

He Who Overcomes

Struggle as an Integral Part of Spiritual Growth

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Several months ago, I was talking with Martin Collins regarding a paper that had been put out by a man named Steven Collins, regarding a prophecy concerning the end of the world. In that prophecy he said, "You do not have to worry about Europe, because China is going to be the beast." So we have nothing to worry about from Europe, according to him.

Martin and I took a few minutes to talk to each other and exchange different thoughts on end-time prophecy that we had heard over almost forty years. I think we have heard almost all of them and none of them were correct. Even though we could denote the end time season, as John talked about this morning, we could not figure out the exact steps that were going to take place, the exact date of Christ's return, or what it would take to bring the end to come to pass.

It was not that we were saying to forget looking into prophecy, but more of the thought of putting it into perspective with what we are to accomplish. Then Martin described what keeps him on an even keel when these prophecy things begin to overwhelm him. He stated that whenever he starts to wander, his mind brings him back to Revelation 2 and 3, where we are told seven times "He who overcomes will (inherit, or be given)...."

The definition for 'overcoming' from The New Testament Word Study Dictionary by Dr. Spiros Zodhiates is as follows: "To be victorious, to prevail, to overcome, to conquer, and to subdue." This word *overcoming* describes Jesus Christ and His followers as being victorious over the world, evil, and all adversaries of His Kingdom.

The synonyms for overcoming are: To triumph, to have dominion over, to completely overcome. or cause somebody to be defeated, to be powerful, to be strong against, to control.

The antonym has such a discouraging sound to it: To be defeated!

Indeed, these days that we are keeping picture living without sin—to be unleavened—but the act of overcoming is the process we all must go through to achieve becoming unleavened.

This process is not at all strange to us on a physical level. We all understand that in growing up we have to continually overcome the problems of life.

We have all heard the story of the man who saw the butterfly struggling to escape from the cocoon. He felt sorry for the butterfly, and took out his pocket-knife and slit the remainder of the cocoon to make it easier for the butterfly to get out, only to find out that now the butterfly could not fly. The reason being that his wings were not strengthened from the struggle to overcome the cocoon. As he watched he realized that the struggle was all important to the future life of the butterfly.

And, brethren, as simple as that example is, it shows us that struggle is all important to life, and to our life at this time, to prepare us for the future that is awaiting us.

Romans 1:18-21 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Job 12:7-11 But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? Does not the ear test words and the mouth taste its food?

When I read about the invisible things of God from creation, I always picture the beauty and grandeur of all that God created. I think of tropical paradises, our huge forests and sparkling rivers that seem to run forever, with their cascading waterfalls. I think of the huge ocean, the crag covered coast lines, and the thundering breakers. Of the sunsets, the beautiful heavens, and all the green fields, not to mention the marvelous animals and birds.

But I must confess, not once did I stop to consider the lessons in the struggles that all created life must go through to grow and survive.

We are told to go to the ant, and observe his diligence, and to view the ox and his strength, and the lion with his kingly power.

We all understand the survival of the fittest, an evolutionist type thing. But we understand that those that have to develop skills to hunt, and those that have to develop the abilities God gave them to watch and be able to flee. When we stop to view the creation, we marvel at the beauty, but do not often see the every day struggle that goes just beneath the surface.

For mankind, in general, it is the same. For men and women to grow and get ahead requires diligence, planning, education, and work. Even in doing most things correctly, unexpected trials (personality differences, political changes, natural disasters, health situations, market conditions, job problems, etc.) come to the front that must be overcome. Life is not smooth, and it is not an easy road.

The works of men are subject in their results to God's will. Mankind feels that he has a free hand, or a free will, in all that he does. In all that man struggles with, there is a season, an appropriate time which God appoints for it to be done.

The word "season" means a fitting time to every purpose under heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-10 (*New English Bible*) A time to be born, and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to pull down, and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time for mourning, and a time for dancing; a time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them; a time to embrace and a time

to refrain from embracing; a time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to mend; a time for silence, and a time for speech; a time for love, and a time for hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Solomon concludes this by saying: "What profit does one who works get from all his labor? I have seen the business that God has given to men to keep them busy. He has made everything to suit its time; moreover He has given men a sense of time past and future, but no comprehension of God's work from beginning to end."

