

# UPLLOOK

Special Guest Editor Jamie Martin

JUNE 2003

## THE MAN IN THE MIDST



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## ↑ CONTENTS

# UPLOOK

Volume 70  
 Number 5

J U N E 2 0 0 3

## FEATURES

CHRIST IN THE MIDST <i>Arnold Spears</i>	7
EPHESUS <i>Gary McBride</i>	9
CHRIST-CENTERED MINISTRY <i>Shawn Abigail</i>	11
SMYRNA <i>Sam Ooman</i>	13
CHRIST & THE SEVEN CHURCHES <i>Chart</i>	16
PERGAMOS <i>Crawford Paul</i>	19
THYATIRA <i>Mark Anderson</i>	21
SARDIS <i>James Martin</i>	23
PHILADELPHIA <i>Steve Gonder</i>	25
LAODICEA <i>Jack Baker</i>	27
ARE WE TRULY REMEMBERING HIM? <i>Colin Anderson</i>	29

## DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL	3
FRONT LINES	4
BOUQUET OF BLESSING: <i>Him</i>	15
WHAT'S GOING ON?	18

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# Sine Qua Non

*“Without Me...nothing,” said the Lord.*

♥  
♥  
♥

The course calendar said it was Latin, but maybe the class should have been called Miscellaneous. Some days we learned more English, French, and history than Latin. Long ago I forgot what prompted me to sign up for the course, but surprisingly I’m still glad I did. And even though Mr. Doherty informally intruded upon the fields of so many other teachers, he did teach us about Latin. For instance, he loved to teach us Latin phrases. *Repetitio mater sapientia est.* “Repetition is the mother of knowledge.” (For some reason he kept telling us that.) *Caveat emptor.* “Let the buyer beware.” And *Sine qua non.* “Without which... nothing.” It denotes that element of an object which is essential, vital, indispensable; it’s paramount feature; that without which the item would be, well, nothing.

When we study an object, we can benefit from considering any of its components. But we learn most from its *sine qua non*. The study of the Church is no different. And when we ask, “What is the *sine qua non* of the Church?” there can only be one answer: the Lord Jesus.

The pictures of the Church point us to Him. For what is a bride without a Bridegroom, a body without a Head, a flock without a Shepherd, or a building without a Foundation and Cornerstone?

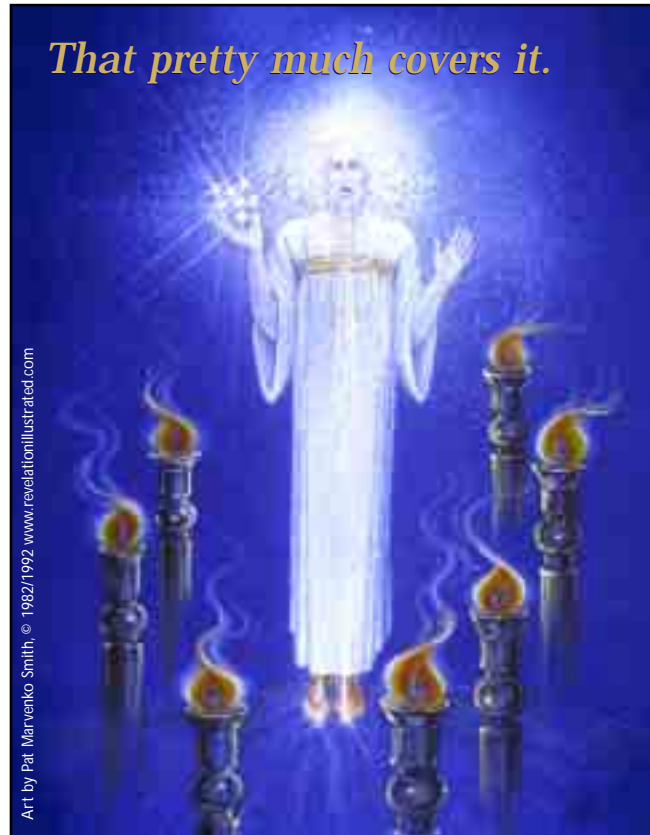
The principles of the Church direct us to Him. The New Testament has a lot to say about shepherds, but much more about the Chief Shepherd. The Breaking of Bread is a remembrance of Him. Headcoverings turn out to be not some cultural triviality, but an object lesson about the headship of Christ and the glory of God. When we consider the autonomy of the local church, we see Christ walking among seven lampstands.

And what of those lampstands? Seven golden lampstands “*which are the seven churches*” (Rev. 1:20), everyone with its own special circumstances. Some with strengths, some with weaknesses, most with both. In each case, the Lord has a special message for the church. In each case, the message starts with a revelation of Christ Himself. And, if we look a little closer, we see that in each case that revelation isn’t arbitrarily selected. Rather, the Lord reveals Himself to the church in a way that addresses its unique circumstances—perfectly. The answer to every weakness and the source of every strength.

Every aspect of the Church centers on Christ—every picture, every principle, every word. Every blessing and wonder directs us to Him in gratitude and worship; every failure drives us to Him in repentance and petition. In the end every detail about the Church comes back to Him. Without which...without whom...nothing!

***My special thanks to brother Jamie Martin, an elder and family man from the Sudbury Bible Fellowship who guest edited this issue of Uplook***

*That pretty much covers it.*



Art by Pat Marvenko Smith, © 1982/1992 www.revelationillustrated.com

*James Martin*  
James Martin

# STILL DANGEROUS IN NAZARETH

*Where they tried to stone the Saviour...*



Photo of Nazareth: Jack Hazut

**U**rgent prayer is requested for the Lord's work in Nazareth. On March 29, a conference was held there for all the assemblies in Israel and about 200 attended, both Jewish and Arab. Then a team of nine young people from various assemblies in Germany and Austria joined with local believers in a literature distribution effort in Galilee. Large quantities of books, cassettes, videos and CDs were distributed in towns across northern Israel with invitations included for Bible correspondence courses. There was much to encourage.



However we just received a further note from George Khalil: "During the ten days of literature distribution we experienced a few minor incidents of opposition. However today, a week since we finished the outreach, there was a major reaction...A sheik from a nearby town has written an angry and inciting article in three local newspapers against the Emmaus School and against me personally, even featuring a photo of the assembly hall with the address, phone numbers, email addresses.... We are now receiving continual cursing and threatening phone calls, accusing us of allying with Zionists, and other political and religious abuse which can incite such extremists to violence. They even contacted three Catholic bishops who wrote against all evangelicals, saying they had nothing to do with us and that 'God also has nothing to do with [us].' We would ask you to pray for wisdom in our response; for protection as a family and for the assembly and offices; and that the Lord will use this to create more interest in the gospel."

## A LOOSE CANON

Colin Burnett writes from the Republic of Ireland: "We had our Monday night Bible study in Abbeyfeal last night. About ten minutes into the study, the canon for the area showed up...He started arguing against the authority of the Bible, stating that the Bible...was just one of 'many bricks used in building the Church.'....

"We had a scriptural reply to all of his statements, which troubled him. I asked him before he left that since he felt we were lying to these dear folks, would he please tell us how we can be saved and know we are on our way to heaven. He replied with 'faith in God

and keeping the commandments,' something that by his own confession he had not been able to do...

"After he left, we had a good talk with those present, showing them how this man denies the Word of God and puts the Church and its teaching above God. They were glad to have seen this interaction and only wished that others had been there.

"I just found out that the canon went to the community hall today and told the folks that they were not to attend the "Protestant" Bible study as we were leading people astray. Do pray as we are going to do doors in Abbeyfeal tomorrow night. We will try to get a visit with the canon.

## A YOUNG ADULT'S CONE

A Young Adult Conference will be held in Wichita, KS at Westside Bible Chapel, on Aug. 15-17 with speakers John Heller (AR) and Jonathan Brower (FL). Contact:

Darold Peters at 316-943-3334  
darold.peters@juno.com  
Lavern Skiles at 316-269-0517  
unclevern@juno.com

## FAMILY MEETINGS

Grace Bible Chapel, Kenosha, WI, is planning a series of lectures on the Christian Family. Daniel H. Smith (IA) is the invited speaker. The series begins Friday, Aug. 22, at 7:00 PM, continues at 4:00 PM and 6:30 PM Sat-

# GREAT OPPORTUNITIES!

urday, and concludes Sunday at the 10:30 AM Family service. Supper provided Saturday. Contact Ian Taylor at:

3917-59th Street, Kenosha, WI 53144  
262-697-1383

## GREENWOOD HILLS

The Fall schedule for Greenwood Hills Bible Conference (PA): Labor Day Conf., Aug. 29–Sep. 11 with speaker Bob Gessner; Ladies Fall Retreat, Sep. 12-14 with speaker Ruth Schwerteger (WI); Colorama Conference, Oct. 13-17 with speaker Steve Hulshizer (PA).

7062 Lincoln Way E;  
Fayetteville PA 17222.  
ejs@greenwoodhills.org  
717-352-2150

## CONFERENCE IN BC

Horse Lake Christian Fellowship (100 Mile House, BC) extends an invitation to the Lord's people to attend their annual Labor Day Bible conference, Aug. 30-Sep. 1. The conference will be held at two locations: on Saturday in the ballroom at The Hills Health and Guest Ranch; on Sunday and Monday at the 108 Resort Conference Center. Conference theme: Lord, Change Me! Speakers invited are Jack Spender (CT), Warren Henderson (WI), and John Stutters (BC).

## LADIES' RETREAT

A ladies' retreat is planned, DV, at Camp Li Lo Li, Salamanca, NY, for Friday evening, Sep. 12 through Saturday afternoon, Sep. 13. Speaker: Bonnie Lucas (VT). Contact Lori Robinson at:

38 San Mateo Road  
Rochester, NY 14624  
585-429-7052  
ladiesretreat2003@yahoo.com

## HARTFORD CONFERENCE

Prospect Bible Chapel in Hartford, CT, is to host their annual Bible conference Sep. 20-21, DV. Wade LeBlanc (NB) has been invited. Ministry on Sat-

## *The Gaspé Peninsula: A Mission Field*

When we look for a mission field we seem to think of far-away places. But here in North America there is great need. The Gaspé is one of these places where, village after village, there is no gospel testimony. There was a time when servants of the Lord were looking to blaze a trail where Christ had not been preached, in places where people lived

in darkness without the liberating message of salvation. For those who still have this desire, the Gaspé offers such an opportunity. For the majority, attendance to their religious services would be rare. There is talk of closing some of the big Catholic church buildings due to a lack of priests and financial support. We need to go forward with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a desire, Lord willing, to bring the good news to some of these villages around the Gaspé coast. It seems that the Lord is already working in this way. Some have been saved in a little place called Grande Riviere after the visit of a Charismatic group, but because of disorder that little group was dismantled. Some of those who confessed Christ went back to their old ways, but others kept reading the Bible with a desire to grow. Finally, after some time without meetings, two of them were sent on behalf of the group along the coast one Sunday, looking for a place where they could have fellowship. They drove over an hour to find the assembly in New Carlisle just before the evening meeting. They couldn't speak English but brother Danny Dugas from New Richmond was there to preach. After the meeting he spoke with them to discuss their situation. They enjoyed the talk and the next Sunday, four of them drove one hour and 40 minutes to see the French meeting in New Richmond. They were very pleased with what they saw, and expressed a desire to have Bible studies in their own village. They know other people interested in attending. We greatly desire to help them.

