THOUGHTS OF NOVEMBER, 2020

1. This Thought if for us who have been thinking we are the only saint who has been overly blessed lately by being so lovingly tested by the Lord. Go ahead; praise Him for His love as expressed through those tough tests. See Deuteronomy 8:2; 16; 2 Chron. 32:31. He was testing those Old Testament saints, and likewise He tests us. But then, we can get in trouble when in those same situations we reverse the test, and test the Lord – Heb. 3:9. Not a good thing to do.
2. Ultimate democracy [self-determination] is the agent of personal destruction. That is why America’s fathers, who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, leaned on the Bible for basics. The Bible limits self-determination. Its laws are unifying factors in a democracy, so they set limits to self-determination as long as biblical principles are honored – Joshua 24:14-15, 31. Otherwise, we end up doing what is right in our own eyes – the disaster of democracy – Judges 17:6; 21:25.

Look around us at America, the bastion of democracy – killing unborn children, all manner of sexual perversion, families falling apart, apostacy, anarchy, riots, untrustworthy leaders, self-centeredness, and loose living of all sorts. The church is in a fertile field for missionary work. Returning to the Lord of the Bible solves all problems, including the deceptive problem of political personal destruction.

1. Now to return our Thoughts to our ongoing teaching on the condition of the church. Today we start with Jesus’ message to the Christians in the church at Smyrna:

2:8 – Smyrna means “crushed” or “martyr witness.” Again, the name of the city, thus of this church, is a clue to the message. The time period of this second message is from 170 A.D. to 312 A.D., during which years the Roman Empire carried out 10 great persecutions against the church. Christians and others, such as James and Paul, certainly were persecuted and martyred before 170 A.D. but not as Empire-wide persecutions.

Jesus calls Himself the one “who was dead, and has come to life ..” What an encouraging reminder to those choosing death rather than denial of Jesus – to follow Him in faithfulness unto death, and then into Life! It delivers one of His most common and important messages to His people: “Do not fear. Expect ultimate victory -- soon.” Believing for the ultimate reward encourages the ultimate sacrifice.

Having that sort of faith shows our dependence on the Almighty Faithful One. The Greek word for Almighty means “the God who controls all things.” Do you understand that His control of all things means for His glory and our eternal betterment? Like Jesus going to the cross? Are you fine with that for yourself? Are you satisfied with your focus being on the Lord, and the Lord’s focus being on you? Selah.

But the Lord is not only the Almighty One, but is the Almighty Faithful One. The word faithful is defined as “being absolutely trustworthy.” Selah again. So, our God is absolutely trustworthy and He controls all things. Is that adequate for your faith? If not, what more can be added than He loves you and gave Himself up unto death for you, is with us now, and awaits us in glory. Can that faith be lived in you – daily, to the end?

It is significant that in this second message to the churches Jesus has no words of rebuke, although each of those Smyrna believers were imperfect. That’s a helpful instruction to us, as we may try to help our own brothers during their present trials with a few misplaced words of “helpful correction.” Remember Job’s 3 friends, as they wrongly worked to perfect Job so he would “qualify for God’s grace!” Not good.

2:9 – The Lord is intimately with them in their persecutions, their temporal-only poverty, and the blasphemies hurled against them and their God. The Jews who said they were Jews, but were not, are those who were Jewish by natural birth but not through re-birth. Real Jews, since the cross, are those Jews and Gentiles who are believers in Jesus Christ – Rom. 9:1-8. Even before the cross [actually since Adam], real Jews were those called of God who had Abraham’s faith.

2:10 – What a solid word to those who are in prison and being killed: “Do not fear!” Like Job, they [and we] are to be tested under fire, with their Lord’s loving hand upon them and upon every aspect of their happenings. Those saints who pass the test will receive something that those who fail their tests will not receive – a “badge” to wear among the brethren, their reward for their faithfulness, a heavenly display of the success of their mission.

See Paul’s comments in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, which reads: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” Wow! Loving His appearing seems to be related to enduring under trial. All believers will not get that reward. How badly do you want it? It must be paid for in advance, by our lives being poured out for the Lord, meaning now, during our earth-life. And, no, we don’t need to do that in order to go to heaven.

2:11 – Again, those who have been given the gift of hearing this word would do very well to live according to it. This addresses the church of Smyrna, those individuals who went into the persecutions, and all saints since then who have embraced their trials knowing they are from the Lord, that He is with them in the fire, and that there is great reward for faithfulness. [Think marriage, at work, and all relationships.] Yes, He will abundantly reward us for our faithfulness under trials and persecutions. Not all were faithful, not all are faithful, and not all will be faithful. I have not been always faithful under trial; no one except Jesus has been always faithful under trial, but some have been very faithful. And, by the way, some of the most faithful in the end are those who had failed the Lord previously, but did not come short of His grace at the end.

This reward will go only to the overcomers. Like Jesus, they will have suffered extremely, and then entered unending peace and joy. They have the assurance of receiving 1) the opposite of those who departed this life without any faith in the Lord Jesus, and 2) a reward distinctive from non-overcoming believers. Question: Using your biblically informed mind, and your spiritually sensitive soul, how do you imagine that these overcomers might be differently blessed and used by the Lord among the non-overcomer believers in Jesus’ millennial kingdom?

2:12 – Pergamum means “simultaneously married,” or “twice married.” The message in this name is that this church is not wholly given over to the Lord, so is trying to walk with one foot in the kingdom of this world and the other foot in the kingdom of God, meaning divided loyalty, or adultery. “The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,” says Jesus’ half-brother in James 1:8.

The time period for this message is 312 A.D. until 606 A.D., which was from the time Roman emperor Constantine ended the persecutions, making Christianity the state religion, until Boniface III was crowned universal bishop. Whereas the persecutions had cleansed, strengthened and enlarged the church, this almost 300 years of “peace” would be a time of spiritual decline and disaster for the church, much like has happened in America. Mainly, there was an increase in corruption, departure from Bible doctrines, and a mixing of Christian theology with pagan philosophy. Can you see those three apostacies in the church today? In your church? In your life?

When Constantine freed the church from its persecutions, he needed an identifiable church structure and hierarchy that Rome could interface with, a worldly church structure like the structure of His government. For him, the church structure was upside down, with its leaders being genuine servants, exercising only spiritual authority, and not lording themselves over their fellow members. As a result of Constantine’s pressure, the offices of those humble servants in Jesus’ body began to take on typical earth-type positional authority over their flocks. It was a devilish setup for the evil of the next stage of the church, which we will study later in verses 18-29, the church in Thyatira.

Because Christianity was now the state religion, the state had to have an identifiable, state-accepted, obvious ritual to show that one had become a member of the Church. If Christians had held to the Jewish laws, that ritual and external mark may have been circumcision. That not having been the case, Christianity used that which it already had for this outward show of church membership and commitment -- water baptism.

