

The Word of Righteousness

The Overcomers in the Seven Churches (11)

The epistle to the church in Philadelphia is the highest and most significant of the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3, and it is the one most needed for the church today, near the end of the present age. This brief word of Christ, the holy and true One, touches the heart of God with His desire, purpose, and intention, revealing what the overcomers in the church age must see, seek, aspire to, and become in order to fulfill God's economy for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ to produce the New Jerusalem in its initial stage in the present age, its manifestation in the coming age of the kingdom, and its fullness in eternity. All those who endeavor to answer the Lord's call for overcomers must know this epistle in its revealed depths, aspire to its reality, pray for its realization, and learn the lessons from history concerning the church that the Lord desires.

The church in Philadelphia signifies the return of the church to its pristine and apostolic orthodoxy after centuries of falling away and after its initial stages of recovery. Beginning at least from the fourth century, the church became married to the world, and in its degradation it became an apostate system of religion, typified by the churches in Pergamos and Thyatira (2:12-29). As a reaction to this degraded system, the Lord brought in a great recovery, the Reformation, signified by Sardis (3:1-6). However, this recovery was incomplete, and many items of the degraded church remained, leaving the church in a dead and dying condition. In the stage of Philadelphia, therefore, the Lord reacts further, completing His work of recovery and returning the church to God's standard. Watchman Nee declares, "The work of Philadelphia is greater than the work of the Reformation. Philadelphia gives us the things which the Reformation did not give us" (70).

The Church of Brotherly Love

Revelation 3:7 begins, "To the messenger of the church in Philadelphia." The name *Philadelphia* is composed of Greek φιλέω, "to love affectionately," "to delight in," and

ἀδελφός, "brother," literally, "from the same womb" (Thayer 10). Philadelphia is a church characterized by brotherly love. In the first of the seven epistles the Lord calls the church to love Him with the first love (2:4); here He commends the church that loves His brothers. It is a great matter to be characterized by love. This is revealed especially in the writings of John. He tells us, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God. He who does not love has not known God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). *God is love* is stated not in a metaphoric but in a predicative sense, referring to God's essence and nature. God's essence is the divine life, and love is the nature of His essence.

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To know love in its divine reality is to know God in His inward nature; only those who know love truly know God. Hence, "if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us...God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him" (vv. 12, 16). To abide in God as love is to partake of an intrinsic, organic union with Him in His divine nature. John continues, "In this has love been perfected with us, that...even as He is, so also are we in this world" (v. 17). *As He is* refers to Christ, who lived a life of God as love. *So also are we* indicates that such a One is now in us as our life so that we also may live a life of love, becoming the same as He is in His life and nature. "As He is, so also are we" is a statement of God's highest intention according to the highest peak of the divine revelation.

Jesus told His disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Following this, He prayed to the Father, "I have made Your name known to them and will yet make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (17:26). How unfathomable yet how real it is that the very love

that the Father in eternity has toward His Son can abide in us, the believers, as His duplication and reproduction! Such a love is expressed in Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love.

Paul tells the believers, “Love one another warmly in brotherly love” (Rom. 12:10), “Through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13), “Put on love, which is the uniting bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14), and “Let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13:1). The first aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). God has given us a spirit of love (2 Tim. 1:7), we bear one another in love (Eph. 4:2), and the Body of Christ grows unto the building up of itself in love (v. 16).

Peter likewise tells us to “love the brotherhood (ἀδελφότης),” the universal family of brothers (1 Pet. 2:17). He exhorts: “Since you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly love, love one another from a pure heart fervently” (1:22), “Above all, have fervent love among yourselves” (4:8), and “Greet one another with a kiss of love” (5:14). In his second Epistle he demonstrates that brotherly love is a chief virtue as the mature development of the characteristics of the divine nature in the believers (1:4-7).

John says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. He who does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:14). Death and life are two sources, elements, and spheres. Witness Lee writes,

To pass out of death into life is to pass out of the source, the essence, the element, and the sphere of death into the source, the essence, the element, and the sphere of life... Love (the love of God) toward the brothers is strong evidence of this. Faith in the Lord is the way for us to pass out of death into life; love toward the brothers is the evidence that we have passed out of death into life. To have faith is to receive the eternal life; to love is to live by the eternal life and express it. (*Recovery Version*, v. 14, note 1)

Love is the sign of maturity in the divine life. The church in Sardis has a name that it is living, and yet it is dead (Rev. 3:1). The overcomers in the church in Philadelphia have passed out of death into the realm of life in their experience, and they express the church-loving Christ, in their maturity of life, through their love for the brothers. They enjoy God and abide in His inner substance, and they love one another out from His substance.