As well as literature distribution in the area around Jonquière, an effort is also planned for the north side of the St. Lawrence River at Camp Joie de Vivre in Mont St-Pierre. It is a camp run by the assembly in Ste-Anne-des-Monts. We are inviting Christians, both French and English, to join us for this effort in distributing Seed Sowers texts in the surrounding villages. The distributions will take place, DV, July 13-19 and Aug. 17-23. We also are planning time for Bible study, singing, campfires, and relaxation. Lodging and meals at Camps Brochet and/or Joie de Vivre: \$50 CDN. Contact Donald Cox at 4026, des Outardes, Jonquière, Québec G7X 9B4

418-542-5092 or lizdon4@sympatico.ca

urday at 2:30 PM and 6:00 PM. On Lord's Day, Breaking of Bread at 10:30 AM and ministry at 2:30 PM. Contact Thomas E. Woods:

31 Strickland St.  
Manchester, CT 06040

860-643-4477  
TWoods1231@aol.com

## FALL CONFERENCE IN NY

Jim Comte (ON) will be speaker for a five-day Fall conference at



Camp-of-the-Woods, located in the scenic Adirondack region of NY state. Dates: Sep. 22-26. The cost is \$270 per person and includes meals, deluxe accommodations, and a day trip to nearby Lake George. Contact: [www.knowtheword.com](http://www.knowtheword.com)  
e-mail to [knowtheword@att.net](mailto:knowtheword@att.net)

**EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY**

On Sep. 27, the Christians at Grand Valley Christian Fellowship in Marne, MI (Grand Rapids area) will host the first of nine monthly EFM (Equipping for Ministry) Intensive Saturday Bible studies. Lord willing, Bill Gustafson (SC) will teach on The Priesthood of the Believer; Mike Fitzhugh (MI) will speak on Spiritual Gifts. The study is scheduled from 8:30 AM until 4:00 PM. Those who come are asked to bring a lunch. Drinks and snacks provided.  
Mike Fitzhugh at 616-784-4887  
[pbc mike@juno.com](mailto:pbc mike@juno.com)

**ANNUAL AUTUMN CONE.**

Jim Comte (ON) will be speaker for a five-day fall conference at Camp-of-the-Woods in the scenic Adirondack region of NY state. The dates are Sep. 22-26, 2003. The cost of \$270 per person includes meals, deluxe accommodations, and a day trip to nearby Lake George. Contact [www.knowtheword.com](http://www.knowtheword.com)  
[knowtheword@att.net](mailto:knowtheword@att.net)  
Or contact:  
Mark Kolchin  
P.O. Box 305  
Lanoka Harbor, NJ 08734

**SPECIAL MEETINGS IN NJ**

The Kenilwoth assembly is planning two special series. There are Family meetings Oct 3-5, from 7:30-8:30 PM at Kenilworth Gospel Chapel (NJ). Speaker: Kenny Barrett (NJ).  
As well, special meetings are

planned with Alex Strauch (CO) beginning on Oct. 12 at Kenilworth Gospel Chapel. Meetings Monday-Wednesday nights from 7-9 PM at Terrill Rd. Bible Chapel, Fanwood, NJ.  
Don Dunkerton at 908-272-6131

**NATIONAL WORKERS CONE.**

With the theme, "The Assembly: a Showcase of God's Grace," the National Workers and Elders Conference is planned for Oct. 7-9. Location this year is Forge Road Bible Chapel, 5040 Forge Road, Perry Hall, MD, northeast of Baltimore. Speakers: Alan Schetelich, George Farber, Joe Pratt, Tom Wilson, Warren Henderson, Steve Hulshizer and Bob Spender. Register at Forge Road Bible Chapel address or contact:  
Roger Dunkerton Jr.  
410-248-0896  
[2dunks@comcast.net](mailto:2dunks@comcast.net)  
Or register online at:  
[www.workerselders.org](http://www.workerselders.org)

**CHANGES**

**Assembly in Clinton, ON**  
Fellowship Bible Chapel, formerly of Clinton, ON.  
Fellowship Bible Chapel  
220 King Street  
Londesborough, ON  
N0M 2H0  
519-523-4513  
**Warren and Brenda Henderson**  
E 6820 871st Ave  
Colfax, WI 54730  
715-962-3708

**AT HOME**

**Mary Lou Engle**  
Mary Lou met a young man named Kenneth Engle while she was taking nurse's training at West Suburban Hospital in Chicago. He was preparing to serve in the Philippines.  
Ken left for the Philippines and immersed himself in the work of a

missionary. Two years later, after finishing her nurse's training, Mary Lou joined him in the Philippines. The Engles were commended by Woodside Bible Chapel, Maywood, IL.

Working with ladies, children's work, providing hospitality, and raising six children kept her busy. Mary Lou also played piano and organ and produced the four-tape series, *Hymns of Worship and Remembrance*.

On April 12, Mary Lou passed into the arms of her Saviour after several years of battling cancer. The funeral was held April 19 with all of her children, 10 grandchildren and many others attending.

**LOCAL MINISTRY**

Rob and Colleen Kerr have been working with Christian Transportation (CTI) for many years, the last 10 from Kansas City, KS. They are commended from Stone Ridge Bible Chapel in Hamilton, ON. The elders of Stone Ridge advise of a change in their commendation. They will leave full-time work with CTI to focus on the Lord's work in their local area and in assemblies located in the midwest and midsouth US. Rob and Colleen will also continue to assist with CTI's ministry as time permits.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE**

Camp Galilee, Renfrew, ON, is looking for a couple to take the position of Camp Managers starting this September. Contact:  
Doug Pilgrim at 613-432-6493

**AUDIO TAPES AVAILABLE**

An extensive audio tape catalog can be had by request with hundreds of titles from well-known speakers. A minimal charge of US \$2 per tape. Contact Harold R. Preston at:  
3853 McGarry Dr.  
Lexington, KY 40514

# Christ in the Midst

*“...Two or three...gathered...in My name, there am I in the midst”*

**H**ow wonderful to think of the risen Lord, the Christ, the Son of the living God condescending to dwell with men and women! After all, our reputation is nothing to boast of. Rebels from the beginning, we've caused the Lord untold grief. But Matthew 18:20 assures us of our Saviour's gracious intent to be among us when we gather in His name. As we look at the verse more closely, it may be helpful to consider three principles arising from the Lord's words.

## Fellowship

This involves a sharing of things in common. It might be as ordinary as a partnership in a business venture, as it was with Peter and his friends in the fishing business (Lk. 5:10). But these men, and others with them, were called to a greater venture and a wider fellowship when the Lord Jesus came along. Later on, Paul could speak of himself and his colleagues as *“laborers together”* in the work of the Lord. Titus and Philemon were among others in that first century fellowship.

On a broader level, Jewish believers at Pentecost entered into a wonderful new fellowship when they were *“baptized into one body”* (1 Cor. 12:13) by the work of the Spirit of God. They, together with those who had been meeting in the upper room, *“continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship”* (Acts 2:42). Not only were they taught the great truths of the faith once delivered to the saints, but they also gathered together to share in the breaking of bread and in prayers. They were drawn together by common values, and in their meeting together they expressed the unity that the Spirit had initiated at Pentecost. These believ-

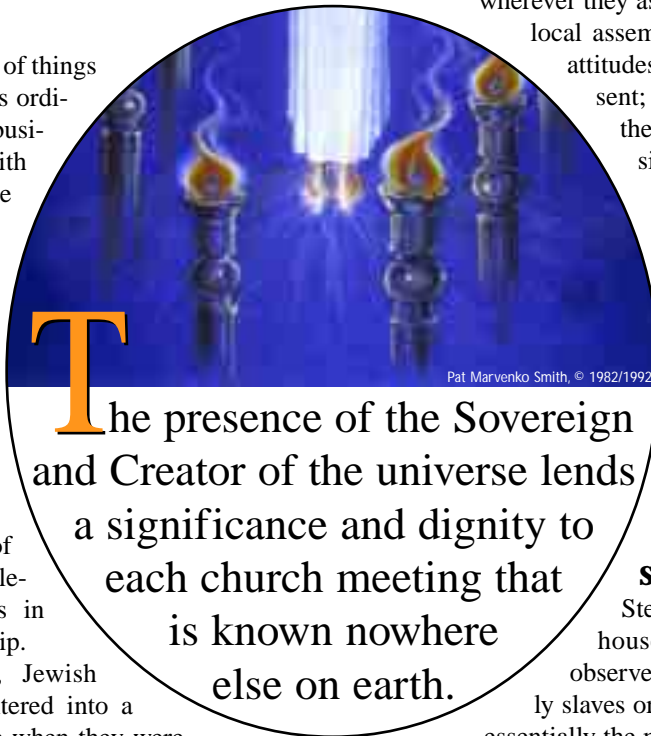
ers were no longer a part of the Jewish community in Jerusalem, nor were the Christians at Troas or Corinth part of the Gentile community; they were now part of something new and wonderful!

These gatherings were the local manifestations of the universal Church that the Lord was building. *“I will build My Church,”* the Lord had declared, and it was these expressions of that Church that He had in view when He dealt with the realities facing believers wherever they associate with each other as a local assembly (Mt. 18:15-20). Wrong attitudes would undoubtedly be present; offenses would occur within the fellowship. Brother might sin against brother, and if the procedures the Lord put in place failed to achieve the desired result, they were to *“tell it to the church.”* Those gathered in the Lord's name to hear the case could be assured of heaven's validation of their decision and of the presence of the Lord in their midst.

## Stewardship

Stewards were managers in a household or estate. Vine observes that stewards were *“usually slaves or freedmen.”* Their work was essentially the management of the affairs of their master, the householder, and it was his prestige and the grandeur of the estate that lent dignity and significance to their tasks. Their decisions were determined by the wishes of the owner, and it was in his name that they acted. In one sense, they had no will of their own. There is no finer example of one acting in the name of another than our Lord Jesus.

When David sent out ten young men on an errand to the house of Nabal, they went in David's name. *“And when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal*



according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased" (1 Sam. 25:9). Their business was really David's business, not theirs. When rebuffed, they simply brought the matter to David and left it for him to take appropriate action.

When the church met together to consider the issue of an unrepentant brother, the Scripture indicates that it was to be, as the Lord said, "*in My name.*" Their decision and action was not in their interest but the Lord's. Paul directed the church in Corinth to deal with the sinning brother when they were "*gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 5:4). All was to be done "*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The church, even this Corinthian church with so many problems, was still the Lord's concern.

H. L. Ellison points out that the Greek expression "*in My name*" in the papyri "means 'to the account of', 'into the possession of', i.e., they meet as the conscious possession of Jesus." Our Lord's presence as we meet is a reminder that we meet in *His* name, as *His* stewards. We do not meet to carry out our agendas or to please ourselves. We are there to carry out His desires, exercise gifts He has entrusted to us, and achieve His purposes. We are there to please and glorify Him. The Father, too, has a proprietary interest in the affairs of this "household," and the stewards could expect heaven to ratify their decisions and the Father to answer their concerted petitions.

### Ownership

I once worked in the shipping room of a firm doing business across Canada. The normally relaxed atmosphere in our workplace was occasionally interrupted by the appearance of the owner of the firm in our midst. His presence in our midst, away from his usual place in his office above us, transformed the atmosphere of the room and considerably sharpened our focus! Personal experience confirms the sad truth that we have a tendency to gather together in the Lord's name—for whatever purpose—in a nonchalant manner. We also may need to recall the Lord's sure word, "*there am I in the midst.*" Ultimately we have to give account to Him in person. As we remind ourselves that the One who purchased the Church with His own blood is among us, it will encourage faithfulness in the exercise of our stewardship. How might our meetings differ if each of us was careful to consider the Lord's presence each time we gather?

But the Lord's presence among us is not meant only

as a sobering thought. It is also both a privilege and a blessing. The presence of the Sovereign and Creator of the universe lends a significance and dignity to each church meeting that is known nowhere else on earth. What an incentive to meet! In spite of the shortcomings (perceived or otherwise) of our meetings, the Lord is there!

And there are other blessings as well. For example, the Lord is "*in the midst*" in yet another wonderful way as the Leader of the praises of the saints (cf. Heb. 2:12; Rom. 15:9). And knowing that He is among us speaks to us of His care, protection, and love for the Church. Do we thank Him for His attendance when we meet?

Our Lord's presence in our midst is a spiritual reality, not a physical phenomenon. When Solomon with all his wisdom prayed at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, he voiced the enigma that confronts us all when we contemplate Christ in our midst: "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?*" (1 Ki. 8:27).

David also pondered this when he wrote, "*Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?*" (Ps. 139:7). We too have to confess, "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me*" (v. 6)!

On the other hand, just because it is a spiritual presence does not make it any less real. Elisha's servant was unable to see the "*mountain...full of horses and chariots of fire*" as the prophet saw them, until the prophet prayed, "*Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see*" (2 Ki. 6:17). We are equipped to "*walk by faith*" and we need to exercise our equipment. Appreciating Him in the midst requires an exercise of faith each time we meet.

Finally, if we believe the Lord regarding His remarkable promise—albeit a conditional one—in John 14:21, 23 guaranteeing His presence and the Father's presence with us in an individual sense, can we believe Him for this in the corporate sense as well? If so, we note that the key in John 14 is obedience which springs from love. Our response to the reality of the presence of Christ in the midst will measure the genuineness of our love for the Lord. Charles Spurgeon's lines seem appropriate:

*If now, with eyes defiled and dim,  
We see the signs, but see not Him,  
O, may His love the scales displace,  
And bid us see Him face to face!*





# Ephesus

*“I have this against thee...”*

**T**heophany” is a Greek word that means an appearance of God. There are a number of theophanies in the Old Testament as God appeared to His people at various times in history. In particular, these appearances could be described as Christophanies: pre-incarnate appearances of the Lord Jesus. Often in these appearances the title “Angel of the Lord” is used to describe the One who has appeared.

