

THE OVERCOMERS

OF REVELATION, CHAPTERS II. AND III.

WHO ARE THEY ?

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NO CONFLICT, NO CONQUEST: NO CONQUEST, NO CROWN. God might have ordered it differently, but He was not pleased to do so. Work must precede rest; Service comes before reward, and suffering before reigning. Rest, reward and reigning would lose their value, if they could be had without effort.

The Seven Epistles of these two Chapters give us at least four distinct lines of teaching.

First.—In them we have the history of the church outlined prophetically, from the days of the apostles till the coming of the Lord.

Second.—Those Seven Epistles were sent to the churches whose names they bear, as they existed in John's day, and among which he had ministered. The various conditions described in the letters, prevailed in those churches. That being so, we may be prepared to find in our own day, in such assemblies, various degrees of spirituality and carnality.

Third.—It is quite possible for an assembly now to backslide from the conditions in which He first found Ephesus, to that in which He found Laodicea. The saints of the present time are no more proof against departure, than were the saints of the apostles' days. Rather, indeed, is the danger greater, because of abounding error, and the general low state of spirituality that prevails.

Fourth.—The successive steps of departure seen in these churches, but show what is possible in the case of the individual believer. Indeed departure must first take place in the individual, ere it can be seen in an assembly, for the state of the assembly is but the state of the individuals who compose it.

The rewards to the overcomers, are held out as incentives to faithfulness in times of departure. And the very fact that the overcomers are addressed in every one of the Seven churches, tells us, that until the Lord returns, the conflict must go on, and that *all* will not be overcomers.

We shall see that the things to be overcome differ in each church. Also that in every case, throughout the Seven, there is that which tests in a special way the loyalty of the Christian, and gives ample opportunity to prove his devotion to the Lord Jesus and to His Word.

EPHESUS.—“To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. ii. 7).

The sin of Ephesus was incipient backsliding. Outwardly they seemed to be going on well, but in heart occupation with Christ, a great and very sad change had come over them. And the Lord has to tell them that they had “left their *first love*,” and that they had *fallen* (Verse 4-5).

In all their activities (and they were many), that was lacking which gave real value to them in His eyes. This was real heart devotion in Christ Himself. All was emp' and unreal without that. He was looking for love: nothing else could take the place of that. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man

would give all the substance of his house for love, *it would utterly be contemned.*" (Song of Sol., 8, 7). Of Ephesus, the Lord could say, as He did of Jerusalem, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness" (Jer. ii., 2). But this is only a memory, now.

In Ephesus, evil doctrine and practices were not allowed, but their state of heart departure left them exposed to these things, and unless that departure is checked, other evils will surely come in.

The rewards held out to the overcomers here, are suited to their case. To "eat of the tree of life" in the midst of the Paradise of God, tells of enjoying communion unhindered, with Himself. He is the tree of Life, and like the Bride in the Song of Sol. (ii. 3), they shall sit down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit will be sweet to their taste. No more danger of heart backsliding then, love will not ebb and flow then as now, the garments will not become spotted, nor the fine gold get dim.

SMYRNA.—"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. ii. 11).

Smyrna, gives us a view of the martyr age of the church, or that period from Nero till Diocletian, when the world raged against the church with fire and sword. Death in the most cruel and awful forms, that man, inspired by Satan, could invent, was the portion of those who confessed the Name of Christ. But the love of Christ overmastered the horrors of the dark, damp, evil-smelling, vermin-infested prisons, the fire and the lions. Calm with a heavenly courage, even weak women did not shun the Amphitheatre, where the lions were let loose on them,

nor the stake, where the fire would soon release their ransomed spirits, to be with Christ.

Very appropriate are the words to the overcomers of Smyrna. Let us recall a scene in Nero's gardens. Games are being held, and the populace of Rome are there in their thousands. Nero mingles with the crowd, and evening is drawing on. But the games must not stop. The gardens must be lighted, and so they shall, *but how?*

Around the garden at intervals are statue-like figures; they are draped in a coarse kind of sacking, and this is smeared with pitch. What are these figures? Or rather, Who are they? for they are men and women. These are believers in our Lord Jesus, our brethren and sisters in Christ. That they may stand upright, while they wait the time when the torch shall be applied, a sharp stake is put into the ground and the other pointed end is under their chin.