Keeping the Lord's Word and Not Denying His Name

Revelation 3:7 and 8 say,

These things says the Holy One, the true One, the One

who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will shut, and shuts and no one opens: 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.

Having a little power, keeping the Lord's word, and not denying His name are outstanding features of the church in Philadelphia. To have a little power is not to do much for the Lord but to do our best for Him with whatever little we have (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 8, note 2). To keep the Lord's word is to return to, receive, and safeguard the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42), which unveils God's New Testament economy concerning Christ and the church. This is the only category of teaching revealed and recognized by God. To keep the word of Christ is to receive it in His presence, to love it, read it, pray it, study it, speak it, and let it dwell in us richly to become our constitution (Col. 3:16).

In His New Testament economy God speaks in the Son [Heb. 1:2], and the Son speaks not only by Himself in the Gospels but also through His members, the apostles and prophets, in Acts, in the Epistles, and in Revelation. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Col. 3:16, note 1)

All these speakings are the word of Christ, through which His riches are ministered to us. The recovered church in Sardis did a great work of freeing the Bible from the superstitious priesthood of the medieval church and began to open some of its crucial and fundamental truths. It is in Philadelphia, however, that the riches of the interpreted word pour forth.

The church in Philadelphia keeps the word of the Lord in love. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments...He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him” (John 14:15, 21). In the same vein, He also said, “As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love” (15:9-10). John writes, “Whoever keeps His word, truly in this one the love of God has been perfected. In this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5). Keeping the Lord's word is a matter of the divine life, which is God Himself, and to be in the Lord is to be one with Him. By this oneness the loving essence of God, which is supplied to us by His word, becomes ours, causing us to love God and love the brothers. Therefore, John concludes, “In this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (5:2-3).

The Lord also commended Philadelphia for not denying His name. The Lord's word is His expression, and the Lord's name is the Lord Himself. The believers under the care of the apostles were characterized by their openly and vocally calling on the name of the Lord, even at the cost of their lives (Acts 2:21; 7:59; 9:14, 21; 22:16). This was a living and visible sign of their love for Him. To not deny the Lord's name is also to abandon all names other than His. The churches that were produced by the Reformation became denominations by taking the name of particular persons, teachings, or practices. It is not a small matter to call a group of Christians by the name of Lutheran, Wesleyan, Anglican, Presbyterian, or Baptist. The church is a pure virgin espoused only to Christ, her unique Husband (2 Cor. 11:2). To take a name other than His is to join oneself to a principle, teaching, or leader that rivals the Lord's place in His Body. The fully recovered church belongs uniquely to the Lord, clinging only to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Witness Lee writes,

The deviation from the [Lord's] word to heresies and the exalting of many names other than that of Christ are the most striking signs of degraded Christianity. The return to the pure word from all heresies and traditions and the exalting of the Lord's name by abandoning every other name constitute the most inspiring testimony in the recovered church. This is why the church in the Lord's recovery has the revelation and presence of the Lord and expresses the Lord in a living way, full of light and with the riches of life. (*Recovery Version*, Rev. 3:8, note 3)

Meeting in the Lord's Name and in Brotherly Love

As a sign, the church in Philadelphia prefigures the church life recovered by the brothers raised up by the Lord in Great Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century. Their history is illustrative both of the principles of the church in brotherly love and of the dangers faced by such a recovered church.

Coming out of Divisions to Meet in Oneness

The first events of this move of the Lord took place in Dublin, Ireland, centered around Trinity College. By 1825 a number of Protestant Christians there, finding themselves to be a minority, practiced coming together in small numbers, in "drawing-room meetings" in one another's homes for prayer and study of the Scriptures (Neatby 6). By meeting in this way, they began to understand the error

of denominational barriers between sincere believers. In 1827 Edward Cronin found that even the nonconformist church that he attended required him to declare his formal membership, and objecting to this, he began to meet with Edward Wilson and several others. Another such meeting included John Parnell (Lord Congleton) and William Stokes.