When these appearances are studied, we find that they were revelations of the Lord’s person and character; furthermore, He always appeared in a way that met the need and circumstances of His people.

When the Lord appeared to Abram (Gen. 18:1-15), he was a pilgrim and a stranger in this world and indeed the Lord met him as a pilgrim. The Lord too was passing through and stopped to have a time of fellowship with His servant.

For Joshua, it was as he was about to embark on the conquest of Canaan that the Lord appeared as the Captain of the Lord’s Host (Josh. 5:13-15). Joshua had to submit to His leadership, but was also able to go on in the confidence of the truth.

The Lord’s appearance to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace gave comfort and assurance that He was right there with them when they went through the fire untouched (Dan. 3:24-25).

## The Appearing of Christ in Revelation 1-3

In Revelation 1, Christ appears in glory to John and personally gives him specific messages for seven churches in Asia. These messages are recorded in chapters 2 and 3. To each church He reveals Himself by a title that answers to the condition and the character of that particular church. Depending on the state of the assembly, to some the title is reassuring, while to others it is a rebuke.

Each aspect of His person that is revealed to the churches is first seen in chapter 1, where the Lord is shown in all His majesty and glory.

To the church at Ephesus, the revelation of the Lord Jesus was of the One who holds seven stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars and the seven lampstands



The library of Celsus at Ephesus

are explained in Revelation 1:20: *“The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”* The seven churches are readily understood and their names are given through the first three chapters of the book. However the identity and interpretation of *“the seven angels of the seven churches”* pose some challenges.

There have been several reasoned suggestions put forth by biblical scholars. Some feel the angels are the messengers who were to take the letters to the various churches, and even translate the word as “messengers” instead of “angels.” Others see the angels as the responsible element in the church, either elders, a pastor or a bishop depending on one’s view of church government. Still others view them as actual angels who have a special, if unspecified, roll regarding those particular churches.

James Allen, in his commentary on Revelation, as part of the *What the Bible Teaches* series, presents another option.

If the lampstands represent the literal physical congregations viewed against an earthly background, then the stars must represent the same company but in their moral and spiritual condition. The term the Lord uses to represent their true condition is ‘angel.’

Allen goes on to say:

In the representative ‘angel’ the company is seen against a heavenly background and hence there can be no

deceit—all is real, the actual state of the assembly is in view. For this reason it is the angel, the church viewed in its actual spiritual state, which is variously commended, condemned, charged and challenged (pp. 55-56).\*

### **The Lord's Revelation to Ephesus**

The fact that the Lord Jesus is walking in the midst of the lampstands, which are symbolic of the churches, suggests four things. It speaks first to us of the centrality of His person. He is the One that we are to gather to and His name is the one we are to own. His position also reveals His omniscience in that He knows all that is going on. He knows what is commendable and what is condemnable in each local church. This position furthermore displays the concern He has for each local church. The One who upholds the entire universe is seen in the midst of the churches, which demonstrates the value the Lord places on the church, which He purchased with His own blood. Lastly, it reveals that the Lord is the One who is in full control of the churches and that He alone is the One who can, and does, remove the lampstand.

For the believers at Ephesus there were great lessons in the consideration of these two truths about the Lord Jesus. Had they thought these lessons through and meditated on them, it would have challenged them to change their conduct and adjust their attitude.

Consider what this church was like. Here was a busy assembly that could be described as orthodox, energetic, dedicated, and discerning. If outsiders were to visit, they would have undoubtedly been impressed at the level of activity and the no-nonsense approach to error. False apostles did not easily fool the assembly and those who practiced what the Nicolaitans preached were not tolerated. The Ephesian believers were careful to uphold the honor of the name of the Lord Jesus in that they truly labored for Him. The saints persevered in their efforts for Christ. They were industrious and did not grow weary in well doing.

To the outsider the assembly would appear to be the perfect local church, but the Lord Jesus saw the true spiritual condition. As the One who holds the seven

\* A similar use of this word is found in Acts 12:15, when the recently incarcerated Peter arrived at the house where prayer was being made for him. When Rhoda told them Peter was at the door, "*Then said they, It is his angel.*" In other words, "It is his spirit." So in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord is addressing the true spirit of Christianity in the seven churches. —*ed.*


stars in His right hand, He is the One who is aware of all. The church looked good to those in it and to believers looking from the outside, but the Lord "looks at the heart". The Lord Jesus reveals that there was one essential ingredient missing: they had left their first love! All their commendable activity and orthodoxy was not motivated by love for Christ, the very thing the Lord desires above all else!

The One in the midst of the seven golden lampstands has a message for this church. The first word for them is "*remember.*" Jesus wants them to think back and consider what it was like at the beginning of their love for Him. Then they are warned to "*repent,*" which is to confess their failure and return to their former condition. And this solemn warning describes the result of a lack of response: the One in the midst of the lampstands will come and remove their individual lampstand. This seems to mean that the Lord Himself will cause the local assembly to be removed and the light of testimony to be extinguished.

### **He Still Walks in the Midst of the Lampstands**

The same Lord reveals Himself in a similar way to local assemblies today. He sees the moral and spiritual condition of each assembly. The truths about His person, position, and power remain unchanged. He is in the midst and is still concerned about the true character of each and every local church. He is still cognizant of what is commendable and what is condemnable in each assembly. He also is the One who is still in control and He, and He alone, takes responsibility for the removal of the local assembly and the extinguishing of the light of its testimony.

Local assemblies today refuse this revelation of Christ at their own peril. They may be busy, industrious, well-organized, and orthodox as to doctrine—all of which is admirable. But above all, the Lord is interested in the motivation that guides the assembly. Is there love for Him? There is a call to each assembly to remember its first love and then to repent or else face removal of the lampstand.

The messages to each church are also relevant to individuals. Individual believers in local assemblies are called "overcomers" and as such need to remember and repent. It is important that each believer consider these aspects of the person of Christ and our love for Him. May the words of R. M. McCheyne, "teach me, Lord, on earth to show, by my love how much I owe," mark each of us in our response to the Lord. 

# Christ-Centered Ministry

*Let's get practical.*

In today's rush to be relevant and trendy, many preachers have forgotten Who called them and why. Today's goal is often to build a large "seeker-sensitive" church, and to provide practical help in our everyday lives. We are told that we must preach to "transform" and not "inform." By conscious decision, doctrine is not preached. And few are bothering to ask, "What think ye of Christ?" (Mt. 22:42)

There exists on the market any number of books on how to preach sermons. And while many contain helpful nuggets, there are dangers, the biggest of which is that we will not properly understand the scope and importance of Christ-centered ministry. We are told to focus on other things in order not to "bore" the listeners. Now, let us be clear that "practical ministry" is good. It is important that we understand we are reaching people who are in a fallen condition. Expository preaching can be helpful. The redemptive message of the Scripture should be clearly presented. Yet none of these provide an adequate understanding of the scope and importance of Christ-centered ministry.

## Man-Centered Ministry

A recent textbook on preaching presents two aspects to what it says is Christ-centered ministry. First we must remember that we are preaching to people who are in a fallen condition. These people have "real world" problems, and we must address these problems. Second, that in every passage we must find the redemptive focus. If we focus on these two important points, we are told, we will be giving Christ-centered ministry.

To be sure, we are preaching to people with real world problems, and we should seek to shed the light of the divine instruction and wisdom contained in Scripture onto their problems and into their lives. But is this Christ-centered ministry? Can we really preach a message dwelling on man and his problems, and call it Christ-centered? Simply put, a message cannot be

man-centered and Christ-centered at the same time.

Likewise, if a passage of Scripture is relevant to the gospel, we should not miss the opportunity to present the gospel. But do we have to find a redemptive message in every verse? If we follow Covenant Theology and believe that God's highest purpose is our salvation, we might think so. But if we follow Dispensational Theology, and realize that God's highest purpose is His own glory, we are closer to the mark. We must not preach a man-centered gospel, but rather the "glorious gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4).



## Christ-Centered Ministry

So what is Christ-centered ministry? Christ-centered ministry is ministry that exalts the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is similar to worship, but differs in the intended audience. Worship exalts the person and work of the Lord Jesus to God the Father. Christ-centered ministry exalts the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ to our fellow man.

Is such preaching contrary to "practical ministry"? The author of Hebrews answers this question: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith... For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:2-3). The Christian race cannot be run well unless our eyes are fixed firmly on Christ. If we want to make progress in the Christian life, we must make progress with Christ.

How do we make progress with Christ? There are an infinite number of ways, but four categories are presented here: our doctrine, our outreach, our encouragement and our devotion. How can we be Christ-centered in each of these areas?

In our doctrine, we must make sure we have a good grasp on those teachings that concern the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, His high priestly ministry and His impeccability are concepts we should understand. We must study the main "Christological" passages of the

Bible. These include John 1 and 17, Colossians 1, Philippians 2 and the Epistle to the Hebrews. We must understand and be able to articulate to others who Jesus Christ is and what He has done. For example, can we demonstrate from Scripture the deity of Christ?

In reaching others, we must go forth because of a love for Christ rather than only a love of the lost. Of course, it's not wrong to love the lost! But if a love of the lost is our sustaining reason for trying to reach others, our evangelistic fervor will not last. Veteran missionaries tell us that many of the people they meet are not loveable; it is the love of Christ that keeps them on the mission field.

In our encouragement, do we seek to help people become nice and good and polite and moral? Or do we seek to help them to be transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18)? The Word of God can cut as a sword, and the sometimes cutting message of exhortation from the Bible must be given for the noble purpose of making people more like Christ.


Christ-centered ministry will also encourage us in our devotion towards the Lord Jesus. The ministry we receive should cause our minds and hearts to contemplate the person and work of the Lord, and this will lead us to private and corporate worship.

However, in an effort to be devotional, we must be careful. There are many people, events, and objects that may be applied to the Lord Jesus. But, in our ministry we must be sure we do not present these devotional applications as the primary interpretation of the passage. For example, there are many parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ. Christ-centered ministry will point these out for the purpose of stirring our hearts, but we must not present these parallels as the infallible interpretation of these verses.

### How Can We Be More Christ-Centered?

Genuine Christ-centered ministry leads to Christ-centered assemblies, and so assemblies must make a conscious and deliberate commitment to such ministry. This commitment is both personal and corporate. Personally, each brother who speaks from the pulpit must examine his own messages to ensure that they are Christ-centered. Every message doesn't need to be solely focused on the doctrine of Christ, but the person and work of the Lord Jesus must be evident in and vital to every message. As you prepare, preach and review every sermon, you must ask yourself, "Have I spoken well of Christ? Have I taught the believers about Christ? Have I warmed their hearts towards Christ? Have I pointed the lost to Christ?" If not, then we have not discharged our responsibility with all diligence.

Corporately, the elders must lead in this direction, making sure that ministry that exalts Christ exists in the assembly. They must make it clear to those who preach that Christ-centered ministry is expected. This may call for loving but honest feedback to those who are ministering. It may require the courage to stand against the tide of popular "needs-based, man-centered" ministry. Such leadership may not be easy, but an oversight that knows it reports to the Chief Shepherd and not to the sheep (much less the goats!) will have the courage to lead the flock toward Christ.

A man-centered message may be trendy and may seem relevant. It may fill a building, but it can't fill a heart. We are saved by the work of Christ and built through the work of Christ so that we can be like the person of Christ and worship Christ for eternity. Ministry that is Christ-centered makes all this possible; ministry that is not Christ-centered falls short of the mark. 

## WHO ARE YOU?

**I**t is impossible to recognize Christ as the center and sovereign ruler in the assembly, and continue to sanction the setting up of man. When once we have tasted the sweetness of being under Christ, we can never again submit to the servile bondage of being under man. This is not insubordination or impatience of control. It is only the utter refusal to bow to a false authority—to sanction a sinful usurpation. The moment we see man usurping authority in that which calls itself the church, we simply ask, 'Who are you?' and retire to a sphere where God alone is acknowledged.

