

THE CHURCH

***“Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless”
(Ephesians 5:23, 25-27).***

EPISTLE TO THE READER

The Book of Revelation and the Epistles of John are written to the church, not the unchurched, to Christians, not pagans.¹ Jesus defines Himself as “the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands,” a metaphor for the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia.²

Jesus knows His Church. He is the High Priest always amongst the lampstands. His attention is not upon worldly kingdoms or political parties or wars and rumors of war, but upon His Church for it is most precious to Him.

The Church is God’s *ekklesia*, those called out from the world. The bona fide Church is comprised of those chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”³

The Church is composed of blood-bought “saints by calling” who are gathered for the common cause of uncommon living, determined to fulfill God’s holy purposes for their lives.⁴ Christians have been set apart for God’s holy exercises.⁵ You are enabled to identify Christians by their peculiar character trait of holiness.

Christ holds the true Church “in His right hand,” the place of honor so that it might be endowed with His authority, power and protection.⁶ With His right hand He blesses, comforts and imparts His own strength to His true Church. The problem arises when His true Church begins to resemble more closely the world than the Christ.

Could a city set upon a hill become a Tower of Babel? Does your church lift up the name of Christ, or is the mantra of your church body that of the tower-builders: “Let us make for ourselves a name”?⁷

THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

Only in the first and last of the seven letters to the churches in the Roman province of Asia is a church threatened with perfect destruction. Why would a loving God destroy His church? God says, “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”⁸

The God of your Bible does not only love; He is just and righteous and pure and holy and a consuming fire. His love is not blind; nor is His love mere sentiment without substance.

What is your first love? When you first recognized that the Holy Spirit had transformed your heart, what was your response? When you realized that you had been graced with the new birth, the birth from above, what was your reaction toward Christ? Can you still remember the joyous love you had for God?

The zealous love for Jesus expressed by recent converts is encouraging to seasoned Christians, and contagious for the unconverted. God says, “I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown.”⁹ Upon being born from above, the Christian man pursues God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. He wants to become known as Christ’s disciple so he unashamedly loves Christ and His people.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the love that scores of churchmen originally express may begin to chill. They may continue to be moral people and steadfast in their worldly employments, but they have left their first love.

What is the primary cause for one losing his first love? Living in a fallen world encourages a natural decline upon holy loves. Unaddressed and unadorned, your love for Christ shall wax cold losing its holy passion. **First loves initially chill** by degrees unless the One who exercises the greater love alerts you.

You can discover your loss by scrutinizing the loves and lovers you presently pursue. As you pursue other loves, Christ becomes a stranger. His teachings become **foreign** to you, and you no longer have the passion to read and memorize His truths. You ambulate away from the First Corinthians 13 attitude you should have toward Christ.

Why do the churched lose their first love? Though the reasons are diverse, Jesus says, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.”¹¹ Lawlessness is when sin appears normal and natural, though righteousness seems odd – an exchange has been effected for the worse.

Numerous churchgoers are misled into thinking that lawlessness is lawfulness, and what is not appropriate to a Christian ethic thereby becomes Christian. Paul says these people “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”¹²

How many regular attendees of your church are actually worshipping gods other than the Lord Christ? The prophet Jeremiah says, “Has a nation changed gods, when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.”¹³

- ❖ Materialism is a smotherer of churches. No church has ever been betrothed by Christ to worldly attractiveness or popularity. Yet when a church begins to behave as the world, that church becomes the world.
- ❖ Affluence is a destroyer of churches. Affluence is a vicious temptation due to the subtleness of its approach. Churchmen are not alert to affluence as a destroyer because its capture is the desire of the hearts of all men.
- ❖ Associations can also damage churchmen. Be ever mindful that worldliness breeds worldliness. Everyone with whom you maintain close relations is your influencer. Those close relations may be via media as well as personal contact. Those whom you admire or watch with interest shall engrave their images upon you. The Church of Christ should expect to travel alone even as Moses, Mordecai, Daniel, John the Baptist and Jesus traveled.