At this time it was Anthony Norris Groves, in particular, who had insight into the oneness of the church and the proper way to meet. He stated, "We are evidently called to know nothing among our fellow-Christians but this one act—Do they belong to Christ? Has Christ received them? Then we may receive them, to the glory of God" (qtd. in Baylis 5). After being baptized, he was approached by a Baptist minister who assumed that Groves would now become a Baptist. Groves replied,

No! I desire to follow all in those things in which they follow Christ; but I would not, by joining one party, cut myself off from others...So should we each take hold of Christ, not of any of the systems of men, and then we shall be safe and united: we should keep together, not because of any human system, but because Jesus is *one*. (qtd. in Groves 36)

Groves answered the charge of breaking communion with the Church of England by writing to a friend:

If you mean that I do not *exclusively* join you, it is quite true, feeling this spirit of exclusiveness to be of the very essence of schism, which the apostle so strongly reproves in the Corinthians. I therefore know no distinction, but am ready to break the bread and drink the cup of holy joy with all who love the Lord and will not lightly speak evil of His name. I feel every saint to be a holy person, because Christ dwells in him, and...my duty still is, with my Lord, to join him as a member of the mystical body. ("Exetor"48)

Groves saw that the ground for meeting with believers should be "that simple principle of union, the love of Jesus, instead of *oneness* of judgment in minor things" ("Dec. 14th" 259). As for the practice of the church in oneness, John Gifford Bellett recounted to a sister in the Lord the fellowship that he had received from Groves:

It appeared to him from Scripture, that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread together, as their Lord had admonished them; and that, in as far as the practice of the apostles could be a

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guide, every Lord's day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death, and obeying his parting command. (qtd. in Coad 20).¹

At Trinity College Bellett came to know John Nelson Darby, and it was through Bellett that Darby began to meet in the new way.² Darby writes, "Four persons who were pretty much in the same state of soul as myself came together to my lodging; we spoke together about these things, and I proposed to them to break bread the following Sunday, which we did" ("J. N. Darby's Own Account" 185). By 1829 a number of these small meetings began to coalesce. Francis Hutchinson provided a room at Fitzwilliam Square in Dublin, where he, Bellett, and Darby were joined by Cronin's meeting. There they broke bread "for communion in the name of the Lord with all, whosoever they might be, who loved Him in sincerity" (Bellett 5). In the following year Parnell and Stokes's meeting joined the one at Fitzwilliam, and they rented a larger room on Aungier Street. Cronin recalls the joy of those days:

Oh! the blessed seasons to my soul with J. Parnell, W. Stokes, and others, while moving the furniture aside and laying the simple table with its bread and wine, on Saturday evenings—seasons of joy never to be forgotten—for surely we had the Master's smile and sanction in the beginning of such a movement as this was! (17)

Later that year Darby met Benjamin W. Newton, who invited him to Plymouth, and a meeting was established there. Andrew Miller writes,

They flocked together, and gave themselves to the study of the Word of God, and soon experienced the sweetness of Christian communion, and found the Bible—as they said—to be a new Book. It was, no doubt, in those days of virgin freshness a most distinct and blessed work of God's Spirit, the influence of which was felt not only throughout this country, but on the continent, and in distant lands. (31-32)

In 1832 George Müller and Henry Craik moved to Bristol and began a meeting in that city. In time, as Darby writes, "England became gradually covered with meetings, more or less numerous. Plymouth being the place where most of the publications originated, the name 'Plymouth Brethren' became the usual appellation given to such meetings" ("J. N. Darby's Own Account" 186). The testimony of a sister's first visit to the meeting in Bristol provides us with a taste of those gatherings. Coming from a "well-upholstered" London chapel with a grand organ and richly dressed pastor, she was put off by the bare-looking meeting hall of the church with its grave-looking attendees and women in unattractive dresses. However, she notes that when a brother offered a prayer,

"We were at once in the presence of God. It was a Spirit-led prayer. I forgot the dress and all else" (Beattie 28-29). When Craik rose to speak, she records,

All had their Bibles and used them. His exposition of Scripture was quite a new feature of worship to me, and it was indeed marrow and fatness. The meaning of the passage read was brought out as I never heard it before, and I found myself feeding truly in green pastures... To me it was like a new conversion. Now I heard a clear Gospel that I could understand. The Bible became a new book to me. The brotherly love shewn was such as I had never seen before. The godly and simple lives of even wealthy people who had moved in the highest society were such as to carry one back to the days of the apostles and I felt that this was indeed Christianity of a high type. (29)

By meeting in oneness, the brothers honored the unique name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by clinging to the Scriptures they kept the Lord's word. William Blair Neatby writes,

The minds of the Brethren were saturated with the words of Scripture; they talked of them when they sat in their houses and when they walked by the way, when they lay down and when they rose up. Conversational Bible-readings were their principal recreation, and in the older days an invitation to tea might almost be taken to imply an invitation to social Bible study. (278)

This is the testimony of the "unsightly few" who were so blessed by the Lord (Stoney 20). At a time when the state churches of England and Ireland dominated Christianity there, and even the nonconformist churches had become systematized, this was a great recovery. Those who met in this way—in oneness, in brotherly love, and outside of divisions—enjoyed the Lord's presence and the riches of His Word. They could testify, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is / For brothers to dwell in unity! / ...For there Jehovah commanded the blessing: / Life forever" (Psa. 133:1, 3).