Night now settles down on that scene of Pagan revelry. But the light in which it is carried on, comes from the burning bodies of these dear followers of our blessed Lord. They have been counted worthy to drink of His cup.

If it were possible that one could have spoken to the next, nearest to him, as they waited the fagot being applied, what more encouraging words could he have spoken than, "He that overcometh shall not be *hurt of the second death.*" "Courage brother, the pangs of this fire may be sharp, but they will be short. And we shall never feel the pangs of the lake of fire." Soon a little heap of ashes is all that remains, the spirit has gone to be with Christ.

Happy, holy sufferers, Christ was with you in the fire, as with the three Hebrews in Dan. iii. 25., the crown of life has been won, and they are more than conquerors through the love of Christ (Rom. viii. 37). Not having loved their lives unto the death (Rev. xii. 11), precious

in the eyes of the Lord will be their dust. It will be safely guarded until His coming, when by His power He will regather it and their's shall be "a better resurrection" (Heb. xi. 35).

The prison, the lion and stake are not likely to be the portion of believers now, for Satan learned that he could not thus prevail against the church. But there is as much need for the spirit of these dear ones of Smyrna to-day, as there ever was. To suffer rather than sacrifice fellowship with Christ, requires the martyr spirit.

PERGAMOS.—"To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it" (Rev. ii. 17).

The sin of Pergamos, is leaving the pilgrim path and settling down in the world, where is Satan its prince and god. This stage of the history of the church, begins with the reign of Constantine. Then it was that the marriage of the church and the world took place. No longer is the church a heavenly stranger on the earth, despised and persecuted, rather did the profession of Christianity open the door to wealth, honour and power. The meaning of the name, Pergamos, is now sadly realized, for *marriage* has taken place, but it is with the world.

Doubtless the vast majority of the Lord's people thought that the world had really changed its character, and was no longer what it had been when it crucified their Lord, imprisoned and persecuted themselves, and slew their brethren. A Christian Emperor (?) was on the throne of the world, and they were basking in his favour. Alas, it was only a change of tactics on the part of Satan, and a successful one, too. He had failed to destroy *Christianity by cruelty*, but now he seeks to destroy the Church through

craft. Imperial favour has impaired the spiritual eyesight of the men who should have seen the snare, and they look on the numbers who come to be baptized, as a triumph of the Gospel, while yet they were but unregenerate men and women, joining the church, because it was the popular thing. The "doctrine of Balaam" has accomplished its work (verse 14), the separated people are mixed up with the world, the true character of the church is lost.

That the heart of the Lord Jesus was gladdened by the faithfulness of some, who were not deceived as to the character of the world, and who would not give up the pilgrim path, or settle down in the world, is seen in the way He speaks of one dear man, Antipas. "*My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth*" (Rev. ii. 13, R.V.).

You will look in vain in the martyrologies for his name. It is not likely that we shall ever learn more about him till we reach the Judgment Seat, then we shall. But may God not mean us to gather a lesson from his name, for this is His way in these letters, and throughout the Book of Revelation. The name divides into two, *Anti*, which means, *Against*; and *Pas*, which means, *Every man*. Thus we might read it, "*Against every man.*"

Of one thing we may be well assured, Antipas would be a godly, self-denying man, true to Christ and faithful and loving towards his brethren. Had he been otherwise, Christ would not thus have singled him out. How then would there be any correspondence between the man and his name? At a time when the church was carried off its feet by the prosperity that it was having under Constantine, and the preachers treated with consideration and honour, received at the Emperor's Court, most failed to see that they had just stepped into the place from which

Paganism had been deposed. It was different with Antipas, fellowship with Christ had enabled him to see the snare of Satan in it all. But he is sadly alone, but alone he will be true to Christ, and keep the path of rejection. If he is "against every man," it is because he is standing with his Lord and Master.

