want to be given the approval from the Lord they initially received.

However, - and it is sad there has to be a 'however', - the church in Ephesus has come to be known as the church who had lost its first love. They had 'gone back' in many ways and had settled for less than God was prepared to give them. In our language, they had backslidden ... But how can they be accused of backsliding when the Lord Jesus, - standing in the midst of the candlesticks, - has so highly

praised and commended them? Is there not a contradiction ...? In our study we shall see their experience is not-at-all uncommon.

If a person has been truly born again by the Holy Spirit, and been privileged to know sins forgiven and the company of God ... there is nothing in this earth that can make them truly satisfied, apart from Him. Consequently, when a genuine believer turns his/her back on the Lord *nothing* can 'fill His space'. Some backsliders, though, maintain the façade of being faithful by continuing to involve themselves in the Lord's work. Not all backsliders return to the public house or to the drugs, or to an open pursuit of the old life. Many stay within the church. However, no matter how hard they try, a discontentment takes over, and their work for the Lord yields little to no fruit ... no satisfaction or joy ... and it does usually manifest itself in the fellowship. And if ever you have fallen into a backslidden state you will know how it's as if you are chasing after something you know you will never catch!

Another question we could ask is this: are there *degrees* of backsliding? Does there come a stage when you have backslidden so far there is no way back to where you once were with the Lord? ... Let's look at this subject from the perspective of the church in Ephesus ...

So far, there has been nothing derogatory said about them. In fact, it has been the very opposite! ... They were faithful, hard-working, they could not stand evil, they stood up for the Word of God against idolatry and apostasy ... and they seemed to be a genuinely 'good church'. There is quite a lot this Ephesian church has in common with many good sound evangelical churches today, - the Gospel of saving grace is preached, the Word of God is opened and read, and the people who attend the church are good people.

"What's the problem then? What are these people doing wrong? Why is there now a change of tone and change of attitude towards these church members?" ... Perhaps one of the first things we should notice is ... there's no sign these questions were ever asked ...

AN UNAWARENESS

These good people were unaware that such a message would be levelled against them. Yes, maybe this letter should be sent to other churches ... but not at us! In fact, it's not fair to accuse us of having lost our first love ... We love the Saviour as much today as when we first came to Him in repentance. ... We have been working hard in this godless city of Ephesus. ... *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee* ... You will notice the word 'somewhat' is in italics; this indicates it

is not in the original Greek, and has been included in the English text to make the sentence flow more smoothly. In other words, Jesus said to the church in Ephesus, *Nevertheless I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.* This was no minor matter.

However, I could understand it if some of the church members in Ephesus would have been hurt by this section of the message. “How have we lost our first love for the Saviour? ... You have just said yourself You know our works, our labour, our patience, and how we have stood for God and the truth of His Word. It hasn’t been easy in this pagan city. Some of us have even suffered because we have let it be known we are Christians.” ... Yes, looking at it from a very ordinary point of view, I can understand how some of these dear people would have felt hurt and aggrieved at this message.

But if the Lord Jesus confronted them and told them they had lost their first love ... then, they should heed His warning and examine to discover how they have lost their first love and what has been the reason behind them losing their first love ... How has it happened? To what aspect of my life do His words apply?

Now, beyond any shadow of a doubt, if the Ephesian church was like just about every other church, there would have been those who would have put up an argument. “No, I don’t believe it. You are being too harsh. This is a good church ... Okay, it might have a few faults ... but doesn’t every church?! No, I’m not willing to accept what you are saying, Lord!” ... And there would, very likely, have been those who would have dismissed the message. ... We don’t need to spend any more time thinking about such people for the simple fact is that if the Lord says there’s a problem, then ... there’s a problem, and it needs to be dealt with. If that type of person is not willing to accept the challenge of God’s Word, then they need to look at whether they really know Him or not!

Another group, - usually a fairly nasty and unloveable group, - and they would have readily agreed with the Lord. “Yes, Lord, there’s a problem ... and I know the ones You’re talking about. There they are over there ... and I could tell you many stories about them, and it is not a bit of wonder the place has deteriorated, and we are seeing no blessing ... and they are the ones at fault ... for I know it’s not me!” Sadly, just about every church has this kind of people too. They sit on the sidelines and do the devil’s work of ‘stoking the fires’ of discouragement and disharmony. There is usually not an awful lot you can do with them either because it’s often hard to distinguish whether they are saved or not.

The group, though, the Lord Jesus confronted were a body of people who very likely would listen to Him and take heed of what He was saying. They recognised that if the Lord Jesus told them they had lost their first love ... then, sadly, they *had* lost their first love.

What does it mean, to lose your first love? ... What is the first love Christ is referring to here? Quite simply, it is the love we had for the Lord from the day and hour He entered into our hearts, and that the Holy Spirit has developed. Jeremiah used this kind of language to describe God's love for Israel, *2:2 Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.* ... Remember the day we fell in love with our spouses, and how it was the beginning of something that has grown and matured as the years have passed. Our love for them has not stayed the same, it has deepened. ..

It is stronger now than ever it has been. The difficulties, trials and heartaches have made it more impenetrable ... and the mighty bond of love you have for each other is a shadow of the glorious love Christ has for His Bride. And the evidence of the love we have for the Lord is demonstrated in our love for His people ... and then it moves outside to embrace the unsaved.

But sadly these Christians in Ephesus had fallen victim to a spiritual recession ... the kind of spiritual recession William Cowper wrote about, "Where is the blessedness I knew, When first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul refreshing view Of Jesus and His Word?" ... The fellowship among the saints was beginning to disintegrate for the unique and special love they had for the Lord was in danger of slipping away from them ... and unless the Lord would *confront* them, their witness would vanish and their church would crumble ...

Yes, in many ways they were counted as a good church ... but as the Lord saw into the hearts of these lovely people He could see how they had wandered away from their first love of Him ... And when something else 'takes your fancy', your relationship with Christ is in danger! ... **Their unawareness** ...

THEIR UNCONTENTEDNESS

There is like a cloud hanging over them ... as these words of Christ indicate. The people have been working hard, and they have been working faithfully, and they have persevered for they haven't given up or fainted ... and yet, their work is going nowhere ... or so it seems. "Lord, there is nothing more we can do! We're almost exhausted in the work, and there is nothing being achieved!" ...

These people recognised the difference between true doctrine and false doctrine, and they faithfully stood upon and defended the teachings of God's Word. They are 'in a fix' now though, because for some time it seems as if nothing was moving forward. The work seems to have dried up! Many of them could look back with fondness to the successful days of Paul when the Spirit of God was moving through the city ... but not anymore! Try as hard as they could they could not relive the presence of God amongst them, that belonged to those days! Maybe if we had another Paul?! ... No, it wasn't a work of man they needed ... it was a work of God!

And they are *bound* to have been discontent, - they could not have been happy! ... And then you start looking at all the options to rectify the situation. We become so impatient for blessing that we would look almost anywhere! ...

We look here, there and yonder for *any* possible answers to our need ... but the last thing we would do is bring the problem to the Lord! ... And, isn't it interesting we are again brought back to the kinds of people already mentioned in v.2, "them which are evil", and those pretending to come from the apostles and claiming to have the apostolic qualities and gifts. The Lord 'picks up' on this again in verse six ... I wonder if this is repeated because even though the church in Ephesus had rejected the false apostles, there were some amongst the congregation who might have been pondering the possibility, "Maybe we should have given them a better hearing! Maybe they might have something of worth to our fellowship." It's like nowadays when some Christians look at other churches that have adapted forms of worship that seem to be bringing in the crowds ... The problem is, though, - no matter how 'successful' those forms of worship might seem to be, - they are not sanctioned by Scripture, and therefore, we have no remit to 'go down that road'. In many cases, these are the ways of the world being brought in and an 'evangelical spin' put on them. ... It's dangerous and it is contrary to God's Word.

These false apostles were setting out to promote a gospel that was not the true Gospel, and the good people who should have known the difference simply sat back and allowed it to happen. These 'good' people who loved the Lord ... how can they sit back and allow error to encircle the congregation? ... To their credit, they kept them out, yes ... but they didn't stand up against them as strongly as they could have and as strongly as they should have! They didn't drive them away as they ought to have done for if they had have, there would have been no more mention of them in verse six! ... The lesson is that you cannot play with error and you daren't 'give an inch' to the deceivers because they are masters at their art and they can wear you down and ultimately draw you in and draw you away from your first love. They exhaust you. It's not just the Nicolaitanes with a capital "N"

you need to watch ... It's all those with a small "n" that nice and gently and subtly creep in unawares (see Jude v.4).

There had come upon the fellowship in Ephesus *an uncontentedness* that rivalled their joy in the Lord and, as a consequence, they had lost their first love for the Saviour. And so their **unawareness** had developed into an **uncontentedness** which then, in turn, further developed into ...

AN UNFULFILLMENT

They were seeing nothing being done ... and it was made all the worse by the announcement of the Lord Jesus, v.5 *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.* ...

Notice how the sentence is structured. Jesus didn't say, "Get back and get busy in the church". He didn't say *that* because they had not stopped being busy ... He said it because in their labours they were working *for the church*, they were inadvertently no longer doing the work for Him. What I mean is that their 'churchianity' had squeezed out their 'Christianity'. Their service had gradually become for the service of *the church* in Ephesus, and not for the service of *the Christ* of the church in Ephesus.

He was relating to them the basis of His criticism, the condition that results from it, and He prescribes the only possible corrective. If you have a problem you can only fix it when you know exactly what that problem is. ... And the basis of Christ's criticism was simple, v.5 *thou art fallen*. It wasn't that they had stopped giving in to the church funds, or stopped witnessing to their faith ... the underlying evaluation by the Lord Jesus was, v.5 *thou art fallen* and you're lying flat on the ground! She has left her first love ... and the only way to deal with such a predicament is to get back to the place where it first started to go wrong and get it sorted out! ... And you need to do it immediately, because the longer you do nothing about it, the urgency will begin to recede ... and the situation will become worse! If you fall, and you lie there ... and you don't try to get up ... *you'll give up!!* You'll start to become used to being away from Christ.

What an important word to the backslider, "Remember". Cast your mind back to how you used to love the Lord. You used to attend the prayer meetings and the Bible Studies. You used to share your testimony with unbelievers. You used to be involved in the fellowship ... but now you go along simply out of habit. When you look at it closer, you can see how this church in Ephesus was getting itself into a sad state. ... And Jesus said to the believers, *Remember, Repent, and Return!*

He's not giving advice here, He is issuing a command. This church in Ephesus was in crisis. Yes, I know they were faithful in their works, their labour, and their patience ... but as the Lord Jesus was looking closer than you and I ever could, there were 'gaping holes' in their witness for Him. It was a 'front' they were presenting, while what lay behind was measured seriously lacking by the Lord. They had to see their testimony from God's point of view if they were to move out of their dilemma.

What dilemma? ... some would say. They were the members in that church who had no heart after pleasing God. It was the church building and all its associations they were married to ... not the Lord of the Church. ...

You can be baptised and you can come into membership ... but it doesn't make you a Christian ... for a Christian is a *follower* of Christ, not of a building ... *and a follower follows!* And Christ was saying to His Beloved, - ⁵Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.

What was the alternative? If they chose to ignore the Saviour and decided not to heed His command to repent of their sin ... well then, He would remove the lampstand from them. "Either you do something about it, or *I will!*"

What does it mean to remove the lampstand? Does that mean He will take away my salvation? No, it doesn't mean that for our salvation is eternal, - once in Christ, in Christ for ever! What does it mean then? The removal of the lampstand is no less than Christ closing the doors of the Ephesian church. What?! ... And leave Ephesus without a witness? The only answer to such a question is yet another question ... What use is a candlestick/lampstand if it is not sending out any light? ... If it is not beaming out the light, there is no point in keeping it. It's like what Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, Mt. 5:14 *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. ... That is the purpose of the Church ... and if, - in a local setting, - it is not fulfilling Christ's purpose, *why should He keep it?!* It is not serving why He established it to be there for it is not shining out the Light Who is the Lord Jesus Christ!*

Yet, God's grace is wonderful for it is far more than we deserve. In verse six He commends the church again, - He gives them hope. He reminds them, - even though He has had to speak harshly to them, - that He loves them, and they *do* have a goodness ... even though other issues are spoiling the view at the moment ... Against the backdrop of verses four and five He encouraged them, ⁶*But this*

thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He indeed loved His people at Ephesus, because the love He has for His people is eternal. They ‘utterly detested’ the false doctrines of the Nicolaitanes ... because they *knew* the truth in Christ and this was the evidence of their salvation. Yes, while their love for Christ had been on the wane, they shared in hating what Christ hated and this demonstrated that underneath it all they were His. And, - if they *remembered, repented and returned*, - He promised them full recovery back to where they once were with Him.

CONCLUSION

In this church the Lord Jesus pointed out to the members how they had lost their first love, and we noticed that otherwise they would have been **unaware** of their predicament. They needed to know so they could rectify the situation. And, in this state into which they had fallen they were under the cloud of **uncontentedness**. Their work had become a drudgery because the Lord was either not in it or something else had been placed above Him. Then thirdly, we considered their **unfulfilment**. Their work was achieving nothing, and they were in danger of being cast upon the scrapheap.

What are the lessons for our fellowship? As we examine ourselves in the light of God’s Word, have we as a fellowship lost our first love? To make it more personal ... have we as individuals turned away from our first love? ... There are things about us He *commends*, but what about those issues He *confronts*?

In our next study, we shall concentrate on the seventh verse that instructs us, - in the light of all these things, ⁷He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. May God’s people attend to His Word! Amen.

EPHESUS COMFORTED

Revelation 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. ⁷He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God

In previous studies we have looked at how the church in Ephesus had been *commended* (v. 2-3) by the Lord. However, we also saw how there were some serious matters that needed to be addressed ... resulting in them being *confronted* by the Lord. Drawing to the close of this first epistle to the seven churches,

though, the Lord Jesus *comforted* them. That is the basis of our study today, - **Ephesus comforted**. They were hard-working, patient, and showed a commendable degree of faith but, - on the downside, - they *had* lost their first love. Nonetheless, the Saviour called on them to *remember, repent, and return*.

Many of us *do* sometimes become tired and weary in the Lord's work ... and that is what seems to have happened in the church in Ephesus. They had allowed their 'guard' to slip, and the enemy had taken advantage ... They had come in like a flood (cf. Is. 59:19). As we look back, we are all aware of how easy it is to fall into this situation. Therefore, we can't be too hard on these folk because it is only the grace of God that keeps *any* of us on the road to Heaven.

