



COUNSEL

SPRING & SUMMER 2014

*The Righteous Judge
What We Ought To Do
and more*

What Is In Thy Hand?

This was the Lord's question to His reluctant servant Moses.¹ What was in his hand? A rod. It seemed an ordinary thing to Moses. He was likely familiar with it and it undoubtedly had served him well. But this ordinary rod became something quite extraordinary. It proved to demonstrate the supremacy of the God Moses served. It was soon to be called 'the rod of God'²

When the Lord called Moses to be His spokesman and to lead the nation out from Egypt it was based on God's careful preparation of His servant for the task. Moses' reluctance and unbelief provoked the anger of the Lord. The fearful servant could not see that God had anticipated everything and knew precisely what He was doing in calling Moses to the task at hand.

It is difficult to be critical of Moses because he demonstrates an all too common trait found in many of us. Moses was overwhelmed at the immensity of God's call to him. He immediately felt his own inadequacies and weakness. And that in itself is a good thing. However Moses was only looking inward but he failed to look upward. He was not called because of some particular natural ability. He was called because God had and would yet do a mighty work through His servant. But everything that Moses needed would be provided by the Lord.

The Lord has continued to work that way in moving His purposes forward. He uses men and women who have nothing naturally to contribute. He will equip and prepare them Himself to accomplish the task. The seemingly humble rod that appeared so

1. Exodus 4:2
2. Exodus 4:20

common became the instrument that demonstrated God's power.

But Moses learned another aspect of how God works. You may recall how the Lord commanded Moses to put his hand into his cloak and pull it out again. It became full of leprosy. He put his hand again into his cloak and it was clean.³

Not only did Moses learn God's power would be seen through the rod, he learned that the power did not come from himself. Leprosy is often a picture of sin in the Bible. And Moses learned a lesson that Paul would later put this way, 'For I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing;....⁴ The flesh remains in all of us until we get to heaven. It never improves and is ugly right to the end. Every one who serves the Lord needs to know this. It is folly to think the flesh can either accomplish anything or will improve or cease to be a danger because of our spirituality. The flesh can no longer control, but it will make every effort to try.

What is your hand today? What circumstance or ability has the Lord developed in your life that He wants to use? What daunting task has come to mind that overwhelms you and is far beyond your own ability? The Lord uses men and women who have no confidence in self and every confidence in Him. Do you feel inadequate, a sense of failure, conscious of your own ugly flesh? After looking inward, look outward and upward.

Kittie L. Suffield reminds of this timeless truth in her hymn :

*In the harvest field now ripened
There's a work for all to do;
Hark! the voice of God is calling
To the harvest calling you.*

3. Exodus 4:6, 7
4. Romans 7:18

*Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame.
There's a crown—and you can win it,
If you go in Jesus' Name.*

*In the mad rush of the broad way,
In the hurry and the strife,
Tell of Jesus' love and mercy,
Give to them the Word of Life.*

*Does the place you're called to labor
Seem too small and little known?
It is great if God is in it,
And He'll not forget His own.*

*Are you laid aside from service,
Body worn from toil and care?
You can still be in the battle,
In the sacred place of prayer.*

*When the conflict here is ended
And our race on earth is run,
He will say, if we are faithful,
"Welcome home, My child—well done!"*

This was the secret of Moses work for God. Yes, he had some missteps along the way. He was slow in faith, but God was patient and he was used in a big way. Likewise we too follow imperfectly. There will be failures of faith, but even these prove to be stepping stones to greater faith.

What is in thine hand?
*"And there arose not a prophet since
in Israel like unto Moses, whom the
Lord knew face to face, in all the
signs and the wonders which the
Lord sent him to do in the land of
Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his
servants, and to all his land, and in
all that mighty hand, and in all the
great terror which Moses showed in
the sight of all Israel."⁵*

5. Deuteronomy 34:10-12

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COUNSEL

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*Begin the day with God,
Kneel down to Him in prayer;
Lift up thy heart to His abode,
And seek His love to share.*

*Open the Book of God,
And read a portion there;
That is may hallow all thy thoughts
And sweeten all thy care.*

*Go through the day with God,
Whate'er thy work may be;
Where'er thou art, at home, abroad,
He still is near to thee.*

Rules for
Daily Life

*Converse in mind with God,
Thy spirit heavenward raise;
Acknowledge every good bestowed,
And offer grateful praise.*

*Conclude thy day with God,
Thy sins to Him confess;
Trust in the Lord's atoning blood,
And plead His righteousness.*

*Lie down at night with God,
Who gives His servants sleep,
And while the hours of night pass by
He will thee guard and keep.*

-Author Unknown

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THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25).

In the 18th chapter of Genesis we find these remarkable words spoken by Abraham to Jehovah, the Self-Existent One: *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* (Gen. 18:25). God having taken Abraham into His confidence concerning his plans for Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham then pleads with God as to whether He will spare the righteous from the fate of the wicked. Note that Abraham speaks not just of physical death (*to slay the righteous with the wicked*) but also the prospect of eternal death (*that the righteous should be as the wicked*). He says, in effect, God forbid that you should do this thing (treat the wicked and the righteous alike), while speaking to very God Himself, so convinced is he of the righteousness of Jehovah. Undoubtedly, Abraham was thinking of his nephew Lot and his family. Yet his prayer was based on the character of God Himself. The most powerful examples of prayer in scripture follow this pattern

of a man in fellowship with God appealing to God’s holy and righteous character and words as the basis for his request. (Psa. 5; Neh. 1:4-11; Dan 9:4-19; Ex. 32:11-14).

Who is it that shall be the Judge of all the earth? The word judge used here means to pronounce sentence (for or against); by implication to vindicate or punish, according to Strong’s concordance. It is found 203 times in the Old Testament but as a title used only here. In Acts 17:31 Paul, preaching at Mars Hill, says *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”* The Judge of all the earth is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And how shall he judge? Revelation 19:11 tells us how He will judge: *“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.”*

Before we look at the perfections

of God as Judge, it is instructive to note the failure of man in this area, due either to sinfulness or the weakness of the flesh.

Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, recognized that the burden of judging the children of Israel was too much for one man. *“For this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone,”* he said in Ex 18:18. Moses as judge reveals man’s lack of strength and limited patience.

In 1 Samuel 8 we read *“And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.”* But *“his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment”* resulting in the peoples’ shameful request *“now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”* Samuel as judge failed because of nepotism.

Saul as judge failed through disobedience (1 Sam 13:13). David as judge failed through hypocrisy (2 Sam 12:5). Solomon as judge failed through idolatry (1 Kings 11:4). Rehoboam as judge failed through arrogance (1 Kings 12:13).

In the time of our Lord, Herod as judge failed through anger (Matthew 2:16). Pilate as judge failed by condemning an innocent man (Mat 27:23).

Man’s record is one of continuous failure. But oh, how the love of God makes provision. When the cry of Malachi 2:17 is *“where is the Lord of judgment?”* the glorious response is *“the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple... behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.”* (Malachi 3:1). Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the perfect judge.

His judgment is righteous and sure. We can safely trust Him to pronounce innocence and guilt. He will deliver the righteous and condemn the guilty. His verdict and sentence will be pure. Yes, *“the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.”* (Psalm 19:9).

The Lord Jesus Christ is qualified to act as the Judge of all the Earth because of His omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and His everlasting life.

His omniscience: *“Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?”* (Isaiah 40:13, 14). *“In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* (Col. 2:3). The Lord Jesus Christ has perfect knowledge. There is nothing He does not know. Every thought, every word, every motive, every act or omission, of every person who ever lived or will live is known to Him. There is no possibility that He will not take into account everything before he renders a verdict.

His omnipotence: *“The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself”*

(Psalm 93:1). *“Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength”* (Isaiah 26:4). *“And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.”* (Rev 12:10). Not even Satan can withstand the mighty power of God, as the last verse shows. No nation, no alliance of nations, no power in the earth or under the earth or in heaven can prevent the judgments of God from being carried out. He speaks, and it happens. He decides, and it is done. He sentences, and whatever he decrees shall come to pass.

7:16). *“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”* (Heb. 7:25). The judgments of the Lord Jesus Christ will never change. Time will never have an impact on His words, His verdicts or His law. The One Who is the same, *“yesterday, today and forever,”* will never change His mind, never rewrite an opinion, never have second thoughts.

Christian, are you sorrowing over a relative or friend you fear does not know Christ? Are you weary and apprehensive over the failures in your life? Does the lawlessness of this present world lead to despair? Is sickness and pain causing you

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS QUALIFIED TO ACT AS THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH BECAUSE OF HIS OMNISCIENCE, OMNIPOTENCE, OMNIPRESENCE AND HIS EVERLASTING LIFE.

His omnipresence: *“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”* (2 Chron. 16:9). *“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy.”* (Isa. 57:15). Nothing is hidden from the Lord. There is no place in the universe that is not under His watchful eye. The vast distances of space, the inconceivable heights and depths of His creation, are inhabited by the One in Whom all things consist.

His everlasting life: *“Who only hath immortality”* (1 Tim. 6:16). *“Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.”* (Heb.

to question God’s ways? Oh the comfort of these words: *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”*

We have a Judge whose judgments are true and righteous altogether! He will never judge wrongly. Never mete out a sentence too harsh or too lenient. Never allow a Christian to enter hell. Never allow a sinner to enter Heaven. Never fail to punish the wicked. When He considers our lives, he will do it as perfect man and holy God. We cannot have a more righteous judge. We cannot ask for a more sympathetic Advocate.

What a joy to know that it is our loving Saviour and Lord Jesus who is the Judge and that He shall do all things right.



ISAIAH 53:7-9

God's Servant Will Be Submissive

PART 4 OF 5

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the fourth stanza of this servant song when Philip met him. He admitted that he didn't understand what he was reading and "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). This is a prophecy about the Lord Jesus and more specifically about His attitude to His sufferings. In one sense, men were responsible for those sufferings: He was despised and rejected (v3), wounded and bruised (v5), oppressed and afflicted (v7) at the hands of men. In another sense God did it: "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (v6). But the focus in this stanza is that through it all the Lord Jesus submitted to what was happening without any resistance or retaliation.

1. His Trial: 53:7

At His trials before Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod, He was "oppressed and afflicted". These men had a measure of authority and misused it as they bullied the prisoner before them, put Him down and humiliated Him.

However, the focus is not on what they did to Him but on how He responded and twice we read that "He opened not His mouth". Of course, He did say some things. When the high priest asked a direct question about

whether He was the Christ, the Son of God, He didn't avoid it: "It is as You say" (Matthew 27:11). Similarly, when Pilate asked if He was the king of the Jews, Jesus replied, "It is as You say" (Mark 15:2).

He did not try to defend Himself

But He did not try to vindicate Himself or plead His innocence. Caiaphas said, "Do you answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" The charges were absurd, the testimony was weak and He could have responded. "But Jesus kept silent" (Matthew 26:62-63).

"And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him, 'Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?' But He answered Him not one word, so that the governor marvelled greatly." (Matthew 27:12-14). John adds that Pilate "said to Him, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave Him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, 'Are You not speaking to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?'" Then Jesus spoke up, not in His own defence, but boldly to set the record straight, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:9-11).

Pilate sent Him to Herod and Herod was glad, hoping to see some miracle. "Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9).

He did not seek revenge

"He was led as a lamb to the slaughter." John the Baptist may have had this text in mind when he saw the Lord Jesus coming towards him and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We cannot know the thoughts that were passing through John's mind. He had knowledge of various passages in the Old Testament and may have seen the Lord Jesus, for example, as the answer to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb?" (Genesis 22:7); or as the realization of the Passover type (Exodus 12); and possibly also as the fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah 53.

A lamb is docile and submissive. Far from seeking revenge, the Lord Jesus prayed for those who killed Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). His prayer wasn't a general request for forgiveness but a specific request with respect to a specific sin. They were crucifying Him. He in effect prays, "Father, do not execute Your judgment upon them for what they are doing. Hold back Your judgement.

Forgive them for their part in My death."