Meeting as One Expression of the Church in Each Locality

John Darby became the leading spokesman for the vision and principles of the British brothers who began to meet in oneness. He was ordained first as a deacon and then as a priest in the Church of Ireland, and he labored greatly to convert poor Catholic mountaineers in that country. While he was recuperating from a riding accident, he was afforded by the Lord the time to consider his work. In an autobiographical letter to an associate, he recounts, "Much exercise of soul had the effect of causing the Scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over

me” (“J. N. Darby’s Own Account” 182). It was then that he realized that

the Church of God, as He considers it, was composed only of those who were so *united to Christ*, whereas Christendom, as seen externally, was really the world, and could not be considered as “the Church”...

The careful reading of the Acts afforded me a practical picture of the early Church, which made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state. (182)

Surveying the situation of Christianity at that time, he was grieved by the worldly constitution of the churches produced by the Reformation and by the inadequacy of the dissenting and nonconformist churches. He concluded that no proper, practical expression of the church could yet be found. The greatest problem, he noted, was that no Christian gathering was formed on the unique basis of the common salvation of all believers in Christ. Rather, the ground of contemporary churches was either that of the political state or that of a particular person or practice. In “Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ” he writes,

The [existing] bond of communion is not the *unity* of the people of God, but really (in point of fact) their *differences*...The people of God are found as individuals, among bodies of professing Christians, joined in communion upon other and different grounds. (Darby 1: 22)

He concludes, “We may adjudge that he is an enemy to the work of the Spirit of God who seeks the interests of any particular denomination...No meeting, which is not framed to embrace all the children of God in the full basis of the kingdom of the Son, can find the fulness of blessing” (24-25), “Unity is the glory of the church”(30), and “So far as men pride themselves on being Established, Presbyterian, Baptist, Independent, or anything else, they are antichristian” (30-31).

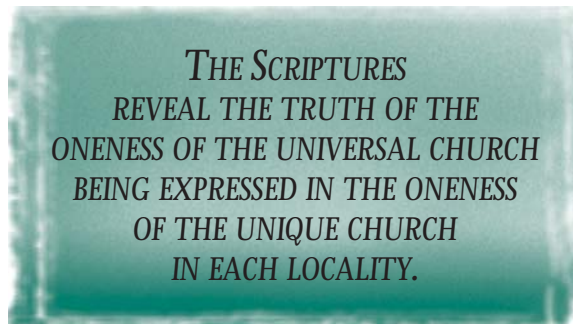
Darby saw that the recovery under Luther and Calvin accomplished much for the liberty and life of the believers, but in “On the Formation of Churches” he adds, “The Reformation did not directly touch the question of the true character of God’s church. It did nothing directly tending to restore it to its primitive estate” (140). Darby moreover considered those who attempted to meet outside of organized Christianity yet without a proper expression of the church to have also come short. He notes, “Believers have sought to shelter themselves under the

distinction between a visible and an invisible church. But I read in Scripture, ‘Ye are the light of the world.’ Of what use is an invisible light?” (140). He perceived that the biblical formula for the proper expression of the church is a meeting of all the Christians in oneness in each locality. He writes,

This truth of the gathering together of God’s children in Scripture seen realised in various localities, and in each central locality the Christians resident therein composed but one body: Scripture is perfectly clear on that head. (141)

This is indeed the case, as can be seen by the examples in Acts 8:1 and 13:1, by how Paul addresses the local churches in the Epistles, and by how the Lord addressed the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Foreseeing an objection, Darby counters,

It has indeed been objected that such union is impossible, but no evidence is produced from God’s word in support of the assertion. It is said, How could it possibly be in London or in Paris? Now the thing was practicable at Jerusalem, where there were more than five thousand believers: and even though meeting in private houses and upper rooms, Christians were nevertheless but one body, under the guidance of one Spirit, with one rule of government, and in one communion, and were so acknowledged. (141)



History proves that the implementation of the foregoing vision by the British brothers indeed met with difficulty, which we will speak of in the following installment of this department. Nevertheless, the Scriptures reveal the truth of the oneness of the universal church being expressed in the oneness of the unique church in each locality. In principle, this view of the standing of the church at the time of the apostles was shared by the brothers in England. Nothing short of this can be called the oneness of the church in Philadelphia.