Could anything be so appropriate as the rewards of the overcomers in Pergamos. The manna spoke of Christ in His humiliation down here. The manna was Israel's food in the wilderness. They had it all through their journey, during those forty years. But when they left the wilderness the manna ceased, something quite significant in a typical way.

While the church was a stranger on the earth, hated and despised by men, what could be more sweet to her than to feast on Christ in His humiliation. He, the Son from the bosom of the Father, treading a path of lowly obedience, of no reputation, in the form of a servant (Phil. ii. 7), ever taking the "lowest room" where all others sought the highest. The moral glory of that Holy One, was rich food for those who were in measure treading the path which He had trod, and finding the world what He had found it, a wilderness.

"He that overcometh will I give to eat of the *hidden manna*. The manna which was put into the golden pot, and laid up before the Lord, tells of the One who humbled Himself, now glorified in the presence of the Father, but still the food of the pilgrim. But those in Pergamos who lacked the courage to go "*outside the camp*," lacked also the spiritual ability to go "*inside the veil*," where the hidden manna was. Their loss was infinitely greater than their gain. Nothing that they gained in the world, could compensate them for missing the "food of the mighty" (Psa. 78, 25, R.V.).

"And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone

a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." The white stone is a "voting pebble." It is said that monarchs of old gave to favourites, this white stone, and the Lord uses this to illustrate the reward that the overcomers of Pergamos would receive. This is in keeping with the Epistle. Strangers and pilgrims don't take part in the politics of the land, though they obey its laws. But they will have part in rule, when the rejected King takes the throne, and then, and then only, can they touch politics in fellowship with Christ. But many of the Lord's dear ones have so imbibed the spirit of Pergamos, as to resent this, and urge believers to go to the voting booth, and elect their man.

"And in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Here is a *special secret token of love between the Lord and the overcomer*. In a time of gross unfaithfulness, they had through grace been faithful. They would not swerve from the path of loyalty to Christ for the favour of the world, men there were to whom Christ was more than the favour of the Emperor, as Athanasius, who forfeited the favour of Constantine, in order to defend the Deity of Christ. Such will receive the "white stone" and the "new name."

THYATIRA.—"And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power (authority) over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I have received of My Father. And I will give him the Morning Star." (Rev. ii. 26-28.)

Thyatira gives us Romanism, and in what is said to the overcomers we have a clue to the special sin of that system, even if we did not know its history. A lust for power or authority over the nations, has ever characterized

Rome. During the middle ages, she had that lust gratified, for she was then the real ruler of Christendom, Kings and princes were her vassals. What Daniel said to Belshazzar about Nebuchadnezzar, with very slight modification might be said of the Popes of the middle ages, "*Whom he would he set up: and whom he would he put down*" (Dan. v. 19). Henry the 4th, of Germany, Philip of France, and John of England, kings above the ordinary, all felt the power of the Popes, and cowered in submission before them. Not merely as before a spiritual power, but before a sovereign prince. In the case of John of England, he accepted Pope Innocent as his liege lord, and agreed to pay annually to the Pope 1000 merks, 700 for England and 300 for Ireland.

It is passing strange, that something which began in such weakness, should so soon attain to such power, something which was hated and despised by the world at first, should have reached such honour. This is but the development of something which we find in the Epistle to the Corinthians, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you" (1 Cor. iv. 8). "*Without us,*" these two words might well stir the consciences of the Corinthians. While they were glorying in being "full," and "rich," and affecting to reign as kings, what was the case with Paul and his fellow-labourers ?

The men who jeopardated their lives to bring the Gospel to Corinth are far from full, rich or reigning. Yea, the Son of God, Who stooped to Calvary to shed His precious blood, that they might be redeemed from an eternity under the wrath of God: He is not reigning, He is still despised and rejected of men. The apostle then goes on to tell them how he and those labouring with him were faring. And in this account (1 Cor. iv. 10-13) we meet the words,

“hunger,” “naked,” “buffeted,” “no certain dwelling-place,” “reviled,” “persecuted,” “defamed,” “the filth of the world,” “the off-scouring of all things.”