Is your love for Christ merely painted fire? That is a love composed of a religious picture painted with the brush of Christianity yet possessing no fire, no power, no affection, no abundance and zeal for others to partake of His life. Judas’ affection for Christ was painted fire. Your loves become either the object of your earthly sacrifices or your eternal curses.

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

A fearful church is an ineffective church. God says to the churches, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”¹⁴

God commands you not to fear even suffering that appears certain. You know that you shall never receive the crown of life unless you take up your cross and suffer the life of Christlikeness in this Christ-hating world.¹⁵ God has promised persecution to the godly.¹⁶

Think back upon Daniel who was tempted to compromise with the pagan religion of Babylon. He and three other young Hebrews were offered “a daily ration from the king’s table But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food.”¹⁷ From a human perspective, the offering was attractive to these youngsters in a foreign land because they were to eat the food from the king’s table, but the food was dedicated to idols.¹⁸ They courageously refused participation in idolatry at the expense of their very lives.

The Pharaohs, Caesars and ancient near eastern kings viewed themselves as divine. These faithful Hebrews who had been deported to Babylon and those Christians in Smyrna were rejecting the divinity of even the uppermost of men. They would only pledge their allegiance to the one true God. Nevertheless, they must be prepared to suffer for the cause of Christian discipleship.

All suffering in this world is limited in degree and duration. In addition, the eternal rewards for temporal suffering far outstrip the pain of present suffering: “For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”¹⁹

You are called to look beyond the suffering to the glory:

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”²⁰

Your responsibility is to “be faithful until death.” Stephen and James have established the standard.²¹ Testing forces definition and declaration. Every test, regardless of its proximate source and painful severity, is a divine test purposed to distinguish the genuine from the false believers in the Church.²²

If you are a Christian in heart as well as in name, you will be strengthened by the tests just as others will be identified as imposters. Scores of pew-sitting elders, deacons and ministers are members of the earthly Church, yet without membership in the eternal Church. God says, “My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”²³

Christian churchmen choose to die rather than deny their holy Christ who died so that they might enjoy an abundant everlasting life. They shall receive the gift of “the crown of life.” Christians receive the eternal imperishable garland of victory.²⁴

Is your church populated with scores of receivers of “the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award”?²⁵ You can know by numbering your congregants who gladly die daily to themselves. Will you receive the crown of life?

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

A stumbling church is not a conquering church. Too many churches are plagued with a spiritual cancer within their leadership. Some of those churches afflicted with this leadership malignancy are undergoing chemotherapy, while others are opting for

radiation treatment. Nevertheless, the body most in danger is the church with the *undiagnosed* yet debilitating spiritual leadership tumor.

Satan is laboring within your church to foster his spiritual scourge. You are commissioned by God to discern and identify the disease. You may immediately demur declaring, “But who am I to take on such a battle?” God gifts you with your victory over the devil, for Jesus says, “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is ... where Satan dwells.”²⁶

Jesus knows your dwelling place because He did take flesh and dwelt among mankind. He knows the difficulty of living where Satan roams “about on the earth and walking around on it.”²⁷ He has also done battle with Satan on the enemy’s territory. Nonetheless, “when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him.”²⁸ Satan lost!

Satan is the definitive instigator of man’s difficulties. The more closely associated you are with your Christ, and the nearer you live to Satan’s havens, the more sober you should be concerning your well-being. Those taking up residence near the lair of evil are exhorted to expect evil assaults.²⁹

The enemy of Christ and Christian man is calculating, disciplined, intelligent, organized, motivated, shrewd, well financed and sacrificial in his commitment to seducing and crushing Christians. Satan is a fool for his cause, and he has a keen awareness of the appropriate instant to effectuate the most inappropriate works of darkness.

The devil appears to come out of nowhere, yet he and his legions are well positioned to foster their evil. He is called the Accuser; he manifests himself in various ways and in all venues. He is unconcerned with world approval, yet he consistently receives the world’s endorsement.