That made church membership easy for Constantine. He marched his army through a river and declared them baptized members of Christianity. Of course, those who then were called “Christians” were social or cultural Christians, or christianoids, not born-again Christians; the Lord had not placed His Spirit within them, so their hearts were not changed. In fact, they continued to worship their gods and observe their special pagan days and ceremonies. That was supposedly solved when the church began granting “incorporations,” which were inclusions of pagan practices into the practices of the church. Example: Worship of the pagan goddess of fertility, Ashtar [she has other names in other languages], was incorporated into the church’s observance of Resurrection Day. That day, then, became also known as “Ashtar Day” or “Easter.”

So, it was possible for the church to shift its attention from Resurrection Day to Ashtar, which makes it possible for our children and our ambient society to grow up in the church with more of a focus on Ashtar [Easter] than on Jesus {Resurrection Day]. Ritualistic use of eggs and rabbits on her day are reminders of Ashtar’s role as the goddess of fertility. Can you imagine the spiritual resistance that a group of Christians in our day might encounter if they began to neglect Ashtar and celebrate only Jesus’ resurrection on that day? It is happening, even in the church.

The church’s release from persecution allowed it to change from being “obvious, unequivocal sojourners in this world” [meaning a set-apart group passing through this world but not of this world] into “contented settlers coexisting in this world” [meaning settlers who had found their homeland in this world].

The sharp two-edged sword has always accomplished its purposes, 1) it freed saints from sin and condemnation and 2) it condemned those refusing the gospel. It still does.

Pergamum was a center for pagan cults, most of which had started in Babylon and moved westward. Remember King Belshazzar of Babylon, the grandson of reasonably-good king Nebuchadnezzar, the Belshazzar for whom Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall, who lost his life and kingdom that very night? After he died, the cult centers began moving westward. Pergamum became one such center, after which they gradually moved further westward into Rome where later they encountered and began merging with the young church, after those 10 great persecutions.

2:13 – Here is a serious and difficult question: If a serious and powerful person had a knife and said to you, “I know where you live,” how would you understand what he meant? Yes, that he was a dangerous person and was coming after you where you live. So, when Jesus says to these saints in Pergamum, while waving His sword, “I know where you live,” how were they to take that? How would you? Either, “I am coming to cut you to pieces” [a frightening thing, especially when backed by Matthew 24:51 and Luke 12:46 – at Jesus’ return, cutting to pieces misbehaved church leaders], or “I’m coming with My life-giving two-edged sword [my word of truth] to cut you free, if you will.” Choose Life now and we will get Life then.

However, every Christian did not have divided loyalty, and all of the church did not morph easily from sojourners into settlers. There were those who resisted paganism, paying the ultimate price for their faithfulness. King Attila III [the Hungarian Hun (? – 453)] is supposed to have brought some Babylonian cults westward where later they merged with the church.

Antipas, who many years previously had been ordained bishop of Pergamum by John the Apostle, was martyred in 92 A.D., before the Empire-wide persecutions began. He was boiled in oil by the inhabitants of Pergamum because he was disturbing their pagan worship. Antipas means “against all;” that’s his name, which church tradition holds to be from his consistent faithful witnessing in the face of the satanic evil there in Pergamum. When Antipas was advised that the whole world was against him, he is reported to have said, “Then I am against the whole world!”

Some of Pergamum’s main gods were Zeus, Aesculapius, Athena [Ashtar], and Dionysus. Satan’s throne and power were literally and figuratively in Pergamum. Jesus told the saints there to focus purely on Himself.

2:14 – Now come the sins which called for repentance – “just a few things,” but have you noticed that just one thing will hinder our walk with the Lord? Remember Balaam from the Book of Numbers chapters 22, 23, 24 and 25. He was a prophet of God who refused to prophesy against Israel on behalf of their enemy, Balak, the Gentile king. However, when the king’s bribe became sufficient [for Balaam was not a “common, cheap, every day prophet;” he was a “common, high class, everyday prophet”], Balaam did tell Balak how to defeat Israel. His method was for Balak’s people to make friends with Israel, intermarry with them, gradually lead Israel into multiple disobediences, and God’s favor [meaning power and protection] would depart from Israel. That is the gradual process of most backsliding, is it not? How would we know except we observe others? 😊

Again, we see the problem of peaceful coexistence with the world and gradually moving away from the Lord. It leaves us where we now are – apostate, not knowing we are apostate, and when we are informed of our condition, not considering that our apostacy is serious enough to need correcting, or that nothing can be done, especially by “me.” The main stumbling blocks that Balak used on the Israelites were, 1) getting them to eat meats that had been sacrificed to idols [which Jesus and Paul have cleared us to eat [usually], and 2) committing immoral acts [which are increasingly common in our day, being incrementally approved by the church and society, but totally forbidden by the Lord].

2:15 – As in 2:6 back in Ephesus, the church of Pergamum had moved into a world-type of church leadership where its shepherds ruled carnally over the sheep. In this case, there was a false division of the church into two groups -- clergy and laity, which exalted the clergy and limited the laity’s function, authority, power and the Holy Spirit’s leadership.

At the first great council of the church in Nice in 325 A.D., there were 1,500 delegates. The laity outnumbered the clergy by 5 to 1. It was a stormy meeting and in the end the clergy ruled. Church doctrine was set contrary to that which John, Peter, Paul and others would have imagined possible. The tangible, concrete priesthood and equality of all believers was discarded in favor of a clergy priesthood which ruled over a laity. Likewise, local shepherds were no longer directly and only accountable to God, but were now accountable primarily to clergy of a yet higher level. Thus, the order of man, the order of the kingdom of this world, was established officially in the church and remains to this day.

Spiritual authority alone is not satisfying or sufficient for the flesh; it cannot be appreciated by the flesh. Spiritual authority alone is unable to maintain a carnal organization. To the carnal mind, whether believers or unbelievers, things of the Spirit, including spiritual authority and spiritual organization, are like a wisp of smoke – intangible. See Acts 20:28-30 (17-38). Living by the Spirit, including His authority and order in the family and church, is a good test of the spiritual health of the church, and of us.

2:16 – The answer: Change, go back the other way, repent. Those who will not repent will be in direct conflict with the Lord Who chastises with the sword of His mouth, which is His word – see 1:16 and 2:12. Who today, is standing up in the church against its worldly corruption? Do you see it? Will you speak?

2:17 – Again we apply the triple application of this word – to Pergamum at that time [312 to 606], then to the churches worldwide for all of the church age, and then to anyone or any congregation at any time who hears these words with conviction. This is a word only to the church, meaning only born-again humans. It is not a message to unbelievers, including those unbelievers on the church’s rolls, including unbelieving church leaders.

Those who hear and turn to the Lord in regards to this message will receive some of God’s hidden manna. Jesus is the manna, the heavenly food come down from heaven. He is and has manna that He has not revealed or shared with all manna eaters. In Exodus, manna was placed in the ark, hidden there next to the Lord, next to Jesus. He is inviting us to Him, to a special and intimate feast, beginning now.

