

AFFIRMATION & CRITIQUE

MONOGRAPHS

THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST
IN THE STAGE OF
INTENSIFICATION

Ed Marks



Anaheim, California

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The twenty-seven books of the New Testament reveal that the full ministry of Christ is in three stages.¹ The first stage is the stage of incarnation, the stage of Christ in the flesh as recorded in the four Gospels. In this stage four wonderful things took place. First, the infinite God was brought into the finite man. Christ was “God infinite, in eternity, / Yet man in time, finite to be” (*Hymns*, #501). Second, the Triune God was united and mingled with the tripartite man. Third, the unsearchably rich and bountiful God was expressed in Christ’s humanity through His aromatic virtues by which He drew men to Himself. Fourth, Christ accomplished an all-inclusive judicial redemption for fallen mankind. Because of His redemption we have the forgiveness of sins, the washing away of sins, justification, reconciliation with God, and positional sanctification unto God.

Through His all-problems-solving death, Christ entered into resurrection and into the second stage of His ministry, the stage of inclusion. This is the stage of Christ as the life-giving Spirit. In resurrection Christ as the last Adam became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). This life-giving Spirit is all-inclusive; that is, He

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includes all the elements of Christ's person and work. In resurrection, in the second stage of His ministry, Christ was also begotten to be the firstborn Son of God (Acts 13:33; Rom. 8:29), and He regenerated the believers to be the many sons of God (1 Pet. 1:3). The first stage of His ministry was that of the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14). The second stage of His ministry was that of the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit. As the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, Christ is imparting Himself as life into the believers to fulfill His stated commission: "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). He first gives life to our human spirit to make our spirit life in regeneration (Rom. 8:10). He then gives life to our soul to make us a person of life in transformation (v. 6; 2 Cor. 3:18). Finally, He gives life to our mortal body to transfigure it in glorification (Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:21). We were reconciled to God through His death in the first stage of His ministry, but "much more" we are saved in His life in the second stage of His ministry (Rom. 5:10).

The first stage of Christ's ministry is recorded in the four Gospels, from Matthew to John. The second stage of His ministry is recorded in the next twenty-two books, from Acts to Jude. The third stage of His ministry is seen in the book of Revelation. This third stage is the stage of Christ as the seven Spirits, the sevenfold intensified Spirit (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The first stage of Christ's ministry was judicial. This means that in His earthly ministry He satisfied the legal requirement of God's righteousness through His death on the cross for our redemption. The second stage of His ministry is organic. This means that in His heavenly ministry He is now vivifying our whole being so that we may not only have His life but also have His life abundantly by being saved in His life day by day until we are fully transformed and conformed to His glorious image (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). The third stage of His ministry is sevenfold intensified. This means that in His heavenly ministry He is carrying out God's heart's desire in an intensified way as the seven Spirits of God to bring the believers out of all degradation and make them God's overcomers for the consummation of the New Jerusalem.

In order to see the third stage of Christ's ministry, we must first

consider this enigmatic title of the Spirit in the book of Revelation—"the seven Spirits of God." (See Ron Kangas's article in *Affirmation & Critique*—Vol. I, No. 4—for a full explication of this title.) The seven Spirits are undoubtedly the Spirit of God, because they are ranked in the Godhead in Revelation 1:4-5. The Father is the One who is and who was and who is coming, the Spirit is the seven Spirits who are before God's throne, and Jesus Christ is the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Paul tells us clearly that there is one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). How then can John say that this one Spirit is seven Spirits? The explanation is in Revelation 4:5 where John says that "seven lamps of fire [are] burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." These seven lamps of fire, the seven Spirits of God, are the seven lamps of the lampstand (Exo. 25:37; Zech. 4:2). On the one hand, the lampstand is one, but on the other hand, it is seven lamps. In essence and existence the Spirit is one just as the lampstand is one, but in function and work the Spirit is seven, just as the lampstand is seven lamps. This reveals that the one Spirit is sevenfold in His function and work for God's move. Thus, the seven Spirits are the sevenfold Spirit.

The lampstand provides us with a marvelous picture of the Triune God. The golden element signifies God the Father in His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This gold is in a form, an image, a shape, a likeness, signifying Christ the Son as the image of the invisible God and the embodiment of God (Col. 1:15; 2:9). The seven lamps of the lampstand signify the sevenfold intensified Spirit as the expression of God. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 and the manifestation of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 are the expression of the Spirit depicted by these seven lamps. Thus, the golden lampstand is the manifestation of the Triune God—God the Father is the element, God the Son is the shape, and God the Spirit, one in essence but sevenfold in function, is the expression.

The Spirit in Revelation is intensified sevenfold. Isaiah 30:26 gives a picture of intensification. It describes the intensified light of the sun in the millennium, which will be seven times brighter than today's light. The light of the lampstand is also an intensified light,

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the sevenfold light of the seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God.

The number seven signifies completion in God's move. God's move to accomplish His creation with His rest in Genesis was completed in seven days. The seven churches in Revelation give us a complete view of God's move in the church throughout its history. (F. W. Grant, G. H. Pember, Andrew Miller, and Watchman Nee share this view.) The mystery of God's economical move is contained in the seven seals (Rev. 6:1—8:5). The execution of God's move to judge the earth and bring in His kingdom is carried out with the seven trumpets (8:6—11:18). The seven bowls are the complete outpouring of God's wrath on Antichrist and rebellious humanity (16:1-21). Because of the degradation of the church and the darkness of the age, the seven Spirits, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God, are desperately needed for God's move to be completed on the earth. By the operation of the sevenfold intensified Spirit within Christ's seeking believers, they are intensified to become the overcomers to build up the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. In Christ's ministry in the stage of intensification, He carries out three main things: He intensifies His organic salvation, the salvation in His divine life; He produces the overcomers; and He consummates the New Jerusalem.

The Intensification of Christ's Organic Salvation

In order to see how Christ intensifies His organic salvation, we must first see how the sevenfold intensified Spirit functions. In Revelation 1:4-5 the Spirit is the second, the center, of the Divine Trinity. This reveals the importance of the intensified function of the sevenfold Spirit of God. The seven Spirits are the seven lamps of fire operating within the believers. These seven lamps of fire are the seven lamps of the lampstand spoken of in Exodus 25:37 and Zechariah 4:2. Exodus speaks of the lampstand in the tabernacle. The lampstand here typifies Christ as the embodiment of God to shine within us as the light of life "in the fullness of the power of the sevenfold Spirit" (Scofield 102). Zechariah speaks of the lampstand in the recovered and restored temple. The lampstand

here has a twofold significance, signifying not only the recovered Israel as God's shining testimony on earth but also the Spirit as the sevenfold intensified Spirit. Zechariah saw a vision of a golden lampstand with two olive trees by it, one on the right and one on the left. Verses 4 through 6 of chapter 4 say,

I answered and spoke to the angel who spoke with me, saying, What are these, sir? And the angel who spoke with me answered and said to me, Do you not know what these are? And I said, No, sir. And he answered and spoke to me, saying, This is the word of Jehovah to Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says Jehovah of hosts.

