

*A Letter
From Christ To
Be Read*

by Jonathan

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A LETTER FROM CHRIST TO BE READ

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I. THE MASTER'S EARTHEN VESSELS

“FURTHERMORE then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Je’sus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, *so* ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Je’sus. For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-4).

“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, *and* prepared unto every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21).

As Christians, I trust that we already have the knowledge and understanding that salvation is the gift of God in the redemption of man from the tyranny of sin. But what about the Christian life after this turning point of coming to Jesus? Can a believer sin after this? What are the possibilities of a victorious Christian life? Is there such attribute as “personal holiness”? What about the doctrine of absolute “sinless perfection”?

Unfortunately, due to differences in theological persuasion among the various Christian communities that exist, it is evident that the answers are not always as forthcoming and as straight as we might like it to be. While we most strongly believe in sound doctrine, the difficulty sometimes lies with semantics. However, as we turn to the infallible Word of God, we can

most assuredly believe this: Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary is the whole premise for our sanctification. Apart from the precious blood of Christ (1 John 1:7), the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16 and 1 Peter 1:2) and the water of the Word (Psalm 119:9, John 15:3 and John 17:17), there can be no sanctification whatsoever. You see, our sanctification and overcoming victory does not lie in the works of the flesh, but trust in the accomplished work of Christ as we are empowered by the Spirit. The danger arises when we begin to glory (even a little bit) in our own spiritual accomplishments because then we are attempting to mix law and grace. Hence, we must acknowledge and recognize that it is the Holy Spirit (and not ourselves) that initiates and moves us toward holiness and sanctification. Our part, however, due to our free moral choice, is to cooperate, submit and yield to the Holy Spirit and "HAVING therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

LETTERS OF THE LAW AND THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

"And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I *am* the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*" (Ezekiel 36:23-27).

“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:2-6).

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Lips-service and outward profession should have no place in the life of the believer. Instead, God is confronting us with the reality of a heart and soul that followeth hard after Him (according to Psalm 63:8). We are long past the days when we merely know about Him, we must now *know* Him. You see, we may hold doctorates in the “letters of the Law” (head knowledge) but do we also have “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” that makes us “free from the law of sin and death?” (Romans 8:2). And should the searchlight of the Holy Spirit be allowed to measure our hearts today, where would we stand? Have we drifted spiritually? Do we have hearts uncircumcised (read Romans 2:29, Romans 15:8, Colossians 2:11)? Are we guilty of becoming white-washed gravestones, like the Pharisees?

The prophet Ezekiel spoke of a new covenant wherein it is to be written in the hearts of His people (Hebrews 8:10), to be “known and read of all men” (2 Corinthians 3:2).

EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE

“EXCEPT the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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Whenever God calls an individual to fulfill a certain task in the Body of Christ, He will always equip him by the Spirit. There are underlying Biblical principles for Christian service that must be upheld in order to maintain our proper function and place in the church.

To begin with, Romans 12:4-6 tells us, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us... ”. As I understand from the Word of God, this implies that even though there is a place of ministry and service in the church for each and every believer, we are not all entrusted by God to do the same things, or called to stand in the same offices. We certainly do have the same Spirit, but there are different gifts and callings of God, accompanied by degrees and measures of anointing.

Next, as “the gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance” (Romans 11:29), it means that God is not going to lift His call on your life. He does not change His mind respecting whatever He has called you to do. To one, it may be to preach the Word; to another, it may be to participate through the ministry of helps- but the important thing is to respond to the specific calling that He has placed upon your heart.

Also, as “the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21), the same principle applies to our spiritual function in the Body of Christ. While each of us has our own individual roles to fulfill, it is only scriptural and valid that we relate this to the Body, with Christ as the Head and

foundation upon which the church stands (1 Corinthians 3:11). Hence, we must appreciate and flow with the other parts of the Body, with each and every member submitting to the Lordship of Christ. Since maintaining our proper function and place in the church is so important, the failure to abide by this principle would lead to disunity and division. In other words, all of us have specific God-assigned roles and we are not to assume places of responsibilities other than those areas in which He has called us for. Just because God allows His plan to be executed in a certain approach in the life and ministry of one of His servants does not necessarily mean that another of His servant should adopt similar ways. Each must seek to hear from God personally and then step out in faith and obey God. This is the secret of success in ministry: The Lord must build the house, or else that which we do would be wasted efforts. Even if we should have good reports among men, it may still not be God's plans, purposes and ways- "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). We want to ask, "Is it possible for preachers to have the applause of men (by appealing to the flesh and the intellect through the use of enticing words and base display of emotionalism) and yet not have the anointing of the Holy Spirit?" Allow me to answer this question by calling your attention to the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:4, "And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power".