The Corinthians had forgotten the words of the Lord Jesus, “Remember the word that I said unto you: The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also” (John xv. 20). Paul did not want to fare better than His Lord, but the Corinthians did. They fell into the snare which Satan had set, but set in vain, for Christ, when in the temptation in the wilderness. Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them,” thus seeking to have Him take the crown, before He had endured the cross.

What we see here in the case of the Corinthians, is in the heart of every believer, and this is a desire to antedate the reigning time. Naturally the path of reproach and suffering is repugnant to us all, we would fain escape it, and nothing but the grace of God, can keep us in it.

Rome and the Protestant sects also, which are following hard after Rome, love power, and when they have been able, have sought to dominate the world, something which is never contemplated of the Church while the Lord is away. Not till the Lamb takes the Book out of the right hand of Him Who sits upon the throne (Rev. v. 5-8). When in virtue of His precious blood, He thus takes the title-deeds of earth and reigns, *then* and not until then, will it be the saint's time to reign.

“To him that overcometh, will I give authority over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers.” What we have here is the bringing to an end, the smashing up of all that is Satanic, the anti-Christian power, when the saints come back with Christ. But the

rule of the saints throughout the Millennium, will be benevolent.

SARDIS.—“ He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment ; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels ” (Rev. iii. 5).

Lifeless profession, failure to hold what had been committed unto them, and the denial of the truth, are the special evils of Sardis. As a stage it began in the 16th Century, when through the work of Luther and others, the Protestant princes of Germany broke away from Rome. So Sardis pictures, what we speak of as Protestantism.

A survey of it to-day, might well raise the question : Is it any better than Rome ? When we think of the onslaughts of many of its ministers on the truth of God, no ; all that is vital in Christianity, The Inspiration of the Bible, The Virgin Birth of Christ, His Deity, His Vicarious Death, His Physical Resurrection, His Ascension to the Father's Right Hand, His Personal Coming Again, The Eternal Punishment of the Wicked, etc., we confess that the priestcraft of Rome seems if possible less objectionable than most of this.

Here and there throughout Protestantism, there are good men seeking to stem the tide of religious infidelity (an impossible task), and the Lord takes notice of such in those words, “ Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments ; and they shall walk with me in white ; for they are worthy ” (iii. 4). It is to such as these that the next verse refers, “ He that overcometh shall be thus arrayed in white garments,” (verse 5 R.V.).

In the midst of defilement they had kept themselves

unspotted, and at the Judgment Seat (xix. 8) they had gotten His "Well done," And it will be their joy to walk with Him in white, where no shade nor stain, can ever sully those white robes they wear.

At a time when it was considered a sure sign of ignorance and of not keeping pace with *scientific* Christianity (?) they had confessed Him as the Christ of the Bible, the Christ whom Peter owned (Matt. xvi. 16), content to be thought little of by those who degraded the Lord to the level of a *mere man*. Like Thomas they knew Him and could fall at His feet and say, "My Lord and my God." Now it is His time to confess their names before His Father and before His angels. And when He shall blot out the names that man has recorded in their books of life, man's roll of saints (not the "Book of Life of the Lamb," of Chap. xiii. 8), these names of His faithful ones will remain inscribed by the Lord's own hand there for ever.

PHILADELPHIA.—"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the Name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him My new Name" (Rev. iii. 12).

In Philadelphia, we see the results of that work of the Holy Spirit which took place some ninety years ago, when the long-lost hope of the church, the coming of the Lord for His people, was recovered. At the same time another very precious truth which goes hand in hand with the coming of the Lord, was also recovered. This was the gathering together of believers on the First day of the week to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread, according to His own appointment (Luke xxii. 19, 20; Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor. xi. 23-34).

Those who were taught by the Spirit through the Word saw that when thus gathered, there must be no man allowed to preside, thus displacing the Lord at His own table. And there must be no humanly-invented order, that would interfere with the Spirit's leading the saints when so gathered. He must be free to lead in praise, prayer and ministry, as and whom He would.