Joseph's brothers were callous and cruel towards him and, when they came to Egypt, he was in a position to take revenge. But he never did. Neither did he seek to get back at Potiphar's wife. When she heard about the young Hebrew who had been promoted at the court of Pharaoh she may have trembled, but she needn't have feared. There were no thoughts of vengeance on his part. Nor were there with the Lord Jesus:

2. His crucifixion: 53:8

No justice

There is some uncertainty about how to translate the opening statement of v8. Some translations render it, "By oppression and judgement He was taken away." The point would then be that the servant was the victim of a grave miscarriage of justice. That interpretation is suggested in Luke's quotation: "In His humiliation His justice (or His claim for justice) was taken away" (Acts 8:33). As in the case of Joseph when Potiphar's wife levelled her false accusations against him, there was no justice and no fair trial. Before Caiaphas the Lord Jesus acknowledged that He was the Christ the Son of God and the high priest tore his garments and asked, "What do you think?" "They answered and said, 'He is deserving of death.'" (Matthew 27:66). Was that a crime which deserved death? The charges were invalid, the testimony unreliable, and the sentence altogether inappropriate.

No understanding

The statement that follows is difficult too. The NIV suggests that it refers to His having no offspring: "Who can speak of His descendants?" To die without children was considered a great shame and He had nothing to show in terms of descendants. If that is what is meant, then it is interesting that v10 tells us, "He shall see His seed." In other words He does have offspring, although not in a physical sense!

The ASV and RSV render it something like this, "As for His generation, who among them considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living..." We've seen in the previous stanzas that the people of Israel did not understand what was going on. In fact neither did the disciples. It was after His death and resurrection that they began to understand that "for the transgressions of My people He was stricken."

Again this verse suggests that on the part of the Lord Jesus there was submission: "He was taken..." He didn't have to submit, but He allowed them to take Him:

The officers came into the garden and "took Jesus and bound Him" (John 18:12). When He uttered those majestic words, "I am," they fell helpless before Him. Peter drew his sword and struck the high priest's servant but the Lord Jesus would have none of that.

Pilate was frustrated at the proceedings, at the absurdity of the charges and at the refusal of the accused to cooperate. And he "took Jesus and scourged Him" (John 19:1). He said to Pilate, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11).

Pilate handed Him over to be crucified and the soldiers "took Jesus and led Him away" (John 19:16). He had said, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself;" (John 10:18).

In all of these situations, He could have resisted, but He allowed them to take Him.

3. His burial: 53:9

This verse can be read in two ways:

Contrasting statements – "...BUT with the rich in His death BECAUSE He had done..."

There were two criminals crucified with the Lord Jesus and it was intended that He be buried with them in a common grave, but God overruled. Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus and buried Him

in a tomb in which no dead body had previously been laid. Contrary to the intentions of those who killed Him, He was with the rich in His burial. And that was appropriate "because He had done no violence..."

That may be the correct interpretation, but it is interesting that all four Gospel writers describe the burial of the Lord Jesus but not one of them refers to Isaiah 53:9 having been fulfilled when Joseph buried the body of Jesus. The other possible reading may, therefore, be better.

Parallel statements – "...AND with the rich in His death THOUGH He had done..."

Oftentimes in Scripture the rich have obtained their wealth by wicked means and trust in their wealth rather than in God. Therefore, the rich represent those who are opposed to God. The intention of the executioners was to associate Him in His death with those who were the enemies of God, the wicked and the rich, in spite of the fact that He did not deserve to be identified with them: "though He had done no violence..."

"Nor was any deceit in His mouth." Peter quotes the last statement of this verse and again it is in connection with the submission of the Lord Jesus. He talks about His sufferings and points out that His attitude towards them is an example to us, "What credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." (1 Peter 2:20-23).



The Virgin Birth

Non-belief in the virgin birth leaves us with serious consequences as to who the person of Christ is. If His life as recorded in the Gospels and referred to in the Epistles is miraculous and His exit from death also miraculous then belief in the virgin birth must be a reality. Sinlessness demands a miraculous origin.

“The angel answered and said unto her (Mary), The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the son of God” (Luke 1:35).

This conception by the Holy Spirit is only the beginning of a series of unexplainable human facts that lasted over a period of thirty years.

At the dawn of human life and the tragic consequences of the fall of man came a remarkable prophetic statement by the Creator. *“I will put enmity between thee (Satan) and the woman (Eve) between thy seed and HER seed...”* (Genesis 3:15). The normal course of generation is through the seed of the man, but it is quite clear from Matthew’s account of the angel’s visitation to Joseph that the conception of his betrothed had already taken place. There is no way that an earthly human, however noble, could father the eternal Son of God. Hence his devastation at the news that the one he loved and trusted was expecting a child caused a distraught Joseph to seek a quiet divorce. However all changed when the angel in a dream told him: *“Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that*

which IS (already) conceived in her IS of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 1:20).

This is a most remarkable and fundamental statement of the saintly state of motherhood and the sanctity of marriage. It was necessary that it should be a virgin birth, but that could not take place until they were married! This sets the divine seal on a man and a woman union before the birth of a child.

The Incarnation of the Son of God speaks also of the original creation of the first Adam. Created in the image of God he, nevertheless, became the head of a fallen race. This does not in any way affect the Creator’s original design and neither before or after was there a more noble creation. Now, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth calls Jesus, Son of God, the “Last Adam” eternally in human form.

Furthermore, the angel when explaining to the virgin girl that the word “holy” would characterise this child. No one before Him or since has been born “holy” and certainly no one ever born, apart from this One has been called “Son of God” That speaks of preexistence. God is eternal. His Fatherhood is equally eternal. If there is an eternal Father then the son MUST be eternal. We must remember that the full mystery of the birth of this One was not revealed prior to (by the Jewish prophets and now the angel) or at His birth. His mother Mary was not given the full story. The whole truth, including preexistence would be manifested in His life, work, claims, death, resurrection, ascension, present ministry and coming again

would be expanded upon and corroborate His own statement *“I came out (from beside – equality of deity) from the father, and am come into the world, again I leave the world and go unto the Father”* (John 16:28).

