



"The ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God."

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

13-Jul-12

## The Relationship Deficit (Part Two)

As we saw last time, the [letter to Laodicea \(Revelation 3:14-21\)](#), the Parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants ([Luke 12:35-40](#)), and the fifth chapter of the Song of Songs all picture [Jesus Christ](#) standing behind a door, [waiting](#) for His people to respond. The symbol of a door is used in a number of ways in Scripture, but the commonality in these passages is that the door represents something that separates people from [God](#). Mankind became separated from Him in the Garden of Eden when [sin](#) entered [the world](#) and the way to the Tree of Life (and by implication, to God) was blocked. As [Isaiah 59:2](#) says, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God."

In God's dealings with ancient Israel, there was a "door of the tabernacle," and inside that, there was a "veil"—another door—both of which granted sequential access into God's dwelling place. God was not walled in; those whom He designated could go through the doors and approach Him, as long as they did so according to His instructions.

Under the New Covenant, the way to the Father has been opened by Christ's sacrifice ([Hebrews 10:19-20](#)), yet only those the Father calls have the door to the Son opened to them ([John 6:44](#)). Thus, if the Father has called us, we

have access to Christ and ultimately to the Father Himself. A door has been made where an impenetrable barrier once stood.

In all three of the above passages, Jesus is pictured as behind a closed door. The separation is not permanent, though—a door, by definition, can open, but the impetus to open it lies with the individual. This is in contrast with the letter to the church at Philadelphia, where Jesus tells them, "I have set before you [an open door](#), and no one can shut it" ([Revelation 3:8](#)). This open door—held open by the Creator of the universe—is a reward for the Philadelphians' [faithfulness](#) in keeping His Word and not denying His name, despite having only a little strength. They have also kept His command to persevere (verse 10). The picture that emerges is of a people who have little power yet devote all they have to pleasing their Master. He is their highest priority and the object of their attention and affection. Because of their unreserved response to the opportunity to know Him, Jesus guarantees that no one will close that door.

Yet, Christ is still uncertain how much the [Laodiceans](#) really desire what He has offered them. Other things are competing for their attention and affection, and the competition is close enough that He asks them to demonstrate where their hearts truly and fully are. Will they open the door?

Another description in the letter to the Laodicean church parallels Luke 12. Jesus describes the Laodiceans as saying, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and His teaching just prior to the Parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants touches on this: "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, *a treasure in the heavens that does not fail*, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" ([Luke 12:33-34](#)).

Spiritual riches are what truly matter, and what we treasure will determine where our affections lie. Physical wealth can be a tremendous distraction, as numerous scriptures warn. Yet, we dare not conclude that we are in danger only if we are rolling in cash. For one thing, due to God's [promises to Abraham](#), even the poorest within the Western world have more than the average first-century Christian. Compared to the standard of living then, each of us is "rich and increased with goods"! Regardless of our physical wealth, the much greater danger lies in misidentifying our *spiritual* riches.

[I Corinthians 4:8](#) contains an example of this. The apostle Paul mocks the congregation for thinking that they were spiritually better off than they actually were: "You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!" The context makes it clear that he is not talking about physical riches at all. Rather, the Corinthians felt spiritually full, so they were not hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of Jesus Christ. They were puffed up, and at least part of their self-exaltation stemmed from the fact that many of them had received spiritual gifts.

They saw their gifts—ostensible spiritual wealth—as evidence that their spiritual condition was good, then behaved as if they were already reigning with Christ. Did not their gifts demonstrate God's favor toward them? The reality, however, is that God gives spiritual gifts for the outworking of His will and the edification of the Body—and He can bestow them on the unconverted if it suits Him! He even inspired true prophecies about Israel and the Messiah through Balaam, a pagan soothsayer. The presence (or absence) of spiritual gifts cannot be taken as an infallible barometer of one's relationship with God.

Paul had to clarify the place and purpose of the gifts that God had given. He had to draw their attention back to the meaning of [Passover](#), because their relationship with the Passover Lamb was so shallow. He had to explain to the Corinthians the rudiments of godly [love](#). The Corinthians' improper emphasis on these gifts caused them to overshadow their *true* treasure, their relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet even as they neglected that relationship, they were convinced that they were spiritually rich! Had they actually been close to Christ, they would have been a far humbler congregation (compare [Job 42:5-6](#)).

Something similar transpired in the [Worldwide Church of God](#) (WCG), even before the apostasy. We had an apostle, and many believed we had the end-time Elijah. We had rare biblical knowledge and a much greater doctrinal understanding than the previous era. We had a global reach with the telecast and magazine, enabling us to preach [the gospel](#) in a way that had not been

done for 1900 years. We had a full social and activities calendar. And because we were "in the church," we were assured a spot in the "place of safety."

Perhaps as a backlash against Protestantism, we were, by and large, not encouraged to get to know Jesus Christ. This is not to say it never happened, but that relationship was not the focus. Whereas Protestantism typically overlooks Christ's message concerning the coming [Kingdom of God](#) on earth, the WCG, as a generality, went to the opposite extreme of concentrating almost entirely on His message, shying away from talking about the divine, all-powerful Messenger.

We thought we were rich, that we had become (spiritually) wealthy, yet many were not very interested in the true treasure. In the headiness of our spiritual "affluenza," we forgot Him. In response, the Head of the church chose to get our attention again by turning everything upside-down, revealing our spiritual poverty—and that without Him, we can do absolutely nothing.

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

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by David F. Maas

One of the most widely occurring metaphors in the Bible involves eating. David Maas contends that it is not just what we ingest spiritually that is important, but that we also develop the ability to feed ourselves properly.

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