Coming out of the Clergy-laity System to Meet as the New Testament Priesthood

As a result of the Reformation, the priestly hierarchy of Roman Catholicism was rejected, but the pastoral system that replaced it is in many ways the same. Both in state and private churches the mediatorial class can still be seen. In contrast to this, the Lord told His disciples, “You all are brothers” (Matt. 23:8). Peter tells us that we, the believers, are a holy and royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9),

and John declares that Christ has made us priests to His God and Father (Rev. 1:6). Paul, in particular, describes the God-ordained way for the meetings of the church in the New Testament age, showing that all the members are gifted and equipped to function in mutuality for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-12; 14:26, 31). The church in Philadelphia eliminates the clergy-laity system and perfects all the members to operate in the measure of each one's portion (Eph. 4:7, 11-12, 16).

Groves received this important revelation concerning the Body. Although he strongly intended to preach the gospel in the Near and Far East, he renounced ordination in the Church of England. Realizing further that being sent by the Church Missionary Society meant that he would not be able to hold the Lord's table with his converts, he broke off his connection with them also. He writes, "One day the thought was brought to my mind, that ordination of any kind to preach the gospel is no requirement of Scripture. To me it was the removal of a mountain" (qtd. in Neatby 9). He went on to pioneer the way of voluntary service unto the Lord in full dependence on Him. In 1828, before leaving for Baghdad, he imparted this vision to Bellett, telling him,

This, I doubt not, is the mind of God concerning us, that we should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or minister, but trusting that the Lord would edify us together, by ministering as He pleased and saw good from the midst of ourselves. (Bellett 5)

Bellett was profoundly affected. He writes,

At the moment he spoke the words, I was assured my soul had got the right idea; and that moment I remember as if it were yesterday, and could point out the place. It was the birthday of my mind, may I so speak, as a brother. (qtd. in Beattie 8)

Darby likewise speaks in the most forceful way on the matter of the clergy and laity. He writes, "I believe the notion of a Clergyman to be the sin against the Holy Ghost in this dispensation" (1: 38):

"He gave some apostles" (Eph. 4:5, 7, 11); so in 1 Corinthians 12, they are known only as gifts. My objection to the notion of a Clergyman is, that it *substitutes* something in the place of all these, which cannot be said to be of God at all, and is not found in Scripture...

If clergymen have the exclusive privilege of preaching, teaching, and ministering communion, which they claim, and which is the very sense and meaning of their distinctive title, then *must* it be all evil. (39-40)

In "Christian Liberty of Preaching and Teaching the Lord Jesus Christ" Darby speaks concerning the God-ordained way of all the members of the Body functioning. He notes,

The directions in 1 Corinthians 14 are entirely *inconsistent* with the necessity of ordination to speak...They were all to speak, that all might learn, and all be comforted. Not all to speak at once, not all to speak every day, but all as God led them, according to the order there laid down, and as God was pleased to give them ability for the edifying of the church. I apply all this simply and exclusively to the question of Christians in general, having God's Spirit, using their respective gifts. (70)

He adds, "I by no means admit that the ordinary gifts of believers, for the edification of the church, have ceased. On the contrary, I believe they are the instruments, the only real instruments of edification" (71). He recalls the case of those who prophesied in Numbers 11, considering it as a type fulfilled in the New Testament age:

"Would God," said the meek man of God, "that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them." That which was here typically proposed, the pouring out of the Spirit upon all, was in principle fulfilled in the Christian dispensation...This is the dispensation of the out-pouring of the Spirit here, qualifying, for preaching, any who can do so; in a word—for speaking of Jesus...

The type of the pouring out of the Spirit in the camp with the gracious wish of Moses is the characteristic, the essential distinction of Christianity...To deny this, is to mistake the power of the dispensation, and, I will add, to lose it. (75-76)

The universal priesthood of all the believers for the building up of the church was a great revelation received and practiced by the British brothers. In their churches they appointed elders with much care not to ascribe more to them than the New Testament reveals to be their place, and they shunned the creation of any offices not found in the New Testament writings. All were encouraged to speak, pray, and break the bread at the Lord's table. In this, the love, esteem, and worth of all the members was testified, and the churches were built up.

Holding Fast the Crown until the Lord Returns

To the church in Philadelphia the Lord Jesus speaks, "I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown" (Rev. 3:11). Those in the recovered church have a little strength, which they utilize to do their best for the Lord. They keep the Lord's word and do not deny His name. They please the Lord to the extent that

He puts before them an opened door which no one can shut, and He will make those of the synagogue of Satan to come, fall prostrate before them, and know that He has loved them (vv. 7-9). Because of this, it seems remarkable that He still calls for overcomers in the church. Even this church requires that some among it be overcomers.