This meant that in order to carry out this new found truth, they had to withdraw from the sects to which they had belonged, where it was wholly impossible because of man's will and ways, to observe God's order. It was indeed to them, going forth "unto Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. xiii. 13). They were misunderstood and maligned, whereas if they had remained in the sects to which they had belonged, they would have been esteemed and honoured.

Exceedingly precious is the way that the Lord addresses the overcomers of Philadelphia, "Him that overcometh will I make a *pillar in the temple of my God.*" A pillar is one who has a place in the church, as in the case of James, Cephas and John (Gal. ii. 9). Some of these faithful men had high places in their respective denominations, but these they sacrificed in order to obey the Word of God (1 Sam. xv. 22), and honour Christ as Head and Lord in His Church. Men told them that they were making a mistake, which would hurt or hinder their usefulness. But with this they had nothing whatever to do; it was theirs to obey God, and to leave the consequences to Him. And they did.

Did they make a mistake? Hear the words of Christ to such, "*I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.*" A position of honourable service in eternal nearness to the One, for whom the overcomer had turned his back on a place of honour that man put him into, and also

could put him out of, is to be the rich reward of the overcomer now.

Service in the glory, is not a familiar thought to believers ; yet it is written, " His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face ; and His Name shall be in their foreheads " (Rev. xxii. 3, 4). What a comfort this is, in view of the poor quality of our service down here !

" *Shall go no more out.*" It was indeed going forth " *unto Him without the camp,*" when they identified themselves with a little company, gathering in His precious Name alone without any other added. Now they shall go no more out. The reproach shall be exchanged for the glory, " *outside the camp,*" for " *inside the veil.*"

How much is said to the overcomers of Philadelphia about the *Name*. It is that which characterizes this church, " *Thou hast kept my Word, and hast not denied my Name.*" It was that they might own His Name alone, as *the gathering name* that they forsook the sects. They confessed it alone, and rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer shame for it (Acts v. 41). And now, He gives them that which they loved.

" *The name of the city of my God,* which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God." It is significant that it is to the overcomers of Philadelphia, that the Lord speaks of bearing the name of the heavenly Jerusalem. As with the church, it is here seen to be *Divine in origin and heavenly in character*, for it is not of earth, and is the equivalent of the " *heavenly calling.*" Paul looked on that calling as a prize to be attained (Phil. iii. 14), and these dear ones now enjoy what they had set their hearts on, they bear its name.

" *The Bride, the Lamb's wife.*" This is what the heavenly Jerusalem is called (Rev. xxii. 9) ; thus the name the city, which He will write upon them, shall proclaim them as the church, which He " *loved*" and for which He gave Himself a Saviour (Eph. v. 25).

LAODICEA.—“ Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne ” (Rev. iii. 21).

This is the last stage. The sentence pronounced in the Epistle to Ephesus (Chap. ii. 5), is here carried out, the lampstand is removed, the mass of unreal profession is spued out. That is done by the rapture of all the really saved ones, and the rest are left to be judged by the ten kings (Rev. xvii. 16, 17, 18), as Jezebel of old was judged (2 Kings viii. 30-37). The false church and Jezebel both meet their doom at the hands of those who had flattered them. What specially characterizes Laodicea is, *utter worldliness* (verse 15); *indifference to Christ* (verse 20, first part); and withal, full *self-satisfaction* (verse 17).

The world has ever been a rival of Christ, for the hearts of God's people, and its triumph in Laodicea is complete. Though the relentless enemy of the people of God, and therefore God's enemy, its attacks are so subtle, so insidious, that most are in its power before they are aware of it. And once in the power of the world, there is more hope for those overcome by the *flesh*, or by the *devil*, than for those overcome by the *world*.

Only the constant exercise of faith can preserve the child of God. “ This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith ” (1 John v. 4). Faith, means that God has spoken, and we take hold and act on what He says. Thus our power to overcome the world, is to believe what He has said about it. He says that it is an “ *evil world* ” (Gal. i. 4); that it *lies in the evil one*, (1 John, v. 19, R.V.); that *Satan is its prince and god* (John xii. 31); that to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God (James iv. 4). Who, we would ask, can take in what God has said and cultivate friendship with the world? It is impossible, while faith is in exercise.