Another gift to these overcomers is a white stone, from Jesus’ own hand. I understand these to be a purer knowledge of Him by deeper, direct revelation. Jesus is the rock, and we are given to join Him as His stones or pebbles. White indicates purity; white pebbles indicate we will be privy to share deeply in the revelation of Christ – Matt. 16:16.

Isaiah 56:5 spoke of a time when responders to God would receive new names that are better than others’ names. A new name implies a God-imparted character change [see Gen. 2:18-25, Acts 13:9] that enables and shows a more intimate relationship with Him. He says that no others know our new name. It simply cannot be described. In Revelation 14, new names will be given to a group of followers who are first fruits [those who first step out as examples and leaders], who hold to God’s truth, and are free of reproach. They were also allowed to sing a new song to Jesus that no others knew [Hint: When we sing our unknown language spiritual gift to the Lord, we manifest that same wonderful praise, even though we may not know the interpretation of the words that we sing.]

We will resume the teaching on “The Condition of the Church” a few pages later.

1. I would venture to say that we all want to be right, to know the truth, to not have gaps in our knowledge and be left wondering, “What is the truth here?” The honest soul who asks that question is on the right trail. Actually, the secret of a person’s strength and our pathway to the truth is our ability to admit that we lack the truth [not just lack facts], especially when we have failed. [Ouch! Who stepped on my toes?!]

Jesus said that His word is truth, and that when He left the earth the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth. Wow! That means that every day is the potential for being another day for receiving more wonderful, life-changing truth. Being on the trail of the truth is productive and soul changing. So, do you see that seeking the truth requires of us more than seeking? We can seek and not find, although the truth may be there in front of us. It requires a setting aside, or a loosening of ourselves, our doctrines, our mind-sets in order to see and receive that truth, that new area of revelation to our souls.

Many others may have already received that truth, but to receive it ourselves requires humility, a death to self, an emptying of another area of our soul to make room for the truth, like the lady who was searching for a valuable lost item and had to sweep her whole house in order to find it – Luke 15:8-9. She devoted time, careful effort, turned from other duties, and needed the help of extra light [the Holy Spirit] – but she found that valuable coin. That typifies our search for the truth, if we are not satisfied with the nine coins we already have.

The Lord of all has not yet given us His all, and He desires to be about giving it. Paul knew the trail to walk, because he wanted to know Jesus better, have more life-giving power, and was ready to pay the price of walking it with the Lord – Phil. 3:9-10.

1. In the Old Testament, such as in Leviticus 26:3-4, the Lord promised to give His people rain in due season and they would prosper if they would walk in His statutes, and keep His commandments, and do them. Remembering that the Lord tells us New Testament believers that those things happened to His Old Testament believers and were recorded for our sakes, what is the Lord telling us in Leviticus? Answer: Rain is the power of God [the Holy Spirit] to bring forth the results of seed [God’s word] planted in good ground [us].

The verses that follow are equally wonderful. The Lord promises that our threshing time shall reach unto the vintage time and the vintage time shall reach unto the sowing time. In other words, our obedience to Him by the Spirit will do away with the dormancy between fruitful times and cleansing times and fruitful times, etc., which is the usual up and down history of the Lord’s people. Then His people will have peace, live without fear, will have victory over enemies even when outnumbered – and both we [believers] and Egypt [the world] will know that our God is among us. Great promises and great God.

1. Some things are so good that we don’t dare believe them, even though they are true. Then there are the negatives of fear, lust, and other things of the flesh that cling to us and we to them. Consider the Lord’s call for us to follow Him. Our proper response requires a revelation from the Holy Spirit, because we have to forsake all and everything to follow Him. To receive all, we have to leave all, and in reverse order, meaning first leave, then receive. When the Lord possesses all that we are and have, we possess all that He is and has.

But often we do not make a full and forever deal with the Lord, like it appeared to be with Saul on the road to Damascus. Instead, at least for some, it seems to be more like a gradual and continuous bargaining process, if it is in earnest. He had said, “Follow me,” and we did. It became a gradual process as we gave Him that which we could give on a day-to-day basis. We may feel unworthy, or not be well-taught about the Lord, but we make a gradual surrender, but He accepts us as we come to Him in simple honesty. As surrender is made, we grow.

1. I have good and good news for us. If you have been trying to earn or perfect your justification, your place in God’s kingdom, your standing before Him, His grace, stop! Human effort is useless; we have been justified by the works of Jesus alone. That is a “done thing.” We have been made “just-as-I’d” never sinned, in God’s eyes, which gives us continuous and eternal standing before Him. That can be appreciated but not improved upon. We are the righteousness of God Himself in Christ, outside of any performance requirement.

But our sanctification, the cleaning up of our humanity, does require our attention. It can require blood, sweat and tears, but its essential working component is our active faith in the Lord, without Whose grace our growth cannot move forward. Our flesh has not obtained perfection [has not been justified], for that will not and cannot be achieved in this earth-life. In this life we “work” [press on] to gain Christlikeness, even if it requires the loss of all things. It is the Lord’s purpose that we press onward in that process, our sanctification.

We receive no credit for our justification, which should be a pride-diminishing, peace-producing bit of information for us. But the rewards for becoming more and more like Jesus are mind-expanding and faith-producing – Phil. 3.

1. Our individual and group visits into our wildernesses are special times. To the point, those unenjoyable visits bring out the truth about ourselves, bring out the fleshy “us” in us, for good or for bad. We see how wonderfully the world ministered to our flesh by freely feeding us cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic, and how now we tend to groan and complain when all we have now is this same ole manna every day. What a piece of junk our flesh is. That’s what God’s people learned [although some did not learn] in Numbers 11. They turned their complains toward Moses, although he was unable to give them what they wanted. They knew that, but they just wanted to complain. They were afraid to complain against the One Who had actually brought them into their wilderness. There was a very good thing going on in Moses’ soul. During his own private 40-year wilderness experience in Midian, he had become meek and humble. Those two soul characteristics are the same, except for the direction of their application. Our humility is to be applied toward God, and our meekness is applied toward mankind. Neither have a sense of self-assertion. The things that usually would bring forth self-assertion out from us are left to the Lord, because we know that those things only harm those who do or say them when they are unrighteous toward us. The same Spirit of grace Who worked meekness and humility in Moses, is doing the same in us, and it often takes time and several visits into the wilderness to get it done – Num. 12:3.
2. This is a continuation of my teaching on “The Condition of the Church” from Thought No. 3 above, which is being taught weekly by Zoom. Join if you desire, and it is being recorded for public use.

Today we will study Jesus’ fourth message to those seven churches, beginning in the Revelation 2:18. Let me give you a brief overall summary of these lessons: 1) Jesus died to bring His church into existence, and lives to perfect her; 2) He loves His church [who, after all, is His chosen bride]; 3) He is the Head of His church [even though at times the church does not honor and obey Him as her head], and 4) He is the builder of His church [despite all of the building and tearing down and revisions going on that are not of Him]. That, in a nutshell, is the story of the Revelation chapters 2 and 3. We are studying His messages in those two chapters which show, for one thing, that His wayward church is still His church, His born-again ones forever. Each of His born-again forever ones has on our foreheads a “forever stamp” issued from the heavenly post office. How great is His love and how enduring are His purposes!