The Lord's charge to Philadelphia is strong; they must hold fast what they have that no one take their crown. The recovered church has gained the crown, the sign of its reward before the Lord. However, if it does not hold fast all the things that the Lord has given it, even until He returns, its crown may be taken away. To overcome, therefore, is to hold fast what the saints have in the recovered church. The overcomers have attained to the high peak of Zion within Jerusalem, but the Lord warns, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1). Philadelphia is not simply a particular church; it is a principle, a condition. In our experience we may drift from Philadelphia into lukewarm Laodicea, or we may hold on to the habitual ways and manifest the lifeless practices of Sardis. If we do either, we will fail the Lord, and we will lose our crown. We must remain unshakable, stable, and steady. We must keep the Lord's word faithfully, purely, absolutely, without compromise, without dilution, and without leaven. We must continue steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42), and we must give all the ground in our being to receive the word into the soil of our heart, allowing it to grow in us, penetrate us, renew us, and dwell in us richly (Matt. 13:3, 8; Col. 3:16). We must also be enlightened by the word and allow it to operate in us as a fire and a hammer (Psa. 119:105; Jer. 23:29). Moreover, we must know that the enemy of God will attack and oppose the recovered church in many ways, and we must remain vigilant and pray.

Having the Name of God and the Lord's New Name Written upon Them

The Lord speaks to Philadelphia:

He who overcomes, him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name. (Rev. 3:12)

This is the highest reward promised to the overcomers in

chapters 2 and 3, and it reveals the highest intention of God in His economy. The higher, deeper, and more intrinsic nature of the church in the present age is seen in its aspect as the Body of Christ, the organic constitution of Christ with His believers in the divine life (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:30; Col. 1:18; 2:19). The practical church today is simply the outward frame of this inward, intrinsic reality; as such, it represents the process of God's operation, not His ultimate goal. This means that even the recovered church in Philadelphia is not God's ultimate intention in the church age. His intention is to gain the Body of Christ in its divine and mystical reality, which He will ultimately accomplish through the vehicle of the proper church life. Thus,

we should not think that we are at the goal if we have, under the Lord's blessing, the privilege of being in the recovered church, a church filled with brotherly love...

The Lord is calling for overcomers in Philadelphia. This surely indicates that something more needs to take place in Philadelphia—something in addition to loving the brothers, keeping the word, honoring the Lord's name, keeping the word of endurance, holding fast what they have, and using their little power...The fact that the overcomers do this and become this indicates that not everyone in Philadelphia is overcoming in this sense. (Kangas 202-203)

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ITS ASPECT AS THE BODY OF CHRIST,
THE ORGANIC CONSTITUTION OF CHRIST
WITH HIS BELIEVERS IN THE DIVINE LIFE.*

In Revelation 3:12 the Lord says, "Him I will make." This indicates that the overcomers are called not to do something but to be made something, that is, to become something. They first become pillars in the temple of God. This is an advancement beyond the reward offered to the overcomers in Pergamos. There the Lord said that He would give to the overcomer a white stone (2:17), meaning that he will become a transformed component of God's building. In 3:12 the Lord says further that the overcomer will become a pillar, an unshakable and immovable support, in the temple of God. Verse 22 of chapter 21 tells us that the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the New Jerusalem. This means that some in Philadelphia will become pillars built into the redeeming God Himself. In the holy city the redeeming God and the redeemed man are mingled and constituted together to be one entity, a corporate God-man—the enlargement, expansion, and expression of God.

The Lord also promises to write the name of God, the

name of the New Jerusalem, and the Lord's new name upon the overcomer. God Himself, His city, and the Lord Himself all belong to the overcomer, and he is one with God, one with the New Jerusalem, and one with the Lord. In the Scriptures a person's name represents the person himself. When Jehovah transformed Jacob through many sufferings, He changed his name to Israel (Gen. 35:10). The Lord's promise to the overcomers in Philadelphia indicates that they too experience a change of name, that is, a change in the constitution of their person. The name written on the overcomers is the name of God, the name of the holy city, and the new name of the Lord Jesus. This indicates what they become. To write, here, is to inscribe in a person's inward parts by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3). What God is, the nature of the New Jerusalem, and the person of the Lord are all inscribed, wrought, into the overcomer. This is a great mystery and a great vision.