The Lord told Zechariah that the lampstand with the two olive trees was a picture of His Spirit. Christ, typified by the lampstand in Exodus, is the Spirit, typified by the lampstand in Zechariah. Christ the Lord is the Spirit for our experience (2 Cor. 3:17). Eventually, the book of Revelation speaks of the seven churches as seven golden lampstands (1:11-12). The one lampstand has been multiplied to become seven lampstands. These lampstands are the reproduction of Christ and the reprint of the Spirit. Christ is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit fills the churches to make them the reprint of the Spirit.

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As we consider these three portions of the Scriptures where the lampstand is seen, we can see what the desire of God's heart is. God's desire is to dispense Himself in Christ as the Spirit into His chosen people to make them a golden lampstand for His full expression. The lampstands in Revelation 1 eventually consummate in the New Jerusalem, the ultimate and eternal

lampstand in this universe. The holy city is a golden mountain, a golden stand (Rev. 21:18). Christ is the lamp of this stand (v. 23), and God is within Him as the light (22:5) to shine forth in His divine splendor and radiance through all of His chosen and redeemed people.

We need to apply this wonderful vision to our experience of the sevenfold intensified Spirit. The emphasis in Zechariah 4 is on the sevenfold Spirit. If we were to take away the seven lamps of the lampstand, there would be no lampstand. This shows that if we take away the sevenfold intensified Spirit from the church, there would be no church. In other words: “No Spirit, no church.”

This maxim is also applicable when we consider the two olive trees on each side of the lampstand. These olive trees are “the two sons of fresh oil” (lit.), standing before the Lord of the earth (4:14). Zechariah sees them emptying the golden oil out of themselves into the lampstand (v. 12, NASB). This golden oil is a type of the Spirit. According to the literal Hebrew, the two sons of fresh oil are emptying the “gold” out of themselves. The word *oil*, although implied, is not there in the Hebrew text. This shows that the Spirit who indwells our spirit and with whom we are filled day by day is “liquid gold.”

Gold signifies God in His holy nature. This liquid gold, this flowing gold, is the flowing Holy Spirit who has been intensified sevenfold, flowing out of the innermost being of the sons of fresh oil into the lampstand. Surely these sons of fresh oil prophetically signify two persons, but what we want to emphasize here is that, in principle, all of us believers in Christ need to be sons of fresh oil. The two olive trees are also called two olive branches (v. 12). We believers are also branches of Christ, the unique olive tree (cf. Rom. 11:17), and in Christ we should be filled with and supply others with the sevenfold intensified Spirit.

We need to be wise to redeem our fleeting time on this earth by being freshly filled with the Spirit, the golden oil, day by day. Paul says the following in Ephesians 5:15-18:

Look therefore carefully how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit.

This portion of the Word matches the Lord's parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. Five are wise and five are foolish. The five who are wise spent their days buying the oil, being filled with the Spirit. As a result, they have the oil not only in their lamps but also in their vessels (v. 4). Lamps signify the human spirit of the believers, as shown by Proverbs 20:27 which says, "The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah." Our human spirit contains the divine Spirit as the oil. The divine Spirit comes into our human spirit when we receive the Lord Jesus as our life in regeneration, but the Christian life does not stop there. We need this oil to be dispensed from our spirit into our soul, which is "our vessel." Note 1 of Matthew 25:4 in the Recovery Version says,

Man is a vessel made for God (Rom. 9:21, 23-24), and man's personality is in his soul. Hence, *vessels* here signifies the souls of the believers. The five prudent virgins not only have oil in their lamps but also take oil in their vessels. That they have oil in their lamps signifies that they have the Spirit of God dwelling in their spirit (Rom. 8:9, 16), and that they take oil in their vessels signifies that they have the Spirit of God filling and saturating their souls.

The foolish virgins have oil in their lamps, but as they are going forth to meet the coming bridegroom they realize that they are short of oil, for their lamps are going out. The prudent virgins tell the foolish ones to buy oil for themselves. Because the foolish virgins are short of oil at the bridegroom's coming, they are not prepared to go in with him to the wedding feast. This wedding feast, which signifies the marriage dinner of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9), will be a reward to the overcoming believers who pay the price in this age to buy the oil (3:18, 21). May the Lord have mercy on us

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that we would not waste our time but redeem it by paying the price daily to gain more of the Spirit.

Paying the price to be filled with the Spirit involves many things. We must pay the price to be those who love the Lord supremely, live for the Lord exclusively, and renounce our self and ambition absolutely. Spending time daily to personally contact the Lord through the Word and prayer is a basic price that all of us must pay to have the Spirit dispensed into us freshly. To buy the oil in this way is to take the Lord's counsel to "buy...gold" refined by fire that we may be rich (v. 18). As we have seen, the oil is the gold. We gain more of the gold, the oil, through the fire of suffering so that we may be truly rich toward God (Luke 12:21). This is so that we can empty this fresh, golden oil out of our being into the members of the Body, who compose the lampstand, to make the church truly rich and to make the church shine brighter with the sevenfold Spirit for God's glory in this dark age. Then we can be like Paul, who was poor yet enriched many (2 Cor. 6:10). We also can be like those in Smyrna, of whom the Lord said, "I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich)" (Rev. 2:9).

The Spirit who is filling us and saturating us to make us rich with Christ so that we can dispense these unsearchable riches to others (Eph. 3:8) is the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit. Since the life-giving Spirit has been intensified sevenfold, all the elements of the Spirit have been intensified sevenfold. The Spirit is the Spirit of life; thus, the life in the intensified Spirit is an intensified life (Rom. 8:2). The Spirit is the Spirit of grace; thus, the grace in the intensified Spirit is an intensified grace (Heb. 10:29). This intensified Spirit with all His intensified elements such as life and grace is for the believers' organic salvation. We have pointed out that Christ's redemption was accomplished judicially as the procedure of God's salvation, and His salvation is carried out organically as the purpose of God's salvation (Rom. 5:10). Because the degradation of the church frustrates the accomplishment of God's eternal economy, Christ has intensified His organic salvation sevenfold.

In Christ's sevenfold intensified organic salvation, the Triune God is wrought into His redeemed to make them the golden lampstands. The lampstand, as we have seen, signifies both Christ as the image and embodiment of the Triune God (in Exodus) and the Spirit as the expression and realization of the Triune God (in Zechariah). This one lampstand is multiplied to be seven lampstands in Revelation. This shows that God wants to have a duplication, a reproduction, of Himself. His work of duplicating Himself in us, His believers, is by His imparting Himself into us to save us organically in our entire tripartite being (1 Thes. 5:23). In God's organic salvation, the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit is dispensed into us to deify us, that is, to make us God in life and nature but not in His Godhead and not as an object of worship (Athanasius 65). God takes us step by step through all the stages of organic salvation to make us His testimony, the golden lampstands. Through all the following stages of God's dispensing Himself into us, we become His lampstand, His bright testimony, in reality. By regeneration we participate in God's life (John 3:15; Col. 3:4). By dispositional sanctification we participate in God's nature (Eph. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:4). By renewing we participate in God's mind (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:23). By transformation we participate in God's rich being (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:8). By conformation we participate in God's image (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). Finally, by glorification we participate fully in God's glory, God's sonship, God's manifestation, and God's likeness (Heb. 2:10; Rom. 8:23, 19; 1 John 3:2). This consummates in our becoming the New Jerusalem, the one unique lampstand, as the consummation of all the lampstands (Rev. 21:18, 23; 22:5).