Beloved, if God has called you into a specific area of ministry, I want to encourage you to respond in faith and in obedience, without fear and procrastination. Even if you do not sense the "fullness of His time" yet, I believe with all of my heart that you are to prepare yourself with much praying, watching and seeking His face. In the meanwhile, begin with something small and practical. But in all truth, I must say that "no work of

God is too small and unimportant”. In most cases, perhaps in all cases, it is not really the magnitude and the size of the ministry that matters, but it is the faithfulness and the motivation that causes you to do everything your hand finds to do. Above all, remember this key: The work of God is not really *your* work, it is His- “EXCEPT the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

II. THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST TO THE CHURCHES

The last message of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Word of God, is actually found in the book of Revelation. Here, Christ is revealed in all His glory, majesty, power and splendor. Having fulfilled His mission on earth as the suffering Servant, we now behold the Christ “clothed with a garment down to the foot... his head and *his* hairs *were* white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes *were* as a flame of fire; ... and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:13-16). So awesome is the Presence of Jesus that John “fell at his feet as dead” (according to Revelation 1:17). Can our hearts not be moved with “fear and trembling” today? What is our concept of Christ? Do we *see* Him just as He is, the risen and glorified One, seated on the right hand of God? Perish the idolatry and the thought if the “Christ” of our vain imagination is anything less than the spotless Lamb of God who occupies the eternal throne!

Even as the revelation of Jesus Christ to John has specific references to the *local* churches of the first century (that is, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea), the *basic* issues are still applicable and relevant to our churches today as they did confront the churches there and then. Some speculate and teach that the message to the

seven churches as covering seven distinct periods of time, beginning with the birth of the church at Pentecost up to Christ's Second Coming. This is the dispensational application some Christian teachers hold. I believe, however, that the truth of the matter is not dispensational, but geographical. In other words, should a postman be asked to deliver these letters by hand to the seven churches in Asia, the route he would have taken would likely to be in such order: from Patmos to Ephesus, then proceeding to Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and eventually Laodicea. Moreover, I believe that the conditions (merits and problems, strengths and weaknesses) which exist in the seven *local* churches of Asia in John's day also apply to ours, in the context of the various *local* churches we witness all around us (But since all *local* churches combined make up the universal church, you may say that there is also a permanent and universal application to the church at all times, in the broader sense). This, we believe, is the *correct* method of interpretation.

THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

“UNTO the angel of the church of Eph-e-sus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nic-o-la'i-tanes,

which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:1-7).

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In the letter to the church of Ephesus, Christ begins with words of commendation, “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil... ” (Revelation 2:2). Evidently, this was a *labouring* church, busy in their involvement with the work of God. It was also a church of tremendous perseverance, for the word “labour” means “toiling to the point of exhaustion”. Then we are told that they were discerning and uncompromising in their doctrine. In verse six, the word “Nic-o-la’i-tanes” refers to a sect of people in religion who “lorded it over” the flock, depriving the believers of their liberty in Christ (You may study 3 John 9-11). In essence, whenever a line is drawn between the “clergy” and the “laity”, then that person or church stands in danger of adding to the Word of God. We do not apologize for saying that all God’s people are “kings and priests” (Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:9) and have direct and equal access to the Heavenly Father through the blood of Jesus Christ. Now, I communicate the Word (in some small measure), yet I tell you this. If you place absolute trust in a minister, you are in for trouble. There is a potential of a man failing you, but as you learn to trust in Jesus yourself, you will never be confounded or disappointed.