This is something that God has given us. Jesus Christ in John 15 told us, "you are my friends therefore I have told you what I am doing." We, of all the people on this earth, have had the veil lifted from our face and we have an idea of what God is doing, and we see God's plan.

God has seen fit that all men and women, unless their life has been cut short, experience all these happenings that they might be exercised by them; put through a routine with the things that come upon them.

Rich or poor, young or old, weak or strong, handsome or plain, all share in the above situations, and this is just a part of being a human being on the face of the earth.

I Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken hold of you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful; He will not suffer you to be tempted beyond that which ye are able to bear, but with the temptation will also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

What is being stated here, is that mankind has to go through many trials, that we, to one degree or another, have to share. Just as the fighting to escape the cocoon causes the butterfly to be strengthened, our calling requires an effort on our part over and above what the world has to go through, to become free of Satan's cocoon that encompasses this whole world by its system.

We, who are called by God, have to understand that God has a responsibility toward us. He has brought us into an understanding of who He is, what He is about, the purpose of our lives, and the future He wants for us. Because of this, the Father and Son have the responsibility to see that we learn what is needed.

Philippians 1:1-6 Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in my every prayer for you making request with joy, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ.

Psalms 138:8 The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me; thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever; forsake not the works of Thine own hands.

We should all be able to relate to this verse from the life around us. In the animal kingdom, adults train their young. In sports we understand it is the coach's job to train those he coaches to be the best competitor they can possibly be. As parents, we should understand the duty and need to raise our

children to have good work ethics, to be honest, to develop character, to show respect, to be diligent in their studies, to develop their talents, and to have good morals. As parents, we know this does not just happen because we wish it to happen. Our children do not normally hang up their clothes, make their beds, have good table manners, do household chores, do their best in school, have proper morals without instruction, and follow-up on those instructions to see that good performance is there.

In the business world, supervisors are reminded that there are two words that sound alike, delegate, and abdicate. A good leader, who delegates will follow up to see that his instructions are carried out. The leader who abdicates will issue an order and just assume it will be done.

God the Father and Jesus Christ, delegate what we individually need to accomplish in our calling, and They will always follow up to make sure it is completed.

We, as parents, are not perfect in the raising of our children. We cannot see their future, and we cannot see the depth of their hearts. We have a difficult time relating to, and fighting, the perverseness of this generation and the peer pressure it presents to our children.

God the Father and Jesus Christ, on the other hand, know us intimately. They know our strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and the future they wish for us and what they expect us to accomplish. They know the pressures that are on us. With thoughtful care, they lead us through this life in a way that will develop in us the mind, character, love, faithfulness, and skills we will need to have for the future offices we will hold.

It is extremely important that we realize that God sees everything we do and that He knows our every thought and that nothing escapes Him.

Psalm 139:1-10 To the chief musician: A Psalm of David. O LORD, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but lo, O LORD, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.

This is what we have going for us.

Psalm 139:11-14 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me," even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee. For Thou hast possessed my inmost parts. Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

God just has not called us and left us, He knows every single thing about us. He knows the good and the bad things, and He is going to work to help us.

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

We all heard this on Passover night. This is the plan of God. In Revelation 20:6 we are told we going to rule with Jesus Christ for a thousand years, and if you do not think He is planning for that rule right now, you are thinking incorrectly. He knows who you are, all about you and He is developing the necessary skills in you so that you can rule with Him.

Our minds are so limited that we cannot begin to see the great offices God has in store for us. He has called a variety of personalities and abilities, and He will cause us to grow in the areas that are needed to fulfill the goals He has in store for us.

It has been said that the seven churches exist at this end time. Jesus Christ tells us to hear what He says to the seven churches and we are to apply them to ourselves and grow therein from those instructions. We will spend some time now in Revelation 2 and 3. We will start in Revelation 2:1-7 and we will go through all seven churches.