But first I want to say something. It seems to me that we have been having little to say in our discussion times, especially about the deeper things in these lessons. Perhaps we are mainly here for the lesson, not discussion. I understand that, because I have put years of my life in Christ into them endeavoring to not come short of His grace, and now hours in study and prayer for their presentation to you. So, I can appreciate that you may be here mainly for the lesson and not to discuss it. Also, it may be that you are changed after the lesson and are content with what you heard. In that case, you may need time to digest what is going on in you and not be moved to group discussion. That, too, can be wise, especially if that is the way the Lord has raised you up. Or, you may not have been challenged by what you heard, and so your response is to press your re-set button and get on with your life as before, not being inclined to discussion. Any and all of that is fine with me, and I think it is fine with the Lord, also. You decide that.

Although in-depth discussion is probably not possible for us in the setting of our Zoom meeting, nor may this be the setting for intense discussion of well-entrenched beliefs, but as Christian brothers and sisters we should [if we desire] be in a position, even with our short available time, to mention our thoughts, experiences and reservations about matters. In any case, we here as gathered are seekers of the Lord, the Truth. As such we want His living word to change us, and there are many settings for Him to do that.

For an example of why I am continuing this commentary, recently there was almost no response to Jesus saying He hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans in Ephesus and Pergamum, and that the hated deed of the Nicolaitans was the division of Christians into clergy and laity. That is a tremendous and wide-open topic! At some time, it is a prime topic for some group to discuss! Everyone has some degree of loyalty to his current church, and considering the clergy-laity division to be a hated thing may be a new or distasteful thought, which means everyone may not have been prepared to discuss it. And that strong word, hate, is something Jesus said about the church that we are part of, and my teaching is an effort to explain what He said and how strongly He feels about it.

You may not have decided that these things can or should be changed. So, at some other select time perhaps the Lord will bring us to a place of discussing that. In sharing our insights and perhaps experiences, our intent should be openness, honesty, and perhaps a coming together in the truth. We are family, the Lord’s hand-picked ones, brought together in this setting, and I think we can rely on what being family means among this group.

Now let us begin today’s lesson in the Revelation at 2:18.

2:18 – Thyatira means “continual or repetitious burning.” Again, the name of the city and the church tells us the focus of Jesus’ message – which is that, although with Jesus’ victorious sacrifice on the cross, and the Jews’ repetitious body and blood sacrifices being over once and for all, the church in Thyatira had continued them. It was not the repetitious sacrifices of animals that were being continued, but of the Messiah, the Lamb of God Himself. Their repetitious sacrifices were in the form of repetitious offerings of the Lord’s Supper, as a form of ongoing sacrificing of Christ for our sins. However, any repetitious form of His sacrifice is no longer efficacious.

Scripture informs us that Jesus Christ has been sacrificed once, and that for all time and for all men. There is no other sacrifice, or form of sacrifice, that is efficacious. It is an error to offer them. Enjoying together the Lord’s Supper as a sincere act of remembrance of the Lord and His sacrifice is vastly different from again eating His body and drinking His blood from a renewed or ongoing sacrifice. Certainly, there are various modifications to the theology of Holy Communion being a renewed sacrifice, but Holy Communion is a remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice, not a further or renewed or repeated sacrifice.

I take communion in Thyatira churches, and am in brotherly fellowship with those brothers and sisters, including their priests, but for me it is in thankful remembrance of the Lord Jesus’ gift of Himself for us. When a Roman Catholic priest heard me, a Protestant, teach that the bread and wine of communion is the body and blood of Jesus, he openly proclaimed that I was a Catholic and began serving me communion in his church, with his bishop’s permission. He and I just did not bother to discuss exactly how we understood Jesus’ words in the gospels when He said, “This is my body and this is My blood.” Jesus’ words and Jesus’ love are sufficient among family.

The years of the application of this message to the church age are the Middle Ages [which encompasses the Dark Ages] from 606, when Boniface III was crowned universal bishop, until 1520 when the Protestant Reformation began. During those 900 years the human headship of the church presumed to take to itself much of the role of God, declaring itself the writer, only interpreter and only oracle of God’s word, and that the church’s chief bishop was Christ’s Vicar or “only deputy” on Earth. Their position was that the church wrote the Scriptures and therefore the church was its sole interpreter. As a result, the Scriptures were removed from the hands of the laity. The Bible lost its place and power; its content becoming largely unknown to the laity. The clergy, and the clergy alone, presumed to speak for God, and as God.

Remember that the church had begun with every believer being a priest to God [the priesthood of all believers], each believer being urged to go boldly before the Lord’s throne of grace in our times of need. Every flock’s shepherd was accountable directly to God, and as such he pointed every Christian directly to God, no one being accountable through a religious hierarchy. As the teachings of the Nicolaitans progressed in the church, two separate classes of believers had developed – clergy and laity, with the clergy ruling over the laity instead of being humble servant-brothers to the church.

In the Nicolaitan church, certain priestly ministries and functions and positions were not open to the laity; an Old Testament practice. Church-prescribed study was required before certain ministers and ministries could be accepted, with the death penalty being applied to those who did not comply. Whereas Jesus had told His followers to partake of the bread and wine of His body and blood as often as they desired, and that the partaking would be a powerful reminder of His sacrifice and later return, the Thyatira church taught that partaking of those two elements cleansed the saints of their sins day by day, and that only the clergy could administer them. The church withheld communion and ministries from those who had not met church-ordained and other qualifications.

Altars within temples made with human hands were erected, instead of altars of hearts in the souls of believers. The church gathered to itself earthly riches, not the richness of God. The Word of God was lost, as far as it being His Word available to all mankind. The penalty for possessing God’s word in print [the Bible] was death. Challenges to the doctrines and teachings of the church were labeled heresy, and were punishable by imprisonment and death.

That church taught that only the clergy could pronounce forgiveness of sins, and that certain deeds, such as paying money to the church, would enable forgiveness of sins. That led to the sale of forgiveness [called indulgences] even before the sin had been committed. The list of sins of the church, especially during that time, is long and grievous, but it is our heritage. Those sins are not only theirs; broadly and truly, they are ours. We still own them. Recall that in the Old Testament the righteous ones of later generations confessed Israel’s sins along with the gross sinners of the past who had actually done them, saying, “We have sinned. Forgive us, Oh Lord.” As always, the Lord was patient. Over those 900 centuries He offered the church time for and opportunity of repentance.

There were many examples of faithfulness as peaceful protestors arose to challenge the church’s sins and impurities. They would give rise to the Protestant Reformation. The Lord was about to move against the church, again using humans. The church could have repented, but did not. Instead, it had to receive strong human protestations as God’s instrument of chastisement and change.