God's sevenfold intensified organic salvation is carried out by the sevenfold intensified Spirit, who functions as the seven lamps of fire within us believers to burn, enlighten, expose, judge, purify, and refine us to produce the golden lampstands for the fulfillment of God's New Testament economy. In order to experience the sevenfold intensified Spirit in this way, we must cooperate with His inner operation as Witness Lee encourages us to do:

We all need to pray, "Dear divine Flame, come! Come and judge! Come and purify! Come and refine that You may

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produce the golden lampstand"...Every day, every morning, and every evening, we need to pray, "Lord, come; we are open to You! We open every avenue of our being to You!"...I can testify that nearly every day I pray, "Lord, enlighten me; search me within and expose me, Lord. I like to be enlightened by You and exposed in Your light"...We all need to pray, "Lord, we are open. Come and shine upon us and shine from within us and enlighten every avenue and every corner of our being. I like to be exposed, purged, and purified." Then the Lord has a way to produce a pure golden lampstand. (*Economy* 241-242)

The sevenfold intensified Spirit is also the eyes of Christ as the redeeming Lamb. Revelation 5:6 speaks of Christ as the Lamb with "seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." Revelation 1:14 tells us further that Christ's eyes are like a flame of fire, showing that His seven eyes are the seven lamps of fire. In Zechariah 3:9 Christ is prophesied as the stone with seven eyes. We should never say that Christ and the Spirit are separate, because the Spirit is His eyes. A person's eyes are for observing and searching. Wherever we may be, we cannot hide from the Lord's eyes: "The eyes of Jehovah are in every place, / Keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). Instead of hiding from the Lord's eyes, we need to allow Him to search our inward being so that anything that does not correspond to His holy nature may be exposed and confessed in the light of His presence. We need to pray as David did: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; / Try me, and know my anxious thoughts; / And see if there is some harmful way in me, / And lead me on the eternal way" (Psa. 139:23-24). Any way other than the way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14) is a harmful way, a way that will harm us, those whom we contact, and God's testimony. We need to open to the searching of the Lord's seven eyes that every harmful way in us may be exposed so that we can be kept in His way for the fulfillment of His purpose.

The Lord's eyes are also for infusing and transfusing. A person's look can infuse us with his thought and feeling. The main function of the sevenfold intensified Spirit as the seven eyes of the

redeeming Lamb and the building stone is to infuse us with Christ's essence, riches, and burden for God's building. Christ as the Lamb infuses His chosen ones with Himself in a sevenfold intensified way for their judicial redemption. Christ as the stone infuses His chosen and redeemed ones with Himself in a sevenfold intensified way for their organic salvation. By being infused with the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit, we are saved organically to become living and precious stones for God's building (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:12). His infusion vitalizes us to make us living and transforms us to make us precious.

We need to live, move, and have our being in the sevenfold intensified Spirit, in the eyes of Christ. Paul tells us that he forgave a certain brother "in the person of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10). The Greek word for *person* here means "the part around the eyes; the look as the index of the inward thoughts and feelings, which shows forth and manifests the whole person" (Recovery Version, 2 Cor. 2:10, note 3). This shows that Paul was a person who did everything in the presence of Christ, in the face of Christ, under the infusion of the Lord's eyes. He was a person in the closest and most intimate contact with Christ, a person who acted according to the index of the Lord's eyes. May the Lord grant us, as He did Paul, such an intensified intimate contact with Him in all that we do and say for the building up of His Body.

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The Producing of the Overcomers

The second major item of Christ's work in the stage of intensification is the producing of the overcomers. This work is seen in the Lord's seven epistles to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

These epistles show us not only the evils which afflict Christendom and their remedy but also the Lord's calling for overcomers in the midst of degradation. The overcomers are not super-believers. Rather, they are normal believers in the midst of abnormality, believers who have come back to the Lord's original intention in His economy. The Lord calls for these overcomers seven times (2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 20-21). As we have seen, seven is the number for completion in God's move. In order for God's move in this age to be completed, He must have the overcomers. Through the degradation of the church, nearly all the believers in Christ have become defeated and corrupted by Satan through sin, self, the world, and their flesh. In His seven epistles to the churches, Christ calls the defeated believers to be His overcomers by Himself as the sevenfold intensified Spirit.

At the beginning of each of the seven epistles, it is the Lord who is speaking (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). At the end of each of these epistles, it is the Spirit who is speaking (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This shows that the Lord is the speaking Spirit, and this speaking Spirit in Revelation is the sevenfold intensified Spirit. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7). The overcomers are those who have an ear to hear what the sevenfold intensified Spirit is speaking to the churches. May the Lord have mercy on us that we would not become dull of hearing. We may listen to the Lord's words and nod our heads in assent to them, but do we really hear them? Is His written Word merely objective to us, or does His written Word become an instant, personal express word to us in a daily way? We need to receive His personal speaking to us, as seen with Ezekiel: "The word of Jehovah came expressly to Ezekiel the priest" (1:3). We also should be like the seeker in Song of Songs who cries out to the Lord: "O you who dwell in the gardens, / My companions listen for your voice; / Let me hear it" (8:13).

In the spiritual realm, seeing is dependent upon hearing. John turned to see the voice that spoke with him, and when he turned, he saw the vision of the lampstands with the Son of Man walking in their midst. When the Lord took Peter, James, and John with Him to a high mountain so that they could see Him in His

transfiguration, the voice out of the cloud said, "This is My Son, the Beloved. Hear Him! And suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone, but Jesus only with them" (Mark 9:7-8). When we open our being to the Lord to really hear Him, we will see that what God desires is "Jesus only" in our daily living and our ministry for the building up of His Body. The overcomers are those who have an opened ear to hear the Lord's voice (Isa. 50:4-5; Exo. 21:6) that they may see His heart's desire.

Watchman Nee presents a striking story of the significance of our hearing the Lord's speaking:

Two people were walking on the street, and one said, "Just a moment, I hear the sound of crickets." His friend replied, "You are crazy; the cars in the street are making so much noise, we can hardly hear ourselves talking! How can you still hear the sound of crickets?" But he ran to the wall at the side of the street and told his friend to stand and listen. Sure enough, there was a cricket. His friend asked him how he could have possibly heard it. He replied, "Bankers can only hear the sound of money, musicians can only hear the sound of music. I am an entomologist; my ear can hear the sound of insects." The Lord tells us that he who has an ear and can hear the Lord's word, let him hear. There are many who do not have ears and cannot hear the Lord's word. If we have an ear, we must hear. (*Orthodoxy* 101-102)

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We need to hear with an opened ear what Christ as the seven-fold intensified Spirit is speaking to the churches. Through His

speaking, He produces the overcomers by saving them from the things related to the degradation of the church.

G. H. Pember points out that the seven epistles to the churches have a twofold purpose:

Firstly, if we regard them as a whole, we may, probably, detect in them specimens of every kind of circumstance, temptation, or trial, which God's foreknowledge saw in the future of Christian believers. Hence He is enabled, by means of them, to give advice, comfort, exhortation, or warning, to any of His Own disciples, and at any time during the course of the Church-period.