The oft repeated and well known trio of confirmation of the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus is reserved to His apostles: *“He DID no sin...”* (1 Peter 2:22); *“He KNEW no sin...”* (2 Corinthians 5:21); *“IN HIM WAS no sin...”* (John 3:5). His very nature, mind set and actions are untainted, untarnished and unspotted! Well might Pilate say *“I find no fault in this man!”* Belief in the absolute perfection of this One and belief in His miraculous conception stand or fall together. To believe that in the smallest degree that the “holiness” of Jesus was not an inseparable part of His nature would condemn Him as a sinner in need of regeneration. In another context the apostle Paul’s denial is none too strong: **GOD FORBID!**

It is exhilarating to contemplate that after completing the work of redemption that He had come to accomplish He now shares in that body, glorified, a place at His Father’s right hand in Majesty in the heavens. And wonderful too, it is that in a coming day the redeemed people of all ages will share in that glory!

I close this brief study of a great and undeniable truth by quoting the late Professor James Orr: *“A sinless man is as much a miracle in a moral world as the virgin birth is a miracle in the natural world.”*

DREW CRAIG | Belfast, Northern Ireland



The Glories Of Christ: His Incarnate Glories

In our previous study we considered the pre-incarnate glories of Christ. Those glories that He had with the Father before the world was. Little is revealed to us of this glory, but even as we looked *“through a glass darkly,”* we felt provoked to worship and praise. In this study, we will consider the glories of Christ associated with His humanity.

THE INCARNATE GLORIES OF CHRIST HIS GODHEAD GLORY

One of the doctrinal errors that has afflicted the Church teaches that in coming into humanity, Christ surrendered His deity. This, of course, is absolutely false. The incarnation was not a subtraction from His person, but an addition to it. He had always been the eternal Son of God, but now in incarnation He became something that he had not been before: “Son of Man.” Perhaps an appeal to the book of Numbers would help to illustrate our point. The Ark was the symbol of the presence of God in the midst of His people, and when the Tabernacle was pitched, it was enshrined in the Holy of Holies, behind the veil, surrounded by the Shekinah glory where men were forbidden to enter upon threat of death. When the time came for Israel to strike camp, the priests went into the Holy Place and they took down the curtain - the veil - that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, and they draped it over the Ark. Following this it was covered in badger’s skins, and then with a cloth of blue. The Levites were then brought in to carry the Ark across the wilderness. So when the Ark was in transit, all that men saw was the cloth of blue. But behind the coverings, the Ark was the very same that dwelt in the unsullied light of the presence of God in

the Holy of Holies. So it is with Christ. He remained what He ever had been in the pre-incarnate state, but His glory was now veiled in His flesh. As the Ark moved among men, there was nothing unique about it in appearance, so with Christ. The Lord had no halo round His head, or garments that glowed, nor did He assume any outward appearance of being other than man. However, like the Ark’s covering of blue, the Lord Jesus always displayed his heavenly character whilst here among men. He belonged to another sphere, and to it He would soon return. Men spoke about Him as “Joseph the carpenter’s son.” But behind the outward veil of His flesh, absolute deity was enshrined. With the hymn writer we can say with wonder:

*Christ by highest heaven adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the virgin’s womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate deity.*

Now as to the manifestation of His Glory during his sojourn here below, it is John who reminds us

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14). The question naturally arises as to when, how and where the Glory of Christ was seen? We will consider the incarnate glories of the Lord Jesus in three separate spheres: His Personal Glories; His Official Glories; and His Moral Glories.

HIS MORAL GLORY

Holy

The angel speaking to Mary concerning the birth of the child said *“...the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the*

power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35). This is one of the unique glories that belonged to Christ in humanity – He was holy. There was a time when Adam was innocent, but we never read about Adam being holy in his nature and character. Here we are reminded that the humanity of Christ was different from ours. He had not partaken of Adam’s fallen nature. Unlike ourselves, He was not *“born in sin and shapen in iniquity”* Paul writing to the Corinthians reminds them, *“The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.”* (1 Cor. 15:47). It was not only that He lived a holy life – and He did - but this was an attribute of His pre-incarnate deity, that was present in His incarnation – He was HOLY. The same glory of His holiness that caused the seraphim before the throne to cry *“Holy, Holy, Holy...”* (Isaiah 6:3) was retained in all its fullness when He came into humanity.

Sinless

In the same way that God demanded that the Passover lamb, and all of the Levitical offerings had to be *“without blemish.”* So also it was absolutely essential for the Lord to be sinless, else His death on the Cross would not have been effective. But he was not only holy, He was also sinless. The Lord Jesus was the only human being to cross the stage of time, and never to have sinned.

Witnesses from earth and heaven testify to His sinless character. The Lord Himself said *“And he that sent me is with me:.... for I do always those things that please him.”* (John 8:29). There never was a single moment of deviation from the path of His Father’s will and pleasure. Pilate said *“I find no*

fault in this man." The dying thief said, "This man has done nothing amiss." The centurion standing by the cross said, "Certainly, this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Matthew and Mark add that the centurion also said "Truly this was the Son of God." Paul, the man of intellect writes "who knew no sin." (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter, the man of action writes "He did no sin." (1 Peter. 2:22), and John, the man who lay on Jesus breast, wrote "In Him was no sin." (1 John 3:5).

Impeccable

The sinlessness of Christ is a truth that is unchallenged in evangelical circles. We all recognize that to be our Saviour, and Sacrifice, He needed to be without sin. But the truth of His "impeccability" goes further, and emphasizes that our Lord Jesus was not only sinless, but that he was incapable of sinning - that there was nothing in the Lord Jesus that could respond to the temptations of sin. This is why the writer to the Hebrews wrote, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15) - or more correctly, it should be translated "apart from sin." The Lord Jesus speaking to His disciples said "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." (John 14:30, AV). Another proof of the impeccability of Christ lies in the fact that He was God. To conceive of God being able to sin is reprehensible, and so also with the Lord Jesus.