... And, of course, the enemy often comes in many pleasant shapes and forms, and it is sometimes very difficult to recognise him. He had entered the church in Ephesus through a group of people known as the Nicolaitanes ...

We don't know very much about them, - they are only mentioned here in this chapter. What we *are* sure of is ... they were known to the churches in both the cities of Ephesus (2:6) and Pergamum (2:15). We also know they were a Christian heresy ... *v.6 thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate ... 15 the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.* ... They claimed to be 'Christians', but their actions and beliefs contradicted the teachings of the Apostles. ... And that is about it, really, as far as the Biblical knowledge of them is concerned! From here on, we enter into the realms of church history ...

In church history, there was a very famous Christian theologian from Rome called Hippolytus (170-235). It is claimed he was a disciple of Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John who wrote the Book of Revelation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This Hippolytus stated that the deacon Nicolas (*a proselyte of Antioch, Acts 6:5*) was the author of the heresy, and he founded the sect, hence the 'Nicolaitanes', - the followers of Nicolas. Concerning Nicholas ... The Bible describes him as a 'proselyte', - a Gentile who had been converted to Judaism. For him, - a converted Gentile, - to have been one of the seven men chosen by the early Jewish church to look after the daily administration of "serving tables" (Acts 6:2), it shows he had a high degree of respect. That is as far as the Bible tells us about him.

However, some of the early church historians began to write about a new sect that was claiming to be associated with him. They were promoting a liberalism contrary to the true Christian and Biblical lifestyle of the apostles. The exponents of this sect were very relaxed concerning their theology and practice ... they

encouraged the pleasures of the flesh, - drunkenness, sexuality, promiscuity, polygamy. They were also comfortable attending various functions at which idolatry was very much to the fore. ... They seemed to be quite an ‘anything-goes’ kind of people, - a kind of ‘antinomianism’ (i.e. as a Christian you can do whatever you like ... for you are no longer under the law, but under grace, ... and, therefore, you can’t lose your salvation!). ... They were a form of so-called ‘Christianity’ that wanted to keep up with everybody else.

Clement of Alexandria, though, claims the sect actually expropriated/*stole* Nicolas’ name and corrupted his preaching. ... Clement, along with some others, recorded Nicolas had nothing to do with this sect, either in their formation or in their doctrinal licentiousness. In other words, - for whatever reason, - they had *hijacked* the name of Nicolas for their own ends!

So, here is what we can be fairly sure of ... These Nicolaitanes did not belong to the mainstream of the Christian Church, they were heretical, an anathema to the Lord Jesus, resident in Ephesus and Pergamum, and reviled by the Early Church Fathers. Eusebius recorded the good news the sect was short-lived.

Looking into the name itself, the name ‘Nicolaitanes’ (Νικολαίτης) is formed by two Greek words ... νικο (“conqueror”, “destroyer”, the ‘overcomer’), and λαίτης (... it comes from the Greek word λαός, the people) ... In other words, the name ‘Nicolaitanes’ means “the conqueror/destroyer/overcomer of the people”. ... So, if we are to take this name literally at ‘face value’, it describes a group within the local church who set themselves up to become “conquerors of the people” ... to make sure they got their own way! They were a group of outsiders convinced they were of leadership quality, and that the ‘ordinary’ people would do well to adopt their doctrines and their practices.

This cult of self-inflated leaders, - according to Church History, - encouraged the genuine Christians that it was ‘fine’ and ‘okay’ to ‘respect’ and ‘co-operate’ with the idolaters in relation to the social and moral issues of the day. After all, they shared a common interest in society ... and they didn’t want to allow religion to become an obstacle to joint progress. They were willing to ‘accommodate’ ... except when it came to anyone wishing to hold faithfully to the teachings of the Apostles ... (You can imagine them *not* being too ‘accommodating’ *then!*)

Rather than adhere to the teachings of Paul and the Apostles, they happily diverged and began to lead the people contrary to the plain instructions of Scripture. They would, of course, have referred to Scripture ... but they would

have related Scripture in a way that suited their own context and aspirations. They would have not only *used* Scripture, they would have *abused* it.

In both the churches of Ephesus and Pergamum they had obviously *promoted* themselves above the 'ordinary' believer. In fact, certain church traditions have since used the term 'laity' (from the second part of the term 'Nicolaitane') to develop the concept of two different 'classes' within the church, - the 'clergy' and the 'laity'.

Now, you will not find this distinction in any of the letters sent to the New Testament churches. You *will* find, for example, such terms as this though, ... Eph. 4:11 And he gave some, *apostles*; and some, *prophets*; and some, *evangelists*; and some, *pastors* and *teachers* ... There were clear areas of responsibility given to believers in the churches but there was *not* any notion given of a separate 'class' of Christian such as apparently these Nicolaitanes were promoting. ... The concept of being "all one in Christ" didn't fit their scheme!

But, there are no separate 'classes' of Christian such as these Nicolaitanes had devised. ... It was the same work of God's grace that equally was applied to them all ... And similarly, it took the same measure of the blood of Christ that saved me as a Pastor, that saved you also. I'm no more special in God's plan than you are, and neither am I any less, - there are no different 'classes' in the Lord's redeemed. I'm answerable to Him in the same way *you* are answerable to Him ... The only difference is, He has called me to the office of a pastor ... *And*, at the same time, He has also called *you* to fulfil a role for Him. Therefore, we serve Him together as equals, for that is how He has saved us.

Now, there was no Biblical warrant for what these characters, - these Nicolaitanes, - were promoting ... and it absolutely reviled the Lord Jesus, for He made no secret of it, [v.6 the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate](#).

They had come into the church and 'taken over' ... In fact, it's very likely *some* of the church members welcomed them initially ... because ... if you want to move forward and if you want to make an impression on the community you need to 'get new people in', be prepared to change your views somewhat, and update the old-fashioned principles you formerly held to. ... *But*, the Lord Jesus shows us in this epistle that the church in Ephesus wasn't the better for being in contact with the Nicolaitanes ...! They left their 'smell'. They deposited their stench ... and, consequently, the church in Ephesus was in need of a good 'gutting out' after the Nicolaitanes had been there! ...

So when we draw together the evidence from the early Church historians, this is the kind of picture we accumulate ... And it teaches *us* how we need to guard our fellowship in these days when the spirit of the Nicolaitanes is still very much active around us! ... As a consequence of them ‘worming their way in’ to the fellowship in Ephesus, the Lord Jesus found it needful to call upon His people to *remember, repent, and return*. In fact, He concluded His message to them by using words He often spoke while here on earth, *v.7 He that hath an ear, let him hear ...* (cf. Mt. 11:15;13:9,43; Mk. 4:9,23; 7:16 etc) ... And the reason Jesus had to challenge them to ‘hear’ was because they were no longer ‘listening’! They had allowed their ears to be closed to the Holy Spirit, and what He was saying to the churches in that region of Ephesus. Nevertheless, such is the patient Saviour that He gave them the call and the opportunity to *return*.

And look at how He invites them further ... *v.7 To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.* ... There is the word again ... ‘overcometh’ (νικᾶω). It is the same word that’s used in connection with the Nicolaitanes, - one of the words they *hijacked*. But the Holy Spirit is now using it to show the true believers *they can overcome* the ‘overcomers’! ... The exact same word is used again by John in I Jn. 4:4 *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* ... When we allow ourselves to believe the devil’s propaganda that he is winning the battle we become openly susceptible and we cast doubt on God’s promises! Through Him, - God, - we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37) ... and we mustn’t forget it! ... Remind the devil and his minions Who defeated who at the cross! ...

Remind the devil of the countless numbers the Lord has snatched from the jaws of Hell ... and how powerless Satan is to stop God, and the plans of God!

The poor Ephesians had lost sight of their victory in Christ. Had they looked round their congregation and considered that each of those trophies of grace sitting in their meetings was a child of God ... Each member was there because Christ died for them and purchased them for Himself. ... And the comfort Christ brings to that fellowship is to keep on going on in order to *overcome!*

... And the “tree of life” was shown to our first parents in the midst of the Garden of Eden, but sadly, it was where they fell into temptation (Gen. 3) ... Through grace, though, God ‘reclaimed the tree’ and by one act of obedience by Christ on the cross He returned to the believer the promises of God concerning the “tree of life”. Yes, God’s glory awaits each blood-bought child in Heaven!

Notice, also, *Who* will give ... *I will give*. Those whose names He wrote in the Lamb's Book of life will be given to eat of the tree of life ... and the privilege is given by no less than the King of Heaven! The complete work of salvation is Christ's ... It is not according to our works, or anything we can use to attract Him to us ... To overcome and eat of the tree of life is Christ's alone to give ... and it is in the very midst of the paradise of God!

We often recognise we don't count for much in this world, but in Heaven we shall be in the very centre with the King! And yes, it is a paradise ... The Garden of Eden was *the* paradise of Eden ... Jesus said to the thief on the cross, *Lk. 23:43 To day shalt thou be with me in paradise* ... and the concluding promise to this church in Ephesus was concerning the paradise of God! It is the eternal abode of the Redeemed. There is no sin there ... no weeds, no thorns, no thistles. It is where God lives eternally with His people. It is the final destination of all those from every corner of this world, and throughout every century and millennia since its creation!

That is the promise to this Church! Yes, initially they had been **commended** for being a *serving* church, - *thou hast borne, and hast patience* ... a *sacrificing* church, - and for my name's sake hast laboured, (v.3) ... a *separated* church, - v.2 *thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars* ... and a *steadfast* church, - and hast not fainted. ...

Yet, they also needed to be **confronted** for it seems they had *an unawareness* that resulted in them losing their first love, and consequently, the Lord had to address *their uncontentedness* and *their unfulfilment* in their attitude towards His work. Nevertheless, the heart of God persisted, and He brought them the possibility of **comfort**, should they *remember, repent and return*. ... v.7 *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

And I believe this is God's Word to many a fellowship today who have slipped into the condition where they have sadly lost that first love they had for the Saviour. ... But there *is* a way through ... only one way ... and it is *God's* way. His way alone is the path His people must travel homewards.

I trust that we in this fellowship would be attentive to His Word, and if any has lost that first love ... that you may call out to the Lord to reclaim it ... and to treasure Him above all else. Amen.

SMYRNA, - THE CROWNED CHURCH (Rev. 2:8-11)

Today we are looking *generally* at the second of the seven churches of Revelation. We'll come back to this epistle when I return from Northern Ireland... but, - just for now, - let's put together an outline of what was happening in this particular assembly in the city of Smyrna

The city of Smyrna lay thirty-five miles almost due north of Ephesus on a bay off the Aegean Sea. It had golden shores, and inland it was encircled by the dark green of the cypress-clad hills. It was known as "The Lovely, - The Crown of Ionia, The Ornament of Asia".

Yet, behind the physical beauty lurked an evil darkness that was even more deadly than the depravity in the city of Ephesus. More than any of the other cities, the city of Smyrna was stained with the blood of martyrs.

Smyrna rivalled Ephesus not only in wickedness, but also in wealth. In fact, it was to replace Ephesus as the Asiatic centre for trade. It was at the end of a major road, and was surrounded by rich farmland. ... It was known throughout the ancient world for its export of wine and an aromatic gum used in the embalming of the dead (myrrh). While Ephesus waned in its importance, Smyrna thrived and prospered! It was also a major centre of every shade of pagan idolatry imaginable!

One of its most endearing qualities to the authorities, though, was its outstanding loyalty and devotion to the Roman Empire. The Emperor *could trust* Smyrna even though a distance of some 900 miles lay between them.

Actually, their official religion was the worship of the Roman Emperor ... but many other religions also lived happily alongside each other. In fact, "The Crown of Ionia" was also used to describe the ring of temples dedicated to Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, Asclepius, Demeter, and Cybele (the mother goddess in whom the people of Smyrna took particular pride). However, this freedom of religion did not extend to the Christians. They were regularly persecuted and put to death, often by being burned at the stake or by being thrown to the lions. There was also a large contingent of Jews living there, and out of them sprang the Christian church.

It was an unashamedly materialistic, immoral and Godless city ... and yet, God had His people there! ... How does a church survive in such a place? What can

we learn today from the church in Smyrna and the message of the Lord Jesus Christ to that assembly of believers?

PERSECUTED

This church in Smyrna was one of two churches of which the Lord spoke no negative word. (Philadelphia was the other 3:7-13). ... And yet this church was a persecuted church.

Polycarp was a famous Christian martyr who was burned at the stake in Smyrna about A.D. 156. ... His home church was Smyrna, and there he learned the great Gospel truths from the Apostle John. He became the pastor of the church in Smyrna, and - by all accounts - he was 'a gentle soul'. Nevertheless, he had firm determination and he was inflexible when it came to the fundamentals of the Truth. He had a mind that wasn't particularly academic ... but he was simple and direct and faithful! ...

At the age of 86 he was arrested and taken before the governor of Asia who tried to persuade him to return to idolatry, renounce Christianity, sacrifice to Caesar and so save his life. He was called upon to curse Christ, and then he would be freed. However, he replied to the pagan governor, "I have served [*Christ*] for 86 years and He has never done me any wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King Who has saved me?" ... The old man wouldn't give in!

He subsequently was condemned to be burned alive, and the mob, *led by the local Jews (on the Sabbath!)*, rushed to gather wood for the fire. He was tied to a stake in the middle of the stadium, and was burnt to death as he prayed.

An early Christian document records that even when he was stripped and bound to the pillar ... even when he was burning someone plunged a knife into him, but here is how he prayed his last prayer on earth,

"Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy blessed and beloved Son, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have been given knowledge of Thyself; Thou art the God of angels and powers, of the whole creation, and of all the generations of the righteous who live in Thy sight. *I bless Thee for granting me this day and hour, that I may be numbered among the martyrs, to share the cup of Thine Anointed and to rise again unto Life everlasting, both in body and soul, in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among them this day in Thy presence, a sacrifice rich and acceptable, even as Thou didst appoint and foreshow, and dost now bring it to pass, for Thou art the God of Truth and in Thee is no falsehood.* For this, and for all else besides, I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee; through our eternal High Priest in heaven, Thy beloved

Son Jesus Christ, by Whom and with Whom be glory to Thee and the Holy Ghost, now and for all ages to come. Amen.”

Now, the reason I'm telling you about Polycarp is to give you an indication of the faithfulness of this church in Smyrna. ... And this old man wasn't the only one who was martyred, - many of his people went to meet the Lord through the jaws of the lion, or the stoning of the mob, or the fire. ... And, of course, we are very aware of the great numbers even in our times that are being persecuted ... and even put to death for their faith. Indeed, throughout the history of the Church, God's beloved people have suffered great persecution ... even here the United Kingdom! ... And the persecution and suffering of God's people, - the Bible teaches, - will increase as the time of Christ's Second Coming draws nearer. ... *But (!)*, no matter how wicked the enemy, the gates of hell shall not prevail against God's beloved and chosen people!