—C. H. MACINTOSH

# Smyrna

## *The poor, rich church*

As Christ walked in the midst of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, His fiery eyes beheld the assembly at Smyrna. Among the seven churches described in these two chapters, this gathering of God's people was clearly outstanding. Along with the church at Philadelphia, Smyrna is noteworthy in that it had no serious issues identified for which the Lord has words of admonition.

Smyrna's name comes from the same root as "myrrh," a costly perfume that was often used in the burial process. It is related to a word that is frequently translated as "ointment" in the Gospels, as in Matthew 26:12 where we read of our Lord in the house of Simon the Leper. Matthew tells us of a woman who entered this home and anointed the Lord with such ointment. As its fragrance filled the home, Christ drew the connection between this precious ointment and His future sufferings and death. How fittingly Smyrna is named,

as the believers there would clearly be identified with suffering even to the point of death for Christ's sake.

Interestingly, Ironside adds that in order for the natural fragrance of myrrh to be released it was necessary to be crushed. The fellowship at Smyrna were well-acquainted with the weight of suffering; difficult days lay ahead. But through these trials the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ was being manifest in this local testimony. Amidst much adversity and the filthy atmosphere of a typical seaport city in the middle of the Roman Empire, the believers at Smyrna were the "*fragrance of Christ to God.*"

### **The First and the Last**

Christ begins His words to the Smyrna believers with a description of Himself: "*The first and the last, who was dead and has come to life.*" In chapter 1, when

John was confronted with the glorious vision of Christ, he appropriately fell to the ground, overcome with fear. And as Christ rested His reassuring hand on John, He comforted him with very similar words: "*Fear not; I am the first and the last*" (v. 17). This description of Himself to the saints at Smyrna was intended to provide comfort and instill confidence. Christ, "*the First*"—the source of all creation: "*For by Him were all things created*" (Col. 1:16). Christ, "*the Last,*" who by His spoken word will bring about its conflagration: "*But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment*" (2 Pet. 3:7). He encompasses time from "*beginning to end*" (Rev. 22:13). And if Christ can say, "*I am the first and the last,*" then His all-powerful hand must reign over all the events in between. Even in times of persecution the Lord Jesus was sovereign.

Christ then links this title to the glorious truth of His resurrection: "*who was dead and has now come to life.*" These are not words in memory of a martyred religious leader; these are the words of the living Lord of the Church. In His death Christ rendered powerless the one who had the power of death, that is Satan (Heb. 2:14). In His resurrec-

**The agora (marketplace) at Smyrna**

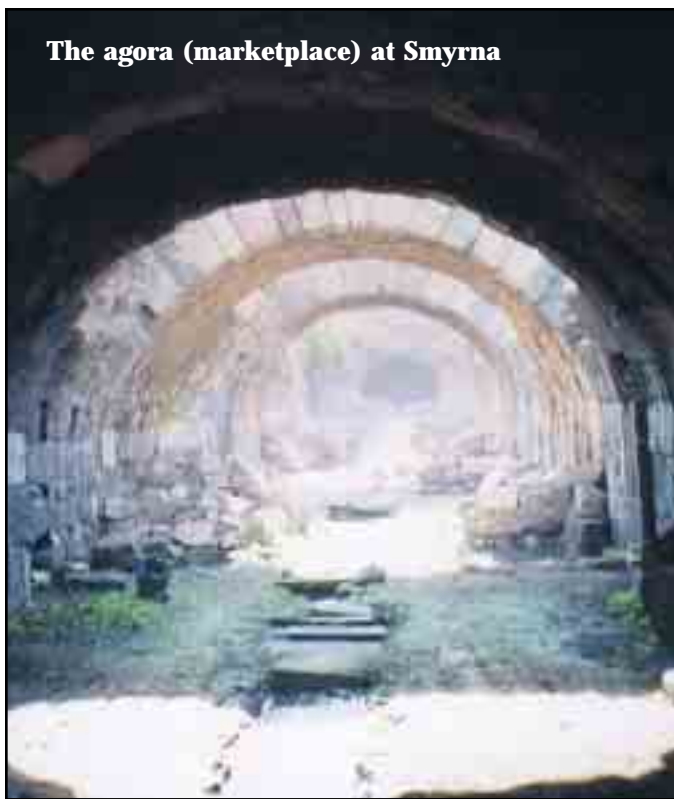


Photo: Ross McIntee

tion, God the Father declared Him to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4). He is the glorious conqueror over the grave who will reign until all enemies are placed under His authority (Ps. 110:1). And ultimately this Victor will abolish death itself (1 Cor. 15:26). His own resurrection was a foretaste of that final victory.

### **The Persecution of Smyrna**

How appropriate that Christ should introduce Himself in this manner to the believers at Smyrna in light of their present suffering and in preparation for their future persecution. Christ spoke knowingly of what they had already endured, and thus brought reassurance to their hearts. Their Lord was intimately acquainted with their sufferings. Their difficulties had not escaped the eye of the omniscient Master.

Bearing up under the weight of much persecution and opposition, these believers had prospered. By any earthly measure they may have been viewed as paupers. But by Christ's estimation they were spiritually rich. But what could bring significance to these trials? The knowledge that the one whose name is first and last was in complete control of all the events of their lives and, ultimately, He would have the last word.

If the tribulation they had already endured wasn't enough, Christ speaks of future times of testing—even to the point of imprisonment and death. Christ reassured them to fear not, which hearkens back to Hebrews 13:5, NASB: *"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."* The Smyrna believers could likewise respond, *"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"* (Heb. 13:6, NKJV).

Christ's words, *"Be thou faithful unto death"* (v. 10) would seem to imply that some of these believers would even lose their lives in serving Christ. But what fear could death hold? The very One who rose triumphantly from the grave—the One for whom it was impossible that He be held in death's power—this is the One who said, *"Fear none of these things"*! And like the results of His words to the troubled disciples battered by the waves on the Sea of Galilee in Mark 6, these words of death's Conqueror would bring a supernatural peace. Physical death was not the end but the beginning of the crowning life for the faithful servant.


Ultimately, the saints in Smyrna had the peerless example of the life of their Lord. His public ministry was marked by opposition. His life was characterized by constant sacrifice, putting the needs of others before His own. On numerous occasions men sought to end

His life. His suffering eventually led Him to Calvary where He died via Roman crucifixion at the hands of cruel men. The believers at Smyrna could well take up the exhortation of the Hebrew writer to *"consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart"* (Heb. 12:3, NASB). But Christ is not only the ultimate human example of suffering; He is the ultimate overcomer. He overcame hell, death, sin, and the grave, and sits exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

### **The Tribulations of Today**

How do we endure life's trials and tribulations, particularly those suffered for the sake of righteousness? The Lord, in His address to the saints at Smyrna, provides us with the wisdom to bring eternal significance to earthly difficulties. As we come to appreciate that time itself, and all of the intervening events of human history, have been set in motion by Christ and will be concluded at His word, the little suffering we may endure along this pilgrim journey takes on eternal perspective. *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (2 Cor. 4:17). Our Saviour has allowed such trials, and ultimately His plans are being worked out in our lives.

This world is not our home; we're simply passing through. When this earthly life is over, the One who has conquered death will welcome us to our true home. And the long-forgotten difficulties that refined and proved our character will be rewarded by the Crown of Life. Today, around the world, myriads of local gatherings of God's children meet in Christ's name, remember His Son, edify the saints, and further His kingdom. The work of New Testament life is fraught with challenges and is often uphill. What comfort to our hearts that He knows all our sorrows. No tears of His children fall to the ground uncounted; no reproaches endured for Christ are forgotten; no sufferings for righteousness' sake are overlooked; and the martyr's death is precious in the sight of the Lord.

Along this pilgrim way what a privilege it is to be identified with Him in *"the fellowship of His sufferings"* (Phil. 3:10). And when this life is over, what a joy to hear the Righteous Judge say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant,"* and to receive His reward. *"Behold, I come quickly and My reward is with Me."* How this life's difficulties will pale when we see His lovely face and dwell at last in His presence. 

# HIM

*That's where the longing for truth, blessing, and hope will lead you.*

**S**ir James Young Simpson, born on June 7, 1811 at Bathgate, Scotland, was youngest of seven sons of the village baker. At four James went to the local school. Showing aptitude in his lessons, his father and brothers determined to provide him a college education. He entered Edinburgh University in 1825 at fourteen, began medical studies in 1827, and graduated in 1832. He was made senior president of the Royal Medical Society in 1835. In 1839, aged 28, he was appointed to the mid-wifery chair. In 1870, a contemporary of Simpson wrote that he “adopted obstetrics when it was the lowest and most ignoble of our medical arts: he has left it a science numbering among its professors many of the most distinguished of our modern physicians.”



After the tragic death of his fifteen-year-old son Jamie, Simpson had a profound encounter with the Lord Jesus. “I am the oldest sinner and the youngest believer in this room,” he said to a gathering of enthusiastic medical missionary students. Despite his fame for discovering chloroform, Simpson confessed, “My greatest discovery is Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour.”

Simpson was deeply moved by the suffering of women in childbirth. In November of 1847, he successfully demonstrated the use of chloroform as an anesthetic at the Edinburgh Infirmary. That same year he was appointed Queen Victoria’s physician for Scotland, and became a foreign associate of the Academy of Medicine, Paris. He also received the Order of St. Olaf from the king of Sweden, and became a member of nearly every medical society in Europe and America.

After a highly useful life, Simpson died on May 6, 1870. His family declined the offer of a grave in Westminster Abbey, and he was buried in Edinburgh. However a bust of Simpson was placed in the Abbey, and on it is recorded that to Simpson’s “genius and benevolence the world owes the blessings derived from the use of chloroform for the relief of suffering.”

In his last address to the Royal College of Physicians, Simpson said, “I do not know in what mood of pessimism I might have stood before you today had it not been that...I had made friends with the sinless Son of Man who is the well-head of the stream that vitalizes all advancing civilization and who claims to be the First and the Last, and the Living One who was dead and is alive forevermore.”






## THE RADIANCE OF CHRIST

**Marvel not that Christ in glory  
All my inmost heart hath won;  
Not a star to cheer my darkness  
But a Light beyond the sun.  
All below lies dark and shadowed,  
Nothing there to claim my heart,  
Save the lonely track of sorrow  
Where of old He walked apart.**

**I have seen the face of Jesus—  
Tell me not of aught beside;  
I have heard the voice of Jesus—  
And my soul is satisfied.  
In the radiance of the glory  
First I saw His blessed face,  
And forever shall that glory  
Be my home, my dwelling-place.**

T. P. in *Hymns of Ter Stegen and Others*

# CHRIST & THE SEVEN CHURCHES

	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamos
<b>Passage</b>	2:1-7	2:8-11	2:12-17
<b>Descriptions of Christ</b>	<i>“He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks”</i>	<i>“The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive”</i> 	<i>“He which hath the sharp sword with two edges”</i>
<b>Relationship of the descriptions to the church</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ is central in everything concerning the church</li> <li>• He is omniscient</li> <li>• He is intimately concerned for each local church</li> <li>• He exercises ultimate control over the churches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ is the source of all creation</li> <li>• He will be the conclusion of all creation</li> <li>• He is the Sovereign of time and eternity, including the circumstances of life</li> <li>• He is the persecuted One who triumphed over death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ is the object, possessor, and source of the Word of God</li> <li>• He has all power and authority</li> </ul> 
<b>Application for today</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is concerned with the true spiritual state of every assembly</li> <li>• He knows what is good and bad in each assembly and we are to answer to Him</li> <li>• He has the right to direct each church</li> <li>• He desires our service, not as an end in itself, but as a by-product of love for Him</li> </ul> <p><i>“Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”</i> (Eph. 6:24)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no trial afflicts us that has not first passed through the heart of our all-wise, all-loving, all-powerful Lord</li> <li>• when we suffer we can be comforted by the fact that He has suffered before us and has overcome the last enemy</li> </ul> <p><i>“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if...I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”</i> (Phil. 3:10-11)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Word of God is the antidote to false teaching</li> <li>• through Christ and His Word we are divinely equipped to win the battle</li> </ul> <p><i>“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”</i> (2 Cor. 10:4)</p> 



Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
2:18-29	3:1-6	3:7-13	3:14-22
<p><i>“The Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass”</i></p>	<p><i>“He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars”</i></p>	<p><i>“He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and no man openeth”</i></p>	<p><i>“The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God”</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ is God</li> <li>• He sees and evaluates everything with perfect clarity and righteous judgment</li> <li>• He is absolutely steadfast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ is the One who gives the Holy Spirit</li> <li>• Christ possesses and governs each church</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ is uniquely and supremely holy</li> <li>• He is the Truth</li> <li>• He has all authority over the people of God</li> <li>• He is sovereign with respect to our service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ is the source of reality</li> <li>• He is the true revelation of God</li> <li>• He is the Creator</li> <li>• He is the remedy to every lack</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we are to be discerning, evaluating all things by His word</li> <li>• we are to be unwavering in our faithfulness and service</li> </ul> <p><i>“[Be on the alert], stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”</i> (1 Cor. 16:13, NKJV).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• everything about the local church must be empowered by the Holy Spirit rather than the flesh</li> <li>• only by focusing on Christ can we enjoy the work of the Spirit of life in the assembly</li> </ul> <p><i>“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”</i> (1 Jn. 5:12)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we ought to pursue holiness and truth</li> <li>• we are to submit to His authority</li> <li>• we should serve as He directs</li> <li>• we ought to glorify and thank Him for all opportunities and victories</li> </ul> <p><i>“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”</i> (1 Cor. 15:58)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His word is the final one</li> <li>• His faithfulness is the cure to our unfaithfulness</li> <li>• we should come to Him with every need, for only in Him are God’s answers found</li> </ul> <p><i>“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.”</i> (Rev. 3:20)</p>

# Flooded in Argentina

*An opportunity for practical Christianity*

Jim Burnett has informed assembly service committees that severe damage has been caused by the flooding of the River Salado, inundating half of the city of Santa Fe, Argentina. It has been declared a national disaster. More than 100,000 had been evacuated at the time of writing. The assemblies in Santa Fe are co-ordinating a relief program and funds can be sent through Echoes in the UK, CMML in the US, and MSC in Canada. Here are some of the details of damage sustained. Calle Corrientes—130 people living in the assembly hall; 40 families have suffered almost a total loss of their homes and belongings. Calle Belgrano—70 people living in the assembly hall; 30 families have suffered almost a total loss. (This assembly has a school and is being used as the hub for medical attention. The assembly is providing room and board for 85 doctors.) Calle La Rioja—50 people living in the hall; 20 families have suffered almost a total loss. Del Norte—45 people living in the hall; 40 families have suffered almost a total loss. Calle Azopardo—assembly building flooded in almost 10 feet of water; practically a total loss to nearly all members. The same can be said for the assemblies in Santa Rosa de Lima and Recreo, just north of Santa Fe.

## MISSIONARY CHALLENGE

In a recent Echoes issue, Ian Burnett gave the following facts:

- world population grows at the rate of 77 million per year.
- 40% of the population of developing nations is under age 15.
- over half the world now live in cities; few missionaries have traditionally worked in urban areas.

• 1/5 of humanity exists on less than \$.25 per day; the wealth of the 225 richest people equals the income of half the world's population.

• the gap continues to widen not only between rich and poor but between countries in the northern and southern hemispheres.

However, he also cites these facts to show that resources are greater

than they have ever been as well:

- cheap and easy transportation.
- gospel radio circles the world.
- the internet reaches everywhere.
- more information on the state of the world's peoples is now available.
- Scriptures are being distributed to an increasing number of tongues.
- the majority of Christians (and evangelists) are in developing areas.

## AWAKENING IN NORWAY

Nat Rodgers, commended from Northern Ireland, writes: "On the island of Karmøy, on the west coast of Norway, south of the city of Bergen, more than 150 have confessed Christ as Saviour over the last year. Pray that God will continue by His Spirit to touch whole families and unite them in Christ..."

"Please continue to pray for the churches in Skien, Oslo, Valderøy, and Vågsbygd."  
—Echoes

## PROF'S ATTITUDE EVOLVES

Texas Tech university students no longer have to believe Darwinianism to get a recommendation from biology prof. Michael Dini. He had a policy of writing letters for students seeking advanced pre-med courses only if they espoused belief in evolution. That has changed as a result of a US Justice Department investigation following a student complaint.

"This new policy rightly recognizes that students don't have to give up their beliefs to be good doctors or good scientists," said Assistant Attorney General Ralph F. Boyd, Jr.

—World

# Pergamos

## *The Saviour has a sword!*

Our world is covered in war. Violence is the ongoing daily pursuit of millions. The Church is also engaged in a fierce conflict, a spiritual war. The Pergamum saints were fighting a vicious battle on the front lines and were engaging the devil, the flesh, and the world from all angles. At times it seemed that the enemy was too strong and would prevail. The Lord in His infinite wisdom sent a word of encouragement and instruction to the weary soldiers. His message was clear: *“I hold the sharp two-edged sword”* (Rev. 2:12). At first glance it seems rather simplistic. But as we probe a little deeper, the Spirit reveals that this glimpse of divine authority, might, and justice is exactly what was needed to reach into the hearts, quelling their fears and doubts.

Three vital characteristics marked the situation at Pergamum. All three of these opposing features could be victoriously overcome by fixing their gaze on the One who has the sharp two-edged sword. The first astounding fact of their spiritual battle was their direct stand against the throne of Satan (Rev. 2:13). There is much evidence to believe that during this time Pergamum was the physical location for Satan and his allies. In a very real sense Satan dwelled where these Christians dwelled. The cult of Caesar worship had started in Pergamum and was, at that point in Roman history, the overwhelming religion of the day. This led to one choice for Christians—worship Caesar or Christ.

Satan was at His old scheme again. It wasn't long before this that an angry mob stood before Pontius Pilate and cried, *“Away with Him... we have no king but Caesar”* (Jn. 19:15). Satan, attempting to rid the world of the Christ (yet fulfilling the purposes of God), moved the heart of Judas to betray the Son of God and influenced the crowd in Jerusalem to ask for Barabbas instead of their King. The Lord commends the saints for their steadfastness and willingness to defend His Name. Due to this, they had already endured tremendous persecution at the hands of this regime. It would have been virtually impossible for them to publicly speak about the Lord without coming under trials and suffering. One of their own, Antipas, had lost his life for his faith and was given a triumphant commendation by the Lord as *“My faithful martyr:”*



The Pergamum theater

Photo : Ross McIntee

It was at this moment that the Lord compelled the saints to consider their situation in light of the sharp two-edged sword. The sword speaks of authority and rule. There is no greater opponent to God and His saints than Satan. Yet the Lord reminds the saints that despite the fierceness of the enemy and the suffering which they must endure, there is a Commander and Chief who is stronger and infinitely greater than Satan. It is the Lord of judgment and power who directs and guides their way. The final destruction of all God's enemies will come from One who's Name shall be written on His robe and on His thigh, *“King of kings and Lord of lords.”* Out of His mouth shall proceed that powerful sword and He will strike the nations (Rev 19:15-16). The Pergamum believers could hope and rejoice in the unflinching promise of their victorious Leader that He would be their portion and strength.

Consider the opposition of Satan today. He has free reign in the hearts and lives of the men and women of this world. He purposes to influence perishing souls against our Saviour and move them to choose the false gods of this world. Our Lord Jesus Christ is calling us to stand and defend His Name. To charge against our great rival and cry, *“The battle is the Lord's!”* (1 Sam. 17:47); to commit our lives at all cost, even death, in order that His Name be proclaimed throughout the earth. Let us take up His cause, laying down the arsenal of selfishness, strife, complacency, and self-worth. Let us hold fast to the Word of God. He is our Captain and Leader. He must be followed obediently into every battle. Therein lies our victory. Therein lies our hope.

The second instruction to Pergamum was a word of rebuke and correction (Rev. 2:14). The church elders had let certain false teachers slip into their midst. They

were teaching false doctrine and leading the Christians astray into false practices. First, the doctrine of Balaam was more destructive to the Christians than the physical persecution of Satan. While many in the church were “*hold[ing] fast*” to the Name of the Lord, they had also allowed others to “*hold*” this false teaching. It was their lack of action against this error that the Lord rebuked. Balaam’s teaching was simple—enjoy the pleasures of sin and still maintain a religious attitude. These teachers were encouraging the saints to “*broaden*” their sphere of social enjoyment while at the same time continuing to worship the Lord and defend His cause. The result was wayward Christians whose love for Christ had all but vanished, who were saturated with the things of this world.

Second, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans had also infiltrated the church and was allowed to go on unjudged (Rev. 2:15). This doctrine was quite different from that of Balaam which encouraged the saints to “*use [their] liberty as an opportunity for the flesh*” (Gal. 5:13, NKJV). The Nicolaitans were introducing a formal, legislated structure into the church which would restrict their freedom in Christ. This resulted in a hierarchy of authority separating the Christians into spiritual classes of people. Men who wanted position and power within the church twisted Scripture and undermined the priesthood of all believers. Men who considered themselves greater than the masses of Christians began to rule and bring in selfish teachings which stripped away the effectiveness of their testimony. It is interesting to note that in both references to the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6, 15), the Lord says He hates their doctrine. God hates false teaching and the division, disobedience, and impurity it brings into His Church.


Against this acceptance of false teaching, the Lord again presents Himself with the two-edged sword, this time speaking not of authority, but of truth. There is only one weapon against false teaching and that is God’s Word. Christ brings to our minds the indisputable fact that His Word must prevail in all matters. The Enemy cannot hope to stand against the proper use of the sword of the Spirit. When being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, our Lord used only the Word of God (Lk. 4) and Satan fled. The Pergamum saints are here instructed to examine the teachings of Scripture and to remove those who would insist on other views. God’s Word is to be the only ruling authority and it must not be kept from His people.

Our assemblies ought to be marked out by a banner

of truth stemming from being saturated with God’s Word. How many of us have a good grip on this divine sword? Ignorance of the Scriptures provides the Enemy with countless opportunities to inflict damage on the Church and upon the reputation of her Master.

But ignorance isn’t the only danger. Too often troubles in the church stem, not from a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, but from those who would use the Bible for fleshly ends: proud men who use the Word of God against other saints to gain control; teachers who, in order to please the masses, compromise undeniable truth and soften the gospel. God’s Word must not only be well-known to each of us, but it must be clearly communicated through the church (“*the pillar and ground of the truth*”) so that all may enter into the good of it and be protected from the lies and schemes of the Devil. In combating the forces of Satan, we will only be victorious when we go forward with the sword of the Spirit firmly in our grasp.

The final word from the Lord to His precious saints was “*repent.*” His will was not to execute instant judgment on these wicked teachers, but rather that they would determine to submit to His Word and come in repentance to Him. Repentance is a liberating action which renews the bonds of fellowship and restores the soul’s condition. When we repent, we judge our own hearts in light of His authority and truth, presenting our sin and failure before Him. It is not a ritual but a heart-rending decision to lay down our selfish ambitions and lusts, and focus singularly on His glory. Repentance brings forgiveness. God no longer holds the guilt of our sin over our heads but enjoys communion with us again. In spite of the failings of the Pergamum church, the Lord reminded them of greater things—His forgiveness and love. In humility of heart, they needed to submit to the Word, bow before Him, and renew the fellowship He so earnestly longed to enjoy with them.

The battle is clear. The enemy is attacking. The Church has a flawless campaign manual. Her Commander has never lost a fight and is out in front to guide His troops to sure victory. As we picture this scene, how do we view ourselves in the battle? Are we listening for the commands of our Captain? Are we seeking instruction from our guide book? Are we willing to lay all on the line and count the cost as we face the enemy? With a heart of humility and repentance, a commitment to His holy Word, and a dedicated determination to follow His authority, may we seek to bring glory and honor to His precious Name! 

# Thyatira

*He'll be seeing you.*

Two compelling features of the Lord Jesus Christ in His role as the center of any assembly are given to us in the letter to Thyatira. These two great and distinctive characteristics are the focus around which the letter to Thyatira can be understood. *“These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire and His feet are like fine brass”* (Rev. 2:18).

## Eyes Like Fire

1 Corinthians 3:13 reminds us that a day is coming when our works will be tested by fire. Those things that are done well will remain; the worthless works will be destroyed by fire. Here in Revelation 2, the first characteristic brought to our notice is our Lord’s discernment: eyes of fire that burn away false externals to reveal true motive and spirit. Hebrews 4:13 notes: *“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”*

This aspect of discernment or perception is repeated throughout the letters to the churches where we often find the words, *“I know...”* Here particularly in Thyatira those *“eyes like unto a flame of fire”* give additional emphasis to the clarity and depth of our Saviour’s understanding.