We are still in verse 18. Jesus proclaims Himself as He should have been remembered: “The Son of God,” a reminder of His role as the world’s judge, different from His role during His days on earth as the Son of Man who had not come to judge – John 12:47-48. His fiery eyes see through all lies and deceptions and burn away all works of the flesh – completely clarifying them – 1 Corinth. 3:10-15. He had done all that was necessary for the church to know and rightly partake of His plan of complete salvation, including having given us Himself, then His Holy Spirit, then His written word, then His apostles, and now His many disciples – Eph. 2:8-10.

2:19 – The church in Thyatira had become a mammoth religious organization with a dim light. It had good works among all of its sins but had fallen from grace despite those works. In fact, its works had increased as it grew in worldliness, which is typical of denominations and congregations and individual Christians as our true spiritual life diminishes. The grace of God was fading from its teaching and life, being replaced by a theology of salvation by works – many of which were evil and which increased as the years of this religious system progressed.

2:20 – To understand the allegorical application of Jezebel to the church [then and now] we need to remember who Jezebel was and what that woman did. To that point: Jezebel was the evil wife of evil King Ahab of Israel, the northern ten tribes of divided Greater Israel. She was not an Israelite, but the daughter of a heathen king, and a worshiper of Baal. She and King Ahab deserved one another. She usurped Ahab’s authority in their marriage and his kingship over the nation. Their marriage could be summed up as if Jezebel said, “Ahab, you run play with your army and fight your battles; I will run our marriage and impose my religion on Israel.” Today there are marriages that work according to the Jezebel spirit.

Jezebel led the nation into Baal worship, killed almost all of the prophets and priests of God, was grossly sinful and, as a fulfillment of a true prophecy, her body was eaten by dogs in the street, who in turn scattered “her” as dung in the fields – 1 Kings chapters 16-21.

Likewise, in Thyatira, the Jezebel church, the bride of Christ the King, had usurped His kingship and begun to rule the kingdom herself. The Jezebel church lied to the saints [God’s bondservants were the Lord’s believers within that religious organization] and led them astray into committing immoral acts and worshipping idols. She called herself a prophetess [a prophetess being an infallible guide], which she was not, and received God’s punishment for leading astray the “little ones” of the church.

Listen to Jesus in Matthew 18:6 -- “.. whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

And remember Paul’s words as he departed Ephesus in Acts 20:28-30 -- “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves’ men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” Paul’s words have been fulfilled ever since they were spoken.

2:21 – The Lord gave the church centuries to repent but she would not, having wed herself into blind carnality and immorality. But over those 900 years the Lord often raised up faithful little groups within and parallel to the church who witnessed of Him. For centuries, those holy remnants attempted to reform the church but were rejected, put out of that evil institution, hounded across the countryside, persecuted and martyred. The institution refused God’s grace for almost 1,000 years, but the Lord always had His faithful little remnants. He still has.

2:22 – Being cast upon a bed of sickness is in sharp contrast to her luxurious bed of adultery. It indicates a long-time apostasy, God’s patience, and now severe chastisement. Those within her were headed for great trouble at God’s hand if they did not repent during the long season offered for their repentance.

Few among that religious organization repented, being heavily involved in religiosity and fearing for their lives and livelihood. They were blinded by a religious spirit, as had been the religious leaders during Jesus’ days in Jerusalem, and whom Jesus had held self-responsible. They could have avoided the tribulation ahead, which probably refers to the turbulent times of the Protestant Reformation, not to the Great Tribulation that will occur before Christ’s return to earth.

2:23 – The Lord himself will kill her children. What a statement for Jesus, the church’s head, to make, that his bride is having children who are not His! The Lord searches the minds and hearts of everyone; whether or not they claim to be His -- He knows. Those who are His will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ for their works. Their works which were done in and through them by the Holy Spirit are rewarded; those which were done apart from the Holy Spirit are counted as nothing. The judgment at Christ’s judgment seat will not be a judgment regarding going to heaven or hell, because only those destined for heaven will appear there before Him. We will be judged and will receive rewards for our individualized benefit in the hereafter.

Those who are not His children will be judged by Jesus’ Father at the great white throne. They will appear at that judgment because they declined Jesus God’s Son or refused His lordship on earth. They, too, are rewarded according to their works – Rev. 20:11-15. This great judgment does not decide heaven or hell for the individual; that decision having been made on earth by the time each one departed their earth-life. This judgment is for determining variable conditions for each of them in the hereafter.

Going to heaven is a gift, not a reward or a wage. We do receive rewards and wages, but they will be for our various earthly righteousnesses. But going to hell is a punishment.

There is another picture here. The true church is a virgin bride here on earth, having no children of her own. She only receives those whom the Lord has brought out of darkness and added to His church; all other humans are missionary fields. But that Jezebel impostor here on earth is an adulteress, producing children in a “parallel family” who are not the king’s children, convincing many that they are children of God; but they are not.

2:24 – But to those outside that religious system [whether on or off the roll of that church], those who do not hold to the teachings of Jezebel [see v. 20], those who rejected her satanic teachings, those saints who may not have much to show other than their acceptance of the simple Truth and rejection of Jezebel’s lies, the Lord holds them responsible for living by only the truth which they have, and have held to. Indeed, they have received little from Him, so little will be expected of them. Luke 19:17 reads: “Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.” Things beyond what I will call “their situational knowledge base” were not required of them, and are not required of us, and we should not require of others.

That is good for us to remember when we think of those believers who are in difficult spiritual situations [whether they are down the street from us or in other nations]. They are not aware of the depth of their spiritual blindness. Unavoidably, they lack much, some of which is due to the church’s own sins and neglect but, on the other hand, if they rejected the “deep things of Satan” [those worse things] they are approved by the Lord and should also be approved by us.

Just as there are the deep things of God [1 Cor. 2:10], there are the deep things of Satan. The deep things of God are received by our drawing closer to Him and by trusting and obeying Him more. The deep things of Satan are received by drawing closer to Satan and by trusting and obeying him more.

2:25 – Yet, they [and we] must live by the even limited truths which they did receive from Him. There have been those in the church who have received little but with their little revelation lived a life of faith in the Lord, having never seen even a Bible. They will be greatly rewarded when He returns, despite their many ignorances and unrighteousnesses.

2:26 – It is again a challenge, but the ones in that category will hear their Lord call them “overcomer.” In the millennium they will rule with Him, having authority and power over the nations. Power on earth in the millennium; power which carnal systems wanted and strove for the most, the Lord will give to the spiritually faithful. It is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom to those who seek the Lord and His heavenly kingdom, instead of seeking earthly authority in earthly ways in this present earthly kingdom. Luke 12:32 (13-34) reads: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.”

2:27 – Old Testament prophets, in this case Isaiah, had foretold that the Messiah would rule the earth as other than a gentle, suffering servant. During His life on earth, Jesus had not sought earthly position or power, and neither do those who follow Him into kingdom living. That heavenly type of spiritual leadership in the world will come during the millennium to those who now do not grasp or push for it – Ps. 2:9. In fact, earthly authority can come to the righteous now during this earth life, as it did to Joseph in Egypt, David in Israel, and Daniel in Babylon, at great expense to their individualism and their self-importance. That is a clue for all believers who sense a calling to earthly authority during this time – meaning parents, employers, church leaders, and civic leaders.