And, secondly, if considered in the order in which they were given, they will be found to foreshadow the successive predominant phases through which the Nominal Church was to pass, from the time of the vision until the close of the Age. (494-495)

As we examine these epistles, our attention will be mainly on the first of these purposes, especially so that we can see how the Lord produces the overcomers in His intensified heavenly ministry. We also need to remember that while these epistles were written respectively to seven local churches, they are also a collective epistle to all the churches. At the end of every epistle, the Lord charges each church to hear what the Spirit is saying not merely to each of them individually but to all the churches collectively.

Through these seven epistles the Lord desires to provide us with a guide on how to be overcomers. The Lord is especially telling us how we should behave in order to overcome, and so, through the fulfillment of these epistles, He shows us the way to be an overcomer on this earth. Therefore, this is related to the way in which each one of us walks. (Nee 92)

The Overcomers in Ephesus

In His epistle to Ephesus, Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit works to save the believers from a formal church life (Rev. 2:1-7). Anything we do for the Lord apart from Him as our person and life is mere outward, religious formality. It is not the worship that God seeks. Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truthfulness (John 4:23-24). This means that our worship to God must be in our spirit, the very place where God dwells (Eph. 2:22; 2 Tim. 4:22). Our worship must also be with Christ as our reality so that He can become our genuineness in our sincere worship of God. Any activity without the exercise of our spirit to contact the Lord as the Spirit is outward and shallow vanity.

In order to be saved from formality and filled with Christ as reality, we must recover the loss of our first love toward the Lord (Rev. 2:4). The believers in Ephesus had lost their first love toward the Lord and consequently lost their shining capacity as a lampstand and their enjoyment of Christ as life. Pember says that the church in Ephesus is characterized by relaxation and a gradual lapsing into indifference (499). The Lord Jesus Himself prophesied that in the last days “because lawlessness will be multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12). The words *grow cold* indicate the gradual work of God’s enemy in the hearts of the people of God to cool them down in their loving pursuit of Christ. We may be serving the Lord and doing commendable things for the Lord just as those in Ephesus were, but what about our love for Him?

We may think that our first love is the love we had for the Lord when we were initially saved. Although this is not wrong, there is a more basic and intrinsic meaning. For us to have the first love toward the Lord is to give Him the preeminence in everything, making Him everything in our life. Colossians 1:18 says, “That He Himself might have the first place in all things.” We need to give Christ the first place in our daily life. This means that Christ should have the first place in what we buy, how we dress, what we say, how we work, how we spend our money, and everything related to how we live. He should have the first

place in our family life and in our church life so that He can be everything to us for our growth in His life which builds up His Body.

When we love the Lord supremely in all the details of our living, we enjoy Him as the tree of life (Rev. 2:7). In order to be rewarded with Christ as the tree of life in the kingdom age, we must enjoy Him today as the tree of life. This is a basic principle with all the promised rewards to the overcoming believers. We need to maintain our eating of Christ as the tree of life day by day. The eating of the tree of life was God's original intention for man (Gen. 2:9). This indicates that God in Christ wants to be our spiritual food: "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (John 6:57).

In the garden man chose the tree of knowledge instead of the tree of life. We need to beware of replacing Christ as life with the mere objective knowledge about Christ. We should not come to the holy Word for deadening knowledge but for life. "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me. Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (5:39-40). The Lord's words here show that it is possible to contact the Scriptures and yet not contact the Lord, as the Jewish religionists of that day did. Whenever we search the Scriptures, we must come to the Lord as the unique One who can give us life. If we separate the Scriptures from the Lord, they can become the killing letter to us (2 Cor. 3:6). If we read the Scriptures prayerfully to contact the Lord of whom they testify, they will become spirit and life to us (John 6:63). The overcomers are those who have returned to God's original intention to eat Christ as the tree of life. By eating Christ daily through the Word and prayer, we live by Christ for His expression. If we leave our first love for the Lord and do not repent, we will not enjoy Him as our daily life supply and we will lose our shining capacity. The consequence of this is that the Lord will remove our lampstand out of its place (Rev. 2:5). By loving the Lord foremost to enjoy Him as our life supply, we shine with Christ as the light of life to be a lampstand in reality.

The Lord warned the Ephesians concerning their love, but He commended them for their hate: "But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (Rev. 2:6). A note in the original Scofield Reference Bible is instructive on the significance of the title *Nicolaitans*:

From *nikao*, "to conquer," and *laos*, "the people," or "laity." There is no ancient authority for a sect of the Nicolaitanes. If the word is symbolic it refers to the earliest form of the notion of a priestly order, or "clergy," which later divided an equal brotherhood (Matt. 23:8), into "priests" and "laity." What in Ephesus was "deeds" (2:6) had become in Pergamos a "doctrine" (Rev. 2:15). (1332)

F. W. Grant, G. H. Pember, and Watchman Nee also hold the same interpretation. However, the New Scofield Reference Bible takes this note out and substitutes it with another. This, we feel, is tragic. The revelation here is exposing, and we must pay a price to walk in its light. We need to hate what the Lord hates. We declare unequivocally that the Lord hates the clergy-laity system because this annuls the functioning of the members of the Body of Christ. God's goal is the built-up Body of Christ, and Satan's strategy is to frustrate that goal.

The Lord's original intention for the children of Israel was that they would be a kingdom of priests (Exo. 19:6). Because of their idolatrous worship of the golden calf and the tribe of Levi's faithfulness, however, God gave the right of the priesthood to the Levites (32:25-29; Deut. 33:8-10). Nevertheless, God's original intention for the Israelites was not to have a mediatorial class. The Lord came back to His original intention in the New Testament, revealing that the New Testament believers are a holy and royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Every regenerated believer in Christ is a priest (Rev. 1:6), but in today's Christendom we see a return to the mediatorial class which the Lord hates. The hierarchy in Roman Catholicism, the clerical system in the state churches, and the pastoral system in Protestantism are all to be condemned. Is there such a thing in the Body of Christ as "laity"? No member of

the Body should be a layman. Every member should function to contact Christ directly, to experience Christ personally, and to minister Christ and bring others to Christ regularly. Serving Christ is not a job for a certain class of people for hire but for every member of Christ. By the operation of the sevenfold intensified Spirit within us, we must reject the notion of being in the principle of clergy to lord it over our brethren or to replace them in their function and service to the Lord. We must also reject the thought of being the laity, passively expecting others to serve Christ in our stead. This is abhorrent to the Lord because this annuls His purpose. If we open to the burning of the seven lamps of fire within us, He will judge in us what He hates and cause our gifts and our service to Him to be flaming. We will not be slothful in zeal, but burning in spirit, serving the Lord as a slave (Rom. 12:11).