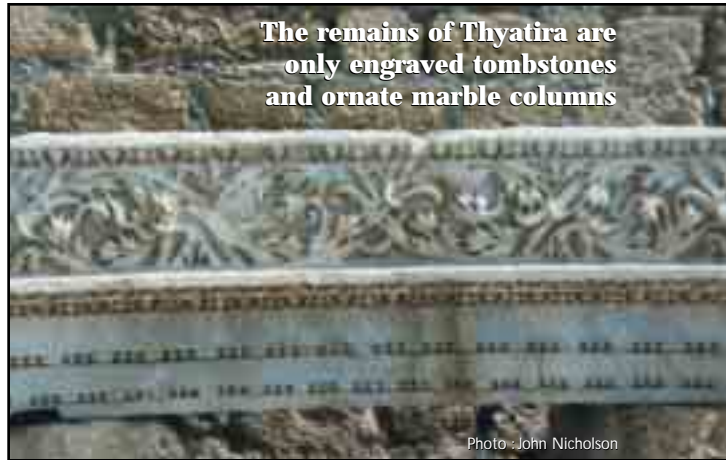
## Feet Like Brass

The second characteristic we would note in verse 18 is that of stability: *“and His feet are like fine brass.”*

In Daniel 2:34, we read of the vision of an image that could not stand—its feet were weak because they were a mixture partly of iron and partly of clay. But in John’s vision of our Saviour, we see that His feet are firm, solid, and sure; they are like fine brass. Those adversities and controversies that would cause lesser figures to crumble will not affect the Lord of lords. His stance is sure and solid; His kingdom is everlasting.

And so it is these two characteristics which are presented as primarily important—both then and now. If the Lord Jesus was to be central to the local church at Thyatira, His omniscience and His immutability would have the most bearing upon their immediate needs.

The letter is largely sobering in content, but it is



The remains of Thyatira are only engraved tombstones and ornate marble columns

Photo: John Nicholson

worthwhile to note that our Lord’s perception extends far beyond their failure. Hebrews 6:10 indicates that seeing the positive set against a predominantly negative background is a hallmark of God: *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name...”*

So it is with Thyatira; before there is ever a word of caution, our Lord commends them in verse 19 for their efforts. Their recent works had been greater than their first works; what a wonderful testimony for any local assembly! It is tremendous indeed to think that God Himself has planted local works, blessed them with godly leaders, given an increase, and firmly established them. But the challenge to keep the doors of any local church open is perhaps greater than the challenge to open them in the first place! What concern it ought to cause us as we see local assemblies around us dwindling in number and—worse yet by far—dwindling in fervor. In Thyatira fervor was not the problem; their last works were greater than their first and the Lord was not one to overlook their sincere efforts.

## The Teaching of Jezebel

Despite Thyatira’s fervor, there were problems. We see all around us today ample evidence that heartfelt intentions and a sincere desire to work are not alone sufficient bulwarks against decline. It is with sadness in verse 20 that we find these words: *“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”*

The local leaders in Thyatira were not actively promoting Jezebel’s false teaching, but unfortunately neither were they warning against it. They chose instead

the third and most dangerous option—simply leaving Jezebel’s teaching alone. They “*suffered*” or tolerated false teaching in the local church. We can only guess the elders’ reasoning for doing so. Perhaps they wanted to avoid controversy, valuing peace above truth. But while we may only hazard guesses as to their reasons, we need not guess at the result: the Chief Shepherd was displeased enough to record it in His Word as a warning to those who would follow Thyatira’s example.

The predictable consequence of leaving false teaching unanswered is also plainly given to us in verse 20—the servants of God are led astray into immorality. Each man rightly bears responsibility for the choices he makes to sin or not to sin; but we should not fail to note the significant role Scripture assigns to the toleration of false teaching in the local church.

In our day tolerance is held up as the greatest of virtues, a sign of an individual’s or society’s character. In Thyatira, however, this tolerance was the mark of a shocking lack of character—and so may it be for us now. How often we are tempted in our workplaces, our friendships, and even our homes to compromise and to tolerate, usually for the sake of peace. How terrible indeed that a sense of idleness about scriptural standards works its way up from these beginnings and infects even the local church, “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Let us not imagine that the Chief Shepherd is any more pleased today about a slackening of His standards than He was at the time this letter was written. Let us not imagine that we will somehow avoid the natural consequence of false teaching: seeing God’s people led into great sin instead of great devotion.

We further note that the attributes underlined for us about the Lord Jesus in this letter—His perception and His stability—are precisely the attributes that would have preserved Thyatira. If an overweening desire for peace hadn’t blinded them, they would have seen with eyes of flame what Jezebel was and what her effect would be. If stability of doctrine were not lacking, they would, with feet of burnished brass, have stood fast against “*every wind of doctrine*” (Eph. 4:14).

### **The Judgment of Jezebel**

We have seen both a commendation and a condemnation of Thyatira. In verses 21-23 we see the consequence of tolerated sin. When men with positions of authority and tasked with tending the flock fail to do so, the Chief Shepherd must step onto the scene in


judgment. Notice with what reticence He brings His chastening. But Jezebel and her followers, though given opportunity, do not want to change (v. 21). When there is no longer a possibility of repentance, the Judge of all the earth must do right. Christ’s judgment against tolerated sin is complete: “*But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner’s fire...*” (Mal. 3:2).

As His eyes of fire are sufficient to expose sin, so His appearance in judgment is like a refiner’s fire and will be sufficient to remove sin finally. In Thyatira, Jezebel and her followers are to be cast into great tribulation and ultimately, barring repentance, given over to death. Just as there were consequences to Jezebel’s teaching, so there are consequences to Christ’s judgment (v. 23)—“*and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts...*” The testimony of Christ which was momentarily distorted by false teaching will now be plainly displayed in Thyatira for other churches to see.

### **The Commission**

We have noted a commendation, a condemnation, and a consequence. Now we come to a commission, a charge laid upon those who remain in Thyatira who have not joined with Jezebel in idolatry. The commission is a simple one: the faithful that remain must emulate the characteristics of the One who is central to the local church. They must exercise discernment and stand fast. They need to see with His eyes of fire and stand with His feet of brass. Other than this simple adjuration, Christ places no additional burden on them. The sin and failing of some in the assembly has not been allowed to adversely affect the sweet fellowship of the sheep and the Shepherd.

In verse 27 we find that the conduct of the faithful in Thyatira is suiting them for ruling much more than the local assembly: their discernment and stability are exactly what qualifies them to rule the nations as well.

Finally, in verse 28 the overcomer is promised the “*morning star*,” a title of Christ Himself (Rev. 22:16). Those who have loved the Lord enough to exercise loving and thoughtful discernment, those who have taken a firm stand on the precious truths of Scripture, will find their hearts desire: “*And there will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads*” (Rev. 22:3, NASB). 

# Sardis

*When you're dead wrong, to whom can you go?*

What's in a name? Sometimes nothing. The church at Sardis had a name, a reputation. In the midst of a corrupt, hostile, and dying world, the church at Sardis was known as a church that was alive! People looked at the church and saw it as active, busy, vibrant—all very commendable. The only problem was, it was only a name. In reality the church was dead. Even though people all around deemed it to be alive, there was one Person who saw past the surface. And He sent them this loving and solemn letter of diagnosis: reports of their life had been greatly exaggerated.

The church at Sardis was not obviously dead. Observers saw what appeared to be signs of life: the right words were spoken and the proper actions performed. Their lifelessness was evident neither to themselves nor to others. To the eyes of men, the church was alive and well. All men but One—the only One whose opinion truly matters. But how could this be? Doesn't activity indicate life?

The Lord Jesus discerned that all of the activity at Sardis was nothing more than the dead works of a dead church. There was service at Sardis, but only in the energy of the flesh. Such service can give the appearance of life to man, but the Lord sees only death, for death and the flesh are partners in Scripture, "*For the mind set on the flesh is death...if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die*" (Rom. 8:6, 13).

In opposition to death is life, and in opposition to the flesh is the Spirit. This was the missing ingredient at Sardis—the work of the Holy Spirit, that which transforms the actions of mere men into living service with the power, life, reality, and eternal fruit that can

come from God alone. He is "*the Spirit of life*" (Rom. 8:2). But rather than their service being empowered by the Spirit, the believers at Sardis were serving in the deadness of the flesh.

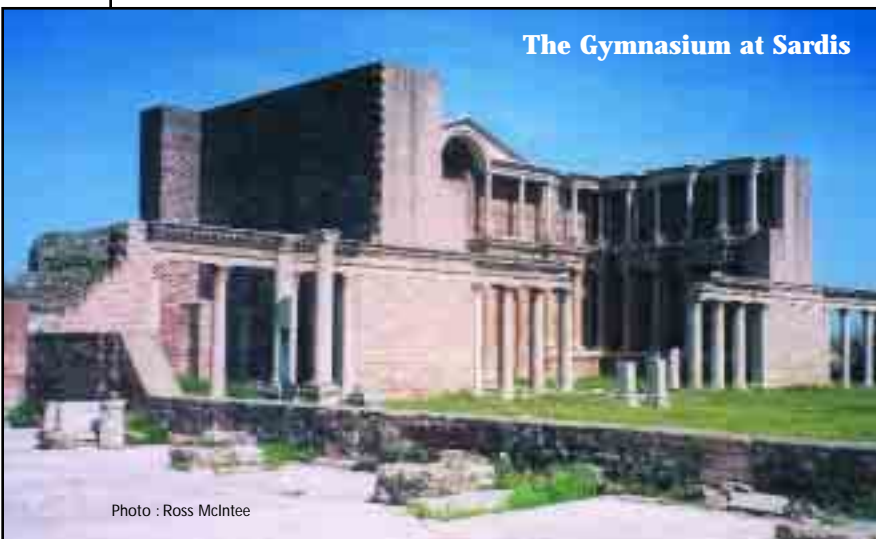
The flesh can be quite industrious. Action, work, movement—the flesh is capable of all of these things. Every unbeliever demonstrates this on a daily basis. But none of it counts in the eyes of the Lord. Heaven only recognizes work carried out in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. No flesh will ever boast in His sight. And so, at some point, the church at Sardis ceased to serve in the energy of heaven and reverted to the weakness of the flesh.

It is significant that at this point the Lord didn't criticize what they were doing so much as how they were doing it. It would seem that He was pleased with much of what they were doing, since He went on to urge them to "*strengthen the things which remain.*" The lifelessness at Sardis didn't mean that the church had no commendable features. Without some good qualities the church couldn't possibly have a reputation for being alive. Certainly Sardis had its strengths. But those strengths were waning. They were "*ready to die.*" Without the divine sustenance of the Spirit, these traits could not long remain. In this we see the principle that the inner leads to the outer: death on the inside inevitably results in the destruction of all that is good in the service of an assembly.

Conversely, inner life leads inextricably to deeds of life, as is seen most clearly in the Lord Jesus. He had life "*in Himself*" (Jn. 5:26) and such inner life overflowed into deeds of life.

And so the problem is clear. The church at Sardis had abandoned dependence on the Spirit and slipped back into reliance on the flesh. But thankfully the Answer was equally clear! Before ever offering a word of criticism, the Lord Jesus presents Himself to the assembly as the one and only solution to their problem. Did they need a fresh working of the Holy Spirit among them? Then they were to come to the One who has "*the seven Spirits of God.*" That fascinating title appears four times in the

The Gymnasium at Sardis



Bible, all in Revelation (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Obviously it is not suggesting that there are seven separate Holy Spirits, for the Bible clearly teaches that there is one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). Even in this letter to Sardis we are told (as in each of the letters) that the Spirit (not “Spirits”) is speaking to the churches. Rather this is speaking of the seven-fold nature of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 11:2 describes Him as the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Many features of the revelation of the Lord Jesus given in Revelation 1-3 are taken from the Old Testament. And this is no exception. Space forbids us from examining each of these seven aspects of the Holy Spirit and their necessity in the life of any assembly. But it will suffice to say that without these seven features, an assembly is dead indeed.

And yet, although the need at Sardis was for the work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus presents Himself, rather than the Spirit directly, as the solution. It is important to notice that Romans 8:2 doesn’t merely call Him “*the Spirit of life*” but rather as “*the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.*” And in the revelation of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11, He is revealed not on His own, but as the One who rested on the Messiah. If we need the Holy Spirit, there is only one way we can find Him: Christ. “*If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*” (Jn. 7:37f).\* The Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son, yet His role is always to focus our attention on Christ (see Jn. 15:26; 16:14). We are aware that Christ is our access to the Father (Jn. 14:6); but the fact is that He is our access to the Holy Spirit as well. Quite simply, He is our access to God “*for there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5).