2:28 – Out of the long Dark Ages the light of the morning star gradually dawned. That is a picture of having gone through a long night of darkness. At last, the first evidence of a new day begins to show – the morning star. Astronomically speaking, our morning star [the first star seen in the mornings] is Venus, the third brightest celestial body within our view [after our sun and moon]. For those saints in Thyatira their morning star was the light of the Protestant Reformation [some say that meant Martin Luther himself], with the good news that the just shall live by faith, not by their deeds. Romans 3:28 had finally jumped off the page and been pressed into the mind and heart of that praying Roman priest.

Questions: All will be judged for our deeds – Christians will be judged by Jesus, and non-Christians by our Father. What is the difference, and why? The two judgments are not simply times for believers and unbelievers to be told wherein we have been good or bad. Why are the two groups being judged? Why separately? Selah.

2:29 – If they heard and we now hear Jesus’ message, the church will be blessed – Rev. 1:3.

NOTE: In this message to Thyatira I have mentioned the Protestant Reformation as being a good movement with good results and that it was in God’s hands, but recall that those saints rebelled against and withdrew from the Church. Some did not rebel, but instead faithfully suffered for their faith and righteousness. Martin Luther did not rebel originally, but ultimately did, as his situation worsened and as his supporters urged him to separate openly from the Roman church. So, on balance, I want to say that God’s first and final decision is that “rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft” – 1 Sam. 15:23. God says He hates rebellion and He hates witchcraft, and He hates covenant breaking, among other things hateful. Rebellion is yielding to and drawing power from evil spiritual forces for purpose of separation, and witchcraft is worshipping and drawing power from evil spiritual forces in Satan’s kingdom of darkness.

The punishment for practicing witchcraft in the Old Testament was execution [physical death], which translates in the New Testament as spiritual death – thus, our own rebellions begin a process within us of spiritual decline and spiritual death, unless we repent and abandon our rebellion. The Protestant Reformation splintered the church, and that terrible divide persists today. Although we Protestants and Roman Catholics have mostly ceased killing one another physically, by our hate and indifference to our division we still kill one another daily.

The spirit of division can be seen as an active cancer among Protestants, as our part of Christianity has continued separating thousands more times, until we seem to consider that the division process is part of a normal, healthy growth process. It is interesting and sad to note that when the Holy Spirit started His own Roman Church Reformation about one century after the Protestant Reformation, there were no true Protestant-type reformers remaining in the Roman Church, so the Roman Church Reformation left much to be desired of true, Reformer-type, biblical Christianity. It can be speculated that, had the Protestant Reformers not rebelled, their spiritual descendants would have still been in the Roman Church when the Roman Reformation began, and the results might have been much more powerful, deeper and longer lasting than it was, and we may now might have had one united and healthy church of Jesus Christ. Selah.

1. The past is the past; it is there, it is real, it is part of us – but we need a healthy regard and dis-regard for the past, don’t we. That means for the good and the bad of our past. We cannot live in the time of our good pasts, and should not live in the times of our bad pasts. They are past, and if we are to move on in the Lord we need to walk away from our pasts in a wholesome way.

Paul talked about forgetting what lies behind [Phil. 3:13] and focusing on what is ahead. He had enough current struggle with his natural nature, so he focused on the Lord, now – Rom. 7:19. Putting our hands to the plow and looking ahead makes for a straight row. I did that often on the farm behind the horse before I graduated to the tractor, and the same focus was needed on the tractor. Jesus said if we looked back when we had our hands on the plow we were not fit for the job – Luke 9:62. That’s exactly what my Grandpa and Dad told me when I was a pre-teen. Dads know. Abba, Father knows.

1. For years I was not impressed that Eve had done such a really bad thing when she ate the forbidden fruit. I was not sure that Adam had passed along to her that they were not to eat it and, after all, determining the difference between good and evil sounds like a fairly good talent – so I reasoned. But the Lord said it was a very bad talent, so I stayed in a quandary during those years [although that was not my biggest problem during those pre-discipleship years].

Once I got on track with the Lord, and saw that He had the preeminence in all things, and wanted those “all things” to include me and my thinking, I began to press toward that new and high goal. That’s when I saw that Eve, and then Adam, chose an independent path of life that made them less dependent upon the Lord, made the Lord less Lord for them than He was, and made Adam more like God than he was [they thought].

God is working to bring all things together in Christ Jesus, so thinking we are less dependent upon the Lord is one of mankind’s most basic flaws. Mankind wants to decide things for ourselves that the Lord has already decided, or that which He wants us to go to Him for leadership. He not only has the wisdom, but has the overall plan in mind, into which He will insert us. There is only one Architect and Master.

I admit to having not attained to perfection in this [or any other] way yet, but am pressing on. The perfect endpoint continues to be somewhere there over the spiritual horizon, and the evening is near, but the pursuit is full of grace and confidence in the Lord. He will get it done in His time, even after this earth-life. My life, and yours, is His game-plan and although it is never too late to get up and begin anew, or to start something new without having to get back up, because perseverance is a common and abundant grace.

1. If you have been searching for a better method of living or of doing things, look no further. Although we look for better methods, the Lord looks for [and makes] better people. He will make and lead you into that for which you are searching. Get better aligned with Him. He is higher and greater than ourselves, and that perspective continues to enlarge as we do it. Then, when you are a “better person,” adjust your life around that which He has given you. His purpose cannot be stopped.
2. Would you rather be officially and legally correct, or have a clean conscience in a matter? Read John 8:1-11. In the heat of our flesh, we can opt for legalism, not truth. Grace, humility, holiness and purity rank high with the Lord, but we would often rather be right, even if we have to assert it ourselves. Wives are strong in those graces, having gained the wisdom of learning how to apparently lose an argument and win the war. It’s called, “Developing hubby.”
3. Good works are exactly that -- good works. They are not a requirement for our salvation, but are the result of our salvation. If our good works are to be of eternal value, they must be a result of the Holy Spirit working in us to develop the character of Jesus, and working through us to do the works of Jesus. Paul wrote the Corinthian Christians that they were going to be surprised, because some of their good works would be judged by Jesus to be junk, so would be burned up as wood, hay and stubble.

My, oh my! Paul was, and the Holy Spirit still is, hard on self-centered, self-designed, well-intended good works. Those good works may benefit others [like giving to the poor in order to be seen and admired], but they actually work to our detriment. What a trap of the devil. What is the solution? Walk justly and love mercy, and walk humbly before God and man, reminding ourselves that we are followers, learning to see things as God and others see them – Micah 6:8, edited a bit. Yes, it’s the same old answer; the way up is down.