Alright, the believers at Ephesus were commended by the Lord for their sacrificial works of service and faithfulness in contending for the faith and perhaps, we are about to conclude that this is the perfect congregation. But hold on! Amidst all their involvement with “the Master’s business, the royal telephone lines on their side were not engaged”. Conversation with the Master is reduced to a minimal. They used to “dial the “P-R-A-Y-E-R” hotline and talk with their “first love” for hours, but now it is over in

minutes or even seconds”. But doesn’t this condition describe some of us too? We sometimes get so busy with legitimate activities that we do not even realize that we neglect the “one thing [that] is needful” (Luke 10:42). Do you remember the words of Jesus to Martha (I refer to one of the sisters of Lazarus, the other being Mary), saying, “Mar’tha, Mar’tha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Ma’ry hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42). Surely, we all know that talking and working for God is important, but isn’t it equally important to talk *with* God too?

After giving a diagnosis of this problem, Christ graciously gives the remedy. He said, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works... ” (Revelation 2:5). In other words, there is a place of restoration in Christ Jesus and He wants us, His sheep, to be in the pasture where “He restoreth [our] soul... ” (according to Psalm 23:3). Hence, for this to become a reality, we must strengthen our relationship with Him through prayer, worship and feeding upon His Word on a definite and regular basis. We must keep coming back to the “closet of prayer” and remain there until we find His strength as the only strength for our day. There is simply no place for the “Sunday Christian” syndrome! But you ask, “Can this be done?” Yes, for the promise of Christ to those who obey is this, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7) and His Word is true and forever settled.

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyr’na write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of

them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Sa'tan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Revelation 2:8-11).

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While most other churches received varying degrees of Christ’s approval and disapproval (some considerably more praise than blame, while others more condemnation than commendation), the church in Smyrna received the almost unparalleled commendation of the Master.

To begin with, we are told in no uncertain terms that the church in Smyrna was severely persecuted. Being an important center of the Roman world, there was a real possibility that many Christian believers were challenged to recant their faith in Christ and say “Caesar is Lord” instead. But did they? No, many remained faithful and true to the Lord by refusing to compromise and submit to the cult of the Romans. One of the best-known martyrs at that time was a man named Polycarp. Even at the point of death, he refused to deny Christ, saying, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” The price he paid for his uncompromising loyalty to the Lordship of Christ? He was taken and burned at the stake! If there was a church that knew what it meant to enter into “the fellowship of his [Christ’s] sufferings... ” (Philippians 3:10), the church in Smyrna was certainly one.

Besides the poverty they had to endure because of the Smyrna’s citizens’ refusal to trade with them, the church further received the abuse and slander from the Jewish community, the so-called respectable “religious”

hierarchy of that day. But listen attentively to what Christ said of this religious group, “...the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 2:9). Religious and yet a synagogue of Satan? How can this be? Well, the implication here is that a genuine Jew is no longer considered on the premise of his natural descent or outward characteristics, but on his spiritual condition instead.

Though no words of rebuke was directed to the church whatsoever, the Lord nevertheless wanted them to realize that they were still to endure the tribulations for “ten days”, saying, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). In spite of their adversity, it is assuring to know that “ten days” imply “a brief time” (You may read Genesis 24:55; Acts 25:6). Indeed, faithfulness unto death is a high price to pay but the promise that awaits them is the “crown of life” (according to Revelation 2:10).

In the context of the church today, I believe that any individual who desires to move with the directions of the Holy Spirit will inevitably experience persecution. As the ways and the spirit of the world stands in direct opposite to the ways of the Spirit of God, the Christian who is serious in fulfilling the directives of God will face severe distress. The media is one tool that has already been employed by the enemy and his earthly agents to frustrate the efforts of some of God’s servants. Another avenue will come through “false brethren” who will hurt the work of God and that should cause you to weep. Can some of you already identify with what I am speaking of?

True, the willingness to fulfill the plan and purpose of God for our lives will not be without humiliation and persecution, but let’s all take encouragement and strength from the believers in Smyrna. It is no doubt

distressing, yet we must press on. Just as Christ said to the church in Smyrna, He is saying this today, “ ...He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Revelation 2:11). Will we overcome? Yes, our earnest cry should be, “With His grace and help, we *will* overcome!”

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

“And to the angel of the church in Per’ga-mos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Sa’tan’s seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein An’ti-pas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Sa’tan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Ba’laam, who taught Ba’lac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Is’ra-el, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nic-o-la’i-tanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Revelation 2:12-17).