You see, not only are God's people **persecuted**, but they are also ...

PRECIOUS

Christ died on the cross to redeem each and every one of them. Nothing, believer, you could ever have done was good enough to make Him love you ... much less die for you! ... But such is grace, that same grace by which you are gloriously and wonderfully saved through faith (Eph. 2:8) ... That is God's gift to you, - undeserved, unmerited, and unworthy, - and yet, He reached down into the pit of sin's miry clay, - He got His hands 'dirty', - and He lifted you out ... He cleansed and washed you with the precious blood shed on Calvary ... and He set your feet on the immovable rock, and ... *I Pet. 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.*

Yes, you are **precious** to the Saviour ... and yes, in His sovereign plan, He does permit His people to be **persecuted** because we are in a battle with a depraved enemy. But, you know, that great and terrible enemy is restricted. He cannot take a single step beyond that which God allows him. God is in charge. God is in control and in the midst of it all, *I Cor. 10:13 God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

The Lord Jesus Who suffered more than any man is the example for His people to follow ... An illustration of such a change happened in the life of the apostle Paul, he declared, *II Tim. 1:12 I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. ... 4:6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Persecuted and precious ... *Whose signature is on the letter?* v.8 These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. ... That's the hope and confidence the Lord Jesus brings ... He was standing in their midst.

PERSEVERED

He reminded the church in Smyrna of the death *He* experienced, - *that*, indeed, was going to mean so much to these beloved believers. They were going to be opposed ... and persecuted ... and many of them would suffer death. In fact, that was what Christ ultimately required and demanded of them. ...

The Bible - and here in the Book of Revelation - teaches there will come a time of great tribulation upon the people of God, - it would be nice if we could be lifted up and out of it before it begins ... but I don't believe God will do that. He has always had His people in the Old Testament go through the 'wringer' to set aside the true from the false (cf. Mt. 25). ... It's easy to be a Christian when all is going well, but it is a different matter when you need to stand up for your faith ... to stand up and be counted for Christ!

... Could you follow the example of the church in Smyrna? ... To many believers today, it is not a hypothetical question, ... it is reality ... Would you be prepared to follow Christ even unto death? I suppose, what I'm basically asking is this, ... *how much does your faith in Christ actually mean to you?* ... Consider this ... Even from before the foundation of the world He knew you and He planned that He would go to the cross of Calvary and there He would die for you. Polycarp and the Church in Smyrna persevered through all types of oppositions and circumstances because of the love they had for the One Who had saved them from a terrible eternity in Hell ... and they were told to be faithful, - to persevere, - even unto death (v.10). Yes, ... how much does your faith in Christ mean to you? Can you say, *Song of Solomon 2:16 My beloved is mine, and I am his?*

PRESERVED

The final part of the message to this Church in Smyrna lifts the believers' minds away from the persecution and darkness of the hour. ... It brings their thoughts Heavenwards, v.11 *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.* ...

Yes, Jesus told them, "I've something else for you to hear." He is now showing them the *blessed hope* of His promise. He is promising them *glory* in Heaven.

There's no more opposition. There's no more persecution. There's no more 'synagogues of Satan'. There's no more fear. There's no more suffering. ... They have **persevered** faithfully, and they will be **preserved**. They will enter the presence of God and the Saviour, - they have been faithful, not lacking in their commitment to Him ... And for ever and ever they will stand around the throne in Heaven (Rev. 7:9,10,13-17).

The One Who suffered in our place on the cross of Calvary told His beloved people, Rev. 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) ... I know all about it! ... I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. ... I know all about them! But, nevertheless, He instructed and promised His own precious people, v.10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, ... tribulation for ten days, what does that mean? It means He will not allow it to go on a single moment more than His eternal plan permits. ... And here is His promise, and I will give thee a crown of life. ... A promise from the lips of God! The same God Who spoke, and the world was created ... He is the One Who issues the promises to His own precious and preserved Elect! The devil and his powers are restricted ... God is the all-powerful King of kings and Lord of lords, for ... Phil. 2:10 at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

CONCLUSION. This is the God we are serving! You are saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ ... the Lamb of God Who has taken away your sin. As a member of this Church of Christ's Redeemed, He has given you the power and authority to stand against anything that is thrown at you for the sake of His glory! It doesn't matter what it might be, for the enemy uses all types of means to search out a plan for the downfall of God's children. He uses every 'trick in the book' to ensnare the child of God ... but take heart from this faithful church in Smyrna. Look and see how, - even in the midst of the surrounding darkness of idolatry, we see the light of the *glory* of our Saviour and Lord as He commends them, be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. ... Even greater than the crown worn by the victor at the games!

John Bunyan, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, approaches the end of the journey of the two men - Christian and Hopeful, "Now I saw in my dream that these two men went

in at the gate; and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured, and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There were also that met them with harps and crowns, and gave them to them - the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rang again for joy.”

Our relationship begins and continues with saving and believing faith in Christ, - *total, absolute, unquestioning faith in Him*. That is what keeps us going on the road to Heaven. ... It is only because of His keeping grace and the working of the Holy Spirit within us that we have the power to continue to trust in Christ and to faithfully follow Him. Don't allow anything to hinder you. If something confronts you and tries to draw you away and dampen your fervour for the Lord ... flee from it. Be faithful onto Christ, and run to Him!

Here, in Rev. 2:8-11, the church in Smyrna shines through the darkness of the years and reminds us - if we need reminding - of the One who is standing in the midst of the seven lampstands, ... in the midst of His Church, - ... and He promises hope where sometimes it may seem all hope has disappeared.

This is the church at Smyrna ... **the Crowned Church**. Faithful unto God, a rich church spiritually (v.9) ... **Persecuted**, - yes, - but **precious**. As they **persevered**, God **preserved** them ... and the promise is also true for His people today, Mt. 10:22 *ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.* ... “How good is the God we adore, Our faithful unchangeable Friend! His love is as great as His power, And knows neither measure nor end! ... 'Tis Jesus the First and the Last, Whose Spirit shall Guide us safe home, We'll praise Him for all that is past, And trust Him for all that's to come.” Amen!

SMYRNA, AND THE SAVIOUR'S ENDORSEMENT

Rev. 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; ⁹I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) ...

Previously we did a whirlwind tour of this church in Smryna. We gave it the title, *The Crowned Church*, because it had demonstrated itself to be faithful in spite of the hostility surrounding it. We looked at how it was a **persecuted** and a **precious** church, and how it **persevered** and was **preserved**.

Every inch of the city of Smyrna had an embattled history. More than a thousand years before Christ, the Greeks had colonised it ... and to colonise it they had to overthrow the original inhabitants. It was then conquered by another Greek invader, - the Ionian Greeks

took it from the Aeolian Greeks. Then they were overtaken by the Lydians, who were conquered in 600BC by King Alyattes. After that, however, Smyrna began to slide into decline. Strabo, the well-known Greek historian, recorded that Smyrna had turned into a loose aggregate of villagers living in various settlements scattered over the plain and the surrounding hills. He noted it possessed no sovereign power or self-governing institutions ... In today's language, it was a kind of a 'has-been'!

One of their main problems was they didn't really know who or what they were, - there were bits of 'Greek' in them, and bits of 'Asiatic'. Yes, the city and the surrounding area still had its physical beauty, - its golden shores and its dark green cypress-clad hills ... It was desperately hanging on to its proud title, "The Lovely, - The Crown of Ionia, The Ornament of Asia" ... but it had lost any legacy in the ancient world it once professed to enjoy. Their boastings were outdated for their city had turned into a place of shame.

It was also the kind of place where anything was allowed to happen ... and it *did* happen. Nonetheless, even in such a place, God had His witness. Here was a church commended, - as W.M. Ramsay describes, - whose faithfulness was "expressed in the most continuous and unbroken tone of laudation". No matter how the city people of Smyrna condemned them ... God *commended* His people. ... Fanny Crosby wrote, "Take the world, but give me Jesus, All its joys are but a name; But His love abideth ever, Through eternal years the same."

The church in Smyrna remained constant in their faithfulness to the Lord. Consequently, He has the warmest of affections for them ... and the joy with which He commends them is not within the context of ease or comfort, but by the triumph of their endeavours against the enemy of unbelief and opposition. They were not ashamed to face tribulation, no matter how harrowing it would become. They suffered financially ... but their loss turned into gain, as the Lord described. He is no man's debtor! [Phil. 3:19 my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus](#) ... and the believers in Smyrna were proof of it! The population of the city were suffering. They were watching their livelihoods disappear before their eyes, and yet the Lord endorsed, - commended, - them, [I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, \(but thou art rich\)](#).

This was no 'health and wealth gospel' ... This was no 'prosperity gospel'. ... I'll give to God so that He gives back to me. No, you don't become a Christian to improve your bank balance. The riches Christ was referring to was the privilege and victory they enjoyed in Him. "Take the world, but give me Jesus. In His cross my trust shall be, Till, with clearer, brighter vision, Face to face my Lord I see."

No matter how wealthy and influential a person is, it does not compare to the riches the satisfied believer enjoys in the Lord Jesus Christ. Last year a multi-millionaire was laid in a grave in a beautiful and ornate coffin with great pomp and ceremony. He was knighted by Royalty and the Vatican, and upheld by many as a great example ... He had it all! His, however, is the name we have all been hearing about this past week ... The wealth the Saviour bestows upon His people is lasting, and it is more than anything the things of this

world can compare. This church in Smyrna brought honour to the Name of Christ, and joy to His heart. They were giving Him His place in their life and testimony.

He is described as *the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive*. What exactly does that mean? Let's look, - very carefully, - at the two sections of this very important phrase. This is a title so significant it is at the basis of our Christian faith. *Jesus is the first and the last. He is absolute deity ... and there is no other kind of true deity! Is. 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me. ... It is a statement that does not entertain controversy! Jesus is God!*

As *the first*, Christ predates all created things, and as *the last*, He will always continue to remain. He is timeless for He is eternal! He is immortal, incorruptible and everlasting, Ps. 86:10 thou *art* great, and doest wondrous things: thou *art* God alone.

He is untouched by all that occurs in time. There is nothing in this world that can harm or hinder Him, and we rejoice with the psalmist, 90:2 *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. ... 118:28 Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. 29 O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. ... And therefore, the believers in Smyrna, - and God's people today, - believe in Him as their refuge, fortress, and strength. He is the same unchangeable and unchanging God!*

While the first part of the phrase concerns Christ's deity (*the first and the last*), the second part concerns His humanity (*which was dead, and is alive*). ... There is something very important here we must emphasise. Some versions translate this verse *was dead, and lived again*. That is actually incorrect, and potentially dangerous. That is a wrong translation that can lead to great error. There is no 'again' in the original Greek. That is an 'interpolation', - it is put in supposedly to help make the statement clearer. *But*, in actual fact, it is not there and it shouldn't *be* there ... for it obscures, - and even endangers, - a great and tremendous truth.

What I mean is this ... The Lord Jesus was not saying to this church in Smyrna that life begins a second time after a period of death. What He *was* saying is that life *persists* in and through death. What He means, - very simply, - is this ... that the moment you and I leave this scene of time ... *that* very moment we enter Heaven and live eternally. At this present time, we have eternal life. The moment we believed in Christ as Saviour we were given eternal life. Eternal life is not a gift we shall be given when we die, - we have already been given it! (Jn. 3:16 ... *that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life ... 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: 28 And I give unto them eternal life.*)

Yes, our earthly body stops functioning and is of no further use but the soul enters immediately into the glorious presence of God. ... I don't have to wait for an extended

period. I don't go into a 'soul sleep' ... At the very moment I die, I enter into Heaven for Christ has already given me eternal life.

No, I don't get a 'second life' when I die ... and with that 'second life' I enter into Heaven; no, **for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21)**. If the Lord Jesus does not return, I'll pass through the valley of death ... *I'll pass through it* ... for I shall come out the other side more alive than ever! I'm depending upon what Jesus said, **Jn. 11:25 I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.**

So, then, did Jesus truly die on the cross? Yes, of course He did. Scripture affirms it and confirms it repeatedly. Jesus *had* to die on the cross! The Sacrifice was slain and summarily put to death for the sins of His people. When Jesus died on the cross, - yes, He literally died ... His human physical body ceased to function, - ... He stopped breathing and He yielded up the ghost (Mt. 27:50). At that point, the work of man's redemption was completed and the angels in Heaven sounded the greatest song of victory ... It was Jesus' earthly human body that was placed in the tomb but, - and here is what we must emphasise ... His eternal Spirit did not die, - for He lived on ... The eternal One does not and cannot die!

So, when He expired His final breath on the cross, what happened? ... where did He go? ... **Eph. 4:8 When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.** ⁹(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

What does all that mean? It simply means that when He physically and bodily died at Calvary the living Lord Jesus Christ immediately victoriously entered Glory ... **Rev. 2:8 (was dead, and is alive)**, - that He Who died (**Who became [aorist] dead**) ... even when He was subjected to death ... remained eternally alive.

... It is similar to when He was born in Bethlehem ... Jesus was actually and truly born as a baby ... and yet, He is eternal. He *began* life on earth as a child, whilst remaining the everlasting God! How do you explain it? Here's how Paul put it, **Phil. 2:5 Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.** The everlasting God of eternity took upon Himself the limitations of humanity ... and He Who died on the cross just over three decades later, was the same timeless and eternal God.

What an encouragement for the believers in Smyrna to know that as they faced their opposition, ... even to the point of death ... they were under the gaze of their Master! In the myths surrounding Cybele, the nature goddess of the city, she was said to descend into death in the winter and resurrected in the spring. What a pathetic attempt to mimic God! ...

Incidentally, you will find in false religion many attempts to mimic our God and His ways ... and often they seek a degree of parallelism with the truth. This, of course, began in the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam, *Gen. 2:16* Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: ¹⁷But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Then, when the devil came along, *he* subtly contradicted God's Word, *3:4* the serpent said unto the woman, *Ye shall not surely die.* ... You and I need to be careful today that we accept God's Word, and not fall foul of the deceiver who sets out to change it!

Anyhow, these Christian believers in Smyrna turned with confidence from Cybele and the other idols to the one true God, and to His Son. Their attention was captivated by the One Who is *the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.*

So then, what was the Lord Jesus saying to the church in Smyrna and ... what is He saying to the churches of today? He was telling them and us of our 'blessed hope' ... and how our 'blessed hope' lies not in ourselves, but in Christ alone. ...