God's intention in His economy is to gain a group of people into whom He can dispense Himself, uniting and mingling Himself with them to be one entity. God joined Himself to humanity in the person of His Son, Christ, the first God-man, and now He seeks to multiply and propagate this One by joining Him with many men, the believers, who become a corporate God-man. Through regeneration we receive the divine life and become partakers of the divine nature (John 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4), and by the increase and development of God within us (Col. 2:19), we eventually become the same as He is in life and in nature (but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship). This is stated by Athanasius of Alexandria, who declares, "The very Word of God...was made man that we might be made God" (65).

In the present age this corporate, divine-human constitution is the mystical Body of Christ. In the coming age and in eternity, this divine-human entity will be the holy city, New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2, 10). It is significant that of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, only Philadelphia is linked to the New Jerusalem. Witness Lee writes, "The New Jerusalem is the greatest and the ultimate sign in the Scriptures, signifying an organic constitution of the processed Triune God mingled with His regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite elect" ("Application" 211). The New Jerusalem is the consummation of the central vision of God's economy and of the high peak of the divine revelation. The main features of the New Jerusalem are its base, its throne, its street, its gates, and its walls. The base of the holy city is pure gold, signifying the nature of God, as the solid foundation of the throne for the divine administration (Rev. 21:18). The throne of the New Jerusalem is the glorious center from which proceeds the divine and human communication, signified by its street (22:1; 21:21). Its gates are pearls (vv. 12-13, 21), which are formed by the secretion

of an oyster when it is wounded by a grain of sand. This signifies the issue of the "secretion" of Christ's redeeming and life-releasing death and His life-dispensing resurrection. The walls of the city and its foundations are precious stones, signifying the transforming and building work of the Spirit (vv. 18-20; 1 Cor. 3:12). All of this indicates that, as the consummation of God's operation in man, God and man are mingled as one corporate entity for His glorious expression in eternity. That the name of the city of God is written on the overcomers is a great matter. This means that the character, the nature, and the aspects of the New Jerusalem are what they become through the transforming, conforming, and building work of God in His economy.

Being Kept from the Hour of Trial and Entering into the Wedding Feast

Christ speaks to the church in Philadelphia, "Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10); then He adds, "I come quickly" (v. 11). The Lord says to Thyatira, "What you have hold fast until I come" (2:25), and to the church in Sardis He says, "I will come upon you" (3:3). However, only to the church in Philadelphia does He say, "I come quickly." This indicates that only in Philadelphia does the Lord see that which will cause Him to return. What He desires is a bride prepared as His counterpart, His reproduction, to satisfy His heart's desire. In order for Him to come quickly, Christ, the Lamb, the redeeming God, must have a wife who shares the same life, nature, constitution, and expression that He has.

Verse 2 in chapter 21 says, "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Verse 9 continues, "I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Ephesians 5 tells us that the Body of Christ is also His wife (vv. 28-30), whose mature manifestation will be the New Jerusalem. As one who comes out of Christ, the bride is bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh (Gen. 2:23), partaking of Him in an inward union and identity of substance, accomplished by the mingling of God and man. The overcomers in Philadelphia enjoy the dispensing of the Triune God into their being, causing them to be filled with love as the nature of God's essence. In this way, they become the counterpart of Christ, ready to be joined to Him in marriage.

The New Jerusalem is called both the bride and the wife of the Lamb. A woman is a bride for one day, but she is a wife for the rest of her life. Although all believers—the chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people of God—will enjoy their status as the wife of Christ

for eternity, only the overcomers will enjoy the portion of the bride. At the end of this age the overcomers, as a minority among the believers, will represent the whole of the Body by making themselves ready as the bride of Christ. As such, they will be taken by the Lord in rapture. This will be the beginning of the process of the Lord's coming, His parousia (Matt. 24:3, 37, 39). Immediately following this, the great tribulation will begin and will last for three and a half years. This will be the hour of trial that will come on the whole inhabited earth, from which the overcomers will be kept. After passing through the greater part of the tribulation, the majority of the believers, those who were not prepared for the Lord's coming, will also be raptured (1 Thes. 4:15-17). Then all the believers will stand at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), and those who constitute the bride will enjoy the wedding feast with Christ, the Bridegroom, for an entire "day"—the one thousand years of the kingdom age (Rev. 20:4; 2 Pet. 3:8).³ Those who become the New Jerusalem in the church age, upon whom the Lord has written the name of the city of God, will be the New Jerusalem in the initial stage of its manifestation in the kingdom of the heavens. Thus, the New Jerusalem in its initial stage will be a reward to be enjoyed mutually by Christ and His overcomers. In order to be this visible, initial manifestation of the New Jerusalem, we must become it now in reality. We must be those who overcome the degradation of the church, build up the Body of Christ, and consummate the New Jerusalem.