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Like the assembly in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos also suffered persecution and many were undoubtedly tried for their belief in the Lord. But unlike the Christians in Smyrna, the believers in Pergamos were not holding sound doctrine. A group of imposters had infiltrated their fellowship and many were led astray. The diabolical error was due to “the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel... ” and “the doctrine of the Nic-o-la’i-tanes” (Revelation

2:14-15). It is generally agreed upon that the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of Nicolaitanes is synonymous. Because of this, it is of tremendous help and value if you are familiar with the story of Balaam in Numbers Chapters 22 to 25. Very briefly, it is basically about “spiritual adultery and fornication”. It records for us about how Balaam, a prophet of God, was tempted by King Balak to curse the people of Israel as they were about to cross the River Jordan into the Promised Land. However, on every occasion when Balaam was about to curse Israel from his lips, God intervened and words of blessing would be uttered instead that of cursing. Frustrated with this phenomenon, Balaam proposed to King Balak that he should arrange for the Moabite girls to entice the men of Israel into partaking of immoral and idolatrous feasts. Whenever this occurred, they incurred the fierce anger and the wrath of God and twenty four thousand individuals died as a consequence. (You may read Numbers 25:1-9).

What Balaam was to ancient Israel, the Nicolaitanes were to the congregation in Pergamos. This spiritual application is in no wise removed in parts of the church today; perhaps the scenario is worse- much worse. The seduction and subtlety of spiritual deception continues to confront the church in an ever-increasing proportion. One of the most fallacious rationalizations amongst some Christians today is, “We must achieve unity in the church at any cost!”

The truth is, “Unity should not be at the expense of doctrinal purity and truth. Ephesians 4:15 tells us, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ”. While it is possible that there are Christians who are so zealous for the truth that they have developed a critical and harsh spirit, we have also met those who are so “loving” in their approach that they have become indifferent to the truth. Beloved, I believe we can speak the truth and yet maintain a spirit of love and meekness. To begin with, the underlying motivation of our hearts

should be love, and it is this love that compels us to uphold the truth by standing against errors. Unfortunately, there are times when we can be misunderstood in doing so; but as we endeavour to hold the truth in love, and love others in the truth of God's Word, we "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

As with the previous churches, Christ's appeal closes out with these words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*" (Revelation 2:17).

THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

"And unto the angel of the church in Thy-a-ti'ra write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jez'e-bel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thy-a-ti'ra, as many as have not this doctrine, and which hath not know the depths of Sa'tan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the

nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 2:18-29).

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The letter of Christ to the church in Thyatira commences with a revelation of Himself as “the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass” (Revelation 2:18). The import of this was to remind this particular church of His all-consuming holiness which burned with righteous indignation against all sin and wickedness. While the church in Thyatira was manifesting the Christian graces of charity (love), service, faith and patience, the fruits of holiness were, however, not found in them. Because of this, the Master had to rebuke them in these terms, “...I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jez’e-bel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols”.

In 1 Kings chapters 16 to 19, we see Jezebel as an idolatrous queen who incorporated Baal worship into the religious practices of Israel. As a manner of speaking, this same spirit of falsehood was at work in the midst of the church in Thyatira. What application can we draw today? I believe 1 John 4:1-4 is the lesson we must take heed and it reads, “BELOVED, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Je’sus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Je’sus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”. You see, we are living in a time

where certain individuals will claim that they are of God or of Christ when in reality, they are ravening wolves in sheep's clothings. Because of the possibility of false teachers deceiving the flock, it becomes imperative that all believers should "try the spirits" (according to 1 John 4:1-6) and "observe the fruits" (according to Matthew 7:15-23) before accepting any teachings and works as genuine. Yes, the church is not immune to false doctrines and the only hope of protection is to be discerning as well as to "rightly divide the word of truth" (according to 2 Timothy 2:15). Furthermore, the desire for holiness (not artificial and legalistic rules and orders) should be the hallmark of every solitary child of God.

Like in the other cases, we note that Christ concludes His letter with a powerful promise, saying, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations ... And I will give him the morning star" (Revelation 2:26; 28).

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

"AND unto the angel of the church in Sar'dis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sar'dis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment: and I will blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an

ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 3:1-6).