Your enemy knows how to captivate your attentiveness to his offerings. Nonetheless, the Cross of Christ changed the landscape of the world and the power of Satan’s throne.

Light and darkness cannot dwell together peacefully; therefore the witnessing church will be the persecuted church. God desires a pure Church unmixed with worldly compromises.³⁰ Christ’s chaste Church will witness to its chastity by the persecution it receives, for God shakes the church tree. Unregenerate man’s disgust and maltreatment of the true Church identifies those within the Church who are but temporary Christians.

In your society the persecution of the true Church is not seen on the gallows or the guillotine or in the prisons. Rather, “civil” persecution is in the form of jealousy and envy and slander and being publicly distanced from the “respected” community. The untrue church will label your true church a cult or a center for worshipping a preacher rather than being a sanctuary where many might join to do business with the holy God who expects nothing less than holiness from His worshippers.³¹

One of your Christian responsibilities is to determine those in your church, particularly in positions of leadership, who are but temporaries enjoying the outward privileges of being churchd though without title to an eternal pew.³² Personal and corporate implications accompany your lack of vigilance. The consequences of failing to judge with a righteous judgment are more severe than you or your church can tolerate, for God shall remove your lampstand.³³

Your church cannot afford for you to refuse the awareness God has brought to your mind. The Holy Spirit is working with your spirit moving you to address the spiritual cancer within your church. Will you respond? Never allow niceness to supplant holiness, politeness to displace purity or men-pleasing to supersede God-pleasing.

THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

Many churches pridefully publicize their tolerance for the things God would never tolerate in His true Church. They are promoting life in an environment unshaped by Christianity. Nevertheless, God does not bless their loose shepherding of His flock. To the church complimenting itself with its unbiblical broadmindedness, God says, “But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel.”³⁴

The Old Testament Jezebel was the daughter of a Phoenician king who incited King Ahab to worship Baal. Her very marriage to the Hebrew king was a direct violation of the Mosaic Law, and her enticement of him to build a worship center in the nation’s capitol to the foreign god further deproved Israel’s desire for the one true God.³⁵ After the name Balaam, Jezebel becomes the primary Old Testament representation of pagan seductions.

Scripture advises that Jezebel promoted immorality, and was unrepentant of her immorality teaching. She taught a liberal permissiveness that included idolatry of worldly lifestyles. Satan wants you squeezed into the world’s mold, enjoying what the world encourages and living what the world teaches.

Many teachers within the Church are teaching a fundamental departure from the ways of God. They are employing the pulpits and teaching stations of the Church to debauch churchmen. These Jezebel teachers are social engineers seeking to bring the Church in conformity with the world, rather than calling the Church and the world to be conformed to the image of Christ.

The indictment the Lord Christ brought against the church in Thyatira is the same charge He brings against the Church in this age: *Tolerance of Intolerables*. Scores of churches advertising Christianity are Christophobic.³⁶ Tolerance is the hound of hell and the goddess before whom your nation bows. Sadly, the Church, by following the ways of man instead of the Lord’s word, is tolerating the intolerable, and in so doing many churches are becoming intolerable to practicing Christians.

Negotiating with what God has declared *intolerable* assures the defeat of the Church and the removal of the Lord's lampstand. Toleration is the grave of revival and reformation for it cultivates the adoption of another's sins. Christ calls for church discipline. You cannot be passive when evil is occurring and expect freedom from guilt.