There are some so bold and so foolish to prophesy the demise of the Church. They say Christianity will have died out in a generation. ... *No!* Not as long as the Lord Jesus is the first and the last ... Not as long as He Who was dead, continues to live! ... The Church of Christ will *never* give in to the attacks of the enemy! After all, we are *more than* conquerors through Him Who loved us (*Rom. 8:37*)!

When they will inevitably gather the armies against Him, they will be thoroughly defeated! And here is how it will happen: God says, *Zech. 14:2* I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. ³Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. ⁴And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east. ...

The Word of God often assures us of the same truth in the New Testament also, for example, *Rev. 19:11* And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. ¹²His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. ¹³And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

We haven't got very far in our study of this church this morning, but I trust we have got far enough! Here in Smyrna God had His people, Christ had His loyal servants, and He saw their faithfulness to His calling.

How is your standing before Christ today? First of all, is He your Saviour? Can you say you are not among those who question Him, or who are in opposition to Him? ... Do you know He has removed your sin forever, and you belong to His family? Are you saved by His precious and atoning blood? Is He your Saviour? ... Is He your Lord and Master? Are you obedient to Him? Do you live to do His will? ... Your heart is not hard, is it? It mustn't be, for it cannot be ... Trust in Christ as your Saviour and Lord.

Believer, you know and love Him. You have the peace and confidence within your heart that you are His ... There is only a small group of us here, but stop looking at our feeble company and look to the Lord.

... The verse that confirmed my calling to Kirkcaldy was [Esther 4:14](#) *who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?* ... The Lord never promised me I would make a great name for myself in Kirkcaldy or that the fellowship would grow and bulge at the seams. No, like the believers in Smyrna, the task we must be busy doing is being faithful unto the Lord.

Do you want to know the will of God for your life? It's simply just that ... to be faithful to Him. It is not always about going to the mission field in some far continent, or going to Bible college ... but it *is* about being faithful to Him where He has placed us ... and being faithful to the claim He has made upon each of us individually, and upon our church.

I trust God would bless to us the study of His Word so that He could say over us, *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)*. Amen.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Rev. 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; ⁹I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. ¹¹He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

I'm sure we can remember as children when someone said they would do something for us, we often asked them to commit themselves a little bit more, "Do you *promise*?" ... And when someone *promised*, we would then be fairly confident they would keep their word.

In these few verses the Lord Jesus told the believers in Smyrna the days were shortly coming when they would experience *pain* (thou shalt suffer), *prison* (the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried), and *persecution* (ye shall have tribulation ten days). With this knowledge, He encouraged them to be faithful and He *promised* them a crown of life, and they would not be hurt in the second death.

As believers in Christ, I trust we are holding onto the promises of God. The missionary Adoniram Judson (19th century Baptist missionary to Burma) used to say, “My future is as bright as the promises of God”. God has, indeed, *committed* Himself to us, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* (Heb. 13:5) ... they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength (Is. 40:31) ... my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19) ... my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (Jn. 14:27) ... the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23). ... Bryn Rees confidently wrote, “Have faith in God, my heart, Trust, and be unafraid; God will fulfil in every part Each promise He has made”.

These faithful believers in Smyrna were being comforted with God’s promises for the difficult days that lay ahead. They were not being promised any “flowery beds of ease”. Life was already proving difficult for them, and it was about to become even more difficult. And yet, the Lord promised them the ultimate victory. As Isaac Watts wrote, “Thy saints in all this glorious war Shall conquer, though they die; They see the triumph from afar, By faith’s discerning eye”.

How do we live in the confidence of this victory in the ordinary day-to-day issues we face? What if I am worrying about the bills I have to pay? What if I’m concerned I can no longer look after myself and might need long-term care? ... What if my health is failing? ... How can I honestly put my trust in the promises God makes to His people? ... Let’s look at this faithful church in Smyrna, ...

THEIR POSITION IN CHRIST

⁹I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan.

To the eyes of the world, there wouldn’t have been much to commend these believers, but as Christ looked upon them and examined their faithfulness, the sentiment previously expressed in Scripture was also true for these people, Is. 43:1 *I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine ... 51:16 I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand ... Thou art my people. ...* Such was **their position in Christ**.

I don’t think we can fully understand how much we mean to God ... why we are so precious to Him. There’s a hymn that asks, “Why me Lord? What have I ever done? To deserve even one Of the blessings I’ve known” ... After all, how many of us would have done what He did? I wouldn’t guarantee you I would give my son in the way He gave His. ... He paid an awful price, - it broke His heart, - when Jesus died on Calvary ... I

couldn't have done what He did! And yet, I would not be a child of God if Jesus had not died for me. ... But that is what God did for my salvation!

I'm saved. I'm born again. I'm redeemed ... and it's because of Jesus. I cannot take the credit for the least portion of my salvation, - "Jesus did it all, and all to Him I owe"! That is my position in Christ. I am not my own for He bought with the price of His blood (I Cor. 6:19,20), - I have been purchased. That is why we *belong* to God. ... That is our position in Christ. ... That was the privileged position these believers in Smyrna shared.

But the problem was that because they belonged to Christ they stood out from the people of the city ... and the people of the city were about to treat them cruelly. Their only 'crime' was they dared to love and serve the Saviour. ... And that is why the Lord Jesus accused the citizens of Smyrna of *blasphemy*? He took it personally ... When those ungodly people berated His people, they were berating Him, Mt. 25:45 *Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.*

The main culprits, sadly, that provoked the people were the Jews in Smyrna. They used their influence amongst the Gentiles to enflame the people against the Christians. They spread lies about them. At first, - in the early days, - the Christians were seen as a Jewish sect, and that was why they were tolerated. However, the Jews resented this association and they set out to stir up civil and social unrest against the Christians. ...

The Jews would have spread lies about them being cannibals, - drinking human blood and eating human flesh (as at the Lord's Table). They were also accused of lewd sexual activity in their love feasts. All kinds of false accusations were levelled against the Christians ... and the pagan people of Smyrna believed them. ... The world has always been eager to believe lies aimed at the Church!

But Christ was watching on ... and He saw what was happening, - He knew the Jews were behind it, and He took it personally, - they might as well have been doing it to Him, because that was the way He saw it! That's why He used the word, 'blasphemy' ... the *blasphemy* of the Jews, - they were doing the devil's work as they showed contempt for His people! It is a reminder that our Saviour misses nothing! He misses nothing today that the ungodly are doing to His Redeemed! ... He is watching over His people in the same way, for example, He was watching what the Egyptians were doing to the Hebrews in the time of Moses, Ex. 3:7 *I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows. ... Rev. 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. ... You see, ... this was their privilege ... their position in Christ.*

THEIR POSSESSION IN CHRIST ¹⁰Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days

The fact He had to tell them, ¹⁰Fear none of those things indicates the Christians were becoming increasingly concerned ... understandably! The storm clouds of persecution

were gathering, and notice the Lord did not promise them easy times. He didn't tell them He was going to step in and deal with those who were against them. Neither is there even a hint that He might return before the worst would come upon them. These were dark days looming over them ... and there wasn't a thing any of them could do!

Behind all the opposition that would fall upon them was the hand of the devil, [the accuser of the brethren \(Rev. 12:10\)](#). The devil is real and, since he cannot vent his wrath against the Lord Jesus directly, - as he did while the Saviour was here on earth, - he has turned his fury on the Redeemed of the Lord, the Church. Satan is determined to use his power to stamp out the testimony for Christ in the city of Smyrna. ... Yes, he is powerful ... but he is not *all-powerful*! We mustn't underestimate him, but neither must we *overestimate* his power for he is under God's control!

Faithful brother and sister in Smyrna ... don't forget it ... God is in control! You will suffer for your faith, - for such is the plan of God. Some of you will be cast into prison for your faith, and for your faith tribulation will come upon you for a time. This was a terrible message they were having to listen to! ... And the Lord Jesus was telling them 'ahead of time' in order to comfort and to give strength to His people ... and surely the words of the Saviour on a previous occasion would bear well to be remembered here, [Mt. 10:22 ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.](#)

By the way, the term 'tribulation' is not referring to the time of increased distress and persecution approaching the end of this present age. It is referring simply to the times of the people of Smyrna in the first century AD ... very likely, during the reign of the emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). Whilst it referred to a terrible time, Christ was promising the testing was restricted to a limited period. ... Remember, He is in control! He is sovereign!

And as He introduced this verse, the Saviour said, ¹⁰[Fear none of those things](#) ... We have a great Master and Lord and there is nothing this world can 'throw at us' that can rob us of His faithfulness. He knows our worries and concerns, He knows the problems we are dealing with. "Does Jesus care when my way is dark, With a nameless dread and fear? ... Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief". ... And He knew all about the believers in Smyrna.

Of course, this letter to the church at Smyrna was about literal persecution for the faith ... but isn't it equally true that God also today sets before His people issues that often test their faithfulness. ... If you fall into that category, and your faith is being tested at the moment ... the principle is the same, ¹⁰[Fear none of those things](#). Or, as Paul declared, [1 Cor. 10:13 There hath no temptation \[trial, time of testing\] taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.](#)

It is easy to be fearful, - it's natural, - but we belong to the Saviour ... the same Lord Jesus Who spoke as He walked along Solomon's porch, in the Jerusalem temple, Jn. 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.

Their position in Christ, their possession in Christ ... and ...

THEIR PROMISE IN CHRIST ¹⁰... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. ¹¹He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Here we are again being reminded what follows death for the believer? ... *Eternal Life!* ... Here is our hope in Christ ... Death is not the end, for the Saviour promises His people life everlasting. For these believers in the city of Smyrna, all their confidence was in Christ. That was why they were picked out by the enemy, and vilified. That was why they were hated and persecuted. They were known for their faith in Christ ... for their faith in Christ set them apart. And, should their faith be the means that would condemn them in their courts ... the moment they ceased to live on earth would be the very moment they continued ... for they began to live a far more abundant life in glory. The Lord Jesus had promised them a crown of life, everlasting victory.

Not all believers in Smyrna would be called upon to die the martyr's death, but nevertheless, each member was required to remain faithful. Again, when we transfer it into our own situation ... as you face the difficulties that come your way, you must never lose sight of Whose you are and the rewards you have been promised. God's promises are as much for us today as they were for the people of a bygone age. The hymn tells us, "Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord, Bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord, Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword, Standing on the promises of God."

By the way, we're not suggesting it is any degree of our ability to be faithful that *saves* us, - for it is grace alone that saves. Our faithfulness to the Lord, though, is the evidence we belong to Him, for He promised, Jn. 10:10 I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly.

Like me, you have seen people 'come and go' in the Christian faith. We have seen some lovely people who it seemed walked closely with the Lord. Something happened, though, that caused them to desert the Lord and only He knows the true state of their heart, and their destination, as far as eternity is concerned. ... Often, we don't understand what caused them to give up ... and it's sad, but it teaches us not to lose sight of the Lord. ... He sets before us the requirements of His Word that we need to obey, and He has provided the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth ... And it can be easy to lose sight of the way ahead ... There is so much going on around us, and so many voices calling for our attention ... There is the possibility of going back, but it is the Lord's will and the Lord's command for each blood-bought child to keep going on until Christ brings us home. *That* was the directive for these faithful saints in Smyrna.

CONCLUSION

In the light, then, of these instructions to His church, the Saviour commanded His people, ¹¹He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. ... Make sure you are listening, and make sure you take it in!

In the Old Testament, the servant-slave who desired to remain in his master's service after he had repaid his debt, was taken to the elders and his ear was pierced as the sign that he loved his master and wished to remain under his authority and ownership (Ex. 21:5). That was the outward sign of his commitment, - the decision he had made. Similarly, it is 'the ear' that has been pierced by the grace of God in salvation that is totally committed to the service of the Master. ... Of ourselves, we cannot stand against the enemy, - we would be defeated in a moment. That is why we must listen ...

And then the final promise is given to these people who are about to enter those hard times, He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death ... What a great promise of comfort! ... The second death is again referred to in Rev. 20:6 Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years ... 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death ... 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. It refers to the everlasting place of punishment for those who reject Christ and His offer of free and saving grace. Hell is the place of the most horrific and terrible physical pain and torment. The good news of the Gospel, though, is that He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death (2:11).

He that overcometh is the conqueror ... and as Paul declared, Rom. 8:37 we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Faithful unto death, - that is as much as God requires from each of us ... nothing less. We're saved, - that's our **position in Christ**. He is our Master and Lord, - that's our **possession in Christ**. And there awaits the crown of life, for those who continue to endure to the end, - that's our **promise in Christ**. Amen.

PERGAMUM, - ITS DEFENDER (Rev. 2:12)

We have already looked at the two churches in Ephesus and Smyrna. The church in Ephesus was "**The Careless Church**" who had lost their first love, and the Lord Jesus appealed for them to return to Him. Smyrna, on the other hand was a faithful assembly, - **The Crowned Church** ... 2:10 be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Both congregations had been settled in large cities through which ran major trade routes. Pergamum, however, was historically *the* greatest city in Asia Minor. Indeed, for over 400 years it had been *the* capital city.

By the way, is the correct title for the city Pergamos or Pergamum? Pergamos was the Greek name, Pergamum was the Roman name, and ... its present name is Bergama. Pergamos comes from the Greek word, πύργος, a tower. It referred to a massive tower on the conical hill that dominated the river valley and the surrounding countryside. From the peak of that hill you could have seen the Mediterranean Sea, over fifteen miles away.

In ancient history, there is interesting evidence concerning the Babylonian priests who fled from Babylon when King Darius of the Medes (and Persians) conquered the city (during Daniel's time). Apparently, these exiled Babylonian priests, - worshippers of Baal, - crossed overland to Asia Minor and settled in Pergamos. There, they established and developed their religion to include the Greek mythology and the Roman Emperor-worship.

The whole aura of the city, therefore, was shaped and directed by its flagrant worship and adoration of other gods. ... It *oozed* the spirit of Babylonianism ... Gen. 11:3 and they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. ⁴And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name ...

The city was also very famous for of its great library, containing more than 200,000 parchments. In fact, our word '*parchment*' comes from Pergamum ... (In the ancient world *parchment* was h pergamnh carta.)

As I have already said, the city was full of idolatry. In particular, it had two famous shrines. It had a great altar to Zeus ("the father of gods and men") built in front of the temple of Athene (the goddess of wisdom, justice, etc.). But the god for which Pergamum was particularly identified was Asclepius. ... Asclepius was widely known as a 'saviour', for he was the god of healing. And if you needed to be healed you went to his temple. For this reason Pergamum has been dubbed "the Lourdes of the ancient world". (The emblem for Asclepius was the serpent, which appears on the cap badge of the *Royal Army Medical Corps*.)