The Overcomers in Smyrna

The Lord's epistle to Ephesus unveils the condition of the church at the close of its initial stage during the last part of the first century. His epistle to Smyrna reveals the church under the persecution of the Roman Empire from the last part of the first century to the early part of the fourth century. Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit worked to strengthen the suffering believers in Smyrna to overcome their persecution by being faithful unto death so that they might be rewarded in the next age with Christ as the crown of life and escape the tasting of the second death (Rev. 2:8-11). They were strengthened in a sevenfold way to endure the slander of the Judaizers: "I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) and the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (v. 9). The Jews mentioned here do not refer to the Jews in the world but to the Jews in the church.

The apostle Paul in completing the word of God made a clear distinction between the religion of Judaism with the law and the all-inclusive Christ with His Body, the church. The theme of his Epistle to the Galatians is Christ replacing the law and being versus the religion and traditions of Judaism. Paul tells us that he had advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries, but

then it pleased God to reveal His Son in Paul (1:14-16). From that time on, Paul had to continually contend with a party within the church who would not let go of Judaism. Some of these were heretically teaching that circumcision was required for salvation (Acts 15:1). When Paul and the brothers went to Jerusalem to solve this problem, they discovered that there was a sect of believing Pharisees who said that the believing Gentiles should be circumcised and charged to keep the law of Moses (v. 5). The church in Jerusalem was a mixture of Judaism with the pure Christian faith. This negative influence of Judaism can be seen when Paul was exhorted by James and the elders in Jerusalem to perform a Nazarite vow in order to appease the thousands of Jewish believers who were zealous for the law (21:18-24).

We may look back at this mixture and think that it has no application to us, but we need to see that in principle today's Christianity has been Judaized. "That Judaism has got lodgment in the Church of God means nothing less than the destruction of it in its true character" (Grant 25). There are four main items in Judaism that in principle we can see in the degraded church: the material temple, the law, the mediatorial class, and the earthly promises and blessings.

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In Judaism one must go to a material temple to worship God, but in the Body of Christ this is not so. God's habitation is in our spirit, and we worship God in our spirit (Eph. 2:22; John 4:24). It is a corruption that many today think of the church as a physical building, in essence a material temple. To say that we are "going to church" is like the Jews saying that they are "going to the temple." The church is the Body of Christ. It is not a place to which we go; it is what we are. We do not worship God in a physical place which

has been “hallowed” by a certain type of outward blessing or designated by a peculiar architectural style. We worship Him everywhere by contacting Him in our spirit. The early believers met in their homes (Acts 2:46; 5:42), not in buildings with great spires and domes.

In Judaism there is the law, a written code to govern the conduct of the people. But in the New Testament we have the Spirit within us as the inner law of life (Rom. 8:2, 9). God imparts His laws into our minds and inscribes them on our hearts (Heb. 8:10). As Christians, we do not follow an outward code of dos and don'ts. We follow Christ as the Spirit who dwells in our spirit. When we walk according to the Spirit, we spontaneously fulfill the righteous requirement of the law (Rom. 8:4). There are written laws and regulations in Judaism and also in many sectors of Christianity. But these outward codes should have nothing to do with the Body of Christ. The indwelling Christ Himself is our code. He is our indwelling law and our Lord, the living One who guides us, instructs us, and supplies us to follow Him (vv. 2, 14). He does not merely make demands upon us as the law of letters did. Rather, He supplies us with what He is to meet what He demands.

We have pointed out that in Judaism there is a mediatorial class of Levitical priests and another class, the “laymen.” Sadly, the practice of the mediatorial class, the clergy and the laity, has permeated Christianity today. Judaism is also characterized by earthly promises and blessings. The blessing that God promised to Abraham in the Old Testament was the good land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 17:8; 26:3-4). But Paul tells us that the reality of the good land as the blessing of Abraham is the all-inclusive Spirit of Christ (Gal. 3:14). All the blessings in the New Testament age are spiritual blessings not physical ones (Eph. 1:3). What a shame it is when we hear health, wealth, and prosperity being preached among God's children! The promise of earthly blessings is of Judaism and has nothing to do with the true church of God. Watchman Nee aptly says,

The purpose of the Jews in serving God is that they may reap more wheat from the fields and that their oxen and

sheep will not drop their young but multiply manifold, just as in Jacob's case. They are after blessings in this world. God's promises to them are also promises of earth, that among the nations on earth they may be the head and not the tail. But the first promise to the church is that we must take up the cross and follow the Lord. Sometimes when I preach the gospel, men ask, "Will there be any rice to eat when we believe in Jesus?" I have replied, "When you believe in Jesus, the rice-bowl is broken." This is the church. It is not that we will gain more in everything after we believe. Once when I was in Nanking, a certain preacher said in his message, "If you only believe in Jesus, you may not make big money, but you will at least make a fair living." When I heard this I thought that this is not according to the church. The church does not teach how much we shall gain before God, but how much we will be able to let go before God. The church does not think that suffering is a painful thing; rather, it is a joy. (28)

The overcomers in Smyrna were poor materially, but in God's sight they were rich with Christ. They were strengthened by the intensified Spirit to endure the slander of the Judaizers and also to be martyred for the Lord's glory. The Lord told the disciples that they would be His witnesses, which literally means "martyrs." Every overcomer is a martyr. A martyr is one who loves not his soul-life even unto death (Rev. 12:11). Every lover of Jesus is a martyr for Jesus. A martyr is one who continually exercises to deny himself and live by Christ as his life. Paul said, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). He was continually dying to himself, losing his natural soulish life, to live by God's life according to the pattern of Christ in His human living (John 12:24-26).

Perhaps physical martyrdom is not our destiny, but all of us must experience psychological martyrdom, a martyrdom of the self. Instead of being lovers of self, we should be deniers of self and lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:2, 4). In a certain sense, we may even say that there is spiritual martyrdom. Even in the spiritual realm, our service to the Lord is not according to our preference as to how we should serve, where we should serve, or even when we should

serve. Watchman Nee speaks of this in the following stanza of a hymn: “Every moment, every member, / Girded, waiting Thy command; / Underneath the yoke to labor / Or be laid aside as planned. / When restricted in pursuing, / No disquiet will beset; / Underneath Thy faithful dealing / Not a murmur or regret” (*Hymns*, #403).

A martyr, a witness, of Christ is one who is constrained to live and die for Christ by Christ’s mighty love (2 Cor. 5:14-15; Rom. 14:7-9). Christ’s love makes the believers martyrs for Him (8:35-37). Those who are faithful unto death will receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). This crown is a prize in addition to our salvation by believing in Christ. It is a reward in the next age to the overcomers who reign in the life of Christ in this age (Rom. 5:17). These overcomers are filled to the brim with Christ as life until this life eventually becomes a crown of victory to them. They will be crowned with Christ and reign with Him in the kingdom and realm of life for a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).

The Overcomers in Pergamos

The name *Pergamos* means “marriage” or “fortified tower.” The church in Pergamos is characterized by a marriage union with the world (2:12-17). It is a church that has changed in nature from a little flock (Luke 12:32; 1 Pet. 5:2) to become a huge tower fortified against her enemies, not through God but through worldly and political alliances. This was foretold by the Lord in the parable of the mustard seed, which should be an annual herb for feeding people but instead is transmuted to become a huge perennial tree, in which Satan’s birds find their lodging place (Matt. 13:31-32). This happened in the fourth century when Constantine the Great made Christianity the national religion in which thousands of unbelievers found membership. This transmuted the church into Christendom with its roots planted in the world and its branches reaching afar with worldly enterprises.

The teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans prevail here (Rev. 2:14-15). The teaching of Balaam, a Gentile prophet for hire, leads

to idolatry and fornication (Num. 25:1-3; 31:16). This teaching distracts the believers from the person of Christ to idolatry and from the enjoyment of Christ to spiritual fornication. The teaching of the Nicolaitans, the teaching that perpetuates the clergy-laity system, annuls the functioning of Christ's members. Thus, the teaching of Balaam disregards Christ as the Head, and the teaching of the Nicolaitans destroys the Body.

Those who go along with the worldly church dwell where Satan's throne is (Rev. 2:13). How terrible it is for Satan's throne, which is in the world, to be in the church! How can we overcome such a degraded situation? First, we must be intensified by the sevenfold Spirit to be like Antipas, who was killed among those in Pergamos for being the Lord's witness and faithful one (v. 13). *Antipas* means "against all." We must be faithful witnesses to be against all that the worldly church would bring in or practice that is contrary to God's nature, way, desire, or preference.

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Furthermore, while the church goes the way of the world, we must come forward to the Holy of Holies where we can enjoy Christ as the hidden manna (v. 17). The Israelites were instructed by God to put an omer of manna in a golden pot and place it inside the Ark for an eternal memorial (Exo. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4). The hidden manna signifies Christ eaten, digested, and assimilated by His people. The overcomers in Ephesus are lovers of Jesus, in Smyrna they are martyrs for Jesus, and in Pergamos they are eaters of Jesus. The Lord tells us in John 6 that He is the living bread that came down out of heaven, the reality of the manna with which God fed the children of Israel for forty years (vv. 32-33, 51). If we daily eat Him as our spiritual food, we will

live by Him as our daily life supply. The hidden manna is the portion of Christ that we enjoy in the presence of God where there is no distance between us and Him. We should pray, "Lord, eliminate all the distance between me and You. I pray that there would be nothing between us." The offerings, typifying the redeeming Christ, were eaten by the priests in the outer court, and the bread of the Presence, typifying Christ as our serving supply, was eaten in the Holy Place (Lev. 6:16, 26; 1 Cor. 9:13; Matt. 12:4). The overcomers have the most hidden, intimate, and sweet enjoyment of Christ as the hidden manna in the golden pot in the Ark in the Holy of Holies.

In order to enjoy Christ as the hidden manna, we must take the Lord's charge in Matthew 6:5-6:

When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

This shows that we need some secret enjoyment and secret experience of Christ. Our secret experience of Christ kills the self and the flesh, which love to be praised and glorified by men. If we pray every day in secret without telling others or letting them know about it, this means that we are spiritually healthy and growing. Outward exhibition frustrates our growth in life. All of us need a "root system" in our relationship with the Lord. We need unseen growth through our secret times with the Lord by which we are rooted in Him as our soil (Col. 2:7). The ones who have no root "last only for a time; then when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately they are stumbled" (Mark 4:17).

We need to follow the Lord's pattern in the Gospels. He was truly a man of prayer, who spent time to have personal, hidden fellowship with the Father. Mark 1:35 says, "And rising very early in the

morning, while it was still night, He went out and went away to a deserted place, and there He prayed." Matthew 14:22-23 tells us that immediately after His feeding of the five thousand, He compelled the disciples to go before Him to the other side so that He might have more time to pray privately to the Father. This was so that He might have the Father with Him in whatever He did for the accomplishing of the Father's plan.

In order to enjoy Christ as the hidden manna, we need to have a personal, affectionate, private, and spiritual relationship with Him. Song of Songs typologically describes such a relationship between the Lord's seeker and Himself as the King. When the seeker in Song of Songs says, "Draw me," this is personal. When she says, "Kiss me," this is affectionate. When she says, "The king has brought me into his chambers," this is private and spiritual, because the King's private chambers are our regenerated spirit where He as the Spirit dwells (1:4, 2; Eph. 2:22; Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22).

When we enjoy Christ in such a way as the hidden manna, the Lord will give us "a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it" (Rev. 2:17). The white stone signifies transformation. When we daily eat Christ as the hidden manna, we will be daily transformed to be justified, purified, and approved for God's building. The "new name" is the designation of a transformed person. It is the interpretation of the experience of the one who has been transformed; thus, only he knows what this name is. For the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, we must be transformed by eating the hidden Christ day by day.

The hidden manna is the focal point of God's building. We say this because of its location in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the center of God's move on earth. The Holy of Holies was the center of the tabernacle, the Ark was the center of the Holy of Holies, the golden pot was the center of the Ark, and the hidden manna was the center of the golden pot. This makes the hidden manna the ultimate center of God's move on earth. The central focus of

our Christian life and of our church life is the Christ whom we enjoy in the most intimate and hidden way for our transformation.

Furthermore, it is by eating the hidden manna that we can be incorporated into the Triune God. We use the term *incorporation* to describe persons coinhering, indwelling one another. The Lord said that He is in the Father and that the Father is in Him (John 14:10-11). This shows that the Triune God Himself is a divine incorporation. The three of the Trinity coinhere; that is, They mutually indwell one another. On the day of resurrection, the Lord Jesus brought the believers into this divine coinherence: "In that day [the day of resurrection] you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (v. 20). Now the believers coinhere with the coinhering Triune God. This is an answer to the Lord's prayer in John 17:21: "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us." This revelation of incorporation can be seen with the hidden manna in the tabernacle. The hidden manna, signifying Christ the Son, is in the golden pot, signifying God the Father in His divine nature (Col. 3:3-4). This means that the Son is in the Father. The golden pot is in the Ark, which signifies Christ the Son as the mingling of divinity with humanity (acacia wood overlaid with gold). This means that the Father is in the Son. The Ark is in the Holy of Holies, signifying that Christ as the Spirit indwells our regenerated spirit.

Thus, the Son is in the Father, the Father is in the Son, and the Son as the Spirit dwells in our spirit. Eating the hidden manna brings us into the reality of this incorporation. The practical way for us to be incorporated into the Triune God as a universal incorporation is to eat Christ as the hidden manna. When we eat the Lord in the most hidden way as our spiritual supply through His Word and prayer, we are abiding in Him and He in us. Then the love for the Father, not the love of the world, is in us (1 John 2:15).

The Overcomers in Thyatira

Watchman Nee points out that the church in Thyatira along with the following three churches (Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea)

will continue historically on earth until the Lord comes back (50-51). Each of the epistles to these last four churches refer to the Lord's coming again, while the first three do not (Rev. 2:25; 3:3, 11, 21). The church in Thyatira signifies the church in apostasy from the ordination of the papal system in the latter part of the sixth century to the end of the church age.