Toleration is a satanic strategy designed to eliminate God's absolute truth. The disadvantages of toleration for the intolerables are legion:

- ❖ Disables the jurisdiction of proven authorities (such as parents)
- ❖ Assures loss of community and accountability
- ❖ Advances prodigal lifestyles
- ❖ Ability becomes the criteria for action rather than appropriateness
- ❖ Increases false confidences in fallen reason
- ❖ Radical individualism supplants community
- ❖ Aids and abets historically recognized wickednesses
- ❖ Silences moral gatekeepers
- ❖ Accentuates the importance of one's feelings rather than one's mind
- ❖ Increases individual and corporate stresses including loneliness, fatigue and fear
- ❖ Tombstones true progress by licensing materialists, hedonists and consumerists
- ❖ Massacres by assassination a civilization

The influence of the tolerant broadminded church upon the culture is slight because those within the church are tolerating and thinking cultural thoughts rather than eternal thoughts. Anyone can have an ordinary uninformative worldview. God is *not* calling you to conventional, customary or ordinary thinking, because He expects His bride to be transformed from the ordinary into the supernatural. You must cease thinking conventionally and begin thinking Christly in order to influence your society. But first, you must address the presence of the Jezebels in your own church.

Do not forfeit your society or your church to the daughters of Satan. You must not allow public opinion to become the god/Baal before whom your church bows. The poison of church tolerance must be antidoted with the inspired, inerrant and infallible word of the holy and righteous Christ.

Your spiritual forefathers bled for truths that now are being neglected, abandoned, butchered or renounced by your church. You cannot allow compromise regarding the essentials of Christianity. Your Christianity is not on the negotiating table.

The day will come with the One possessing eyes like a flame of fire, and feet of burnished bronze shall trample the tolerators and the teachers of toleration! God says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."³⁷

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

The Christian landscape of America is littered with churches who perceive themselves complimented when they are labeled as quiet, charming or “they know their place.” These misled churches are deceived into positioning themselves as refined, tasteful or sophisticated when they are actually asleep. They have surrendered their position as a city set upon a hill. To these dead churches Jesus says, “Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.”³⁸

Samson was the leader of his church. He was responsible for remaining vigilant in order to protect God’s people. Nevertheless, he slept upon the lap of his seductress, Delilah.³⁹

Countless Christians bear too near a resemblance to Samson in their sottishness. They are asleep when their duty requires the utmost watchfulness. Scores of professing believers in positions of leadership in their churches are sleeping in the midst of a vicious offensive being waged by the adversary.

God’s gatekeepers do not sleep during their watch. There is no “at ease” in the Christian life, for the Christian is always on duty. The tresses of your spirit can be as deceptively, quietly and decisively sheared as Samson’s.

The Church is asleep, and Satan is hopeful that its slumber continues. The Church is slumbering because churchians do not want to turn the world upside down.⁴⁰ Until the Church is awakened, the wickedness of the world will remain unaddressed.

God calls your church to be a fort where you come for fortifications to undertake the raging battle. Jesus says, “Strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die.” Scores of churches are but a carcass of what Christ desires. They are unemployed in the campaign of Christ. They have taken on the lethargy of their pagan ethos. Has the strength of your church waxed cold?

Salvation is a revolutionary grace, and makes revolutionary demands upon those claiming God’s saving grace. Churches should be praying daily for the earthly interests of their members to decrease, for those in the marketplace to become more interested in the nurture of their souls than in their finances and for every churchman to realize that even at his workstation he stands *coram Deo*, before the face of God.⁴¹

Christ says, “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.” You may protest, but Jesus judges the merit of your deeds based upon God’s standard, not your standard, the standard of your church or the standard of your culture. Be mindful, “If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?”⁴²

The Bridegroom will not come until the bride makes herself ready. The bride is not just you, but your entire church! Look closely at your church. Are its leaders and members engaging their families and associates in eternal matters, or have they set themselves

upon the task of avoiding engagement, persecution and hardship in order to avert disclosure of their professed Christianity?

Too many church leaders and members are starters, but are not finishers of what they began. Peter slept as his Savior sweated blood. Are you or your church asleep?

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.”⁴³

THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

A church must never allow its assessment of its resources to affect its witness to Christ. You may perceive yourself to be but a grasshopper in the sight of the nations; that is a lie from the pit of hell.⁴⁴ If your church is true to the vision the Spirit has placed before it, and ministers through the open doors the Lord allows, your church shall not be denied the Lord’s victory, and it shall bring about excellence in the eternal kingdom.⁴⁵

Jesus says, “I know your deeds.”⁴⁶ He knows when you have not been distracted from His eternal purpose by the print and electronic media that besieges Christians with decadent lying lifestyles, inappropriate recreations and destructive amusements. He knows your vitality and success in disallowing the seductions of personal deification, earthly lifestyles, and self-love, self-worship as well as selfishness.

