

Revelation 2-3 and Works

Christ and the End Time

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 10-Jul-93; Tape #084

We're going to be spending the major portion of this sermon revolving around some of the things that appear in Revelation 2 and 3.

Revelation 3:22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

We're going to reconsider the importance of Christ's words in the light of the times that we live in. By Christ's words, I mean that which appears in Revelation 2 and 3, and I quoted this particular verse in reference to that because it is something that appears in every message that He gives to these churches. "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what I, or the spirit, says to the churches."

Now being that I picked out Revelation 3:22, you might think that I was going to concentrate on Laodiceanism. No doubt that is going to come into the picture as we go along here. But the subject I'm going to be addressing is much larger than Laodiceanism, much more important than Laodiceanism. As a matter of fact, Laodiceanism is an offshoot of the lack of what we're going to be talking about.

When Christ says, "He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches," that is what the Greek literally says. "He who has an ear to hear..."

This phrase only appears a couple of other times in the Bible. Three times I think in the book of Mark, and one time in the book of Luke. Now, there are almost 2 times that many that appear just in two chapters of the book of Revelation. I think that you understand the principle that if God says something once, we need to pay attention to it. If He repeats it even one or two times more, then what He has to say, He is drawing attention to, and it is very important! But, if He says it SEVEN TIMES in the course of two chapters, then I think that He is intensifying what He says considerably.

"He who has an ear to hear, let him hear" is the literal translation of the Greek. But, what it most closely approximates in the English, if we're going to paraphrase this is, "Now, think through what I have said."

You will recall that I said in one section of the statement of purpose, that the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, when combined with Christ's discourses during the Olivet Prophecy (which appears in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) clearly shows Christ's concern regarding what His people should be focusing on just prior to the end.

I'm sure that His vision of the times that we now live in was clear enough that He could foresee that we would live in a time when there would be more distractions to grab our attention than

was available at any other time in the history of man. He could see that the ease and rapidity of communication would be such that our senses (eyes, ears, nose, mouth—everything) would be attracted, and it was going to be difficult for you and me to keep ourselves focused on what should be our prime concern.

Not that it would be difficult for us to keep focused on the outworking of prophecy. Most of us understand that the book of Revelation is a book that is devoted to prophecy. And it is one that all of us seem to be concerned with. I think that the reason for that is natural. Everybody wants to have some insight into what is going to happen. We want to have advanced news because it is something that piques our interest. And, maybe there is some vanity involved in it because it's almost like we want to know before somebody else knows, so that we might have the privilege of being able to tell them what we understand about prophecy. So, prophecy is something that is intriguing to us, and almost seems to naturally grab our attention.

But I don't believe that was Christ's primary reason for writing the book of Revelation. It wasn't merely to give us insight into what is going to happen. There is something exceedingly more important than that. And most of it is contained in Revelation 2 and 3. You will notice what is in Revelation 2 and 3 is right at the beginning of the book, so that you don't advance very far into reading it before you run into what is actually the most important thing in the book. It is those messages that are contained in Revelation 2 and 3.

What is difficult in this confusing world is keeping our personal life focused. Keeping it focused is a responsibility that each one of us has before God. No one else can do that for us. Individually, we must make the choices as to what we will do with our time and our energies. It is this that Revelation 2 and 3 concerns itself with. Let's go back into the Old Testament because I want to pick up a principle as I lay the foundation for this sermon.

Proverbs 3:19-23 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens; By His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew. My son, let them not depart from your eyes: Keep sound wisdom and discretion; so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then you will walk safely in your way, And your foot will not stumble.

Keep this principle in mind, because as that series of Proverbs unfolds, it establishes something that is important to our life in the first couple of verses, and that is, faith in the fact—having proof and evidence—that by wisdom the Lord founded the earth. That is intended by God to be something against which we bounce off something that is even more important, and that is if God founded the earth by wisdom, and the evidence is everywhere that there is wonderful design in everything that He did, then His word is equally wisely put together. That the same mind that founded the earth also founded His Word.