Indeed, throughout the whole city there were gods from every surrounding society for every conceivable purpose and requirement!

It was also a royal city ... the home and seat of authority. It was the provincial capital, the centre of administration. ... It was an intellectual and an academic city, - it had a large university, and a royal residence. That meant the people who lived there were loyal and committed to the Roman emperors ... more than any other city in Asia Minor. Pergamum was where the citizens were required to call Caesar

Lord. In fact, it was the first city in Asia to build a temple and establish a great altar in honour of Augustus Caesar (27 BC). If you dared refuse to worship the Caesar, you incurred the sentence of death!

Pergamum was the city where Christians were taken from the surrounding areas and brought before the courts and forced to deny the Lord Jesus, or be executed. It was known as “the city of the serpent” (Asclepius), and described by the Lord Jesus as the place where Satan's seat [*θρόνος*] is ... where Satan dwelleth (v.13)!

Into this situation Jesus speaks to His people. Whilst on earth, He promised His disciples, Mt 18:20 where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them ... Mt. 28:20 Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. ... In such a godless city, Christ came among His witnesses!

How were they to withstand such a contentious and belligerent society? How did Jesus address them in order to strengthen their resolve? Notice He didn't appeal to their leaders ... Neither did He tell them they needed to go out and gain vast numbers of converts so that the strength would be in their numbers ... No, He addressed them in v. 12, *These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges* ... What did He mean? Let's consider it very simply ...

THE MESSAGE

These things ...

There is a message coming to the believers that they must listen to, and take heed of. For their witness to continue, they could not afford to ignore what Jesus was about to say to them. There were terrible days coming that would rock their church. In some ways, the attack in a very subtle form had already begun. Error had been allowed to creep in and exist alongside the truth. ... There were those who held to the doctrine of Balaam and to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We'll return to consider these dangerous doctrines ... but for now, we're simply highlighting how the good people in the church at Pergamum were allowing false doctrine to creep in among them. ...

Incidentally, this is often the devil's tactics, - he first of all comes in gently and subtly with his error and deceives many ... and when he is not able to deceive the remainder, he comes with persecution. I believe we shall increasingly see this same old plan as the coming of the Lord draws closer.

It is the greatest danger when that which is blatantly contrary to the Word of God is allowed to sift in among the people of God. We know all-too-well error and untruth needs no encouraging for we are prone to the tickling of the ears and the

caressing of the egos ... What is it that sets us apart ... Let's condense it to the very basics ...

- We believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. The Old and New Testaments as originally given are our final authority and are completely sufficient in all that pertains to our faith and practice.
- And we believe in the unity of the Godhead and the eternal co-equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our God is altogether sovereign in everything, - in creation, providence and redemption.
- We believe the Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true Man. He manifested His glory in His deity, incarnation, virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death and physical resurrection.
- He alone is our salvation, and His atonement for sin secures our righteousness, our forgiveness and our blessed hope of eternal life.
- We believe He ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, and one day He will gloriously, powerfully and wonderfully return for His people.
- And even though we were born in sin, - total depravity, - the Holy Spirit has done a work in our souls that is completely all of God, and He is continuing to do the work of sanctification, working in us so that we would be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus.
- Despite the wickedness of the devil that has blinded us from birth, God, in sovereign mercy and electing grace, has drawn us unto Himself, and we belong to Him.
- ... Yes, we belong to His Church that extends throughout the centuries and has spread to every corner of the world.
- This is the God we preach, and He will continue to be preached until Jesus comes again. Those who accept Him will share Glory with Him, but those who reject Him will be lost forever in a Christless eternity.

... This is **the message** ... [these things](#) ... And, then, we consider ...

THE MASTER

... [saith he](#) ...

Here is the Lord's signature. This is no less than the Son of God speaking ... the Saviour of His people, ... this is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the authority upon which these words depend. This wasn't a message coming from John the Apostle ... This was Jesus speaking directly to His people in Pergamum.

One of the most important phrases spoken by the prophets in the Old Testament was, [Thus saith the Lord](#). It is in the interest of no congregation to take the word of anyone who stands up in front of them if what is being spoken contradicts the

Word of God. ... Sometimes a well-meant enthusiasm can lead some astray. Sometimes and over-zealousness can be detrimental if it conflicts with Scripture. In all things, we must be under the authority of God's Word. God will hold us accountable to that which is contained therein.

It is a wonderful Book the Bible. God has made it freely accessible to us. It is not so expensive that any of us cannot afford it. We have the freedom to own it and to read it. It speaks of God. It teaches us about **the Master**. How do I know God is holy, and He is Who He says He is? His Word tells me. ... And, how do I know I can have confidence in His Word? I can have confidence in His Word because He, - the Author, - is holy. You see, He is **the Master**, He is the all-sovereign God, and He is my Saviour.

This was no idol who addressed Pergamum. This wasn't a figment of pagan imagination. God is God alone, and there is none beside Him (Is. 45:5). All the claims of Asclepius, Zeus, Athene are nothing. In the world's faiths today, there is no other God that equals Him, for He alone is true! He alone is God!

We are a privileged people to have Him as our Master. ... Does this excite you? Does it fill you with enthusiasm? You belong to the Lord, and He belongs to you! ... But, what if it holds nothing for you? What if you don't understand what I'm saying? What if the words that He says are making no impact upon your soul? ... Is there a great gulf between you and God? If there is, there is only one means whereby that gulf can be crossed, and that is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation today.

The Message, The Master ...

THE MIGHT

sword with two edges

... which hath the sharp

When we begin to speak about the might and power of God we enter into a realm that is completely beyond us. Before time began, in eternity God made the decree to create. Everything that He made was in harmony with His holy and perfect character. All that He created was without sin. It was formed for His glory. ... And not only did He create it, He also maintains it. If it were not for God, this world would have ceased already.

What I'm saying is that nothing of man has any comparison with the sovereignty of God. This has been demonstrated once again as we have watched what has been happening along part of the eastern coast of the most self-proclaimed powerful nation on earth. Their financial sector had to close down. Their airplanes were grounded. Their ships couldn't sail. Their streets were empty. People lost their lives. ... The power of man is as nothing compared to God! *Is. 40:22 It is he*

that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof *are* as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain

... And He is the Mighty One Who holds the sharp sword with two edges. He is the One in Whom all exists. Pergamum was renowned for being “the city of the sword”. It was the grandest place of authority in Asia Minor. ... No, said, Christ, there is no authority that compares to Mine! ... What a beautiful message for those Christians who must stand against the wiles of the devil, - as made manifest by the pagan and idolatrous systems, - the Lord was on their side ... Ps. 56:11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. ... As the children of Israel stood on the banks of the Red Sea ... the Egyptian soldiers were catching up on them ... the people panicked, and Moses comforted them, Ex. 14:13 Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. ¹⁴The LORD shall fight for you ...

CONCLUSION To this church in Pergamum, the **message** came directly from the **Master**, v. 12 These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges. Such is His **might** ... He never loses any of His power ... His authority never wanes, for as the Book of Revelation approaches its conclusion, John was instructed to record, 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. ¹²His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. ¹³And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations

What a message to the men and women of Pergamum! ... What a message to comfort and encourage God’s people today, v. 12 These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges. ... May we keep on being confident in Him, Who is the Guardian and Keeper of His people! Amen.

PERGAMUM’S DILEMMA

¹²And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; ¹³I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. ¹⁴But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. ¹⁵So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. ¹⁶Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

In our previous study, we considered the Lord's words of introduction to this church in Pergamos, *These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges*. We now move into the message of the letter, and the Lord encourages the people of this church that He knows all about ...

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

As we have already noticed, the city of Pergamum was the most idolatrous in the region. Every city had their plethora of idols, but Pergamum stood out from all the rest. This was the city where the Lord Jesus specifically declared the seat of Satan was resident. And, this was not merely a seat ... but a throne (**θρόνος**)! This was an extremely dangerous place for Christians! In many ways, this was particularly Satan's kingdom! He ruled through the officials of the city, with such great authority, and his presence was felt everywhere. Idol worship, and the practices accompanying it, was promoted without restriction. There was nothing holding him back in Pergamum!

Now, obviously Satan himself was not sitting on a real throne ... but this is the figurative language the Lord Jesus used to describe the evil power and influence that governed the city, withstood the church and all who belonged to it. It is very similar to the words of Paul when writing to the Thessalonians, *I Thess. 2:17 we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us*. ... Satan had his 'puppets' as the official authority ... and they were at the very highest pinnacle of society. These were the 'top men' who permitted everything and everyone ... except the Christians!

Attention had been drawn to the Christians because they would not perform, - or become involved, - in the ritual of the idolatrous state religion, and they refused to make offerings to the Imperial "God", the "Divine" Roman Emperor! Everyone else was willing, but not the Christians!

Since they were not willing to comply with this requirement, many of them were condemned to death as traitors and enemies of the State. ... This was the kind of setting where Satan found his home, and where he 'reigned' unabated and unchallenged ... *even where Satan's seat is*.

Nevertheless, God had His people in this city. What was the point of them being there when they seemed to be failing in any achievements for the Lord Jesus? Would they not have been better off somewhere else where their influence would have been for the good of society? Well, regardless of how weak and helpless their situation, the eyes and the attention of the Lord Jesus was upon them, and upon their faithfulness. Pergamum was their home, - not that they had succumbed to the false worship, because they continued to remain distinct as worshippers of Christ. Pergamum was where they lived as Christians, and Christ Himself could see they were holding fast onto His Name ... and they had not denied the faith. Such was Christ's commendation.

And indeed, the sense behind how they held fast to His Name and had not denied their faith demonstrates how they were sorely tested. In fact, Antipas, - one of their members, - lay down his life for the Lord. Was he the only one who was martyred? No, history records many were martyred in Pergamum, but his name was given as representative of them all. They had remained unshaken. They trusted in Christ ... many of them, even to the point of death.

Such is the testimony of many today in countries where the Name of Christ brings persecution and death upon the believer. If we were to take more time to study the historical evidence relating to the ancient city of Pergamum we would see how closely it compares with many cruel regimes today. Pray for our brothers and sisters in lands where they are suffering for the Name of our Saviour. We know nothing of it ... but there may come a day, - it has happened on these shores previously, and it could happen again, - when God's people will have to stand for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you be willing to stand ... to hold fast His Name ... and not deny the faith?

These believers in Pergamum were precious to the Lord, as He was to them. He commended **their testimony**, - their faithfulness and courage in the face of extreme persecution. ... *But*, if something needs to be said ... it needs to be said ... The Lord Jesus had to address a very serious issue that had made its way into the fellowship ...

THEIR TRIAL

¹⁴But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. ¹⁵So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

The *But* shows there were issues needing to be dealt with for the sake of the continued faithful witness of God's people. The Lord cannot ignore anything among His people that have the potential to harm their testimony. So often we fall foul of not dealing with problems when they first arise, and then when we do try to deal with them, they have developed to such a stage ... and if only we had dealt with them sooner, we would have saved ourselves heartache.

These believers had two issues that compelled the attention of the Saviour.

This doctrine of Balaam ... what was it? Balaam, the son of Beor, was from Pethor in Mesopotamia (Dt. 23:4). He was a very influential sorcerer who, although aware of the true God, made his services available on a freelance basis. Near the end of their wilderness journey as the Israelites under Moses were advancing north into Moab, - just prior to their turning west to cross the River Jordan, - King Balak of Moab hired Balaam to perform the impossible task of stopping them (Num. 22-24).

With the Israelites approaching, King Balak sent messengers to Balaam to get him to put a curse on the Israelites (Num. 22:5-7). The Lord, however, appeared to Balaam and warned him not to do it (Num. 22:12).

King Balak then sent other messengers to Balaam with an offer of great riches if he would curse the Israelites (Num. 22:15-17). This time The Lord allowed Balaam to go with them to Moab, but on the condition that he do only what the Lord told him (Num 22:20).

When Balaam arrived in Moab, King Balak greeted him, but Balaam warned the king that he could only say what God allowed him (Num. 22:36-38). So, God prevented Balaam from cursing the nation of Israel, – and, in fact, God turned the curses into blessings! *But* it wasn't finished yet ...

Basically, Balaam was greedy. ... Josephus, - the Jewish historian, 1st century AD, - described him as the best prophet of his time, but with a disposition ill adapted to resist temptation. In other words, Balaam was motivated by greed.

So, Balaam didn't want to lose out on the riches King Balak had promised him if he would call a cursing upon the children of Israel ... so he had a plan. He advised King Balak to make friends with Israel, and then invite them to worship and feast at his pagan altars. ... And it worked! Many of the Israelites walked right into the trap and they became “*good neighbours*”, - they ate meat from the altars of idolatry and committed fornication as part of the heathen religious rites.

This was all because of Balaam's scheming! Balaam put King Balak 'up to' placing a stumblingblock in the way of God's people ... and a similar ploy was happening in Pergamum. The word [stumblingblock](#) spoke of the danger facing the Christians, - they needed to 'watch out' and take great care! Originally, the word (σκάνδαλον) described a “snare” or a “trap” laid with a tempting bait to entice an unwary animal. This was Christ's warning to those in this church who were glibble, ... to beware of the devil's plans!

You see, the lesson the church in Pergamum had to learn from this story about Balaam and Balak was this ... Some of them saw no harm in making concessions in order to be expedient, They would be prepared to compromise even the fundamentals of their faith in order to be pragmatic. They would have 'bent over backwards' to accommodate the idolaters ... and Christ judged them as being dangerously wrong!

Paul told the Corinthians, [I Cor. 15:1](#) I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, *and wherein ye stand*; [2](#) By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ... [16:13](#) Watch ye, stand fast in the faith ... [Gal. 5:1](#) Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

This group within the church was failing to stand ... And Christ was speaking to them directly!

Another group was referred to as holding to [the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes \(v.15\)](#). We met them before when we studied the epistle to the church in Ephesus ([Rev. 2:6](#)). We

looked into their name and found that the term ‘Nicolaitanes’ (Νικολαίτης) is formed by two Greek words ... νικο (“conqueror”, “destroyer”, the ‘overcomer’), and λαίτης (... it comes from the Greek word λαος, the people) ... In other words, the name ‘Nicolaitanes’ means “the conqueror/destroyer/overcomer of the people”. ...

So, if we are to take this name literally at ‘face value’, it describes a group within the church who had set themselves up to become “conquerors of the people” ... In other words, they had an agenda, - contrary to Christ and the apostles, - that they wanted to enforce in the church! They were a group of outsiders convinced they were of leadership quality, and that the ‘ordinary’ people would do well to adopt their doctrines and their practices.