The Lord presented Himself to Sardis as the answer to their need for life, for He is uniquely qualified to provide life. He is the source of physical life (Jn. 1:3), spiritual life (Jn. 3:3), eternal life (1 Jn. 1:1f; Jn. 17:3), abundant life (Jn. 10:10), inherent life (Jn. 5:26), indestructible life (Heb. 7:16), resurrection life (Jn. 11:23-25), new life (Rom. 6:4), and true life (1 Tim. 6:19, NASB). No wonder He is called the Life (Jn. 14:6)!

Just as with the church at Sardis, every church today requires genuine spiritual life every moment of every

day. How easy it is to begin to serve by rote; to gradually and inadvertently forget that apart from Him we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5) and to cease to be earnest in prayer that He will work through us.

There is a particular danger of this when things are going well—when we have a name that we are alive. In difficulties and struggles we may be more aware of our own powerlessness. But when service for the Lord prospers, we can practically forget that it was the Lord’s doing. At such moments of victory the Enemy subtly seeks to move us away from dependence on the Lord, and he finds a willing accomplice in the flesh.

It is sometimes mistakenly suggested that the flesh is inveterately lazy and opposed to religious service. But the flesh can be quite religious and hard-working—provided it gets the glory. Let us always be conscious of our need of the Lord’s power and wisdom every step of the way Home. No task should be undertaken for Him without sincere and humble prayer, acknowledging our impotence and looking to Him in simple trust that He will work through us. This should be our inviolate method of service—even if we have performed the task one hundred times before; *especially* if we have performed the task one hundred times before. If He doesn’t work through us, we are capable of nothing more than the dead works of the flesh.

The problem was severe at Sardis—what could be worse than death? But the Lord Jesus specializes in bringing life from death. He did it four times during His earthly ministry (the last resurrection being His own). And He has done it countless times since—by His power every believer has “*passed out of death into life*” (1 Jn. 3:14). Death at Sardis could be overcome by the Life, “*our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Tim. 1:10).

Before ending His message, the Lord had one last word of promise concerning life: “*he that overcometh...I will not blot out his name out of the book of life*” (v. 5). For the believer, the Lord Jesus has already blotted out our sins (Acts 3:19) and the handwriting of ordinances against us (Col. 2:14); one day He will blot out every tear from our eyes (Rev. 7:17; 21:4). But our names are indelibly printed in the book of life!

What’s in a name? Sometimes everything. There was a problem with the name of the church at Sardis. But the answer was found in another Name, the Name of its Lord, the One who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

\* See also Jn. 20:22; Acts 2:33; Mt. 3:11.



# Philadelphia

*City of brotherly love*

The letter to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13) is a wonderful letter of encouragement. Philadelphia and Smyrna are the only two of the seven churches in Asia Minor to whom no condemnation is given. But while there is no rebuke needed, we ought not to assume that things were easy in Philadelphia. It faced many of the same challenges that assemblies often face today, especially those works where there seem to be only a small number of believers struggling on. And yet, the Lord commended them for their faithfulness.

In considering the names of Christ used in this letter we see some truths that extend well beyond the believers in Philadelphia. They are transcendent truths that describe His character when dealing with His Church in every time and locale. We're given three such ideas relating to His character.

*He that is holy, He that is true:* The letter begins with a description of two of the attributes of God. The Lord Jesus is spoken of as holy and true. These terms are often used of Jehovah, and Christ was certainly well within His right to claim them. Although we as believers strive for these attributes, only God possesses them fully and effortlessly.

We think of holiness, and would long to be holy as the Scriptures command. But He is uniquely holy. Totally set apart from the taint of sin left by the world and the devil (both of which are referenced in this letter), the Lord Jesus provides the necessary power and example for believers to be holy as well.

With the deception of those who were "*of the synagogue of Satan*" (v. 9) it would be reassuring for those in Philadelphia to realize that the One they were serving was *true*. Christ is spoken of in the NT as being the "*true light*" (Jn. 1:9), the "*true bread*" (Jn. 6:32), the "*true vine*" (Jn. 15:1), the "*true witness*" (Rev. 3:14), the "*true God*" (1 Jn. 5:20) and the "*minister of the... true tabernacle*" (Heb. 8:2) in heaven.

It is also interesting to note the words Scripture uses in tandem with truth to describe our Saviour. His judgments are "*true and righteous*" (Rev. 16:7; 19:2). The Thessalonians turned to Him who is "*the living and true God*" (1 Thess. 1:9). His witness, His Name, and His Words are "*true and faithful*" (Rev. 3:14; 19:11;



The ruins of "The Church of St. John the Theologian"

Photo : Ross McInnes

21:5). The enemy seeks to undermine the work of God by distorting the truth. Their commendation was that they had kept His Word (Rev. 3:8). They had embraced the truth under difficult circumstances. A reminder that they labored for Him who is Truth would have stirred them up (as it should us!) to a greater appreciation of who He is, and why the struggle was worth it.

*He that hath the key of David:* Keys in Scripture speak of authority. Here Christ is spoken of as holding the key of David (v. 7). A similar wording is used in the prophecy of Isaiah (22:20-25) regarding Eliakim (whose name suitably means "God will establish"), the son of Hilkiah. He served during the reign of good king Hezekiah in Judah (2 Ki. 18; Isa. 36). We're told little about him but we realize that, as a result of his faithfulness, he was promoted to a position "*over the house*" of Judah (Isa. 22:20-23; 36:3). He follows on the heels of Shebna (Isa. 22:15-19), who seems to have been demoted to a position of scribe because of his lack of faithfulness, with Eliakim taking his place.

Eliakim is used as a picture of Christ but, as with all pictures, he is imperfect. Even though he was faithful and was once established "*as a nail in a sure place*" (Isa. 22:23), Eliakim could not serve forever, and was eventually removed (Isa. 22:25).

How much greater authority would the One who is the fulfillment of this picture have in His Church? Christ is forever faithful, and will never be removed. Eliakim was given the key of David over the Old Testament house of Judah for a time. But Christ eternally holds the key of David, indicating His supremacy in His Old Testament house. And now we are reminded of His pre-eminence in His New Testament house, the Church (1 Tim. 3:15).

The Lord Jesus is the administrator of not only what

gets done in His house, but also who will do the work. We are encouraged by the knowledge that Christ has delegated authority to others. He gave the Israelites the key of knowledge in His Law, but their teachers abused that authority (Lk. 11:52). He gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 16:19) for the proclamation of the gospel. And He even gave an angel the key to the Abyss (Rev. 9:1; 20:1). The Lord is quite willing to entrust many responsibilities to His followers, despite their frailties and weaknesses. But He ultimately holds the final authority. It is not given to a failing nation, an imperfect church, or even an angel from heaven. The final authority is His alone.

*He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth:* Having recognized that He maintains the authority, the final statement made about His work is that He “*openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth.*” This is a fundamental role of Christ with respect to His church in Philadelphia—and anywhere else. He is the One who opens doors and He is the One who closes them. We must recognize both of these functions. Sometimes the Lord closes a door, and we ought to be sensitive enough to His guidance to humbly accept it. We certainly ought not to abandon a work lightly, but if the Lord has closed a door, we must recognize and accept it.

Happily, the situation is often the former, as it was in Philadelphia. The Lord is in the business of opening doors of faith (Acts 14:27), gospel work (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12), utterance (Col. 4:3), and service (Rev. 3:8). There are not many who would suggest that the problem in the church today is that there are so many avenues of service being explored that the Lord continues to have to shut doors. More often, He is well pleased to open them for willing servants.

As we seek to serve Him, we ought to pray that He would guide us to the doors that He has gone before and opened, so that our service might be in harmony with His plans rather than vainly pounding on doors that have been divinely shut. The church at Philadelphia must have been profoundly encouraged by the knowledge that omnipotence held open their door of service. No enemy could hope to thwart their work.

But the knowledge that Christ had opened the door also contained another lesson—a lesson in thankfulness and humility. It wasn’t the virtue or power of the church that had opened the door, or that now kept the door open. The open door was a gift from the Master, and He was to receive all of the glory for it. So it is

with us today. It is easy to spot the flaws of a church, but (believe it or not) churches can have strengths, too! After all, they are a work of the Lord—surely we don’t expect them to be universally bad, do we? It is a disservice to the Lord to ignore the good points of an assembly. We ought to be quick to recognize its strengths. Not in order to take credit for them (that would be worse than ignoring them), but for two essential reasons: that we might thank Him for His goodness to us, and that we might humbly petition Him to keep the door open.

An assembly’s successes ought to lead us to glorify the Lord for His magnificent ability to work even through poor sinners like us. And the humble acknowledgement that every good thing comes from Him ought to be the antidote to self-reliance. As with Israel before us, the moment we attempt to take credit for the Lord’s work, the Lord will close the door in order to show us just how impoverished we are without Him. Continued success in the Lord’s work can only come from continued acknowledgement that He is the One who opens doors and keeps them open.

*I know thy works:* One final note of blessing was given to Philadelphia: the Lord knew their works. He also knew that they had little strength. The words used for works and strength in this passage bring out contrasting ideas. Work is a function of labor, toil, and effort. The word for “*strength*” carries with it the idea of miracles, powers, and abilities. The Lord said they only had a “*little*” of these—not the abundance that seemingly thriving churches had in places like Corinth (1 Cor. 1:5) or a few miles down the road in Laodicea. Yet to these churches little commendation is given. But in this little group in the middle of Asia Minor, the Lord was keenly aware of their works. It was not a matter of ability or gift there; nor was it a matter of power or influence. What did the Lord require from them to accomplish His purposes? Hearts willing to serve and hands willing to work. He would supply the necessary ability, strength, and power.

So it is with local gatherings today. Many are struggling on with perhaps only a handful of faithful believers. The world would ask why they don’t just pack it in. The reasons are the same now as they were in the church of Philadelphia. He is holy and true. He holds the key. And He has provided an open door that no one can shut. For those who are willing to be faithful and labor for what He alone can accomplish, only eternity will tell what God can do with “*a little strength.*” 🔔

# Laodicea

## *The rich, poor church*

When John wrote to the assembly at Laodicea, it could not be called a Christ-centered assembly. It had been at one time (Col. 4:15), but now it was the only one of the seven assemblies in Revelation where He was outside the meeting, knocking to get in (Rev. 3:20). Perhaps this helps explain why our Lord describes Himself from Revelation 1:5 rather than from John's vision of Christ in Revelation 1:9-20, as with the other assemblies. In Revelation 1:5 John prays for grace rather than revealing Christ in the midst.

### **The Saviour's Names**

The Lord presents Himself to Laodicea as *"the Amen,"* the source of eternal reality. Believers end prayers with *"amen"* (1 Cor. 14:16) meaning "may it be so." On earth, the Lord Jesus Christ alone began sayings with *"Amen,"* meaning "verily" or "truly." Only John's Gospel doubles the *"amen."* It is equivalent to the Old Testament's *"Thus saith the Lord...."*

He is also *"the witness."* In Him, eternal reality is revealed. He faithfully bears witness, not sparing mere pretense. His witness is true and genuine; He can be relied upon. So Christ is the touchstone of every assembly. Only with Him in the midst is spiritual and eternal reality known and practiced.

Furthermore He is *"the beginning of the creation of God."* All creation begins with Him as its creator and also as the firstborn (Col. 1:15), we being made in His image and likeness. This applies to both creations, old and new. Without Him in the center of the gathering, we need a new beginning as a local assembly.

### **The Saviour's Rebuke**

It is not surprising that He can say, *"I know your works"* (Rev. 3:15). He alone is the test of reality. The Lord uses the second person singular *"you"* in all these letters as He is writing to the assembly as a unit. Laodicea was no exception.

They were not *"cold."* A cold glass of water on a hot day refreshes the soul (Mt. 10:42). A cool head bringing God's peace in time of trouble reflects the presence of the Lord. Being a peace maker is more than mediating in times of trouble (Mt. 10:13) but certainly



Photo: Ross McIntee

includes such intercession. Our Lord demonstrates such refreshing coolness in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:51ff) when Peter cut the ear off Malchus. Except for His cool spirit of perfect peace, murderous strife would have engulfed them all.

Neither were they *"hot."* They were not on fire for the Lord. There was no zeal in their assembly affairs. A work without heart is a lifeless work. If we are not excited about our message and our ways, why would anyone else pay attention? Contrast this with the passion of Christ's love for His own (Rev. 3:19).