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In this letter Christ confronted the church with the reality of its “deadness”. This can be attributed to the absence of the flow of the Holy Spirit. Herein, we are specifically told that the church had “a name that thou livest, and art dead”. Sounds like a paradox? Actually, it can be explained thus: A church may have an impressive number of activities, organizations and programs, but if the Holy Spirit is not allowed to move and operate there, then it is no different from a social institution. Dr. Vance Havner has often expressed the tendency of spiritual ministries undergoing four phases: a man, a movement, a machine, and then a monument. The assembly in Sardis was at the threshold of the “monument” stage and oh, how they needed a message from Christ!

Similarly, there are also too many “respectable” churches that need a trumpet call from the Master today. In terms of outward appearances, they are extremely pretty but our Lord alone knows the inner decay that has already set in. Another problem is what I would identify as “spiritual pride” or if you prefer, “living on past glory”. Church history has the evidence to attest how former “great denominations” have fallen (spiritually) because of either gaining “social acceptance” or “fighting the move of the Holy Spirit”.

Beloved, what about your church? Is it holding the Head (Christ the Lord) in reverence and worship? I pray our churches will not have “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof... ” (2 Timothy 3:5).

Alright, the counsel of the Lord to the faithful remnant is as follows, “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain... ” (Revelation 3:2). This is the hope for the church in need of revival! This is the answer for your spiritual dryness!

THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

“And to the angel of the church in Phil-a-del’phi-a write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of Da’vid, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and he that shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Sa’tan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Je-ru’sa-lem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 3:7-13).

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Other than the church in Smyrna, which received unrestricted commendation; the church in Philadelphia also received the approval of Christ. The key message of Christ directed to this congregation can be found in these words, “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8). Being strategically located, Philadelphia has tremendous opportunities for evangelism and witness. Of course, it is even more important to realize the supreme authority and power of Christ, who has “the key of Da’vid, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and he that shutteth, and no man

openeth” (Revelation 3:7). In other words, there is a need of assurance and reminder for the believers there that Christ is in control and that they should not allow any natural circumstances to overwhelm them. Perhaps, we need to first examine why Christ said that this church had “a little strength” lest there be any misrepresentation of the purpose of His message to them.

Firstly, it appears that this church was not a large or influential church. In the natural realm, this would imply that they could rationalize and say that “they were too weak to evangelize and they might just as well “sit around” in this task”. Moreover, there was also the opposition of the Jewish people as well as impending threat of tribulation, seemingly giving them every reason to fear and not move on. Fortunately, this is not how God operates though! In the eyes of the Spirit, accompanied by faith, Christ would have them know that whenever He calls, He enables and equips. Hence, if Christ alone holds the key of authority, He will see to it that the church will accomplish that which He had purposed. Can we learn something from them for our day? I must give a resounding “Yes!”

One of the greatest thing we can learn is that as His Word declares that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations... ” (Matthew 24:14), there is now a possibility that for the first time in all history, we could see the fulfillment of the evangelization of the world. I can almost hear the burden and the cry of some missionaries, evangelists and pastors. But this is not enough! When Christ gave the Great Commission, He did not give it to a mere a selected few, He gave it to the whole church. Souls are hanging in the balance today and can we afford to see them slip into eternal hell without the light of the gospel? Beloved, I think you know the answer!

THE CHURCH OF LAODICEANS

“And unto the angel of the church of the La-od-i-ce’ans write; These things saith the A-men’, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 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. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 3:14-22).

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We now come to the last of the seven churches of Asia, the church of the Laodiceans. According to Christ, the Laodicean church was a complacent, self-satisfied and self-sufficient one. Worst of all, they even lifted up their spiritual pride (the worst pride of all) and boasted, in essence, “We have need of nothing!” But Christ is not deceived or mocked. He is able to look into the inner recesses of man’s spiritual condition just as He did with the Laodicean believers, saying, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm,

and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

Strangely enough, we may wonder why Christ “preferred an individual to be cold rather than lukewarm”. This is perhaps, not too difficult to explain: Liken to a love relationship between a man and a woman, their love must either be “hot” enough for them to want to commit themselves in marriage or else they might as well decide that they should not enter into marriage after all (if they are “cold” in their commitment while they are still friends in the first place). There is no place for “lukewarm” or half-hearted commitment in marriage!