Revelation 2:1-2 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: "These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil; and how thou hast tried them that say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars;

Here Jesus Christ congratulates this group on their labor and perseverance. They had the patience to endure over all the years of waiting for Christ's return. They knew their Bible, and could not bear those who were evil. They recognized those who were pretentious and puffed up, and they were not lead astray by them. They wanted no part of them.

Revelation 2:3 and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored and hast not fainted.

What a compliment. Jesus comments on their strong points in that they worked and persevered through an abundance of trials. At this time, we have fought to stay with right teaching despite the break up of the parent church, calendar groups and the many false teachings that are out there today. Through all of this the, church continues on.

The thing Christ has against this era is exceedingly important. John mentioned it today.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless, I have something against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Jack Bulharowski gave a fine sermonette several years back regarding this subject, and brought out that the church at Ephesus worked so hard technically, and were so diligent to stay faithful to the

doctrines over a long period of time, that somehow the love for the brethren waxed cold for each other.

This, of course, reflected the fact that they had lost their first love for God the Father and Jesus Christ. I know that when we look back to when we were first called, our love for God was great. We were excited about everything that God said. What food can I eat? We all read labels. We would go to a restaurant and drive the waitress nuts. "Do you fry in animal fat?" we would ask.

Each month we faithfully made out our tithe check making sure we gave God His tithe first, and then we paid the bills. We worked to keep the Sabbath as holy as we could and we asked questions about what we could do on the Sabbath? We asked all of these questions. We loved God, and it was so important to us to carefully please God in all that we did. We had a sermonette today on how children give their parents gifts—they love their parents and they wanted to give them something. We wanted to give God ourselves and to love Him. We were so conscious of God, that we thought of Him in every facet of our life. In the early days the ministry were asked questions like "What kind of car should I buy?" Anything the minister said was supposed to be good, and that was not always the case, but we wanted to please God, and somehow the minister was the answer to all these technical questions.

At that time there was an excitement in our lives over our calling and all that God was doing, and all that He would do to heal this world and bring about the wonderful World Tomorrow. It was an exciting time.

But over the years have we become tired and worn down? Have we become technical, factual, and focused on prophecy? In doing so, lost or diminished, the most important aspect of our calling, our humble, tender love for God? Maybe we have unconsciously let down on the commands of God that early on in our calling we so very much wanted to keep.

This is a serious question that each of us has to honestly answer in the privacy of his own thoughts, and this is the season to do it.

Revelation 2:5-7 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the works as at first; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, unless thou repent. But this thou hast: that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'

Then we come to the next church:

Revelation 2:8-11 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'These things saith the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive: I know thy works and tribulation and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of Life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt by the second death.'

Again, Jesus shows that He closely monitors what is going on in the church. He sees Smyrna's priorities, and faithfulness to their calling. He sees that they are standing firm in the faith, and the poverty that resulted from that, by those religions of the synagogues of Satan. He tells them not to fear, though some will be cast into prison to be tried. They are encouraged to be faithful unto death, and their reward will be a crown of life.

As this applies to us today, we too are to have our priorities straight. For us who have been given the truth, we are to obey it, despite all who come against us. Even though persecution may come upon us we are to stand fast.

It is good to note here, that the attitude and the works that this church possessed caused Jesus not to find any fault with it. It is the only church thus listed among the seven churches.

He concludes by saying, "He that overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death", as they will be a part of the first resurrection.

Matthew 10:22 And ye shall be hated by all men for My name's sake, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

Revelation 2:12-14 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

Here, Jesus describes Himself as the one who has a two edged sword, to divide the truth from the lies. The church is infested with men with wrong doctrines and lies, trying to destroy the faith of God's true people.

The good work of this church in Pergamos was that they carried God's name faithfully and proudly in the midst of dwelling in Satan's seat. It was quite a job, where sin and the malice of Satan was prevalent everywhere. They held to God's name even in the face of martyrdom.