Lukewarmness shows clearly that Christ is not in the midst. Nothing of Him was found in this assembly for He is surely *"cold"* as seen by His practical, spiritual advice in verse 18. He is just as surely *"hot"* as seen by His love in verse 19. The reality of Christ in the midst refreshes in all ways.

No doubt Laodicea held right doctrine, church order, and meetings. But no spiritual refreshment was to be had. Temporal glory (v. 17) was all they boasted of. There was no lasting value to their work. Perhaps they criticized others for being *"emotional"* (hot) on the one hand or *"legal"* (cold) on the other.

They also demonstrated that Christ was not in the midst by testifying of themselves (v. 17) which testimony is not true (Jn. 5:31). Strikingly, this is the only place in the book of Revelation where we read *"you say"* (second person). Clearly the word of the Lord was not in their mouth (Rom. 10:8f) so their works did not glorify God (Mt. 5:16). It seems proper that the Lord threatened to *"spue thee out of My mouth"* (v. 16). Imagine the faithful and true witness with nothing to say about us because we are not in His mouth!

An assembly that pats itself on the back is in great danger. Self-satisfaction takes what belongs to the

Lord for its own. When we meet around Him, He is made known and glorified. Only so is His refreshing Spirit available.

### The Saviour's Solution

How could this assembly return to Christ-centeredness? The Lord counseled them (v. 18) to exchange their riches for pure gold proven in the heat of fire. Their enthusiasm had to be for Him. Perhaps a good start would have been to speak often (warmly) of Him, for we talk of what is important to us. They would quickly have found they didn't have much to say. This would have forced them back to the Scriptures to learn of Him and His love.

He also counseled them to cool the burning shame of their nakedness with the robes of His righteousness. Their walk had to be by faith rather than feeling. When they began to boast of His doings in their lives, they may not have had much to say. This would have forced them to walk prayerfully by His Spirit. But they needed eyes opened by personally applying salve. Who other than the Amen, the faithful and true witness, to open them? They had to do more than read the Bible. They needed to hear His voice and know when He was speaking of them. A clear conviction of need makes the rest much easier.

Here for the first time in these seven letters the Lord addresses the individual. All seven letters end with a personal exhortation to the "hearers" and the "overcomers" but only here is the body of the letter addressed to an individual. The "anyone" of verse 20 refers to any individual in the meeting. Just as the whole impacts the individual, so the individual impacts the whole assembly. One person clearly makes a difference. Israel's well-being was endangered by one man right at the start. In Joshua 7:21f Achan explains how he came to sin. He "saw...coveted...took...hid" what belonged exclusively to God. It began with a look but ended with God's possession becoming Achan's. In Joshua 7:2ff, the whole nation did the same thing. Israel saw that Ai was a small town and felt sure they could take it themselves. It seems Achan's sin preceded Israel's, influencing the whole camp.

The Church also had a similar incident in its early days. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) sold a possession and gave it to the Lord. That was fine but they kept for themselves half of what they said they gave to Him. There was no burning zeal for Him. Their "cold" was selfish human calculation. As a result, they jeopardized the whole Church.

Is that what happened in Laodicea? Did they take the Lord's portion as their own? They testified of their own greatness. But God is not deceived. He is the faithful and true witness who reveals all to them. His love is hot. His counsel is cold. Both provide refreshment.

Notice the grace of Christ. He did not demand but rather "wished" (v. 15, NASB) that they were like Him. He "counseled" (v. 18) them. Even more amazingly, the Lord of the Church stood outside knocking, patiently waiting for anyone to open the door and enjoy fellowship with Him.

Let Him cause your heart to burn. Let Him quiet your heart with His cool comfort. Then you can return to a Christ-centered meeting. How good is the God we adore!



## The Character and Offices of Christ

Christ is the eternal Rock,  
On which His Church is built;  
The Shepherd of His little flock;  
The Lamb that took our guilt;  
Our Counselor, our Guide,  
Our Saviour and our Friend;  
The Bridegroom of His chosen Bride,  
Who loves her to the end.

He is the Son to free;  
The Bishop He to bless;  
The full Propitiation He;  
The Lord our Righteousness;  
His body's glorious Head;  
Our Advocate that pleads;  
Our Priest that pray'd, atoned, and  
bled,  
And ever intercedes.

Let all obedient souls  
Their grateful tribute bring,  
Submit to Jesus' righteous rules,  
And bow before the King.  
Our Prophet, Christ expounds  
His and our Father's will;  
This good Physician cures our  
wounds  
With tenderness and skill.

When sin had and sadly made,  
'Twixt wrath and mercy strife,  
Our dear Redeemer dearly paid  
Our ransom with His life.  
Faith gives the full release;  
Our Surety for us stood;  
The Mediator made the peace,  
And sign'd it with His blood.

Soldiers, your Captain own;  
Domestics, serve your Lord;  
Sinners, the Saviour's love make  
known;  
Saints, hymn the incarnate Word;  
The Witness sure and true  
Of God's good will to men,  
The Alpha and Omega too,  
The First and Last. Amen.

—HART (1712-1768)

# Are We Truly Remembering Him?

*Do we celebrate each Lord's Supper "in spirit and in truth"?*

**T**his do in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24-25). Such is the Lord's instruction to us as we meet each week to break bread. And so we might ask ourselves: As we gather around the table, are we truly remembering the Lord? If so, it will be the result of the following:

## A Voluntary Exercise

You may have heard of Pavlov's dogs, whose meals were preceded by the ringing of a bell. Eventually, even when their noses were not excited by a tempting odor, the dogs would still salivate when the bell was rung. In a similar way, we humans may automatically become happy or fearful in response to a sound or sight connected with some past experience. But the ability to call something to mind at will is a uniquely human trait.

Without any stimulation of our senses, we can voluntarily recall the details and the significance of events we have witnessed. It is as if we could visit a library in our brains, pull out a record of a former experience, and mentally recreate the situation. But we can do even more than this—we can enter sympathetically into the experiences of others, and think about events in their lives simply by hearing or reading about them. The One we profess to love and serve asks us to remember Him in that way.

## A Regular Exercise

Israel's yearly feasts were a constant call to remember their God and His provision for them. The Feast of the Passover provides a clear example. On that night the Israelites could look on the blood on the doorposts

and the lintel and be reminded and assured of their deliverance. At the same time, the Lord saw sufficient ground in that blood to satisfy every righteous claim. In this way Christ and His death were (in type) brought before the minds of the Israelites, and they in turn brought Him before their God in worship. The Passover was not to be enacted only once, but repeatedly.

The Lord was asking His people to use the faculty of memory on a regular basis.

Today the Father still seeks worshippers. In the Breaking of Bread the two things mentioned above—

that is, both the value of the Lamb to God and the Lamb's value to His people—should occupy our minds.

In the 21st century, however, we are unfortunately apt to focus on what the Son of God means to us, while overlooking what His person and work mean to God. This is a deficiency that elders, and indeed all who teach, should seek to remedy. All aspects of the work of the

Lord Jesus ought to occupy our minds at the Breaking of Bread—

for in Scripture, the health of an assembly is primarily measured, not

by its ingenuity in forming links with the community or in its ability to impact the neighborhood, but by whether it gives due place to Christ and His Word.<sup>1</sup>

## A Heartfelt Response

W. E. Vine informs us that in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 Paul does not teach that the Lord's Supper is to be carried out merely as a ritual, for the words "*in remembrance of Me*" require "an affectionate calling of the Person Himself to mind."

Being in the place where He will be remembered,



and at the time when others who profess a similar desire have gathered, is certainly a physical necessity. But that alone is not enough. If we are to be faithful to our Lord's command, our hearts have to be prepared by a purposeful and private recollection of the Saviour and His work. Even the dullest brain may be stirred once a week by the sight of the bread and wine, as Pavlov's dog responded automatically to the ringing of the bell. But we know, don't we, that our God and Saviour deserves more than this?

Yes, the Lord is looking for a heartfelt response. That is a spiritual necessity if we are to enter into the meaning of the Breaking of Bread. Spurgeon reminded us we may "...see the signs, yet see not Him." Some of us may have to admit that we cannot always say as the Lord's Day comes around, "*Your name, even your memory, is the desire of our souls*" (Isa. 26:8, NASB), but that attitude is essential if we are to remember Him "*in spirit and in truth.*" Our Lord's words at the last Passover should shame us when we "*appear before [Him] empty*" (see Ex. 23:15) He said, "*I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*" (Lk. 22:15, NASB). And our remembrance of Him in the company of others on the Lord's Day will be most natural if it is nourished by a daily "calling Him to mind" when we are alone throughout the week.

### A Disciplined Desire


How do we furnish our minds with the material essential for voluntary remembrance?

The Old Testament shows it was mandatory for every worshipper in Israel to examine his lamb carefully before presenting it to the Lord. In hindsight, we know that each lamb was intended to speak of the Lamb of God. It was therefore to be without blemish and without spot. But we also know that God did not find real satisfaction in such sacrifices. What it pleased Him to do in those days before Calvary was to bring the perfection of His Son (in type) before the minds of His people. And if in sincerity of heart and with discerning eye they brought to Him the best of the flock, He accepted their worship.

I believe the thought of an Israelite examining his

lamb with care ought to stir me to endeavor to think and speak appropriately when leading others in remembering Him at the Breaking of Bread. This can only be done if I make it a habit to reflect prayerfully and often on the perfections of Jesus our Saviour, as revealed in every part of the Word of God. True remembrance demands personal discipline, as does every other aspect of holy living.<sup>2</sup>

The teaching of the Old Testament provides many beautiful previews and pictures of Christ, but we need the fourfold historical account of His holy life and death as outlined in the Gospels to fully appreciate the way Jesus thought and spoke about things, the way He reacted to human need, and the way He poured out Himself in sacrificial service. His patience with those who were closest to Him is a challenging study in itself. All that He did and said was climaxed at Calvary when He offered Himself without spot to God. He calls us to remember Him in that way.

Moving on to the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts, and the expositions of our Lord's glory in the Epistles and the Revelation, we find more rich insights into His person and work. All the Scriptures are designed by the Holy Spirit to ensure that we think appropriately about Him. If we make it a habit to daily meditate on the Word of God, such thoughts will be available for voluntary recall when we come together. Our Lord is looking for such a response to His love. Will we truly remember Him this week? 

### Endnotes

1 Compare Rev. 2 & 3

2 1 Tim. 4:7. Any attempt to organize or bring structure into the worship of the church is a confession of spiritual weakness. Men do not put scaffolding around a building unless it is incomplete or some flaw has been discovered in its walls. Similarly, a lame man reveals his pitiable condition by using a crutch. The ideal would be to repair the breach or strengthen the leg, but such answers call for labor in the first case and for exercise in the second. Believers who have not time or desire for such cures are in a very low state indeed. They publicize that they have left their first love.

***Through the swift-ebbing years of this age Christ Himself is its builder, adding stone to stone to this Temple exceeding magnificent, while He awaits the day when at last complete, sanctified, beautiful, spotless, and radiant with His heavenly glory it shall be presented to Himself and taken into the full enjoyment of an eternal association of blessedness, the features of which are at present undisclosed.***

—J. B. WATSON, *The Church: A Symposium*

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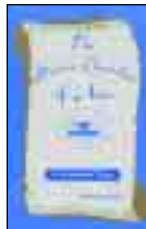
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## THE SEEKER

*Why dost Thou pass unheeded, treading with piercéd feet,  
The halls of the kingly palace, for the busy street?*

*O marvellous in Thy beauty, crowned with the light of God,  
Why fall they not down to worship where Thou hast trod?*

*Why are Thy hands extended beseeching while men pass by,  
With their empty words and laughter, yet passing on to die?*

*Unseen, unknown, unregarded, calling and waiting yet—  
They hear Thy knock, and they tremble—they hear, and they forget.*

*And Thou in the midst art standing of old and forever the same—  
Thou hearest their songs and their jesting, but not Thy Name.*

*The thirty-three years forgotten of the weary way Thou hast trod—  
Thou art but a Name unwelcome, O Saviour God.*

*Yet amongst the highways and hedges, amongst the lame and the blind,  
The poor and the maimed and the outcast, still thou dost seek and find.*

*There by the wayside lying, the eyes of Thy love can see  
The wounded, the naked, the dying, too helpless to come to Thee.*

*So art Thou watching and waiting till the wedding is furnished with guests—  
And the last of the sorrowful singeth, and the last of the weary rests.*

—C. P. C. in *Hymns of Ter Stegen and Others*