The church in Philadelphia had “little power,” but it kept Christ’s word and did not deny His name. They would not negotiate their Christianity, for they knew that their personal power did not determine God’s effectiveness.⁴⁷ This should be the temperament of your church.

Jesus’ promise to the weak yet true Church is sterling: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”⁴⁸

One such as you who exercises little power in the world shall become an immovable pillar in the temple of the new Jerusalem. A person painfully aware of his weakness shall finally discover his place of belonging and serving in the fullness of the Spirit’s power.

Jesus wants you to appreciate your security in Him for the day will come when time will be swallowed up in eternity. The nominal Christian does not receive “the name of My God.” Why? The one bearing God’s name throughout eternity is the same one who bears God’s name in this world. The untrue church and the untrue Christian refuse the bearing of Jesus’ name before fallen man; he shall not bear the Name before righteous men made perfect.⁴⁹

THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

Only in the first and last of the seven letters to the churches in the Roman province of Asia is a church threatened with perfect destruction. Why? Jesus says, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”⁵⁰

Are you, is your church, “neither hot nor cold”? Indifference is inexcusable. God does not smile upon “a cake not turned.”⁵¹ There is no neutral corner in the Christian’s worldly battles. Jesus says, “From everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”⁵²

Jesus commands what Satan hates – “be zealous therefore.”⁵³ Zeal is heat; it never runs out of breath; it boils with Gospel truths. Christian zeal has many rivals, but no friends; it is an earthly pauper. Its embers must be raked, for its nature is to multiply in proportion to the fuel and attention it receives.

Zeal is Simon Peter hearing the voice of the resurrected Christ and throwing “himself into the sea” so that he might approach his God.⁵⁴ The boat could not hold Peter! Zeal is Bartimaeus, blind and begging, “casting aside his cloak,” jumping up and coming to Jesus crying out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”⁵⁵ Zeal is Mary, “Who moreover was listening to the Lord’s word seated at His feet.”⁵⁶

Zealousness is the Christian’s credential. The person appreciating the magnitude and eternal significance of God’s forgiveness of his decadent self-indulgent corruption shall love the Forgiver much.⁵⁷ He is seraphic in his holy burning for his Lord. The zeal of the true Church is quickened by opposition and braced with sacred energy. God’s children have Goshen in their bosoms, Canaan in their minds and heaven in their eyes. The watch fires of your church should be blazing with God’s glory or it will testify to a congregation of hesitating wavering double-minded milksops refusing to stand in the gap.

Satan calls for mere formality in the Church of Christ because he knows the extent of the damage a fervent spirit can do to his work. Those without heavenly fires shall know the fires of hell, for they are causing those under their teaching to pass through the fires of this world without the benefits of Christ.⁵⁸ Was Christ moderate or lukewarm, or was He zealous and excited and enthusiastic in His sacrifice for you? He sweated blood!

How would you describe the spirits of Abraham, Moses, David and Paul? Elijah challenged his church (Israel), thereby forcing an entire nation to make a choice. Barrenness never marks the spouse of Christ. Christ has clothed the Christian; the Church makes public Christ’s clothing, and lives in accordance with His holy clothing.⁵⁹

Jesus indicts the Laodicean churchmen with the grave trespass of being passionless. They are without enthusiasm for the One they call Savior. Apathy governs their hearts.

The world has no passionate interest in the things of God. Worldlings are engrossed in themselves, therefore the eternal Messiah is without appeal or fascination. How tragic is it for those called out of the world to resemble the world?