Revelation 2:15-17 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

He then states, that we should consider the compromise made, and not allow ourselves to follow their example. If we do pull away from Satan's influences, then we will receive the hidden manna or truth that is set aside for the children of God.

It is interesting to note here, also, that a white stone was given: the *tessera* stone. This stone had great significance. It might be likened today to a blank cheque, except it was on a stone. It has your name

on it, and it had a gift attached to that stone. Some of these stones could be given to align families together, for example the Reid family with the Allen family. We are brothers, and this stone would be handed down from generation to generation. It could be given to sports figures that came out of the arena. The stone was an I.O.U. or a cheque in a sense.

Here, it is stated that such a stone will be given to us, with a new name which no man will know except the one that receives it, and perhaps our office will be on there too.

So we learned here, that we must truly avoid compromising at all costs. We must stay on the right track.

Revelation 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass:

This is the longest message to the churches. Jesus again starts out by letting the church know by referring to his eyes, *like unto a flame of fire*, that He completely and fully sees all that is going on in the church as a whole, and each member individually.

Revelation 2:19 I know thy works, and charity and service, and faith and thy patience, and thy works, and the last to be more than the first.

He starts off by mentioning their good works, such as their charity, or love toward others, especially of the household of faith. Their service, mainly of the ministry who ceaselessly worked to serve the brethren. Their faith, which caused the above works to be produced. Their patience and endurance through all the trials, and their growing fruitfulness. Ephesus lost their first love, but it would seem Thyatira was growing in their love. But still there was danger, and God held something against them.

Revelation 2:20-23 Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He that searcheth the souls and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Those who would seduce them would do so after the pattern of Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess. These seemed to have great civil power and their tactics were to cause some to worship idols, to commit fornication (by stating it was not a serious thing). They claimed to have superiority over the leaders of the church.

The enemies of God built quite a following, and worked to defy the law of God and seduce as many as they could. Evidently, the church could have got rid of this faction, or possibly separated from her, but declined to do so.

Jesus gave her and her following time to repent, but she showed no signs of changing. Her punishment is to be cast into a bed of pain, and her followers into the lake of fire except they repent. Again God tells us that He is the one that searches the minds and hearts and will give everyone according to their works.

For the rest in Thyatira who have not sunk down in the depths of Satan, God will not add any other burden.

Revelation 2:24-25 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine and who have not known the depths of Satan [as they say] I will put upon you no other burden. But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come.

But the instructions, basically to them and to us, is to hold fast to what we have until Christ comes and do not associate with those who will work to cause you to compromise. Then He lists the tremendous rewards that will be theirs.

They would be given great power and dominion over the world and nations and knowledge and wisdom to rule over much. In short, they would share in the power of Jesus Christ at His return.

His power, and their power with Him, would be invincible. At last, all the changes that those who follow Christ long to make in this tired sick world will be made. The nations with their cruel perverted power will be shattered, and a new era will have dawned.

Jesus will give those who hold fast the morning star, and most commentaries feel this is indeed Jesus Christ who will be with us forever.

Revelation 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know thy works, and that thou hast a name that thou livest, but thou art dead.

That is a terrible description. He again states that He knows their works and that they have a name and that they are alive but that they are really dead.

Hypocrisy and decay were the problem in this church. The outward appearance of the church was probably good, maybe evidently acceptable. There are no listings of sins, or movements to overthrow the ministry or the truth, but in the hearts of the people it is a whole different story.

They had a form of godliness, but it was just that, a form. Prayers were lax or non-existent, as was service to others, fasting, dedication, and study. Godly works were lacking, and excitement about their calling had disappeared. In short, they were just going through the motions and they were lethargic, and about ready to expire.

He states that those who have let down should remember how they were called and what they were taught. They need to arouse themselves and to strengthen what remains, and repent and hold fast, otherwise He will come as a thief when they expect it not.

Revelation 3:2-5 Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou

hast received and heard; and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Revelation 3:7-8 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth: I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My name.