Some would mock at this truth, saying that He could not have been a genuine man, unless he experienced all that we experience in the way of temptation. We repeat, that the Lord was a real man, but with this difference, He was of a different order and had none of Adam's potential to sin. He was the Lord out of Heaven. The Lord was indeed tempted with all the intensity that Satan could bring to bear, but never from within - as we are - but always from without. Lest we should think that such a temptation was not of any consequence, we are reminded that in the midst of His temptations, angels were sent to strengthen Him in moments of crisis and temptation in His life.

We stand in awe at the manifestation of His moral glory seen in His holy, sinless, and impeccable humanity.

THE GLORIES OF HIS WORKS

The apostle John records the first miracle that the Lord performed in turning water into wine, saying: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory." (John 2:11). Again on the day of Pentecost, Peter speaking to that great multitude of Jews reminded them "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:" (Acts 2:22).

So we learn that His glory was seen in His mighty works. As we read through the Gospels, we see His glory demonstrated in His control over creation, over disease, demons and death. He stilled raging waves, fed multitudes, healed the diseased, cast out demons and raised the dead. All of these manifested His glory as the mighty creator God.

HIS COMPARATIVE GLORIES

As we read through the Gospel records, we discover that the excellence of the glory of Christ is enhanced by comparing Him with other illustrious characters who had a measure of glory in their day.

Greater than Abraham: John 8:53

Listening one day to the claims of Christ, the Jews said, "Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? ..." (John 8:53). The context in which this statement was made had to do with the fact that the Lord Jesus had claimed that those who kept His saying would never see death. The Jews pointed out that Abraham and all the prophets, great men though they had been, were now dead, and they mocked the claim that the Lord made. Later the Lord Jesus also astounded them by saying "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58). Yes, Abraham had been a great man, but a greater than Abraham was here. The Lord had pre-dated Abraham.

Greater than Jacob: John 4:12

Sitting by Sychar's well, the Lord Jesus engaged in conversation with a woman of Samaria. The Lord offers her living water that would slake her thirst forever.

She only knew the well of Sychar, with its traditional link to Jacob, and she says to Him "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?" (John 4:12). Jacob's well could never satisfy, but here was living water that would satisfy the deepest longings of her heart. Of course, Jacob was the father of the nation of Israel, but Christ would introduce blessings that would go far beyond the pale of Israel, and embrace the entire world. Soon she discovered that the one who spoke with her was indeed greater than Jacob, and running into the city in her excitement she cries "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29).

Greater than Solomon: Matt. 12:42

Solomon was one of the wisest men that ever lived on the face of the earth. God had endowed him with this unique gift because he had not sought greatness or glory for himself. His fame became universal, and on one occasion of note, the Queen of Sheba came and visited with him. She was absolutely overcome when she met him and saw the appointment of his house and the way in which his men conducted themselves and the wisdom that he had, and it is recorded that "there was no more spirit left in her." She confessed, "The half was not told me and thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard." (1 Kings 1:7). Later, the Lord Jesus made this statement to the skeptical Pharisees "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." (Mt. 12:42, AV).

The greatness of the Lord Jesus in comparison with Solomon has to do with his wisdom. The apostle Paul writing to the Colossians makes this statement concerning Christ "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2:3) and again "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). We bow our hearts in worship, and confess indeed, that a "Greater than Solomon is here."

HIS OFFICIAL GLORIES

There were three offices that were created by God in the Old Testament.

These were the offices of Prophet, Priest and King. Any who assumed these offices had to be God appointed, and anointed, before he could function.

His Prophetic Office: Greater than Moses

As Moses, that great man of God, looked down the vista of time he made this prophecy: "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;" (Deut. 18:15). We learn from Acts 3:22 that this prophecy referred particularly to Christ and to no other. The writer to the Hebrews endorses this statement when he wrote "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;" (Heb. 1:1-2). Israel had been waiting for centuries for this prophet who would come, and when Christ appeared, and when they saw him feed the five thousand we read they said "... This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." (John 6:14). This was the moment of recognition.

His Priestly Office: Greater than Aaron

Aaron had been the High Priest in Israel, and his posterity had carried the responsibility for this office throughout the centuries. When Christ appeared, the priesthood was in disarray and corrupt to the core. It was but an outward shell of its original glory. But Christ came, and although he was not a priest whilst here upon earth, as the Hebrew epistle reminds us, yet he came and combined in Himself the roles of Offering, Offerer and Priest. The Hebrew writer enlarges upon His priestly office and shows how the His priesthood excelled that of Aaron in its continuity. He writes, "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." (Heb. 7:24). Again we read, "As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." (Heb. 5:6, AV). He also excels Aaron because of the finality of His sacrifice, as we read, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;" (Heb. 10:12, AV).

His Kingly Office

We have already addressed the superlative greatness of Christ compared with Solomon on a personal basis, but he is also greater than any of the greatest kings in an official capacity. We have already seen that Christ in His priesthood is of the order of Melchisedec, and he was one who combined in his person the office of Priest and King. We read in Hebrews, "For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;" (Heb. 7:1, AV). Never before, until we come to Christ, do we find the offices of Priest and King combined in one person. But Christ is both Priest and King. The day is soon to come when His kingly glory and authority will be demonstrated in the same world where he was crucified in shame, and the accolade will ring through the entire universe of God "King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and he shall reign forever and ever."

THE GLORY OF HIS CROSS

The Glory of the Cross-work of the Lord Jesus is far beyond the scope of our brief meditation to touch even the surface of the subject, but we mention a few of the outstanding glories that emanate from His cross.

The Cross and the Glory of the Father

In John chapter seventeen, we are privileged to hear the Lord Jesus praying to His father before going to the Cross, and John records that "Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." (John 17:1). This was the sole preoccupation of the Lord Jesus as he faced the horrors that lay ahead - that He would glorify the Father. No words of self pity, or pleas for deliverance. Only that through it all, He would glorify the Father. Sometimes we become pre-occupied with what the Cross means to us, but here we are reminded of what the Cross meant to the Father. We see Christ here as the anti-typical burnt offering, where there was nothing in it for man, but all was for God. This is the highest form of worship that we can attain to - what Christ meant to the Father. One of the hymns that sing as we gather to break

bread captures this thought as we read "Blessed Lord, our hearts would treasure, all the Father's thoughts of Thee."