All Bible scholars agree that the church of Thyatira refers to the Roman Catholic Church. This does not refer to the confusion which resulted from the marriage with the world in the beginning—that is now over. Now the situation has become so gross, so full of heresy and sacrifice. It is indeed remarkable how the Roman Catholic Church pays so much attention to behavior and sacrifice. The mass is their sacrifice. (Nee 44)

Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit works to rescue the believers in Thyatira from idol worship, demonic teachings, and the deep things of Satan so that they may be rewarded with the authority over the nations in the kingdom age (Rev. 2:18-29). Thyatira, signifying Roman Catholicism, is portrayed as the woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess, teaching and leading the people of God with "the deep things of Satan" (vv. 20, 24). This is the woman in Matthew 13:33 who leavened "three measures of meal," the entire teaching concerning the element of Christ in His person and work. The Catholic Church is built up as a religious hierarchy with the pope as the head. Revelation 17:6 reveals that the Catholic Church martyrs the saints and the witnesses of Jesus. Eventually, the Catholic Church will be hated, made desolate, and burned by Antichrist and his ten kings at the beginning of the great tribulation (v. 16). Revelation 17 refers to the Catholic Church as "the great harlot," and as "the mother of the harlots and the abominations of the earth" (vv. 1, 5). She is the mother, the birth-source, of harlotry and abominations.

We need to be filled with the sevenfold intensified Spirit to overcome every vestige of Catholicism. God's people must overcome by heeding the Lord's call to come out of Babylon: "Come out of her, My people, that you do not participate in her

sins and that you do not receive her plagues” (18:4). In order to overcome we must keep faith in the unleavened teaching of Christ’s all-inclusive person. We must also keep the Lord’s works until the end (2:26). This is to keep faith in all of Christ’s works in His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, descension, and second appearing.

Those who overcome will receive authority to rule over the nations in the kingdom age, and they will enjoy Christ as the morning star (vv. 26-28). The morning star is seen before the sun rises. The Lord will appear in His coming as the sun of righteousness to most of the believers (Mal. 4:2), but to the overcoming ones who watch for His appearing, He will be the morning star. Day by day we should rise early to have a personal time to enjoy the Lord in a hidden way as the morning star. Then He will be such to us at His second coming.

The Overcomers in Sardis

The church in Sardis is a picture of the church in reformation, the Protestant church, from the early part of the sixteenth century to the Lord’s coming back (Rev. 3:1-6). The church in Sardis is dead but has a name that she is living. What the Lord treasures is inward reality, not outward name or appearance (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Pet. 3:3-4). Thus, the Lord who writes to her is the One who has the seven Spirits and the seven stars. We must conquer the deadness of Sardis by being stars, messengers, who are filled with the seven-fold intensified Spirit to be intensely living and intensely shining (Rev. 3:1-2; 1:20). We can conquer the deadness of Sardis by presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God for the practice of the Body life (Rom. 12:1). When we present our bodies to meet with the saints as we open ourselves to the Lord, our mind becomes renewed (v. 2) and our spirit becomes burning with the fire of the seven Spirits (v. 11). Thus, a presented body issues in a renewed mind and a burning spirit.

To overcome in Sardis is to be watchful and establish the things of life, which are about to die, and not to be defiled with the stain of spiritual death (Rev. 3:2, 4). In God’s eyes spiritual death is even

more serious than sin (Lev. 11:24-25). A practical application of the defilement of death is given by Witness Lee in *The Priesthood* (71-72):

Do you like to look into a garbage can? No matter how fine anyone's home is, there is always a trash can. Even a king's palace has a trash can. There is also a trash can in the universe. Hell is the universal trash can to contain all the garbage in the universe. Do not say that such and such a local church is so wonderful, for every local church has a trash can. If you come to my home, will you come to smell and enjoy the trash can? No. But sometimes when we go to a local church, we do not go to the "living room" but to the "trash can." We do not exercise ourselves to taste the good things but to enjoy the trash can—the gossip, the criticism, and the murmuring. Eventually, we are deadened. The more we contact these negative things, the more we cannot pray. We are simply deadened.

We need to be separated from anything that would cause us to be spiritually deadened. We need to be today's Nazarites who are separated from spiritual death by being filled with Christ as life in an intensified way (Num. 6:6-7,9). To be filled with the divine life is to be filled with "anti-death." We need to be those who are continually swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5:4). Christ as the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit came into our spirit to make our spirit life (Rom. 8:10). Now when we set our mind on the spirit, our mind becomes life (v. 6). As we allow the Spirit of the resurrecting God to make His home in us, He gives life even to our mortal bodies, to make us men of life in our entire tripartite being (v. 11).

The Overcomers in Philadelphia

The only churches among the seven that were not rebuked by the Lord were Smyrna and Philadelphia. Philadelphia not only receives no rebuke from the Lord but also is praised by Him (Rev. 3:7-13). This is because she has fully returned in essence to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42). The church in Philadelphia signifies the church in recovery from the early part of the nineteenth century to

the second appearing of the Lord. *Philadelphia* means “brotherly love.” In this church the brothers love one another and the mediatorial class is abolished. The spiritual state here is what satisfies the desire of the Lord’s heart. In Christ all the believers, whether male or female, are brothers, since He is the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). Every person who believes in Christ, having received Him as his Lord and Savior and life, is a brother in Christ. We should receive all believers because they have Christ’s life and are our brothers.

To those in Philadelphia the Lord says, “I know your works; behold, I have put before you an opened door which no one can shut, because you have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied My name” (Rev. 3:8). There is an opened door to those who are willing to take the way of Philadelphia. According to our concept, we need much power to be overcomers, but the sevenfold intensified Spirit empowers us to have “a little power.” This shows that “what pleases the Lord is not our doing much for Him but our doing our best for Him with what we have” (Recovery Version, v. 8, note 2). Listen to what the Lord says concerning the woman who poured out an alabaster flask of ointment on Him: “She has done what she could” (Mark 14:8). This literally means, “What she had she did” (Recovery Version, note 1). May we all be filled with the sevenfold intensified Spirit to do our best for Him with what we have of Him.

The overcomers in Philadelphia also keep the Lord’s word and do not deny His name. To deviate from the Lord’s word is apostasy. We must say Amen to whatever is recorded in God’s Word. We must say Amen not only to the truth concerning Christ’s person and work but also to everything in the Word concerning our daily life and practice of the church life. God’s Word says that there is only one Body of Christ. It also reveals that there are local expressions of this one Body, the one church of God. Thus, we read of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (13:1), and the seven churches in the seven cities in Asia (Rev. 1:11).

There is one church for one city and one city for one church. The

“church in Jerusalem” was not a name but simply a description of what the believers in Jerusalem were. They were the church who met in Jerusalem. We may use the moon as an illustration. Surely there is only one moon, but this moon manifests itself in different localities. Simultaneously, we may say that there is the moon in New York City, the moon in Miami, and the moon in Paris. Just as the one moon is seen and expressed in different localities, so the one church is seen and expressed in different localities. This simple, God-given way of meeting in oneness has been mostly lost.

How tragic it is that the Body of Christ has been divided by doctrinal differences and that the believers receive only those who agree with them doctrinally! In the New Testament there is no such thing as a Baptist church, a Presbyterian church, a Wesleyan church, a Lutheran church, or any other denominational church. To denominate ourselves means that we are of a particular name other than the name of Christ. The characteristic of those in Philadelphia is that they do not deny the Lord’s name. We should not take any name other than the name of Christ. The church is the wife of Christ, and a wife takes only the name of her husband. To be a Christian is to be of Christ and Christ alone. To take any name other than the name of our Husband is spiritual fornication in God’s eyes. We must overcome today’s trend of not keeping the Lord’s word and today’s tide of denying the Lord’s name. Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit works to encourage the believers in Philadelphia to hold fast what they have that no one take their crown (3:11).