Jesus says these things, that He is holy and true, and He has the key of David, and He that opens and no man shuts, and he that shuts and no man opens.

Because of God's revelation to Mr. Armstrong, we know that the key of David is the identification of Israel. This opens up all of prophecy and helps us to understand who the nations of Israel are today and what is going to happen to them. We need to understand how prophecy relates because of this.

Jesus goes on to tell us that He knows our works, and that He has set before us an open door, which as Mr. Armstrong stated, and I believe that is correct, radio and television were thundered over the entire world. We were talking about the pirate radio ships off the British coast. BBC would not allow God's program to be broadcast into England but the pirate ships stayed about 15 miles off whatever the limit was and they broadcast this program into Britain. This was indeed a door that God opened.

He makes the statement that we only have little strength. John Ritenbaugh has mentioned that we at this time, are probably the weakest of all the generations to ever exist. I think we will see that in a moment.

But then on a positive note, Christ mentions that this era has kept His word, and not denied His name. He goes on to state something we have a difficult time considering, that He will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they have the truth, come and worship before our feet. I do not think any of us feel that kind of worthiness to be worshipped, but He says that is what He is going to do.

Revelation 3:9-13 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie—behold, I will make them to come and worship at thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God, and I will write upon him My new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches!

How many in our former affiliation have not held fast to what they were taught? Probably well over one hundred thousand. Christ said He will keep us from the trials that are coming upon the earth.

Revelation 3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:

Again, Jesus stresses He is fully aware of what is taking place, and what He is about to say is true. He states He is the Amen, which means the true and faithful martyr, the first One resurrected from the dead, and the Creator of all that is in the creation.

Revelation 3:15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot.

He now states the problem in this last era of God's churches; the problem we face in the church at this time.

To put it simply, this era is BLAH! Their thinking is wrong, their attitude is wrong, and their measurement of what determines God's approval of us is wrong.

Revelation 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth.

This mindset is not approved of by God one bit. Thus, unless those in this era change, God will vomit them out of His mouth.

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, "I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing," and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked,

The problem is that they relate wealth and comfort as blessings from God, therefore they feel that they have it made, and need nothing. (The poor in Spirit, in contrast, saw that they needed everything.)

Revelation 3:18 I counsel thee to buy from Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.

It is a figurative eye salve, and they are told to figuratively take eye salve, that they might see. Jesus Christ tells them to buy of Him gold purified in the fire. In short, buy the purest truth (even through trials) that you can purchase with the humbleness and fasting of heart, and in doing so procure white garments that your nakedness may not be revealed.

This is no doubt the most difficult era to deal with, and this is the era that we live in at this time.

Revelation 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Because of God's responsibility to perfect us in the calling He has given us, He will rebuke and chasten. He says, stop being lazy, and become zealous, and repent. Here the word 'repent' means to repent once and for all. Do not slide back anymore. Buy the purest you can buy of truth and then repent and do not give up.

Revelation 3:20-22 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches!"

Jesus tells us that He is standing at the door, therefore we should knock, and we should humbly and seriously ask to come in and get the truth. Those who pay attention and obey, will sit with Christ on His throne, even as He overcame and sits with His Father. He that has the Spirit, should hear and act.

I would like to briefly go over the seven eras:

Ephesus: Recapture that first love at all costs, because without that you will be rejected.

Smyrna: Be strong in your priorities toward God, and have courage under persecution.

Pergamos: Do not compromise the truth because of those who hold and push false and liberal teachings in your midst.

Thyatira: Hold fast to the truth even though persecution from those outside the church may be heavy. Do not compromise, and do not associate with those who pervert the truth.

Sardis: Wake up! Arouse yourself, and get busy with right Godly works, and change the lazy way you have been treating your calling.

Philadelphia: Again, hold fast to what you have, do the work, and work to increase your strength in all obedience, respect, and deep love for God, that your crown may not be taken.

Laodicea: Purchase the purest of God's truth even through trial, with humbleness, zeal, and a love for all of God's instruction. And fast often that you might not have an elevated image of yourself because of whatever intellect or success you enjoy at this time.