The Cross and the Purposes of God

The Cross was the pinnacle to which eternity past looked forward, and the pinnacle to which eternity future will ever look back. We are reminded by Peter on the day of Pentecost, that Calvary was no misfortune, or mistake or miscalculation, but something that emanated from the heart of God in eternity past. Peter said, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:" (Acts 2:23, AV). The Cross was the culmination of Divine purposes from all of eternity.

The Cross and the Fulfilment of all Types and Shadows

For centuries, God had been educating His people regarding the coming Messiah through the medium of type and shadow. In particular, the Levitical offerings were pointing forward to the Cross and the various aspects of Christ's death at Calvary. When the Lord Jesus cried "It is finished," every type and shadow found its fulfillment, because he was the reality - the true substance. The book of Hebrews is devoted to the subject of the excellence of Christ, in comparison with the Levitical system. Whether it be in its leadership, its priesthood, its sacrifices, its covenants, Christ had fulfilled all, and has introduced a better Covenant. As we sometime sing:

In Him the Shadows of the Law, Are fulfilled and now withdraw.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude this brief glimpse of the incarnate glories of Christ, we readily admit that even these have bedazzled our vision and we realize as the hymn writer said:

*The High mysteries of His name,
An angel's grasp transcend,
The Father only, Glorious claim,
The Son can comprehend.
Worthy O Lamb of God art thou,
That every knee to Thee should bow.*



What We Ought To Do

If I had entitled this article “What I ought to do” you might have thought, “If he knows what he ought to do why doesn’t he quit talking about it and just do it?” If I had written “you” instead, some might have decided to bypass this article altogether. But the title reads “we” because both of us need to pay attention to what the Holy Spirit says about our privileges and responsibilities. There are things we should be doing, or doing with greater zeal. So before you turn away, think of this article as a reminder to us both. Peter’s second letter had that character. He was deeply concerned that we not only gain access to the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, but that we have an abundant entrance into it. For that reason he says, “I will always be ready to remind you of these things even though you already know them... to stir you up by way of reminder... (that) you may be able to call these things to mind... stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,” (2 Pet. 1:12-15; 3:1).

Those of us who have embraced the grace of God may think the idea of being under some obligation(s) smacks of legalism, but “the grace of God also teaches us to deny ungodliness... and to live sensibly...” (Titus 2:11, 12). Surely those are things we need to be doing. Only if we go beyond the Word of God and add human rules to its teaching could we be rightly accused of legalism. We will seek to stay within the bounds of Scripture; it says clearly that there are things we ought to be doing and rewards at Christ’s judgment seat depend upon our response.

Think of that word “ought” in our title. We tend to use the word in a trivial way, as in “I ought to send Mary a birthday card, she always sends me one.” But that may not mean we will visit the stationery section in the drug store next time we are out, it merely means sending a card would be a nice thing to do if we could get around to it - when we have time, of course. But next year

we may repeat this ritual repentance. Note that Peter says we need a sincere mind in order to respond to reminders appropriately.

PAYING DEBTS

We must not overlook the fact that “ought” is a contraction, the cramming of two words into one. It thus becomes easier to weaken the strength of any charge given to us. But when the Holy Spirit says we ought to do something, He is not speaking of a mere courtesy but a debt; we “owe it” to do whatever He requires. When people wrong us in some way we may think of what they owe us – an apology. However, if they respond positively to rebuke and repent, the shoe is on the other foot, we owe it to forgive them (Lk. 17:3).

Let us look further at the matter of forgiveness by thinking about the greatest Example: to consider the full repayment of what was due by One who, though rich, became poor in the process. What matchless grace was seen in His life, and what amazing grace was displayed in His death. A fairly recently composed song says: “He paid a debt He did not owe; we owed a debt we could not pay...” That is borne out by Scripture. Speaking for the Messiah, Isaiah says, “I restored that which I took not away” (Ps. 69:4). The forgiveness we receive is based on the price He paid on the Cross.

HOW FAR OUGHT WE TO GO?

Peter once thought the idea that we should be always ready to forgive can be carried too far; he asked if seven times put a cap on it. Our Lord’s reply showed nearly five hundred times would be closer to the mark (Matt. 18: 21, 22). Does not any reluctance on our part to forgive our brethren say that the estimate we have of our past indebtedness is far too low? Can we say we are Christians if not ready to forgive one of our brothers who sins against

us? We owe it to be disposed to grant forgiveness - again and again, even if our patience is sorely tried (Lk. 17:1-4).

If the one asking us to forgive him is genuinely sorry for the way he spoke about us or the way he treated us, he is carrying a burden from which we can deliver him. What would motivate us to do so? I am asking this question while assuming that there are a number of his ways that we find somewhat annoying. They are not sins; we put them down to his personality; he is not our type and his background is different to ours. We speak with each other courteously but that is as far as either of us seems to want to take it. We will only find it difficult to respond to his plea if we have allowed those petty differences to lessen our concern for his welfare. We “owe it” to love each other (1 Jn. 4:11).

How are we to respond when people have treated us as enemies? We ought to love, bless, do good to them, and pray for them (Matt. 12:44), acting this way toward them in the hope that they will repent and not in order that we may be shown to be blameless for the breach in fellowship which has occurred, or to see them “eat crow” and humble themselves. Repentance is the first essential step in their restoration to fellowship with God and with us; that is what should really concern us.

There are other things the Scriptures say we ought to do; none of them beyond our ability as the fruit of the Spirit ripens in us: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control” (Gal. 5:22, 23). And we will freely do what we ought to do if we in whom His perfect love has cast out fear (as in terror) are living in the fear of the Lord (reverential, obedient fear). Joseph, ever ready to forgive his brothers, was motivated by this spirit. It is what is due to Christ by all who say they are His disciples.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES

PART 3



This is the third of four articles examining the seven churches by way of exposition and practical application. All Bible study should have these two elements: *what does the passage mean to those who received it* and *what can I do about it today?* None of us live in any of these cities, our location and circumstances are different but there are lessons for us.