When Jesus says the Laodiceans are “lukewarm,” He is declaring their frigid aloofness regarding matters of everlasting consequence. Lukewarmness means a church offers no refreshment to the Lord. How much refreshment do you and your church bring to God? Are you “the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place” and “a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing”?⁶⁰

If you were to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ today, would your lack of concern toward your own soul (for which He died!) so nauseate Him that He would spit you out of His mouth? **The love of the one holy God is the reason He sent His only begotten Son to die for those He loved from before the foundation of the world.**⁶¹ Is your church encouraging your lukewarmness or stirring **your zealous** love for the Lord Christ?

SECOND JOHN: THE CHURCH VIGILANT

John is the last surviving Apostle. John loves Jesus' Church. He addresses the church in this small epistle as a congregation whose ethnicity is populated by those new creatures in whom “the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”⁶²

John knows that “deceivers” are affecting the church.⁶³ They are charlatans counterfeiting Christ's gospel. God does not bless a church that allows imposters to occupy its posts of leadership.

Do the leaders of your church (this includes ministers!) resemble eternity? Are they growing in the grace and knowledge of your Lord Jesus Christ?⁶⁴ Do they love the souls of the people in the church, or are they more wed to the architecture, the buildings, the cemetery, the Sunday school classes, the traditions, the families, the memories of marriages and baptisms, etc.? Is *every person* in a position of leadership in your church of repentant spirit, evangelistic in their desire for the lost to come to know Christ and praying to fall more deeply in love with Jesus?

John so loves God's *ekklesia* that he does not want God's Church to forfeit what Christ has so valiantly won for His Church. Therefore John exhorts the Christian Church declaring, “Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”⁶⁵

Vigilance is virtuous. Jesus said, “Keep on the alert at all times.”⁶⁶ Why should you watch yourselves? God says you diligently maintain vigilance “that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”

It is far easier to watch others than it is to watch yourself. Your heart is a traitor. You view yourself through forgiving spectacles though being graceless when you observe

others. Self-confidence is hazardous therefore, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”⁶⁷

You look into your own heart, and cry out with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”⁶⁸ Once you have looked into your own heart and been addressed by the Holy Spirit, you are to bring forth the judgment the Spirit allows. What you cannot afford is for you or your church to become acceptors or endorsers of strange doctrine. Being carried away by strange doctrine is a common Christian peril.⁶⁹

Vigilance insulates you against losing conquered territory. How valuable is the territory the Holy Spirit has enabled you to conquer? Perhaps the better questions are, “What territory have you conquered?” and, “What are your Christian accomplishments?”

You are going to be held accountable for every deed you have done and failed to do in your world.⁷⁰ This includes your superintendence of your own body of believers. Your deeds sustain or devastate your life’s testimony and the fullness of your eternal rewards.⁷¹ Peter said, “Be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness.”⁷²

Your vigilance and your eternal rewards are tethered to the worth you place upon your Christianity. What is your Christianity worth? Is it worth being vigilant both for you and for the body Christ calls the Church?

THIRD JOHN: THE CHURCH STRANGLER

No place does God so hate sin as in His own Church. One elder or one deacon can strangle a church. These stranglers may bring their Bibles to church, but they do not come to church with the Lord Christ in their hearts. Though they can pray like bishops, the pledge of God’s Spirit is not upon them.

The Holy Spirit moved the aged Apostle to address a church being choked by a man named Diotrephes.⁷³ John levels four charges against Diotrephes:

1. He is ambitious for and claims the leading position in the church.⁷⁴
2. He refuses to accept the Apostle’s teaching.⁷⁵
3. He makes malicious statements about God’s messengers.⁷⁶
4. He excommunicates truth-loving Christians.⁷⁷

Do you have such an elder or deacon in your church?

Many churchmen are feverish for earthly honors and preferments. These men are the sons of Eve who desire more than Christ would have them possess. Ungodly ambition most often fossilizes a man’s heart and incapacitates his conscience.