We need to receive this view of the Body of Christ and the New Jerusalem as the central vision of God's economy for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. We must go beyond even what the brothers in the nineteenth century saw and be governed by the high peak of the divine revelation that has been given to us by God. In Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord calls the believers to overcome the degraded condition of the churches, as seen especially in the epistles to Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea. In Philadelphia, however, there is no degradation to overcome. Instead, the focus here is positive. Nevertheless, there is the need for some in Philadelphia to carry out the completion of God's economy in the present age by entering into the reality of the Body of Christ, building up the Body, and becoming the New Jerusalem.

The Lord's call for overcomers in Philadelphia comes from the depths of His heart. It is an appeal for some in the recovered church to fulfill His heart's desire to be

produced as His counterpart. It is not adequate simply to return to our first love (2:4), to be faithful unto death (v. 10), to not be united with the world (vv. 13-14), to not partake of apostasy (v. 24), and to overcome death (3:1), lukewarmness, and pride (vv. 16-17). It is not even enough to enjoy the proper, recovered church life in brotherly love and oneness. Rather, the overcomers whom the Lord seeks today are those who are produced by Christ in the stage of the sevenfold intensified Spirit to enter into the reality of the Body of Christ, build up the Body, and consummate the New Jerusalem in its initial manifestation so that He may quickly return to claim His bride, close this age, enjoy the wedding feast, and set up His kingdom on the earth.

by John Campbell

Notes

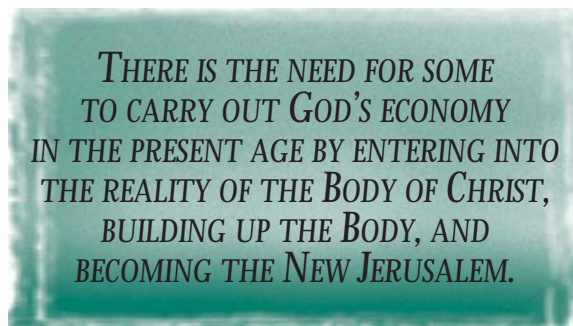
¹Anthony Groves spent most of the remainder of his life in the mission field in Baghdad and India. Although he did not spend much time in the meetings of the brothers in England, he fully functioned in the Lord's move to recover the proper church life by imparting the vision that he received. He also watched the situation in England from afar and communicated his concerns to Darby. Groves returned to England for the last time in 1852, and the following year, in the house of George Müller, his brother-in-law, he went to be with the Lord.

²Bellett said, "If I deserve any credit it is that I early discerned what there was in John Darby" (qtd. in Neatby 11).

³For a detailed treatment of Revelation 3:12, the rapture, and the great tribulation, please see "The Rapture of the Saints," *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 74-91; *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 68-83; and *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 72-86.

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Footnotes from the *Recovery Version of the Bible*

“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).

opened: As the One who has the key of David and who opens and no one will shut, the Lord has given the recovered church an opened door, which no one can shut. Since the recovery of the proper church life began, in the early part of the nineteenth century, until now, a door has always been opened wide to the Lord’s recovery. The more organized Christianity tries to shut the door, the wider it is opened. In spite of much opposition, today the door is open worldwide. The key is in the hand of the Head of the church; it is not in the hand of the opposers.

word: The Lord’s word is the Lord’s expression, and the Lord’s name is the Lord Himself. The apostate church has deviated from the Lord’s word and become heretical. The reformed church, though recovered to the Lord’s word to some extent, has denied the Lord’s name by denominating herself, taking many other names, such as Lutheran, Wesleyan, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc. The recovered church not only has returned in a full way to the Lord’s word but also has abandoned all names other than that of the Lord Jesus Christ. The recovered church belongs to the Lord absolutely, having nothing to do with any denominations (any names). To deviate from the Lord’s word is apostasy, and to denominate the church by taking any name other than the Lord’s is spiritual fornication. The church, as the pure virgin espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), should have no name other than her Husband’s. All other names are an abomination in the eyes of God. In the recovered church life there are no teachings of Balaam (2:14), no teachings of the Nicolaitans (2:15), no teachings of Jezebel (2:20), and no mysterious doctrines of Satan (2:24); there is only the pure word of the Lord. The recovered church has no denominations (names); it has only the unique name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The deviation from the word to heresies and the exalting of many names other than that of Christ are the most striking signs of degraded Christianity. The return to the pure word from all heresies and traditions and the exalting of the Lord’s name by abandoning every other name constitute the most inspiring testimony in the recovered church.