Next, we note that the church was blind to the reality of its condition. They were wearing spiritual masks and were not walking true and honest before God for had they been, they would have readily confess their sins and then experience the full blessings of the communion and fellowship with Christ. Are you ready for this? Christ *outside* the church, trying to get in!

Well, if Christ is standing “at the door” (according to Revelation 3:20), it implies that there is a possibility of an individual or even church to push Him out of the epicentre of his/her or its existence. Sadly, when this is the case, spiritual disaster always follows. I am convinced that the church today must rediscover the preeminence of Christ. That Christ is the Head and the Commander-in-chief; we are only His earthen vessels. Our churches are nothing without Him. Our ministries’ doom to failure apart from Him. Most of all, our relationship with Him would be presumptuous if He is not first place in our lives.

Just as Christ stood and knocked at the hearts of individuals in the church of Laodicea, He is knocking at the door of our hearts today. He is making an appeal, He is making an invitation. Listen to these words again, “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. To him

that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 3:20-22).

There was room at the cross for you on the day you accepted God’s plan of salvation, but now, it seems most strange to even begin to ask this, “Is there room in your heart for Christ?”

May not only believers on the individual level hear the voice of Christ, but the church on the corporate level too. You play your part, as He enables, and you can make a difference in your church!

III. WISE MASTER-BUILDERS

“I have planted, A-pol’los watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, *ye are* God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Je’sus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath build thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned,

he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:6-15).

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For all of us who have been entrusted by God with works of ministry and service in whatever measure, it would do well to remember that “neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7). In other words, *our* ministries are but a part of the overall work of God worldwide- and all of us are inseparably intertwined. Moreover, we should be overwhelmed by the multiplied thousands of God’s servants who went before us, laboured and stood the test of faith- and their foundation was upon the Word of God.

Who are we then? We are nothing but pieces of clay. And whenever we are used in some small ways, it is because of the great grace and mercy of God- and we owe it all to Calvary! Listen to what the Word declares, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Je’sus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

In the world’s system, there is a temptation to compare one with another. But when it comes to spiritual things, is this God’s rule of measure? The answer is no! If we must really see ourselves, it is only in Christ and His Word, not others. In the Body of Christ, it implies that we are not to compete with fellow believers in any spiritual assignment, but to complement each other.

Also, the Holy Spirit is searching out candidates as “wise master-builders” who will live lives with an eternal perspective. Individuals who are not entangled with the things of this world, but with concern respecting the heart of God.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

“For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:8-12).

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

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Every one of us who name the name of Christ will have to come before the judgment seat of Christ. To be certain, this judgment is not a judgment in the sense of a trial to determine our eternal destiny (that is, to heaven or to hell). As Blood washed, born again believers, we should have no doubt in our hearts and minds that our salvation is already sealed the moment we receive Christ as our Saviour and Lord. However, because the Christian life is a journey and a pilgrimage, there is this whole issue of accountability and stewardship and this is where the judgment seat of Christ will deal with us concerning this.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, we are told that all of our works (as believers) will be assessed (Always remember, this is NOT for salvation, but as a consequence of). As there will be rewards for faithful service (1 Corinthians 3:11-15), it is the responsibility of every one of us to regularly take inventory of our spiritual commitment.

As there are occasions where things will attempt to affect our relationship with God and others, it is imperative that we overcome them or else they will overcome us.

Next, wrong attitudes and motives will be exposed and judged (1 Corinthians 4:1-5, Matthew 6:6-18) if undealt with here.

The other areas of accountability include: idle words (Matthew 12:34-37), doctrine (James 3:1), quality and fruits of Christian life and talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehend of Christ Je’sus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Je’sus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

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For a closer study on the subject of crowns and rewards, you may want to turn to the following verses of scripture:

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| * THE VICTOR’S CROWN | 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 |
| * CROWN OF REJOICING (Soulwinners crown) | 1 Thessalonians 2:19 |
| * CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS | 2 Timothy 4:8 |
| * CROWN OF LIFE | James 1:12 |
| * CROWN OF GLORY | 1 Peter 5:4 |
| * CROWN OF GOLD | Revelation 4:4 |
| * THE OVERCOMER’S REWARD | Revelation 2 and 3 |

THE MIND OF CHRIST

“*Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Je’sus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Je’sus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Je’sus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:3-11).