This type of man is pridefully jealous. He does not receive the counsel of wise godly men. He refuses to submit to the authority of others and is intoxicated by the liquor of

self. His heart is like David's body when he grew old: "They covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm."⁷⁸

Christ's axe of judgment for selfishness and self-fulfillment shall be laid to the root of the prideful tree. This asphyxiator of the church unjustly accuses the righteous thereby violating God's command against bearing false witness.⁷⁹ He is a hinderer of Christ's kingdom.⁸⁰

Do any of the elders or deacons in your church match the description given by John, the Apostle of Love, to Diotrephes? John says, "For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds."⁸¹ Are you willing to call attention to the deeds of the church strangler amongst your body of believers? Perhaps a review of Matthew 18:15-17 will serve you and your church well.

EPILOGUE

Every evangelical church is purposed by God to be a colony of heaven. Nonetheless, those within the Church are now outsinning the unchurched of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Church has become more of an amusement park than a sanctuary for holiness, more focused upon entertaining than illuminating, riveted upon being happy rather than holy, and pop psychology has become its therapeutic means rather than Scriptures of the eternally wise God.

Today's Church appears more afraid of holiness, righteousness and piety than of sin. The contemporary Church so craves acceptance within this adulterous and sinful, crooked and perverse culture that it has itself become adulterous and sinful, crooked and perverse.

God says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."⁸² The Holy Spirit is the speaker, informer, inspirer, energizer and engager of Christian hearing. He speaks to the *ekklesia*. Who is the *ekklesia* having the ear to hear? Those into whom God has fulfilled His promise: "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people."⁸³

What identifies those hearing the Holy Spirit? They take upon themselves the activity of Peter and Andrew who "immediately left the nets and followed Him."⁸⁴ Have you left your nets?

Your desire is to learn from God through the teaching of His Spirit just how He views the Church, and who He wants you to become as His *ekklesia*. God expects His congregation to live sanctified lives. He saves people in order that they might live like a saved people!

Many of those occupying the pews in your church act upon the directives of politicians and government officials and employers, but are they as quick to respond to the voice of the Spirit of Christ? Are you? If so, pray through the following challenges.

- ❖ Is your church evangelical?
- ❖ Does your church center its worship and teaching upon God or man?
- ❖ Do the ministers and teachers in your church believe in the inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture?
- ❖ Do they teach the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ and that Jesus is coming again to take the Church to Himself?
- ❖ Does every person occupying a teaching station believe that Jesus Christ is the exclusive way to enter heaven?⁸⁵
- ❖ Is your church serious about christianizing Christians, growing more holy and is it urgent “to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”?⁸⁶

When the Holy Spirit addressed the sin of the Church as exemplified in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira, “a great fear came upon the whole church; and upon all who heard of these things.”⁸⁷ The church fearing the Lord is a nursery for revival, a vehicle for lifestyle transformation and a mini-culture schooling its members on how heavenlings are to conduct themselves during their tenure on earth.

The Church has experienced a Reformation (1500s), Great Awakenings (1720s – 1740s and the early 1800s) and a Prayer Revival (1858-59). Nonetheless, these extraordinary outpourings of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God shall not occur again unless great fear comes upon the whole Church. Is your church so fearful of God’s awesomeness that it pursues being true to God’s evangelistic and edificational commands?

A story is told of a lady touring Westminster Abbey whose tour guide repeatedly advised her of the significance of the people buried in the hallowed ground of that church. As the unimpressed lady walked past the graves of Britain’s most courageous prime ministers, learned playwrights and literary geniuses, she asked, “Has anyone been saved in this church lately?” Perhaps you should ask that question of the principals in your church.