Christ is our great pattern in overcoming the world. Satan caused all its pomp and glory to pass before His eyes (Luke iv. 6-8), seeking to allure Him by its spell, from the path of obedience, which led to the Cross. But He turned from it all, knowing that He must first bear the Cross ere He could wear the Crown. So as Victor, the Father has seated Him in His throne, till that hour when He shall take His own. So will He deal with the overcomers ; they shall share His throne with Him.

The reward to the overcomers of Laodicea seems out of proportion to their service or suffering, especially as we think of Smyrna and its great trials. But let us remember that Paul speaks of the Lord in connection with the Judgment Seat, as "the Lord, the *righteous Judge*." We know that He will not make any mistake, but that each one will receive the reward suited to the service or the suffering endured, for Christ.

He knows how severe had been the struggle for these dear ones to overcome the love of ease, respectability, honour and worldly gain, by which the world seduces the believer, than to overcome its threats of prison and death. And all the more severe is the test of faith in days, when the mass of Christians have succumbed to these things. Paul could write to the Philippians, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. ii. 21). If he had to say that in A.D. 64 what would he have to say in A.D. 1924 ?

Worldliness is rampant on every hand ; it is responsible for the low state of spirituality that is general. Money is hoarded by believers, which should be released to spread the truth of God to saint and sinner. Luxuries are indulged in that are neither good for soul or body. Some spend more on tobacco and others on candies, than they spend on the work of the Lord. Light literature gets more of the time of some believers, than the Word of God. But

as the conscience becomes soothed by the thought that this is now general, all may go in for these things. All this only shows, how, that instead of overcoming, most have been overcome *by* the world.

The victors in Laodicea did not win in such an heroic way as those who were bound to the stake or thrown to the lions. Their names are not to be found in the Martyrologies. Theirs was not the halo that surrounds the martyr, for they did not stand at the stake or in the Amphitheatre. Theirs was to wage a conflict about which there was no glamour. Theirs was not to receive sympathy from fellow-believers in their trial. They did not have the stimulus of meeting the world, as the martyrs did, in its true character, of a persecuting enemy.

The conflict, nevertheless, was terribly real, for it was waged against what appealed to their own natures, and what the mass of professing Christians thought was the proper thing, and what seemed to be in the very air. They could hardly help breathing it.

But the eye was kept on Christ, and by grace they held on day by day, and now theirs is to hear from the lips of Christ, words that will more than make up for all they endured for His sake, "Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne."

Some closing thoughts. Philadelphia (as well as *all* the last four churches, in their character), will continue till the end. For to it the Lord gives the promise of His speedy return. Until then, all who are loyal to Christ, will endeavour to maintain assembly testimony. From the hint we get in verse 8, we may expect that such testimony will never be great in numbers or in power, "Thou hast a *little* strength." It may come literally to "*two or three*" (Matt. xviii. 20), but individual testimony, be it ever so precious, cannot and is not meant to take the place of the testimony the

Lord asks His "Churches" to bear to Him during His absence. *The individual believer cannot carry out Luke xxii. 19, 20 and 1 Cor. xi. 23-34.* And this feast of remembrance is to continue "*till He come,*"

It was not to be expected that Philadelphia would maintain its early freshness, and alas, it has not. For all that has been committed to man has failed. But no candid mind, acquainted with the facts, will refuse to acknowledge, that those companies of believers, suggested by Philadelphia, as they exist at the present hour, stand out in marked contrast to every human sect system in Protestantism to-day. All the denominations are honey-combed with error as to the fundamentals of Christianity, yea, even those that can boast of the names of men in their communion, who were giants for God in their day. On the other hand, go where you will around the world, and you will find companies of believers gathered unto the Name of the Lord, and not a suspicion of unsoundness as to fundamentals attaches to them. They would not tolerate anything derogatory to Christ as perfect Man, or as very God. They maintain a stand against the inroads of error, and a testimony to the imminence of Christ's return, and others have profited by the truth taught by them, who still hold by the sects and likely will to the end.