In all of these letters the centrality of the Lord Jesus is highlighted, a position that indicates His concern, cognizance and control. He views the churches and sees past the external to the heart of the matter. He views the various churches as they really are from heaven’s perspective. His concern is seen in that He cares for the consequences of each churches’ situation. He looks to commend what can be commended and also adds words of condemnation and correction where needed. The Lord gives a call to hear and also offers compensation to those who belong to Him

The Lord Jesus, the One in the midst of the seven lamp stands, is the Head of the Church. The lamp stands are interpreted for us in 1:20 as the seven churches. His position also emphasizes the importance of church life, the Lord Jesus is interested in the gatherings of His people as opposed to the worldly things that so often occupy the attention of His own.

The two churches that are the subject of this article are Thyatira and Sardis.

As mentioned in previous articles there are a number of ways to view these letters. The primary approach is to consider what the words and imagery meant to the first century recipients. This involves an understanding of the word meanings, the verb tenses, and the ideas conveyed. There are no short cuts to this type of study as it involves digging for answers, using a dictionary, concordance, other translations and perhaps commentaries. There is also in this process a need for a conscious dependence in the help and guidance of the divine author, the Holy Spirit.

The devotional aspect of the letters is the application to the various ages of the church. There is no “thus says the Lord” to substantiate this perspective. However, as noted in the first article there are three lists of seven in scripture, feasts of Israel, kingdom parables, and seven church letters. This grouping seems to give the history of Israel, the kingdom and the church - the history given in advance.

In this progressive or prophetic view Thyatira would cover a thousand year period starting in the early 500’s with the formation and dominance of the Church of Rome. This period introduced many pagan feasts and concepts into church life. So much of what was visible was corrupt and anti-Christ. The historian Gibbon, not a Christian, wrote of this time saying, “the history of the church is the annals of hell.” As Broadbent shows in his book, *The Pilgrim Church*, there were

those groups through this time that were true to the Lord Jesus.

Sardis would represent the period from the early 1500’s to the mid 1800’s. This would be the time of the “Protestant Reformation” when much truth was recovered but the movement from Rome was to state churches. Though some RC doctrines and practices were rejected many of the trappings, structures and doctrines were retained. The truth got lost in compromise and controversy. There were signs of life, the church thought it was alive, but in reality the church was spiritually dead.

The Church of Thyatira

The City: Thyatira was about 60 kilometers from Pergamum and was located in a lush valley by the Lycus river. Its location gave it importance as it was at the junction of three highways connecting the cities of Pergamum, Smyrna and Sardis. The agricultural land and manufacturing base gave the city its great wealth.

Among the products that flowed from Thyatira were metals and a purple dye. Lydia was from Thyatira and in Acts 16 was presented as a seller of purple. The production of all the products was tightly controlled by trade guilds, perhaps stronger here than in any of the other cities. The trade guilds had a strong attachment to their patron god which involved feasts and offerings to their god.

The Christ: As in each of these letters the presentation of the person of

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Christ meets the need of His people. This is true through scripture, here are some samples: He appeared as a pilgrim to Abraham in his pilgrimage, a soldier to Joshua before a battle, and in the den with Daniel.

The Son of God as a title for Christ occurs only here in the book of Revelation. In chapter 1 He is seen in His glory as one like the Son of Man; a man in the glory. Here the title Son of God is likely used in contrast to the worship of Apollo in Thyatira, Apollo was revered as the son of Zeus, thus in effect the son of a god. The title Son of God declares the deity of Christ; it was the use of this title that prompted the Jews to accuse Him of blasphemy as they understood the Lord Jesus was claiming to be God. To these believers in Thyatira here was One worthy of honor and allegiance.

The eyes like a flame of fire are found in 1:14 in the presentation of the glorified Christ. This would speak of His discernment, that "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account." (Hebrews 4:13). What these believers might practice in pagan temples would be known by Christ.

The feet of fine brass are also seen in chapter 1. Brass commonly represents judgment or the One who exercises judgment. Here in Thyatira, fine metals were produced by the various guilds of metal smiths. Standing above is one whose feet are the finest of the brass.

Jim Allen in his commentary on Revelation within the *What the Bible Teaches* series makes a fine devotional thought about this threefold depiction of Christ. He suggests that the title Son of God speaks of His omnipresence, the eyes like a flame of fire His omniscience, and the feet like fine brass His omnipotence.

The Commendation: The commendation is much shorter than

the condemnation that follows but these are words of encouragement. This may be a list of six items or it could be that their love, service, faith, and endurance are descriptions of their works. Darby's version and other translations change the order of the middle four words to love and faith followed by service and endurance. In this way their works are motivated by love and faith which are demonstrated through service and endurance.

These believers in difficult circumstances were making progress and growing in these areas of life. This stands in contrast to the Ephesians who were declining in love. Here their love for the Lord and their faith in His Word had a visible expression in service to others and perseverance in the Christian life.

The Condemnation: This letter is the longest of the seven and most of the letter has to do with the condemnation of what was going on in the assembly. Darby and others omit the phrase, "a few things," and render the beginning of the verse, "I have against you that you put up with that woman." (Majority Text). The one word of censure is given because they tolerate the woman who the Lord refers to as Jezebel.

The Lord calls this woman Jezebel because of her prominent position and perverse message. She is given this name due to her likeness to the O.T. Jezebel. The wife of Ahab was a perverse woman who led Israel into deeper idolatry. She was powerful and prominent because Ahab was such a weak leader.

The inference from the text here is that this modern Jezebel was advocating participation with the trade guilds in pagan worship. Her message may have been that it is alright to belong to a guild and still function in the assembly. This involvement would lead to idolatry and inevitably to immorality. Part of

the message may have been a doctrine that by living this way Christians rise above the restrictions of the truth and experience a higher emotional level of spirituality.

It would seem that this woman and her children were involved in these activities. Others were also affected as the Lord warns of great tribulation to those who were engaging in these activities. As for the woman herself she had already been warned and faced discipline from the Lord because she refused to repent.