1. In public school I ran the mile in track. I learned that it was not like the 100-yard dash – that it was not over in a flash, but required a long-term plan and application, but that it did have an end and an accomplishment that fulfilled me. Running the mile took planning, application, and steadfastness. And the closer I came to the finish line on the last lap, the more I had to measure out whatever I had left so that when I finished the race, I had given it all that I had to give.

Ephesians 4:13 shows us our finish line, that it is just ahead, and the great results, “.. until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the true knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” That is unimaginable, but believable because it is the Lord’s idea and He is bringing it to pass. Don’t water down what Paul and the Holy Spirit wrote, that for which millions of believes have already pressed forward. It has always been God’s purpose for creating the universe and planet Earth – to make us like Jesus is, in and to the fulness of His glory. Impossible, except that He is the author and finisher of His projects.

1. In Deuteronomy 5:25-26 God’s people, Israel, told Moses that they did not want to hear God’s voice or words for themselves any more, because they feared they would die, and they were right. Hearing God’s word for themselves was causing something stressful in them that they did not enjoy. So, they wanted Moses to hear God and pass along to them what He had said. They really lost a lot when they made that decision.

Yet, they were right in their wrongness, because when we hear God speak to us it does bring death to self. When we hear God’s word through another human, we think we can reserve to ourselves the option of rejecting or accepting the word as being truly from God or not. It is actually the same word, but our flesh thinks we have an option, which we do not. We are responsible for the ways we filter out the truth. Let’s not do that.

1. What is so important about the cross, whether Jesus’ or ours? Everything! The cross is the victory, the way, the walk, where we leave burdens and sins and step forward into Life. Our flesh wars against all of that, in order to hold onto our precious, rotting junk. The cross does not make sense to those headed to perdition, but it is Life to those who are headed for glory.

In Philippians 3:19, Paul points out four evidences against those who are enemies of the cross: 1) they appear to be Christians (!) but are headed for destruction. I understand that to mean they may or may not be born-again believers but their lives are a mess, or that they are headed for at least a time of trial after this earth-life “until they have paid the full price.”

2) Their god is their appetite, meaning they are slaves to their desires. I enjoy getting what I like, and don’t fully enjoy things that I don’t like, but am learning to be thankful for the Lord’s provision whether of persons, places or things.

3) They glory in their shame. They are proud of that which they should be ashamed. That’s calling evil good and good evil, and being proud of it.

4) They have set their minds on earthly things. That does not necessarily mean things that are obviously evil, but that they have an earthly focus. The motivation for action is not on what pleases the Lord, but on what they want.

All four of those focuses are contrary to those whose eyes are on the Lord Jesus, even if we are church members. They do not lead to Life. What are the things and people and places that you seek the most? How about spending some time evaluating your approach to life, using the four above points?

1. In Deuteronomy 9:4-6 the Lord does a very graceful thing [of course]. He tells His people, Israel, that He is giving them the Promised Land because of the wickedness of the people who lived therein, not because of the righteousness of Israel [what a comeuppance!]. He reminds Israel that they, Israel, are a stiff-necked people, and did nothing to justify the gift of the Promised Land.

Do you see why that was a blessing to Israel, or to us when He points out the same to us? The truth is humbling. It erases the “God owes me” attitude, the haughtiness, the lie that says God owes us something. He does want the best from us, and gives us rewards and wages for tasks well done, but He delights in our accurate humility. He delights in giving us gifts. He delights in forgiving us. He delights in being a loving Father, when we don’t presume to have deserved His love.

1. You know that I am always teaching about the five-fold gifts of the ministry of God’s word [Eph. 4:11] and the giftings of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12-14], so what I am about to say should not minimize those essential truths. John and the Holy Spirit remind us in 1 John 2:27 that we who possess [really, “who are possessed by”] the Holy Spirit “do not need anyone to teach us.” That is a basic, bed rock reminder that at any time “the Lord in me” is my strength, my redeemer, and my teacher. Every Christian is strengthened by that reminder as the Holy Spirit whispers it into our ears when we need to hear it. That and other basic truths are not meant to make us islands unto ourselves, except when and if He ever puts us on that island – then it is “only Jesus and me.” Until then, we are to live as a living, vital and enjoined part of His healthy and whole Body that Jesus came to insert into His fallen creation.
2. We have come now to the Lord Jesus’ message to the church in Philadelphia, beginning in the Revelation at 3:7. Remember that His words and Spirit speak to us today in 2020, to both the church and individuals, so we will be listening and applying these words to ourselves, our local congregation and our world. How can we do that? Answer: Because we have a unique God, the only living God, who came into the world that through His death He might be the means by which people could be forgiven of their sins and be restored to fellowship and family life with God. Being the resurrection and the life, He conquered death. No other religious leader died in public, was buried in a guarded tomb, and rose from the dead, being seen physically alive by multitudes. He claimed that He would return to judge the world, to reward the righteous and to punish the unrighteous.

As almost an aside, I will mention that there is a fresh prophetic word that says through our modern-day Philadelphia, Pennsylvania will come the hand of God to revive Truth and Life in America, dispelling our lies and darkness. I have no reason to disagree with that prophetic utterance, and I certainly have been praying it forward, and for other forms of deliverance from and for ourselves. We are in a divided and dark condition, in our nation and our churches; many are aware of our deep problems. Something like that prophetic word is needed, and the sooner the better, in my observation. The Lord has pronounced judgment on America for our many unrepentant sins, and we are beginning to suffer under that judgment. If we have done all that we should do, we can rest in whatever our consequences, whether or not we have been personally guilty of those sins.

You will recall that these messages to the church, applicable already for 2,000 years, and applicable now to our year 2020 and beyond, began with the church losing its fire and depth of love for the Lord; then, to bring Life to the church, we were gifted with Rome’s persecutions, which greatly increased the church’s righteousness; but that then the control of the state-controlled church fell into the hands of what today we may call professional religionists, for 900 years.

As a painful blessing, persecution of the church by the church began to show and to develop the need for reality and vitality of a personal faith in the Lord, amid the darkness of the institutionalized church. The kingdom of God has never been about getting us out of this sinful earth, but about transforming this earth by the power of God to save, heal, deliver, and reconcile all things to our Creator.

You have read the Book, especially the last chapters, and realize that the end comes not with us floating away to be with Jesus in the clouds, but with Jesus coming in the clouds to rule and reign on earth – the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, and all things being made new. At last! Our prayers and labors will have been totally fruitful.

So, Life continually budded from that dying tree for nine centuries. However, the church organization did not see its need for change, did not want to repent of her sins. There came a great and terrible division, called the Protestant Reformation, and that division continues in the church today.

In last week’s lesson we found that although the Reformers got their theology right, meaning that the Lord’s people must live by faith in Him, they became weak in faith as they began to place their trust in their correct theology instead of in the Lord. That dead, religious faith did not please the Lord, so the Reformation did not accomplish many of the things the Lord desired. Those are works remaining to be completed. But grace and faith are granted to the humble as the Lord lifts them up on eagles’ wings. That is this message to the church at Philadelphia.