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The faithful overcomer will be rewarded to be a pillar in the temple of God (v. 12). In the New Jerusalem the temple is “the

Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22). This indicates that the overcomer is built into the Triune God. The details of the pillars in the temple as described in 1 Kings 7 present a picture of what it means for the overcomers to be pillars. The pillars in the temple were made of bronze (v. 15), signifying God’s judgment. This means that the overcomers allow the sevenfold intensified Spirit the freedom to judge anything within them that is not of God. At the top of the pillars there was lily work (v. 22). The lily signifies the pure Christ in resurrection, living by faith and trusting in God (Matt. 6:28). The brass is “not I,” and the lily is “but Christ” (Gal. 2:20). The brass is the cross, and the lily is resurrection. The overcomer lives a life of “not I but Christ” a life of continually putting himself to death by the power of the resurrected Christ.

The lily work at the top of the pillars was seen on “nets of checker work with wreaths of chain work” (1 Kings 7:17). This checker work and chain work signify our intermixed and complicated situation. It seems that the more we go on with the Lord, the more intermixed and complicated our situation becomes. The Lord has no intention of unmixing or uncomplicating our situation. Instead, He wants us to live the life of a lily, a simple and pure life of faith, a life of trusting in God and not in ourselves. The checker work and chain work are the environment and setting for the lilies. The beauty of Christ is manifested in our complicated situation when we live a simple life of faith. This is the meaning of the phrase *all things work together for good* (Rom. 8:28). The “all things” of our intermixed and complicated situation work together for good. This is the “good” of being conformed to the image of Christ (v. 29), the good of being conformed to the Christ who purely trusted in God in any environment or situation to manifest the beauty of the Divine Trinity. (For more concerning the significance of the pillars in 1 Kings 7, see *Life-study of Genesis*, pp. 1063-1090.) The overcomer becomes a pillar with the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the Lord’s new name written upon him in the kingdom age. This means that he belongs to and is possessed by God, the New Jerusalem, and the Lord in His newness. This also means that he has been built into God to become God in life,

nature, and expression but not in the Godhead to be a part of the New Jerusalem.

The Overcomers in Laodicea

The church in Laodicea signifies the church in degradation from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the Lord's return (Rev. 3:14-22). *Laodicea* means "the opinion of the people." If we debate over minor doctrines that do not affect the common faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), the opinion of the people will cause countless divisions. The Laodicean condition is lukewarm, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (vv. 16-17). Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit works to awaken the believers in Laodicea from their lukewarm and Christless condition. The temperature of the Christian life should be hot, not lukewarm. If we are lukewarm, the Lord will spew us out of His mouth. To be hot literally is to be "boiling." The Lord's exhortation to Laodicea is to "be boiling therefore and repent" (v. 19, lit.).

We need to open to the seven Spirits, the seven burning eyes of Christ, so that He can infuse us to make us boiling in our pursuit of and love for Him. By His infusion we will hate and abhor the pride and boast of being wealthy and rich in vain doctrinal knowledge. Instead, we will pay the price to gain gold refined by fire that we may be rich, white garments that we may be clothed, and eyesalve to anoint our eyes that we may see (v. 18).

The gold signifies God the Father in His divine nature, the garments signify Christ the Son as our lived-out righteousness, and the eyesalve signifies the anointing Spirit of God for our vision of Christ and His purpose. We need to pay the price to gain the Triune God in an experiential way so that we would be truly rich toward God. Because the Lord is shut outside the door of the lukewarm church, we must open ourselves to Him to enjoy Him as our all-inclusive feast (v. 20). We need to cooperate with the inner working of the intensified Spirit by repenting of our lukewarmness to be boiling in regaining the enjoyment of all that Christ is in reality.

We must remember that the Body of Christ is built up by the overcomers, who are produced by Christ in His sevenfold intensified heavenly ministry. Without the overcomers, the Body of Christ cannot be built up, and unless the Body of Christ is built up, Christ cannot come back for His bride. We need to pray and pay the cost as the apostle Paul did so that we can satisfy the Lord's desire for His bride (Phil. 3:7-11). May we respond to the speaking of Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit by paying the price to be His overcomers. We must have "great resolutions in heart" (Judg. 5:15) to deny ourselves and be the overcomers for the sake of the Lord and His Body.

The Consummation of the New Jerusalem

The overcomers take God's goal as their goal. God's goal is the New Jerusalem, the ultimate consummation of His eternal economy (Rev. 21:2). The degradation of the church is due mainly to the fact that the majority of Christian workers disregard the New Jerusalem and take many other good things as replacements of the New Jerusalem. They take something other than the New Jerusalem as their goal. Today to be the overcomers answering the Lord's call under the degradation of the church, we need to overcome all things which replace the New Jerusalem as the goal and take this goal of God's eternal economy as our unique and ultimate goal.

Sadly, many misinterpret the New Jerusalem to be "heaven" or "a heavenly mansion." They interpret the New Jerusalem physically and literally. But Revelation is a book of signs (1:1), symbols with spiritual significance, and the greatest sign is the New Jerusalem. The book of Revelation tells us emphatically that the New Jerusalem is a person, the bride and wife of Christ (21:2, 9). Christ's wife, the holy city, is composed of all of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people. This city-wife is the consummation of the universal romance between God and His chosen and redeemed people (Isa. 54:5; John 3:29) and the conclusion of the entire Scripture.

On the one hand, the New Jerusalem is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). This means that the Lord

does the adorning work. To be adorned is to be transformed with the riches of Christ. On the other hand, Revelation tells us that the wife has made herself ready (19:7). This means that the overcomers make themselves ready by cooperating with the inner working of the sevenfold intensified Spirit, who infuses them with Christ's riches. They do this by daily drinking the flowing God, the Spirit, as the river of water of life and by daily eating Christ as the tree of life to be their fresh and rich supply. In this way they take God's golden divine nature as their street, as their one way, for their Christian life (22:1-2).

In order to be the overcomers of God, we must be intensified by the sevenfold Spirit to do a threefold work, which includes all three stages of Christ's full ministry. We must do a work in the stage of incarnation to produce redeemed people by preaching the redeeming Christ unveiled in the four Gospels. We must do a work in the stage of inclusion to produce and establish churches as recorded in the twenty-two books from Acts to Jude. Finally, we must do a work in the stage of intensification to produce the overcomers and to consummate the New Jerusalem as recorded in the book of Revelation.

May the Lord gain His heart's desire by intensifying us to be His faithful fellow workers for His move to build up His Body, prepare His bride, bring in His kingdom, and consummate this age. 

Notes

¹Primary sources for the major points in this article include *The Divine and Mystical Realm* (71-76), *Incarnation, Inclusion, and Intensification* (chapters 1—2), and *How to Be a Co-Worker and an Elder and How to Fulfill Their Obligations* (chapters 1—3), published by Living Stream Ministry, 1996.

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