The Correction: As with the letter to Ephesus and the one to Pergamum, the call is for the Lord's people to repent. This woman had refused, but others are given the opportunity to reject her teaching, it is not their deeds but, as Darby renders, it is her works they must stand against. There is no room for indifference but rather a stand must be taken.

The Encouragement: There are those who did not accept this teaching and who recognized it as being from Satan. The Lord assures them of their individual responsibility and ultimate recompense for faithfulness to Him. The Lord places no other burden on them other than that they might remain faithful to Him and His name. For the first time in these letters He mentions the fact of His second coming, "till I come."

The Compensation: There are two things offered to the overcomer, one is a position and the other is a possession. The position involves participation with Christ when he comes to set up His kingdom on Earth. On that day when rebellion is crushed and the Lord's righteous rule is established. The possession, "the morning star," possibly involves the enjoyment of His person at His coming at the rapture.

The Conclusion: Today the circumstances are different, the

pressures much less and the employment picture is not as intense. Those early believers had to make a living and livelihoods were controlled by the guilds. They were exposed to false teaching from a prominent woman who claimed to be a prophetess. There must be an application for today though idols and immorality may not be issues we face. It could be that there is the temptation of an unequal yoke in business that could lead to compromise. It may be membership in a union that engages in ungodly practices. Our response may have a cost involved, being misunderstood or having to find a different job. For those believers the pressures were greater but the stakes are the same, allegiance to the Lord Jesus above all else.

The Church of Sardis

The City: The city looked impressive situated on a hill which offered natural defense against enemy armies. The city was captured twice, by Cyrus and by Antiochus, because the inhabitants believed the city was impregnable but each time it was captured by the enemy climbing the hill. The city lived on its past reputation looking back to days of greater wealth and prominence. This was the city of king Croesus who was famed as the wealthiest man in the world.

The worship in Sardis was primarily to Cybele, similar in type to the worship of Diana of the Ephesians. This worship was extremely vile and immoral and was led by white-robed priests and priestesses. Civic celebrations were tied to these religious festivities in remembrance and recognition of their famed history.

The Christ: The Lord Jesus is presented in association with two symbols seen in chapter 1. The seven Spirits of God and the seven stars are in His possession. The seven Spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit in the plenitude of his person and power and suggest the resources available to the church. The seven stars speak of the churches as they are in reality as seen from Heaven's perspective. This is not the visible outer projection to mankind but the inner character and conduct that is visible to the Lord. As discussed in the first article these stars are not pastors or elders but angelic representatives of the reality of church

life. The Lord Jesus thus knows the reality but also has the resources to meet the needs.

The Commendation: As with the letter to Laodicea there is no commendation for this local church. The risen Lord sees nothing to commend as to their collective testimony and so passes on to criticism.

The Condemnation: The discerning Lord says He "knows their works." It would seem these people were carrying on in "church life" thinking that they were serving the Lord. He says to them "you have a reputation of being alive," (3:2, NIV), "but you are in fact dead." One of the features of the city of Sardis was a large cemetery referred to as "a thousand hills," which apparently was visible from ten kilometers away.

It is likely that these people, like those in Laodicea, did not know their real condition. There may have been activity and reality in the past but their present works were not perfect or complete in the sight of God. There was nothing of love, faithfulness, or endurance from them collectively when the letter is written.

The Correction: The Lord tells them to remember, to look back at what they had been given and to what they had heard in the past. This was a church, like the city, that lived in the recollection of past glories but lacked the present reality. They had received the gospel and sound doctrine in the past but they were living out the form of those truths.

The road to restoration involves repentance. There must be an awareness of their current condition, ownership is the first step in repentance. A person must agree with God, the mental or intellectual part of the process. The emotions need to be touched in that there is a need of the godly sorrow that leads to repentance. For true repentance to take effect there must be a response of the will, what is volitional. If this process is followed, the will turns the direction of a life or of an assembly and change takes place.

The danger these people faced was that without repentance Christ would come to them in judgment, by surprise. Just as the city had been attacked and taken unawares, so the church would face a similar fate if the Lord were to come

in judgment it is likely they would suffer the consequences mentioned to Ephesus, the lamp stand would be removed.

The Encouragement: There were those in Sardis, a remnant, who were seeking to honor the Lord in their lives. There were those things in verse 2, "which remain." There was the need to strengthen or revisit the fundamentals of the faith while there was time. Out of the number there were those who had not defiled themselves or their testimony. They had maintained their purity in a worthy walk.

The Compensation: There are three blessings held out to the overcomer. Against the backdrop of the deadness and compromise of the church there is the promise of white raiment. This is reminiscent of the scene in Zech. 3 where Joshua is clothed in white. The promise is future in that faithfulness now will be recognized in a coming day.

Their names will not be blotted out of the book of life. Every city had a roll of the names of its citizens which names could be deleted due to treason or unfaithfulness. Here the thought is not conditional but rather of certainty. Every believer is eternally secure so this is the assurance that their name would not be erased from the Book of Life.

The Lord also says that He will confess their name in heaven. Their faithfulness may have a cost on earth but will be recompensed in heaven. Unknown and unsought here below but befriended and known above.

The Conclusion: These believers lived in days of spiritual decline, many among them were just going through the motions and living in the good of things in the past. Yet there were those who remained faithful and held a good testimony before the world. In some ways our day is not much different, as most local churches reach the third generation the truth is on the bookshelf. It is easy today to become worldly in our affections and to seek the world's favor. The call to watch, to remember, and to strengthen is as relevant today as it was that day. When one considers the value of a life of faithfulness it can be said, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus."



GARY MCBRIDE | St. Thomas, Ontario

quietness

*"Be still and know that I am God,"
That I who made and gave thee life
Will lead thy faltering steps aright;
That I who see each sparrow's fall
Will hear and heed thy earnest call.
I am God*

*"Be still and know that I am God,"
When aching burdens crush thy heart,
Then know I form thee for thy part
And purpose in the plan I hold.
Thou art the clay that I would mold.
Trust in God*

*"Be still and know that I am God,"
Who made the atom's tiny span
And set it moving to my pan,
That I who guide the stars above
Will guide and keep thee in my love.
Be thou still.*

-Author Unknown