You see, the two groups in verses fourteen and fifteen were coming at God’s people from two different angles ... but their intention was the same. It was a ‘pincer movement’. They had the people of God in their sights and they were determined to fill the church with error, and pollute the message and ultimately silence the witness for Christ in Pergamum! ... On the one hand, the believers were being attacked from the outside by the city authorities, and on the other hand, they were being attacked from the inside by the preachers of doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes.

The **so** and the **also** (2:15) gives us an indication that these two groups were busily working inside the church and introducing some of the modes of worship being practised in the temples of idolatry. These were types of worship expressly forbidden by the Lord, so much so, He made the point, **which thing I hate!** ... Perhaps the people were thinking, we can attract some of the idolaters if we show them what we have ‘in common’. *No!* The worship of the people of God has *nothing* in common with the world!

God was telling His people, “Get out, and stay away!” ... **Their Testimony, Their Trial**
...

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

... It’s up to you, believers in Pergamum! What will you decide? Will you keep to the Word of God you have been taught, or will you move away from your foundations? ... It’s time to make up your mind!

Well, on one hand, if they ‘went with the flow’ and progressively adopted the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes, life might become more bearable for them in the city. They wouldn’t have to be as rigid in their fear, - they could afford some ‘come and go’ ... and that would help their position. It would make them look a wee bit more favourable in the eyes of their neighbours. ... Aye, but how would they look in the eyes of the Lord?!

The Lord was giving them a choice, ¹⁶Repent; or else ...! He was prepared to take disciplinary action against His people to cause them to ‘own up to’ their error, and return to Him. He told them, **v.16 I will come unto thee quickly** ... *I’m coming ... this is your final warning, and you need to have the matter sorted out, or else!*

Look at how many times throughout Scripture God has *come* to judge His people. He judged the unfaithful and ungrateful tribes of Israel in the wilderness. He judged David's and Bathsheba's adultery by taking the life of their little child. He judged Saul. He judged Ananias and Sapphira. ... Christ makes no allowances for sin among His people.

Similarly, an 'easy-going' Christianity would not have survived in Pergamum, no more than it can survive today. For them to hesitate or to doubt or to compromise would incur the Lord Jesus to come to them quickly, and fight against *them* with the sword of His mouth.

Let's try a little bit of this and a little bit of that ... until inevitably they would have been burning a little incense to the Emperor. A little incense ... what is it? ... It's nothing! ... Then gradually the whole ritual of the State religion would have followed as a matter of course.

CONCLUSION Sin is never prepared to sit comfortably with God, no more than He is prepared to sit comfortably with sin ... not least in the Church! There is much the times today has in common with the times of ancient Pergamum. In our own personal lives and in our church life ... "Come on and be a wee bit more flexible. Cast off all those old ideas and traditions ... and move forward." "Come into the parlour said the spider to the fly. It's the nicest little parlour that ever you did spy"

Yes, there may be some ideas and traditions we could shed, but where those ideas and traditions have their foundations in the Word of God ... we must hold fast. They are precious and timeless. They have served God's people well down through the ages. I trust you don't hanker after the doctrines of Balaam and the doctrines of the Nicolaitanes ... Stay with the doctrines of the Word of God ... and you will know His blessing! Move away, and He will move away!

The Lord Jesus directed His message to these believers concerning **their testimony, their trial, and their tenacity**. Keep going on, He was saying to them ... May we heed His message today! Amen.

PERGAMUM'S DELIVERANCE

[Pergamum's Defender] ¹²And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

[Pergamum's Dilemma] ¹³I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. ¹⁴But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. ¹⁵So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. ¹⁶Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

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

Everyone is looking for a good deal ... and the less it costs the better! This kind of philosophy also makes its way into the spiritual arena. There are so many religious 'permutations', you can choose the one that suits you best. ...

One of the major attractions, of course, to being a Christian is that you are promised a home in Heaven. If you say you are a Christian, the moment you die you are hoping to enter Heaven. Say the prayer (if you must) ... and that's it! ... It is the greatest insurance policy *ever!*

However, is it not very disrespectful to the Lord and to the work He did for us at Calvary if that is all we consider becoming a Christian is about ... simply, an 'insurance policy' for eternity. The Christian faith is not only for the life hereafter ... it is also for the life here and now. The catechism says, "Man's chief end is to glorify God", - notice the *present* tense! That is our purpose, and that is God's purpose for us while here on earth.

That is the context of these closing words to the church in Pergamum, ¹⁷He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*. The members of this fellowship were being encouraged in the midst of those very real dangers in control of that idolatrous city.

THE SPEAKER

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

In order to endure the gauntlet of the false teachings, God's people in Pergamum needed to be listening to, and for, the voice of God. This set them apart and separated them from their idolatrous and godless neighbours. They would clearly be seen to be different ... identified by the stand they took. It would inevitably attract persecution and oppression for the Name of Christ. ...

They also had some who recently came into their assembly and introduced doctrines contrary to those taught by Paul and the apostles. As a consequence, these were difficult and confusing times ... And in order to survive, they needed to listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

He, of course, came upon the Church on the Day of Pentecost. He opened the hearts of the people firstly in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and beyond to believe

in Christ and be saved. He called Paul and others into Asia Minor and ancient Greece. He prepared their way and led them along the paths God had already destined to be taken. The zeal experienced by the missionaries ... their devotion and diligence ... was a direct consequence of them listening attentively to what the Spirit was saying. For example, Acts 16:6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, ⁷After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. ⁸And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. ¹⁰And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Yes, they were to be listening for God ... He that hath an ear ... This was symbolical and spiritual language referring to those who faithfully belonged to Christ ... as distinct from those who were *not* listening, and who were not *prepared* to listen ... and who were 'pretending', Rom. 11:8 God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and *ears that they should not hear*.

And so, the Lord Jesus was instructing His faithful people to listen to the sound of the Holy Spirit in their midst. How do you know when the Holy Spirit is speaking to you? You know because of the deep impression He lays upon your heart to be obedient to His Word. You *know* when you are following in the way He sets before you. ... But also, can you, - as a Christian, - be disobedient to His leading/will? Yes, you can ... and you know it also, because if you are disobedient, - and a true believer, - there's a battle that rages in your heart.

Yes, make sure you listen as God speaks to you through His Word ... He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. ... **The Speaker**

THE SEEKER

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

Let's take this part of the verse in stages ... Here is **the promise**, To him that overcometh will I give. In other words, Christ promises, - and so we must be confident, - there *will* be 'overcomers'. How do you overcome? You overcome by staying the course. You can never overcome by giving up, and running away. Neither will you overcome by *being* overcome. You must stand firm and confront the opposition that is seeking to ruin your testimony. This is a promise from Christ

based upon your faithfulness to Him. It crucially involves total commitment to the Lord Jesus. It is not always an easy option for the believer. The Holy Spirit wasn't saying to the members of the church in Pergamum ... "Now, those of you are more enthusiastic about your faith in Christ, this message is for you". No, this instruction was the same for them all!

This church already knew the terrors of the enemy ... and they knew how hard it was to fight and win the battle ... but yet, Christ promised them the victory, **To Him that overcometh**. ... That's **the promise** ... Now, here is **the prize**. The prize comes in two forms ... **Firstly**, **To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna** ... This, of course, is referring to the Old Testament. When the children of Israel were hungry in the desert, God provided for them *manna*. After a time, though, God's gift of the manna ceased for it was no longer required. *However*, - under the Lord's instructions to Moses (Ex. 16:33,34), - a golden pot of a portion of the manna was placed into the ark of the covenant ... and later, into the Temple (Heb. 9:4).

What was the significance of the Christians in Pergamum being told they would eat of the hidden manna? Well, it was **the promise** of **the prize**. In the Old Testament the original golden pot of manna was placed in the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle, - it was for God's eyes only. ... Here though, the believers in Pergamum were being promised the prize of feasting with God! **Rev. 19:9** *Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.*

The Lord Jesus was saying to them, "Look, you see all the delicacies these idolaters are boasting of ... Don't be jealous of them ... Don't be envious!" ... **II Tim. 4:8** there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. ... The 'hidden manna' is promised to all God's people who overcome in the strength of the Lord when He returns ... There is also ...

Secondly, ... and *[I]* will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. In other words, in Christ, as well as **the promise of the prize** we also have **the possession**. In Christ we have been changed, - you are a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (**II Cor. 5:17**). You are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of your inheritance ... and that seal will never be removed for it will keep you secure in the knowledge of the Lord until the redemption of the purchased **possession**, unto the praise of His glory (**Eph. 1:13,14**). Yes, God has purchased you and made you His. Your salvation was paid with the blood of His

Son at Calvary! ... “O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, To every believer the promise of God.”

In this part of the verse there are a number of different interpretations suggested as to what the new name written in the stone might be referring to ... but you will notice the Lord Jesus clearly said, *which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it*. Therefore, we accept it as a great, - yet a wonderful mystery, - the work of our salvation. ... “Known only to Him are the great hidden secrets” ... But yes, I also know, He knew me and loved me from before the foundation of the world ... and He’s preparing to come again and receive me unto Himself forever. ... *I know that for certain!*

These believers in Pergamum were being spoken to by Jesus, and He was telling them to be equally as confident ... Stand your ground, *I Jn. 4:4 Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.* ... *Mt. 6:33 Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness* ... **The Speaker, the Seeker**

THE SUCCEEDER

There is only one winning side in the battle ... and that is on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, as Paul wrote to the Romans, *we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Romans 8:37)*. ... That is the victory sound of the Redeemed.

We can trace throughout history the way God has directed all things for His own purposes and glory. We can see around us today His hand guiding and directing events. We’re coming ever closer to the day of the return of His Son, and all things are working in accordance with His plan leading up to that great event. And yes, even the wicked and idolatrous Pergamum was under His authority. The godless were only being granted so much liberty ... but no more! God had it all under His control. And He was speaking to the believers and calling for their devotion ...

Yes, they would pass through the valley of testing and tribulation ... but the promises of God would see them victorious. ... How faithful they needed to continue to be ... God being their Helper!

CONCLUSION

In verse twelve we studied the words of **Pergamum’s Defender**, - the Lord Jesus. Then, in verses thirteen to sixteen we looked at the environment in which this church dwelt, and we saw **Pergamum’s Dilemma**. Those who had fallen foul of the deceptions of the false teachers who had crept in amongst them were called to repent, return, and be restored.

And then we studied **Pergamum's Deliverance** ... Here in verse seventeen we are met with **the speaker, the seeker, and the succeder**. Yes, this congregation of believers in this city had much to contend with and yet, they had the promises of God to depend upon. That is what I trust we are holding unto in these days when it is increasingly unfashionable to be a Christian.

They hymn describes it perfectly, "It's not an easy road we are travelling to Heaven ... It's not an easy road, there are trials and troubles, And many are the dangers we meet, But Jesus guards and keeps us, And smoothes the rugged path for our feet."

Let's not forget the example of others like Nehemiah when he was confronted by the godless, **Our God shall fight for us** (Neh. 4:20). Yes, the spiritual war *will* intensify, as it did in Pergamum, - but we are promised ... **the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful** (Rev 17:14). ... You see, once again, the *promise*, the *prize* and the *possession*!

May God be pleased with our service for Him, and may it be of the very best!
Amen.

THYATIRA – CHRIST'S INTRODUCTION (Rev. 2:18,19)

We are continuing our study of the seven churches in the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation ... We come to the church in Thyatira.

The background to this assembly begins with Paul on his second missionary journey. The word for 'church' is ἐκκλησία and it describes the 'assembly' of God's people. It was originally a secular term for a gathering of citizens *called out* from their homes into some public place, for example, a 'town council' would have been an ἐκκλησία.

It was adopted and used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint, LXX) to describe the 'congregation' of the Israelite people, e.g. Is. 43:1 **O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.** Stephen also referred to Israel as **the church [ἐκκλησία] in the wilderness** (Acts 7:38). It took on a particular Christian identity in the New Testament as it was applied to God's people whom He had 'called out' for salvation, e.g. I Peter 1:2, **Elect [ἐκλεκτός] according to the foreknowledge of God.**

Now, Paul had come from Jerusalem and travelled northwards into Asia Minor. It was on this journey that he passed through his home city of Tarsus. Travelling northwards and then westwards he crossed over the Bosphorus into Macedonia, and arrived in Philippi (Acts 16:6). ... And that was when the Gospel was first brought into Europe. In Philippi, on the Sabbath, Paul went down to the riverside and met a Jewish lady named Lydia. He spoke to her about Jesus, and she was wondrously saved, - the first convert in Europe!

Lydia was a wealthy woman, - a seller of purple (a special and very expensive cloth), - and she came from a magnificent city in the heart of a beautiful river valley ... and the city was called Thyatira. It was surrounded by rich agricultural land, and stood at the junction of three major highways connecting Pergamum, Smyrna and Sardis.

Understandably, it had a strategic importance, especially during the time when one of Alexander the Great's generals founded a Greek colony there (post-323 BC). In its 'victory days' it had a coin with the conquering warrior riding forth to battle, armed with a double-edged battle axe. However, after the Romans defeated the Greeks at the Battle of Magnesia (190 BC), the city was incorporated into the Roman province of Asia. At this point it lost its military importance ... It was against this background, though, Christ introduced Himself as the Son of God in warrior dress (Rev. 2:18).

After Thyatira lost its significance in the military period, it continued as a centre for wealth and prosperity. The agricultural lands provided the raw materials for many successful manufacturing industries ... and it was to this progressive and profitable business community that Lydia belonged. Yes, she was a Jewess, - not one of the local pagan idolaters, - ... but it caused her no real problem for it seemed Thyatira was all about "live and let live"!

Following Lydia's conversion to Christ, she returned to Thyatira where a church was established. Indeed, she - very possibly - may have been one of the founder members of the assembly we read about in Rev. 2:18-29.

This is the longest of the seven letters to the churches; ... what does it tell us? What kind of a church had it become? ... Well, it had developed problems ... There were a few factors that contributed to their condition ...

- * They had plenty of people passing through the city ... with all their different opinions, - cosmopolitan,
- * It was also a military garrison and was the type of town where no-one stayed for any length of time,
- * It wasn't a particularly religious town, - everybody had their gods, but nobody *really* bothered about religion, - there was certainly no threat of persecution to the Christian Church. Making money was the priority.

What then was the problem in the church? The major problem for the Christians concerned the 'trade unions'. In Thyatira there were 'trade unions' of workers in wool, leather, linen and bronze, makers of other garments, dyers, potters, bakers and slave-

dealers. ... Now, *here was the problem* ... to maintain your business, you had to become 'part and parcel' of the 'trade union' system ... If you weren't a member, you would find it practically impossible to continue. As a member, though, you would often *have to* congregate in one of the temples of idolatry, ... you would have to eat the food sacrificed to the idols, you would have to become involved in the drunken revelry, and it would be expected of you to participate in the immorality.