But grant that these companies have failed! Can that justify any believer from refusing to become identified with them? Again: Can it justify one who has been among them in going back to the sects of Christendom? If that be a valid reason, then those who go back cannot stop with Protestantism, for it is a dreadful failure. What is the logical thing for them to do who go back to the sects because of failure among assemblies simply gathered unto the Name of the Lord? Go right back to that from which Protestantism came, right back to Rome, to the

priesthood, to the mass and the Confessional. It is hardly likely that many will be consistent enough to do this.

In those assemblies in John's day, there could not be, from the very nature of things, the same degree of fellowship between all the churches, even as there is not now, nor ever will be, till the Lord comes. Not only so, but the same degree of fellowship does not exist between individuals who sit (and rightly so) at the same table. Some have more of the things of God in common than others, and some are spiritual and others are carnal. But the Lord has not given us the slightest suggestion in His Word that there should be *no fellowship* between those so differing. Nor did He charge the sins of Sardis to the account of Philadelphia. More than that, He did not hold all *in Thyatira* to be equally guilty. Each assembly is primarily responsible to the Lord for itself and its condition, each company is set in direct relationship and responsibility to the Lord Himself.

The Seven Churches rebuke the idea of a confederation of assemblies. The confederation idea is, that when one assembly, or set of assemblies in a given locality, takes any action, right or wrong (of course, those who do take it, believe it to be right), then it is argued that in order to remain in this fellowship, every other assembly must do likewise. And the threat of being "cut off" swings them into line; so coerced by the danger of being cut off, they do that, which if left to their own conscience before the Lord, they would not do, and so an outward semblance of unity (but not the unity of the Spirit, Eph. iv. 1-3), is maintained.

The result of this is twofold. First: It puts the assembly off the true Scriptural ground, that of acting before the Lord, in every several case, and also into making the stronger and more masterful company a sort of metropolitan

assembly, having jurisdiction over others. And *this is none the less real, though it is not openly avowed.*

Second : This man-made confederacy is bound to crack sooner or later, for all the power of man cannot prevent that. The history of the last seventy-five years bears eloquent testimony to this. There is something bewitching in the confederacy idea, for no matter how often and how great, are the failures that have followed the attempt to make it work, still there are those who try to make it go. We do not say that those engaged at it, really understand the nature of it, or are acquainted with its history. How could they and still work at it ?

The overcomer is not one who leaves the assembly because things are in a low state, or because some Diotrophes is ruling (3 John ix. 10). It may be urged that this is hard to bear. That is granted, but it is the place for the overcomer. The more congenial path would be to withdraw and, with others like-minded, set up a new meeting, where all is in harmony with one's own thoughts. The grounds upon which some divisions have taken place are about as Scriptural as the ground upon which some get divorce in the law-courts to-day, "*Incompatibility of Temperament.*" But the harmony which is the result of division is short lived, and like the couples who try the divorce plan and go into a new marriage venture, they find out that "*Incompatibility of temperament*" is rather a common ill. We must have the Word of the Lord for all that we do. By it we came out from the sects, and became identified with a company of believers gathered to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we must have a "*Thus saith the Lord*" ere we can turn from what the Word thus linked us up with. *To act without His Word, is self-will and disobedience, taking one out of the class of overcomers altogether.*

The patience of the Lord in dealing with the Seven

Churches might be profitably pondered over by all. He bore long with them, commended all that He could commend, condemned where He had to condemn, but always discriminated, never condemned the innocent with the guilty, as we see in the case of Thyatira (ii. 24), and Sardis (iii. 4). And the sentence pronounced in the letter to Ephesus, " I will remove thy lampstand," is not carried out till we come to Laodicea.

Alas, this patience has been sadly lacking among some believers, and it seems to have been forgotten, that it is *He* and He alone who can remove the lampstand. When men attempt it, they are invading the rights of the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this, the Lord will not allow.