It is interesting to note that the two churches that have the largest problems are the two that received no persecution, Sardis and Laodicea. In the other eras persecution or "the work" drove them either to God, or separated them from God.

What about us today? Are we being persecuted by the lack of persecution? In my mind this is the most deadly era, or time, to live in. This is a time of great satanic and worldly seduction. We live in a hedonistic, pleasure seeking, self centered, no holds barred society. As far as the world is concerned, God has gone off somewhere, seemingly not caring about His creation. This is an environment that screams, "Let down; it is alright, God does not see or care."

Psalms 73 is entitled "A trial of faith":

Psalms 73:1-4 A Psalm of Asaph. Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm.

Even while doing that which is wrong, the wicked have money and power.

Psalm 73:5-7 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish.

Many people in this world have much more than we can ever imagine, and we say, "Why are they not corrected with some of the things that they do?"

Psalm 73:8-9 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.

There is no restraint.

Psalm 73:10 Therefore His people return hither, and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

God's people are abused.

Psalm 73:11 And they say, "How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocence.

It is hard not to ask and say, "What good is it to be close to God? What good is it to follow His laws? Look at them, they are fat and I am not. They have a lot, and I have to struggle to pay my tithes and pay my bills."

Psalm 73:14-15 For all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning. If I say, "I will speak thus," behold, I should offend against the generation of Thy children.

If I spoke this way in front of the church how I felt, it would destroy them or hurt them.

Psalm 73:16-20 When I thought to understand this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then understood I their end: surely Thou didst set them in slippery places. Thou didst cast them down into destruction! How they are brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors! As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when Thou awakest, Thou shalt despise their image.

Then he repents and he says, "I am sorry." "Sorry that I let myself get in that kind of an attitude because it was wrong." As we see the pain in the world, see people being killed, we see the slaughter in Iraq and Africa, and we all think, "Where is God?" God is taking care of it. This has been going on for generations and He is in charge.

What kind of a nation do we find ourselves in?

Isaiah 1:2-6 (*New English Bible*) "Hark you heavens and earth, give ear, for the Lord has spoken: I have sons whom I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled

against Me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's stall; but Israel, My own people, has no knowledge, no discernment. Oh sinful nation, people loaded with iniquity, race of evil doers, wanton destructive children who have deserted the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel, and turned our backs on Him. Where can you still be struck if you will be disloyal still" Your head is covered with sores, your body diseased; from head to foot there is not a sound spot in you.

In this type of environment does complacency set in or is that a danger? Does the fact that the world seems to be going on with no correction from God, seem to indicate that He has gone off somewhere? Can this cause us to begin to take in leaven, a little by little, thinking that God does not see? Yes, it can, if we are not careful.

II Peter 3:1-2 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

Peter warns us that as the world around is becoming worse and worse, that we are to be mindful of the words spoken, and to listen to what has been said before by the prophets, and the commandments of the Lord's apostles.

II Peter 3:3-5 knowing this first: that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." For of this they are willfully ignorant: that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water,

Knowing that in the end time there will be scoffers who verbally state what they believe, and the population itself, by the way it lives, demonstrates that they feel the same way. And in a real sense, the majority will conduct themselves as if there is no law of God, and in fact in a way that says that there is no God. In short, they walk after their own lusts.

Those that say "Where is the promise of His coming?" willingly put the thoughts that God created the world they now enjoy out of their minds. They want to live their way; they stubbornly refuse to consider His word, or listen to His ministry.

II Peter 3:6 whereby the world as it then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which now are, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Even with all the past evidence, the argument was that the earth seemed solid to them, and disaster was not likely. California might get an earthquake or two but, it is not going to really hurt anything.

II Peter 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

For them, time seems to be going on for ever, but God computes time differently than man does.

II Peter 3:9-10 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

I remember many years ago, David Jon Hill gave a sermon, and he said that the earth would be burned down to the bottom of the deepest mine. It will be cleansed that way.