However, as a member of the church, - one of the 'called out' ones (the ἐκκλησία), - you had the responsibility to maintain your standards. Therefore, you had to distance yourself from the world's activities. Now, understandably this would have had major repercussions on your business dealings ... But it was either one thing or the other, - either you 'gave in' or you 'stood up'! You either compromised and capitulated or you remained apart for Christ.

This would have meant a tremendous battle of conscience for the Christian. ... As always, though, there were some church members who were prepared to reinterpret the Christian stand and accommodate the spirit of concession, - indeed, quite a strong movement inside the church. They were led by a woman described by the name *Jezebel*, - you can imagine what kind of a 'lady' she was! The people who gave their allegiance to her managed to justify aligning themselves to Thyatira's standards in the interests of their business and commercial prosperity.

Now, Jesus comes to this church. He begins by demonstrating the glory of His majesty in order to set Himself distinct from the idols of the pagan city ...

HIS APPEARANCE

the Son of God

In the days when this epistle was first read there would have been many stories concerning the gods and their families. But the manner in which this letter is introduced does not take into account any other deity. It speaks of one God, and one God alone, - it gives no recognition of any of the pagan gods. As far as the Christian church in that city was concerned Christ was showing them their only business was with Him, their Saviour and their Lord.

He was the absolute centre of their faith, - there was none other beside Him. And from the letters and teachings of the apostles they would have been taught clearly that Jesus Christ was the Son of God ... divine and equal to God ... no lesser deity ... "True God of true God, Light from Light Eternal ... Son of the Father, begotten, not created". They would have already been taught of the occasion when He was baptised in the River Jordan, and when the voice of His Father declared from Heaven, **Mt. 3:17 This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased**. They would have been told how the same declaration was made on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:2). Even the demons referred to Him as the Son of God (e.g. Mt. 4:3,6; Lk. 4:3,9)! ... He is the only one and true God.

And now here in Thyatira, the believers were being reminded of their privilege in coming to know Him ... They had been accepted because of His grace, - His unmerited favour that He so wonderfully lavished and bestowed upon them. They neither deserved it, or

earned it ... Even with all their business acumen they could never have gained it by their own efforts, - it came through the love of God for His people ... And the appearance of this One Whose eyes were like unto a flame of fire, and His feet as like fine brass was their glorious Saviour and Lord Who gave His life on Calvary for them, ... Who opened their eyes that they would see and believe in Him, ... and Who drew them unto Himself in saving grace. These were indeed a privileged people ... and it was all because of Jesus, the Son of God! ... **His appearance.**

HIS ATTENTION

... who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire

In Dan. 10:6 the eyes of the man by the river in Daniel's vision are described as *lamps [torches] of fire*. It is, of course, referring to the Lord Jesus, as the similarity of the language in Revelation would confirm. Here, though, - as in Rev. 1:14, - 2:18 is not merely the brightness of the eyes that captures John's attention, but their penetrating power. They were looking *straight* into every corner of the church, - nothing was being missed. This searing beam cut through the sham and hypocrisy. It revealed the minds and hearts of the church members. His eyes were burning into their souls *like unto a flame of fire*. His eyes *engaged* with His people. They could not avoid His glare ... **His attention caught** them where they were and what they were doing. ... God purchased His people from out of the society and the city of Thyatira and He was calling them to account for their commitment.

HIS AUTHORITY

... and his feet are like fine brass

This description referred to the highly purified metal from the area that had been so carefully tended to until it produced a dazzling brilliance. The fine brass was used to make weapons for the Roman legions. The people in the church, therefore, were well-familiar with the arms-manufacturing industry in Thyatira and they would have understood what Jesus was referring to.

They would have understood how the fine brass spoke of purity that resulted in durability. All the metals had to be so highly 'fired' so that the unclean constituents in them would be removed ... and only the very best would remain. But, you see, Jezebel and her clique were telling the good people in the church were being told they must lay aside some of the weightiness of their faith if they were to survive, - they had to give a little in order to carry on in the work. ... Some of them would have been concerned that because they were such a small church in such a large community they were in danger of the outside influences bringing an end to their witness ... unless they 'moved on' and accommodated social change. Christ reminded them, though, it is His authority before which they must bow. Trust *Him* to keep them! **Prov. 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.** ⁶ **In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.** His feet, - like the fine brass, - would trample every opposing force and crush every evil that would rise up against His purposes for His people.

Such is the Christ, - the God, - they and we worship, **His appearance.** He was assuring His people *He* was in charge! If you like ... concerning **His attention**, we see His *omnipresence*. Concerning **His authority**, we see His *omnipotence*. And now He begins to bring the substance of His message ...

HIS ASSESSMENT

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first.

This verse can be translated, I know thy works, [*even*] charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works. The Complete Jewish Bible translates, I know what you are doing, your love, trust, service and perseverance. And I know that you are doing more now than before. He was very warmly commending them. He knew about their acts of love for each other ... and how their faith was demonstrated in patience. Yes, He was commending them.

And even the very fact He repeats *thy works* at the conclusion indicates that instead of their witness fading with time, their works were actually increasing evidence of the Holy Spirit abiding amongst them. If you and I would have walked into this church, we would have been greatly encouraged!

Indeed, their faithfulness and perseverance in the work of Christ was reflected in those concluding words of v.19, *and the last to be more than the first*. This was the Christ's assessment of them, - His appraisal of their testimony. They appeared to be making steady progress. Their love and service together, accompanied by their faith and endurance, were on the increase. Matthew Henry commented about them, "This is an excellent character; when others had *left their first love [Ephesus]*, and *lost their first zeal [Pergamum]*, these were growing wiser and better. It should be the ambition and earnest desire of all Christians that their last works may be their best works, that they may be better and better every day, and best at last."

I know the next verse (v.20) introduces some issues the church at Thyatira had to face and resolve ... but at the commencement of the epistle the Lord presents the kind of endearing people these were. Sometimes we are all too ready to condemn, but isn't it beautiful to consider the Lord Jesus began by commending them.

What would the Lord have to say about you and me, and our fellowship? I know how easy it is in every fellowship to point out all the mistakes and failures ... but don't you notice how the Lord comes and speaks directly to each of these folk ... and commends them. ...

This is His work we are engaged in, and so each of us is answerable to Him. He is not like a hard taskmaster who comes and beats us and tells us all the time how much of a failure we are. Surely, we know we would love to be doing more ... but initially Jesus comes with words of commendation.

Many of you here have had a difficult week. Many of you have had worries to contend with that's away beyond what the most of us can understand ... but you have come to this place of worship to praise and worship the Name of Christ, and to worship God ... *and God notices it!* He knows when you put Him first. He knows you have Him on the throne of your heart.

Yes, He *does* see and scrutinise what we are doing for Him, and how we are doing it. It is not enough to say He will overlook what I'm doing if I am not putting my best into it ... and it is not enough to say either He will overlook me altogether ... because He won't. He looks into my heart and He sees the desires or otherwise to serve Him.

In grace He sent His Son to serve us in order that we would be privileged to serve Him, - it all began with Him. I'm sure as the church in Thyatira listened to these opening words they were encouraged ... and rightly so. Are *you* encouraged also, as Christ today examines your service for Him ... Could it be more? Could it be better? ... Even the best of folk need to be reminded, and so these good folk in Thyatira were being spoken to by the Lord.

You and I are precious to Him, - more precious than we can understand, - and He has us in this fellowship to fulfil His purposes ... And He has individual purposes for each of us, as well as His purposes for our fellowship as a whole. I trust we would know what He desires from us, and that we would give Him the very best we can! Amen.

CHRIST'S INJUNCTION (Rev. 2:20-23)

In our previous study we looked at **Christ's introduction** to the church in Thyatira, and how He warmly commended the believers for their faithful witness to the truth. However, He also had another message for them ... v.20 *Notwithstanding [But] I have a few things against thee*. Nobody likes to hear anyone say that to them! Sometimes people take great delight in 'running others down'. It is so easy to find fault ... and it even happens among believers! That is not what is altogether happening here though. Matthew Henry entitles this section, "A faithful reproof for what was amiss". He continues, "This is not so directly charged upon the church itself as upon some wicked seducers who were among them" ... and the place at which the church failed was it did not 'pick up' on these "wicked seducers". They allowed them to infiltrate the fellowship, and introduce their false teachings.

As a consequence, the Lord Jesus brought an **injunction** against them ...

THE WOMAN

v.20 thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. ²¹And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

That which Christ had against this church was but one matter only, - they were tolerating "that woman Jezebel"! The word translated 'sufferest' (ἐάω) means to allow someone to do as they wish, and not to restrain them. In other words, this woman described as 'Jezebel' was allowed to come in, do what she liked, and she wreaked havoc ... without anyone 'raising a finger' against her!

Who was Jezebel? Well, the basic principle in understanding Scripture is to keep it as simple as we possibly can. Try to understand the text without complicating it ... where there is no need. So, it's fairly safe to assume Jezebel was a woman; otherwise, - if this was a man, - there would have been plenty of men's names in the Old Testament that could have been used. No, in all likelihood this was a woman.

What kind of a woman was she? Well, none of us know any young girls called Jezebel. You hear of children called by Biblical names such as Ruth, Mary, Anne, Rachel, but never Jezebel. ... It has all kinds of connotations we would not wish to lay upon an innocent child!

Jezebel, in the Old Testament, was the daughter of King Ethbaal, of the Sidonians ... a wicked idol-worshipper who *murdered* his way to the throne. This was how Jezebel was brought up ... and she became the wife of King Ahab of Israel. Like her father, she carried out murder (e.g. Naboth) and caused bloodshed across the land, and she also confused the Israelites into worshipping *both* Jehovah and Baal ... This false worship culminated in all types of degrading immorality. As a consequence, God sent three and a half years of famine, as judgment.

Now, when her name is used to describe this woman in the church at Thyatira it can't be with any measure of approval! This new woman was a scheming, manipulative, dangerous enemy! ... Not at all what should be included in the church of Christ! You couldn't have found any good in this woman. You couldn't have changed her, - she was 'rotten from the core out' ... and this was what the good people had let in, and none was standing up against her! ... No doubt, she had a beautiful smile ... but she had an evil heart!

She had taken upon herself the title of 'prophetess' ([which calleth herself a prophetess](#)). Properly used, the task of a prophet was not necessarily to predict the future, but it was to faithfully and accurately teach the things of God.

However, this woman, - like Jezebel in the Old Testament, - came in among God's people and usurped a trusted position in order to lead them into serious error. She set herself up and she 'lulled' them into believing she was speaking the things of God.

Now, remember the early church did not possess the New Testament, - they hadn't the inspired accounts of the words and deeds of Christ, and the meaning of His death and resurrection ... as we do. So the Holy Spirit had established men to set forth the word of God correctly. For example, Paul taught the Corinthians, [I Cor. 12:28 God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets](#), as he also taught the Ephesians, [4:11 he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers](#).

However, this woman had not been sanctioned by the apostles, or authorised by the church leaders ... She had simply moved in and elevated herself ... and claimed to have special

revelations from God! Consequently, she didn't reckon herself to be answerable to anyone!

Now, there was only one other woman in the New Testament called a prophetess, - Anna, - and she *did* correctly speak concerning Christ ... but this 'Jezebel' though wasn't 'in the same league'. ...

Jesus identified her as a false prophet and a false teacher! She would have told the church members she was speaking on behalf of God, but she wasn't ... and the sad thing was that the majority of the assembly in Thyatira were tolerating the dubious character of this woman. This was an unhealthy situation, - they detected something wasn't quite right about her teaching, but they refused to do anything about it ... to deal with her. Basically, weak leadership among the men of the church (as with King Ahab previously) was allowing a woman to do what apostolic teaching forbade, [I Tim. 2:12](#) *I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*

... And she was plainly teaching error, - she was teaching and seducing with the intention of diverting Christ's true people onto a path of falsehood and compromise that would inevitably lead them away from God! The word for 'seduce' (*πλανῶ*) specifically means to 'cause to stray', to 'lead away from the truth' ... and *that* was in a city where all kinds of erroneous religions thrived! This woman wanted to bring the world into the church, so as to make the church like the world!

She was, indeed, *bad*! She was devious! Christ spoke of how she specifically attacked [my servants](#) ... and the word He uses there is *δοῦλος*. These were His own people whom He had purchased ... and she wanted to draw them away. She was blatantly attacking His authority! This rascal of a woman was trying every trick in the book to seduce His servants! And Christ wasn't prepared to have any of it! I mentioned a moment ago about the idolatrous state of the city ... and this woman's agenda was to break down the walls of separation and integrate Christianity with idolatry. ... We see plenty of that happening today!

She would have had no problem meeting with the priests of idolatry, and visiting them in their temples and eating the food offered to the idols ... and she would bring the church members with her, - those who were gullible enough to follow! ... She would have twisted such Scriptures as [I Cor. 8:4](#) (*As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one*) and she would have confused the Christians who would then see no harm in where she was taking them. Once she was settled she would have influence over every strata of the church ... She would even pollute the truths being taught to the next generation ... to the children in the Sunday School at Thyatira ... a new generation, built upon her error!

And at these gatherings there would be all types of activities ... contrary to how the servants of God ought to behave. ... Ah, but what did that matter?! ... Well, it mattered

because Christ took serious offence at her trying to 'deceive His servants. The testimony for Jesus was under threat in Thyatira!

You can draw the comparison with our own times, can't you? I think it is fairly obvious the correlation of the modern Church with the church in Thyatira. There has been many a sound body of believers ... and it just takes *one* to come in and wreak havoc. Maybe it's someone who is good with children and young people ... and they introduce programs that have a 'wafer-thin' connection with Scripture ... but, hey, it brings the children and young people in! Let's say nothing, even if the Bible is used less and less, and silly songs with no Biblical substance are taught ... we've got to relax with the times. God says, "No, it's 'not on'!"

Maybe they come in and they have a really 'winning way' as they stand in the pulpit ... but look and listen to how they dilute the preaching of the Word ... They harangue the old-fashioned preaching and blame it for driving people away, - it's boring listening to someone 'prattling on', - so they update worship, and the Bible is relegated ... Tell me ... has the Church benefited any from 'suffering that woman Jezebel'? How many churches are struggling because they have set aside God's ways and compromised on the truths that have been preached faithfully for centuries?

This woman was a real threat ... and her influence hasn't gone away, you know ... She will be hanging around until Christ gets rid of her at the end of the age ... and get rid of her He will! As surely as she is against Him, *He* is against her. His Gospel is not her gospel ... That is **the woman** ...