The social and economic commerce of the Christian is never ordinary, for it is never separated from his spiritual commitments to the lordship of Christ. God desires a pure Church unmixed with the world’s hypocritical models.⁸⁸ When you and your church are tested, does the outcome of the testing reveal:

- ❖ That you are a member of the eternal Church as well as the temporal Church?⁸⁹
- ❖ That your church membership is as well documented in heaven as it is on earth?⁹⁰
- ❖ That your church is true to the holy Christ?⁹¹

Apply to your church the test Paul commanded of the church in Corinth:

“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!
Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?”⁹²

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

¹ Rev. 1:1, 9; I Jn. 5:13; II Jn. 1; III Jn. 1

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- ² Rev. 1:20; 2:1
³ Eph. 1:4-6
⁴ I Cor. 1:2
⁵ I Pe. 1:15
⁶ Rev. 1:20; 2:1
⁷ Gen. 11:4
⁸ Rev. 2:4
⁹ Jer. 2:2
¹⁰ Jn. 13:34f.
¹¹ Mt. 24:12f.
¹² Ro. 1:25
¹³ Jer. 2:11
¹⁴ Rev. 2:10
¹⁵ Jn. 15:18-21
¹⁶ II Ti. 3:12
¹⁷ Dan. 1:5,8
¹⁸ Dan. 1:2; 5:3f.
¹⁹ Ro. 8:18
²⁰ II Cor. 4:8-10,17f.
²¹ Acts 6:9-7:60; 12:1f.
²² I Cor. 11:19
²³ Heb. 10:38
²⁴ I Cor. 9:25
²⁵ II Ti. 4:8
²⁶ Rev. 2:13
²⁷ Job 1:7
²⁸ Lk. 4:13
²⁹ I Pe. 1:13
³⁰ I Cor. 5:5; 11:32
³¹ I Pe. 1:15
³² II Jn. 7-11; III Jn. 9f.
³³ Jn. 7:24
³⁴ Rev. 2:20
³⁵ I Ki. 16:31; 18:4-19; 19:1f.
³⁶ Jn. 3:19
³⁷ Ro. 12:2
³⁸ Rev. 3:2
³⁹ Judg. 16:19ff.
⁴⁰ Acts 17:6
⁴¹ II Cor. 7:1
⁴² Jer. 12:5
⁴³ Gal. 6:7f.
⁴⁴ Nu. 13:33
⁴⁵ Rev. 3:8,12
⁴⁶ Rev. 3:8
⁴⁷ I Cor. 1:26ff.
⁴⁸ Rev. 3:12
⁴⁹ III Jn. 7; Heb. 12:23
⁵⁰ Rev. 3:15f.
⁵¹ Hos. 7:8
⁵² Lk. 12:48
⁵³ Rev. 3:19
⁵⁴ Jn. 21:7
⁵⁵ Mk. 10:46ff.
⁵⁶ Lk. 10:39

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- ⁵⁷ Lk. 7:47
⁵⁸ Jer. 32:35
⁵⁹ Isa. 61:10
⁶⁰ II Cor. 12:14f.
⁶¹ Jn. 3:16; 15:9ff.
⁶² II Cor. 5:17
⁶³ II Jn. 7
⁶⁴ II Pe. 3:18
⁶⁵ II Jn. 8
⁶⁶ Lk. 21:36
⁶⁷ I Cor. 10:12
⁶⁸ Ps. 139:23f.
⁶⁹ Heb. 13:9
⁷⁰ II Cor. 5:10
⁷¹ Rev. 20:12
⁷² II Pe. 3:17
⁷³ III Jn. 9f.
⁷⁴ Mt. 20:20-28
⁷⁵ Eph. 2:19f.
⁷⁶ Ex. 20:16
⁷⁷ Jn. 9:34
⁷⁸ I Ki. 1:1
⁷⁹ Ex. 20:16; Dt. 5:20; I Ti. 5:13
⁸⁰ Rev. 11:15
⁸¹ III Jn. 10
⁸² Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22
⁸³ Heb. 8:10; see also Jer. 31:31-34
⁸⁴ Mt. 4:19f.
⁸⁵ Jn. 14:6
⁸⁶ Rev. 19:8
⁸⁷ Acts 5:11
⁸⁸ I Cor. 5:5; 11:32
⁸⁹ Mt. 7:21-23
⁹⁰ Lk. 13:23-30
⁹¹ Ps. 34:11
⁹² II Cor. 13:5

Many of the Church concepts permeating this writing were borrowed from:

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