Here in the message to Philadelphia, the Lord shows that it is His good pleasure to give grace and *faith and the kingdom, to little people and to little flocks. He does that when we humble ourselves, or “reduce ourselves.” Have you noticed that losing fatness of soul is harder than losing fatness of body [at least, so I’m told]. It must be said that even as Christians, our* flesh fights against becoming “little,” so we lose grace, faith, and kingdom power. You Know. Let us start at 3:7.

3:7 – Philadelphia means “brotherly love,” “fraternity,” and “love of a brother.” Remember that the second most important commandment is to love our brothers and neighbors as ourselves. The years of the application of this message to the church age are 1750 to 1900, which is from the beginning of the Reformation until the time of the Evangelical Great Awakening. Actually, the 1900 date tails off into the rapture. During those years, born-again, salvation by grace, missions, holiness in Jesus, entire sanctification after repentance, the kingdom of God, and other truths and beliefs and works were grasped and shared around the world by missionaries.

It was a time of the most powerful missionary thrusts ever seen. The big names were George Muller, Charles Spurgeon, Henry Drummond, Dwight L. Moody, General William Booth, Jonathan Edwards, Harry Moorhouse, Charles Wesley, John Wesley, Count Zinzendorf, F. B. Meyer, William Carey, Charles Finney, George Whitefield, and many others. They had zeal for the Lord, truth, love of the brethren and for the lost. They called the lost to brotherhood with Jesus and themselves.

The key of David refers to David and his son, Jesus, who reigns now in God’s kingdom in the hearts of believers, and who will reign on earth during the millennium. He opens the doors of Life to those who respond and He closes those doors to those who reject the good news. It also refers to governments, authorities and powers. The missionaries went out knowing the One who controls everything. They served the sovereign All-Mighty Lord in places and situations where it did not appear that Jesus was Lord, but He was.

3:8 – Their deeds were good and abundant, so the doors of the world were opened to them for evangelization. They went everywhere. Every person, tribe and nation were fruitful missionary fields. They had little earthly power compared to their adversaries who persecuted and martyred them, but they used what they had been given in the name of Jesus. Their central messages were salvation in Christ Jesus and getting ready for His return. The doors could not be shut against them. They had the combination needed for obedience and success – Christ the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit of God – Matt. 22:29.

Question: Why did they have so little power? My answer: Because the church was totally divided, into a dead half and a rebellious half, and the part that divided itself was still continually dividing. When we don’t allow the Lord to work out our problems [starting with “me”], our problems increase [within “me” and “us” then “others”] and we get weaker. There will be some healthy souls who will not get involved with division, thus yet “a little power.”

3:9 – The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed in 70 A. D., 25 years previous to John receiving the Revelation. Therefore, the scattered Jews had to worship and gather in synagogues. It was common for the Jewish non-believers in Christ, and even some Jewish believers, to persecute the church for its supposed non-Jewish beliefs and practices. However, the church was now the repository of the truth, the fulfillment of God’s word to Abraham and his descendants and to anyone else who believed. The unbelieving Jews continued in the Law of Moses and in the best of their revelation of Jehovah – as they do to this day. Thus, the synagogue of Satan was of the Jews who did not believe in Jesus. Those saints in Philadelphia who had little [compared to Jesus Himself!!], have God’s word that the time will come when the truth will also be known and acted upon by His chosen earthly people.

3:10 – In this verse we find another reference to the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, as the Lord of the church promises to keep them from the hour of testing that is to come upon the whole world. If the promise was that the Lord would keep them in or during the hour of testing, that would have meant they were to go through the testing. Also settled is the question of whether the tribulation will be only in and around Israel, because Jesus said “the whole world,” as He also says elsewhere.

The message of the evangelists and missionaries, who were prominent during that stage of the church, included the encouragement to “press on in holiness until the end,” as had Jesus. Put the bow on the box, the whip cream and cherry on top of the ice cream, laboring in the harvest until the Lord of the harvest calls the laborer home to rest. The end is in sight. There is much to say about that sort of keeping on when the heat is on, even when the heat is from within the church.

Paul said it well about church opposition in Philippians 1:18, when his testimony [by the Spirit] was that no matter how or why others preached Jesus, he rejoiced. He knew that whatever happens, the Lord had designed it to further the gospel. That sort of living testimony, especially when lived by those under severe persecution, has converted nations and empires, and has been a stabilizing system for this world, and will continue to stabilize societies until the Rapture. At the Rapture, the church of the redeemed will be taken up into heaven, the Holy Spirit will stop His work on earth as He had begun it on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and the devil will have a much freer [but not totally free] hand among the worldly and against the righteous in the world for a few short years. Deception and evil will be even more rampant than they are today, if we can imagine that at this time.

3:11 – To the stage and condition of the church of the late 1700s, 1800s, 1900s and on into our time the message is that Jesus is coming very soon, and suddenly like a thief in the night – perhaps today, or in 400 years. The lesser spiritual power which we have been given is sufficient at this time. Yes, our “little power” [of verse. 8] is less that the more faithful ones are desiring, considering our need and Jesus’ many and open promises, but it is adequate for our assigned task at this time – certainly adequate for personal righteousness. Hold fast to what is given. Do not try to manufacture faith emotionally, but trust the Lord and use that which He provides. Yes, press forward but do not fret over that which we do not have.

The crown will be our glorious reign with Him in Jerusalem over this earth for 1,000 years in the midst of those who had been our enemies but who then will be our full brothers or beneficiaries. The message of this verse is that those crowns will be given, so be diligent to now earn yours. That is similar to the situation of ticket drawings. Many will have paid a price, but few will be chosen as winners. All of the crowns will be given. Don’t let someone else take a crown that was available to you!

3:12 – Those missionary-minded saints who do not faint or fade will be rewarded by hearing the Lord label them as overcomers. Their character and presence will carry over from being a spiritual pillar during their earth life to being a pillar in God’s temple in the millennium. Fantastic! That type of present abiding will be rewarded with 1) a forever closeness with the Lord, 2) a new name [possibly written upon our forehead or hand, to the shame of those who had taken the number of the beast on their forehead or hand], 3) a label showing that we are one of those who are citizens of the new Jerusalem, and 4) [and this is the MOST!!] the privilege of bearing the new name of the Lord Himself. See 2:17, which refers to the new name written on our white stone. That new name given us is His new name, conferring upon us the sonship and character of Jesus Himself. And, it is written on us, the living stones of the Living Church!

3:13 – Is there anyone reading this who does not desire that position and reward? I suppose not, but there may be some who suppose that they already have a lock on it. Press on, saints. This is a deeds situation. Don’t let anyone else take your place or reward while you rest this side of the finish line. Remember that we are talking about earning a reward, not our gift of eternal salvation. [Song: “I’m not lookin’ for a hole in the ground; I’m lookin’ for a hole in the sky. Jesus is comin’ by and by. It may be night or noon, but He’s comin’ very soon, and you ain’t gonna catch me lyin’ down. No, no, you ain’t gonna catch me lyin’ down.”]