II Peter 3:11-14 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy manner of living and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the Day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Therefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

In this lax end time environment we find ourselves in, what are the three target areas we are to focus on?

I John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

John is saying, do not make this world, with all its allurements, the object of your affections. Do not be fooled by the lifestyle it offers, and do not let its philosophy pull you down, or influence you into thinking the way the world thinks.

James backs this up:

James 4:4 "You adulterers and adulteresses know you not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend to the world, is the enemy of God."

That is pretty plain and straightforward.

Then, John lists the three things that describe what the world consists of, or the threats that pertain to us, today.

I John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world.

The lust of the flesh: In James 1:14 he tells us that men and women are tempted and drawn away by their own lusts, and enticed.

Indeed, this world focuses on the most animal of lusts in its pornography. We continually see it in films, magazines, and, of course, on the Internet. The statistics on those affected by this area of society are just amazing. Something like forty, fifty or sixty percent of church members watch

pornography, including ministers. Many homes are ruined and destroyed because of it. Marriages are broken, jobs are lost, and the costs are staggering, brethren, because of this.

The lust of the eyes: Every one of us have been affected by this. Sales people count on this, saying "I am going to make this person want this." Many have charged great sums of money. Many have purchased things beyond their means, and it puts pressure on their homes and marriages. Because of the strain and stress due to overspending, this also puts pressure on their relationship with God.

The pride of life: As John mentioned in one of his messages, pride has always been a major factor with Israel, and this is the opposite of what God wants from His people, which is humbleness. Here it means that which promotes boasting, and arrogance, and the doing of things their way. Again, humbleness is the attitude God wishes us to have.

John continues on, by saying that this is not of the Father, but is of the world. Indeed, under the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, the world offers many seemingly delightful temptations. The thing we have to understand is that they are temporary, and if not overcome, lead to pain, heartache, and death. In short, our goals must be set higher than the goals of this temporary world. Our goals must be God's goals for us to become like Jesus Christ.

As Peter said, and now John states:

I John 2:17 And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Lest anyone think that there is not a right pride or right satisfaction, and that you have to go around life with your head hung, saying, "Woe is me," there is a right pride or satisfaction in a job well done, but not the pride that he is talking about here.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world."

Jesus wants us to be encouraged here. We read this verse during the Passover. Jesus is not asking us to do anything He has not done Himself. Except He did it perfectly and we stumble through it, but He is still with us.

Hebrews 2:9-11 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Hebrews 4:13-15 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed into the Heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

He is the faithful High Priest that makes intelligent intercession for us for our own good.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Brethren have you ever wondered why Jesus Christ wants us to overcome and to become unleavened? So we can share the freedom that God the Father and Jesus Christ enjoy. Freedom from sin, freedom from the pulls of the flesh and that we can have eternal life, as it says in John 17:3. So that we can be qualified to live eternally as They do, and He knows that without this we would not be able to fulfill the awesome positions that He has set aside for us.

In this world it is indeed very difficult to overcome and become unleavened. Can it be done, and can we have victory? You bet we can!

Romans 8:27-39 (*New English Bible*) With all this in mind, what are we to say? If God is on our side, who is against us? He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all; and with this gift how can He fail to lavish upon us all He has to give? Who will be the accuser of God's chosen ones? It is God who pronounces acquittal; then who can condemn? It is Christ who died, and more than that, was raised from the dead—who is at God's right hand, and indeed pleads our cause. Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction, or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? We are being done to death for Your name sake all day long, as Scripture says; we have been treated like sheep for slaughter—and yet, in spite of all
OVERWHELMING VICTORY IS OURS, A HUGE VICTORY, is ours through Him who loves us.

God the Father and Jesus Christ have a responsibility to bring us through and our responsibility is to co-operate.

Then Paul goes on to say:

Romans 8:38-39 "I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits, or superhuman powers, in the world as it is, or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in the heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord."

Brethren, if we do our part to become and remain unleavened, we cannot fail to make it, as God the Father and Jesus Christ have set as Their goal, our being members of Their Family.