THE WARNING

²²Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. ²³And I will kill her children with death

He had already confronted her, - I gave her space [*χρόνος*] to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. She wasn't interested! She wasn't going to do what Jesus said! (Complete Jewish Bible) "I gave her time to turn from her sin, but she doesn't want to repent of her immorality." ... She was enjoying the attention far too much ... She wouldn't listen. She was successful, - she was getting people to take on board her seductive message. She showed absolutely no inclination to change her mind and her ways. She was rotten to the core!

So, since she wanted to live by her exploits on the bed, - as it were, - Jesus would treat her as such. In the Old Testament, Israel was often described as a harlot ... a prostitute, for example, Hosea 9:1 Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as *other* people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor. ... She was 'selling herself' so Christ decided to punish her by giving her what she wanted, - He would sell her over to the pursuits she had her heart set on! He would see to it that it would ruin her, once and for all! If that was the kind of religion she wanted, she would get it ... and it would bring an end to her!

Some think He would accept almost anything in the name of religion ... if you call it 'Christianity' ... but He won't! We've got to remember God's commands to His people ... He told the children of Israel, [Num. 32:23](#) *Be sure your sins will find you out* ... and it was to the believers in Galatia He also said, [Gal. 6:7](#) *God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

And when He begins to deal with this woman, His action was to be so severe He would use her as an example to anyone else in the church anticipating the same activities as her! He called for the full attention of His people, [Behold \(v.22\)](#) ... I am about to challenge this woman! He was going to deal with her on three levels, - against her person (*I will cast her into a bed*), her partners (*and them that commit adultery with her*), and her progeny (*I will kill her children*). ... Whereas previously her bed had been a place of pleasure to her, it would become a place of pain.

And mercifully and graciously ... for those who had been caught up in her seduction, Jesus offered them hope ... if they would repent ... if they would return to Him and reject this Jezebel. ... It was to be either Jesus or Jezebel!

And the stubborn and intransigent spiritual offspring of this woman's endeavours, - those who had come into the church ... happy to remain under her influence, - Christ would deal with them once and for all. The language sounds drastic ... but it is necessary 'to lance the boil' ... otherwise the church in Thyatira would not continue. Truth and error can't co-habit, - only one of them can survive! ... And Jesus told them it was going to be truth!

THE WISDOM

[v.23](#) and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

And what Christ was about to do was testimony to how He guards the truth He has committed to His Church. Indeed, the only way the Church has survived to this day is because we have a God Who keeps His own who continue to maintain His witness! And His people, His Beloved, His Bride are more precious to Him than anything else He has created ... for He has already written it in His will and plan that someday the Church will rise to meet Him and we shall be with Him forever! ... Such is His keeping and saving power! ... 'Jezebel' is no competition! The Church of Christ will win the victory for we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!

We are in a terrible state these days. Christianity is on the decline in the UK. Other religions are making ground, as is the non-religion of humanist secularism. Churches are growing weaker. To remain in harmony with society, many are following Jezebel's 'lead' and exchanging the well-proven preaching of the Word, and they are introducing what is foreign to our heritage

Yet, the army of God's people continue to move forward in His strength in many lands across this globe ... The Holy Spirit is moving mightily. Countless numbers are being

saved ... and it proves the enemy cannot stop a single footstep in the advance of the Gospel ... And if the Lord chooses to move again in a similar way throughout the United Kingdom the devil won't stop Him either! ... And you will notice the churches in other areas of Asia Minor were being told to pay attention, **v.23 all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts** ... They all needed to be reminded so they won't fall into the same trap as Thyatira, - they had to watch for the 'Jezebel's' too!

Conclusion

The **Woman**, the **Warning**, and the **Wisdom** ... We can never take enough care in our Christian journey. We'll get through only if we keep our eyes open in obedience to the Lord! Peter warned God's people, **I Pet. 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.** ... He comes prowling in through the church doors. When he sees an opening, he sets about causing havoc. He knows enough about religion to twist it in ways you and I cannot imagine. He knows the Gospel and He has succeeded on countless occasions to draw away the unsuspecting.

Our study teaches us we cannot afford to be half-hearted Christians. Neither can we afford to have our attention distracted away from Christ. It teaches us also the devil is so very busy ... he knows his time is shorter ... and he is more intent than ever to deceive the people of God and confound His plans.

Do you know the only type of Christian that is sure to succeed? It is the Christian who heeds God's Word as previous generations of believers upheld it, so as to stand against the devil's whispers in our ears. ... Our Heavenly Father searches 'the reins' and He knows our hearts. He will give to each of us in accordance to our service for Him. That is not to say our salvation stands or falls by our works ... because we're saved by grace alone ... but our works demonstrate whether, - and the degree to which, - His grace is being applied!

This was **Christ's injunction** ... Yes, He had a few things against them ... a few things they had to pay particular attention to ... but their problems were not insurmountable. May God teach us today to give Him the very best we can, and to ensure our service for Him is obedient to His will as shown to us in His Word! Amen.

CHRIST'S INSTRUCTION (Rev. 2:24-29)

Thus far, we have studied this letter to the church at Thyatira under two main headings, -

- I. Christ's Introduction (2:18,19)
 - His Appearance (**the Son of God**)
 - His Attention (... **who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire**)
 - His Authority (**and his feet are like fine brass**)

His Assessment (I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first.)

II. Christ's Injunction (2:20-23)

The Woman (v.20 thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. ²¹And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.)

The Warning (²²Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. ²³And I will kill her children with death)

The Wisdom (v.23 and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works)

Our third heading is **Christ's Instruction** (Rev. 2:24-29) ... v.24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. ²⁵But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come. ²⁶And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: ²⁷And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. ²⁸And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The tone throughout this letter to the church in Thyatira has neither been harsh nor contentious. It simply and directly dealt with an issue that threatened the life of the believers, but Christ spoke in tones of tenderness and love. As He draws to a conclusion, the Lord Jesus commends the faithful for ...

THEIR PROFESSION

v.24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. ²⁵But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come.

He hasn't overlooked the "few things" (v.20) He had to confront them and He had to mention them ... but He didn't linger on them. Those 'few things' had the potential to destroy the witness of this assembly and eradicate their testimony, - it was so serious! Yet, Christ dealt with His people tenderly.

He knew the kind of city they lived in, and the kind of people they lived among. He understood the subtleties and dangers of the enemy ... and how they 'manoeuvred' the truth to disseminate their false doctrines.

I'm not saying He 'went easy' on the faithful congregation, - He *did* point out their failings ... They failed to stand as they should have, and they failed to condemn the error which had seeped in amongst them, - ... but these people were still precious to Jesus.

I think it must be something like the situation in many of our churches today. We haven't meant to ... but we have 'let our guard down' and we have become too accepting of things that should have no place among God's people. For example, we are so concerned about

becoming an attraction that we weaken certain spiritual structures that are necessary to uphold the church! The work of the Lord must be done His way.

You see, this section is addressed to **the rest in Thyatira**, - if you like, - the faithful 'remnant'. They did not adopt the doctrines of Jezebel, they remained confident in the doctrines taught to them by the apostles. They had no truck with the pagan religions or the philosophical systems of the intelligentsia. They simply kept to **the faith which was once delivered unto the saints** (cf. Jude 3). Yes, they might have been described as being behind the times ... not keeping up ... But these faithful people were keeping in step with God and His Word.

As a consequence, the Lord promised them relief in their trials, **I will put upon you none other burden**. That indicates, of course, He had already placed upon them a burden ... What was the burden? The burden was to uphold His Name in the face of the doctrinal error being brought by Jezebel and her associates.

Simply consider what it must have been like for them as that woman and her cronies came in to the church. Her and her people would have been speaking louder than anyone else, - they would have been 'hogging' all the 'limelight', they would have been authorities on everything! They would have been on all the committees and they would have been at the forefront of the plans being made. They would have entered into the church like a tremendous wave overpowering the good folk who had been there since its inception. ...

Yet, Christ had maintained a faithful people whose feet continued to stand on steady and solid ground. To them He said, **that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come**. Keep going on, for, - as He had said previously, - **he that endureth to the end shall be saved** (Mt. 24:13). It is not addressed to those who give up shortly after they began ... but to those who continue. Or, it's not those who become fed up and give up ... Christ said, **that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come**. ... And if what you have is worth having, you will never let it go. You won't exchange it. You will keep holding onto it until Christ either comes for you or calls for you.

In fact, you will notice the word 'already' is in italics. That means it was not in the original language, - it has been added to give further understanding to the statement. Therefore, it should read, "that which ye have, hold fast till I come". He was telling them to continue to do what they were already doing (v.19), - standing apart from the devil's deceptive teaching until He comes again.

And there is another point here ... It's to do with the phrase, **v.22 I will cast [βάλλω] her [Jezebel] into a bed**. It is the same word used in **v.24 I will put [βάλλω] upon you none other burden**. In other words, He recognised His faithful people had enough to contend with, and He would not add to their burden. He would continue to act in grace towards His own people while acting in wrath towards the ungodly. That is another privilege of the Redeemed, - we are privileged with the care and attention of the Saviour ... for **we**

know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose (Rom 8:28).

This is also the first time in the epistle He introduces His coming, *till I come*. ... How long can we continue for? How long can we keep going? ... The length of time an assembly of God's people can keep going is neither in their hands nor the world's hands ... but in the Saviour's hands. His witness *will* continue *until* He comes again.

Such was **their profession**.

THEIR PROMISE ²⁶And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: ²⁷And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

This is a promise of victory and a promise to reign with Christ. It is in the future tense so therefore we can deduce this is a kingdom that has yet to be entered and established. The promise is that Christ will *give power over the nations* so this also seems to indicate this reign will take place in somewhere other than Heaven ... for the phrase "the nations" would not be appropriate to mention in that setting. It seems to be referring to the period alluded to throughout the Book of Revelation. For example, in chapter fifteen there is the solemn and dramatic scene in Heaven. ...

The martyr-saints stand before the throne and they are singing the song of Moses (from the Old Covenant) and the song of the Lamb (from the New Covenant) ... the songs of victory. They are saying, v.3 *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.* ⁴ *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.*

Isaiah also prophesies concerning these nations, for example, Is. 2:4 *He [the Messiah] shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

When will this take place? It is not taking place now ... and it will not take place in Heaven, for these nations do not belong to the number of the Redeemed ... so it must take place in another period. Rev. 20 refers to an angel coming down from Heaven, v.1 *having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.* ² *And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,* ³ *And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.* Is not this the time Jesus referred to in Mt. 5:5 *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth ...* 19:28 *Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel?*

In Rev. 2:27 it clearly says, *He shall rule them with a rod of iron ...* and that symbolism is taken from the Old Testament where it looked forward to and spoke of the Messiah's

reign on earth, Ps. 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee. ⁸ Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen [*goyim, the Hebrew corresponding equivalent of the Greek word ἔθνος, as in Rev. 2:26 and Rev. 20:3*] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. ⁹ Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron [*the royal sceptre when used against His enemies*]

That was what they were being promised! ... Just return for a moment and consider again the name of this woman Jezebel. During the times of Queen Jezebel of Israel the spiritual situation was so bad Elijah reckoned he was the only one left, and it wasn't worth continuing ... and he wanted to die. It seemed to him as if all other true worshippers of Jehovah had been removed from the land. But not so, the Lord told His servant, I Kgs. 19:18 I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which have not kissed him. Now translate that into the church in first century Thyatira. You can hear them saying, "We are only a small church in such a large city. We are going to die. Our witness will soon disappear. It will be as if we never were. We have suffered such irreparable harm from these false believers who have swept in amongst us. We can't see how we can keep going." ... And then we discover Christ comes to them with a promise rewarding their faithfulness.

He is encouraging them to battle on ... **he that overcometh** ... You don't overcome by doing nothing ... You overcome by facing the enemy!

Christ is not suggesting there is going to be a great influx of precious souls into their church. He's not telling them they are going to be 'bursting at the seams' with new members ... but He's encouraging them not to give up, but to keep going on ... **he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end** ... It won't be finished until the end ... so keep going on ... and it will be worth it!

It is hard work 'swimming against the tide'. It's hard work when you don't seem to be 'making any ground', but the Christian must be faithful regardless of how it seems. We cannot see 'the bigger picture', but God can. ... And it's easy to 'flow with the tide' but it is not Christ's purpose for His people. We're different, and we're heading in a different direction to the world ... and our destination is also different.

Yes, as Paul said to the saints in Ephesus, 2:4 God, who is rich in mercy, ... ⁶ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus. In a manner, we *are* already reigning with Him but Paul, in the same passage, points forward to a time when we *shall* reign, v.7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

The new age cannot be inaugurated without the displacement of the old, fallen, sinful age with its rebellious hosts. We are to keep pressing on so that the followers of the Messiah, - the Lord Jesus Christ, - will ultimately share in His triumph. **Their profession, their promise ...**

THEIR PRIZE

²⁸And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

And I will give him the morning star (v.28). In Rev 22:16, the Lord Jesus describes Himself as the bright and morning star.

I remember being up on the Lomond Hills one winter's morning before eight o'clock ... in time to see the sun rising. It was beautiful, so magnificent. And yet, it will be nothing compared to the moment Heaven's brightest morning Star will appear. Malachi refers to Him as the Sun of righteousness (4:2). ... And Malachi tells us that will be the dawning of a great new day, unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. **3** And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do *this*, saith the LORD of hosts.

What a promise Christ gave them ... I will give him the morning star! It is a privilege we shall share with Him. We shall be like Him! ... Conformed into His image, I Jn. 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. James Allen wrote, "Believers with eyes fixed on the horizon awaiting the dawn would see first the dazzling splendour of the morning star". ... As Daniel prophesied, Dan. 12:3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Whether you are in the Old Testament or the New, the promise is the same ... for it is the same Author ... and He will bring His word to pass. And there was only one thing left for God's people to pay attention to, ²⁹He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. ... Don't doubt it, but believe it. Don't try to give it a different explanation, simply and believingly accept it. This Who speaks is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, Who hath eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass (v.18). ... If you can hear Him, listen to Him.

CONCLUSION

Their profession, their promise, their prize. All they had and were was because of the Saviour Who loved them and gave Himself for them ... In the midst of all their doubts and fears, He was continuing to speak to them.

We could ask about our own future as a church ... We could ask about the future of the Church within the United Kingdom. On all fronts we seem to be in an ever-increasing decline. But look again at this church in Thyatira. In such a sinful and godless city, God continued to maintain and to achieve His purposes through His faithful remnant. May God teach us in these days *not* to give up ... but to continue to *look up!* Amen.