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9).

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The Christ who “emptied” Himself is one of the most important and remarkable lessons for all believers. Referred to as “the kenosis of Christ”, the Greek word *kenoo* means “to empty out, to drain”. In this age where “self-esteem” is highly-promoted (even in the church), I really how much have we departed from the clear teachings and experience of our Master and Redeemer? Remember, we are talking about a Christ who had every right to be equal with God from all eternity and for all eternity (You may read John 1:1-2 and Hebrews 1:8). We are talking about a Christ who “thought it NOT robbery to be equal with God”, yet chose to make “himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant... ” (Philippians 2:6-7). This passage cannot simply be passed over lightly or quickly when

we consider the magnitude of the price Christ paid in “emptying” Himself. Alright, even though Christ lost the *expression* of His deity on earth, He NEVER lost the *possession* of that deity. We are told that He is God manifest in the flesh during His life here (You may read Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-25, John 1:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:16). As precious and wonderful humility is, it must be noted that it cannot be learnt from the classroom or the textbook whatsoever. It can only come through *experience* in the Christian life- and a difficult and painful one at that.

Do we realize that the more we live for God, the greater the temptation there is to take pride in *our* spiritual accomplishments and victories? And as spiritual pride is so subtle, there lies the inherent danger that confronts all of us. Hence, we believe that maintaining a broken and teachable spirit is at least one way where we can overcome the ungodliness of this “spirit of Lucifer”. Also, another characteristic the Holy Spirit desires to bring out in us is that of “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). This does not, however, mean that we are to submit to certain false doctrines that some may propagate in the church. It certainly does not mean that we are to “lord it over” someone else either. What it does mean is that we are to uphold fellow believers in the spirit of love and meekness. Even when we are absolutely certain that we are correct in certain issues, we should not rebuke the others in the spirit of criticism or judgment- BUT in love and IN THE FEAR OF GOD. This attitude, we believe, is the first step in leading us to having “the mind of Christ”, the virtue of humility.

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ATTENTION, FRIEND: THIS IS GOOD NEWS!

Dear Friend,

We want to take this opportunity to show you God's plan of salvation, according to the Bible. We believe the Bible is the inspired and only infallible and authoritative written Word of God.

If you are not a Christian and you read this, here's an appeal for you to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. To be included in this invitation, you must have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The choice is yours. If you say "yes" to Jesus, here's what you must do,

Admit the fact that you are a sinner, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23);

Be willing to repent from disobedience and rebellion against God, "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3);

Believe that Jesus is your only Saviour, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16);

Confess, trust and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Please pray this prayer and do mean it with all of your heart:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I now recognize that I am a sinner and I am in need of salvation. I accept the sacrifice You paid for me on the cross of Calvary and I allow Your precious shed blood to cleanse me. I now surrender myself to You and invite You to be my Lord and Saviour. Please come into my heart. Take full control of my life and help me to live and serve You from this moment forward. I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen."

If you prayed this prayer in all sincerity, you are now a child of God. We encourage you to find fellowship in a Bible-believing, Spirit-filled church and obtain a copy of the Bible and that you read it diligently so that you will be the kind of Christian God wants you to be.



"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth" (Isaiah 52:7).

Jonathan Heng was born in Singapore. He was born again at the age of fourteen and baptized in the Holy Spirit two years later. Since then, the calling of God for ministry has been upon his life.

Jonathan served in the ministry of helps and mercy in his high school days and at the age of eighteen, began moving in the exhortation of God's Word and writing onto the printed page. He also communicates on audio/visual music and teaching materials, and composes psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Birthed out of Jonathan's own personal struggles and desperate cry and need for more of Him, it is his prayer that his ministry will encourage hearts to a life of repentance, refreshing, restoration, and revival in the Holy Spirit. Here's an example of a statement he has made reflecting his desire to see people's relationship with the Lord and one another in the Kingdom set on fire: "It is my prayer that the preaching of God's Word will propel and prepare people to practise powerful principles of permanent partnership with a passionate pursuit".

One aspect of his vision is to see lives being touched by the Word of God delivered under the anointing of the Holy Spirit through applied arts, literature, audio/visual mass media (music and teaching) and Information Technology in subservient to the local church, "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Ephesians 3:21).