Let's begin to build on this because it is important to understanding Revelation 2 and 3. I think that everywhere that one looks one is going to be impressed by the evidences of design in the creation. Now whether or not we consider a certain fact important to our life, it seems that right down to the smallest detail, nothing in God's Creation has been left to chance.

The common evolutionary approach is that the creative events were the result of blind chance. They, that is, the evolutionists, are forced into that position because of their very strong reluctance to accept the fact of a Creator who designed all, and is working out a purpose.

Now consider this thing that we may think has no bearing at all on our life. Maybe it doesn't impact upon us every day, but it says here that the Lord, by wisdom, founded the earth. He didn't just found the earth by wisdom, but everything. And I mean everything in His creation was done with wisdom.

All heavenly bodies revolve around larger heavenly bodies. They almost all revolve in a clockwise direction. For instance, the moon is revolving around the earth. The earth is revolving around the sun. But, the sun is also revolving around larger ones, and we even know the entire Milky Way is revolving around something else.

Now here is a peculiar fact: Saturn has nine moons. We have only one, but Saturn is "graced" with nine of them. Eight of them are going in the "right" direction. One of them is going counterclockwise. Why? Not only does nobody know "why", nobody has been able to figure out who did it! Well, God did it! There is wisdom in what He did. There is a good reason in His mind why He caused this one moon to go in the opposite direction from all the others.

There is a design there that we don't understand. But, I want to tie this to something else that is even more astounding.

When I was pastoring the North Hollywood congregation, a group of us went to the Griffith Park Observatory to see a planetarium show. During the man's comments, he made what was to me a startling statement. And after he said it, I could hardly think of anything else just trying to ruminate on what he said. And that is as astronomers are making their calculations (and these calculations are going on all the time, almost endlessly), they are slowly concluding that the mass of the entire creation is perfectly in balance. Consider that!

You know what happens if you if you have an automobile tire that is out of balance. It bounces crazily, doesn't it? Yet, an automobile tire is only 2 or 2 ½ feet in diameter, and only weighs a few pounds.

The Lord by wisdom has founded the earth, and astronomers are becoming boggled by the fact that as they make their calculations, that the entire universe seems to be perfectly in balance. Even though one of Saturn's moons is going in the opposite direction. Even though four of Jupiter's moons are going in the opposite direction. Doesn't it seem logical that if there was a big bang, and everything exploded out from a central location, only to be captured in the gravity of a larger body, that everything would tend to be caught going in the same direction? It seems logical to me.

The entire creation and man are designed for each other. There are evidences of this much closer to home.

It used to be thought that if the earth were about 1500 miles larger or smaller in diameter that life would not be possible on the earth. Now they understand that the tolerances are much closer than that, and they have now brought it down to about 10% larger or smaller; in other

words, about 800 miles larger or smaller. If it were 800 miles larger, the weight of the gases which press in on us, would be such that life could not be possible. And if it were 800 miles smaller, some gases the earth needs for its continued existence and the support of life would be escaping away from the earth, and life could not be possible. Everything is in harmony.

I only bring up these two interesting examples of design to introduce the truth as it pertains to the scriptures.

John 10:35 If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came
(and the Scripture cannot be broken),

It is perfectly in harmony from beginning to end. Everything about it was done in wisdom. The same kind of wisdom, by which God founded the earth, founded the entire universe. His word is founded upon the same principles!

Jesus here was engaged in a discussion during which He is accused of blaspheming God. Now He used this scripture, which He took, or quoted, from Psalm 82 to support His authority that He was the Son of God. And He is saying that the scripture cannot be declared to be irrelevant, that it carries the weight and authority of God, because He inspires it. God's word is truth. And what God says is true.

II Peter 1:21, 19 For prophecy never came by the will of man, but
holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit...we
have the prophetic word [made more sure] confirmed...

Now catch the words "prophetic", and "prophecy." Revelation 2 and 3 are part of a prophetic book. Verse 19 is showing you and me that we also have the prophetic word made more sure.

Do you have a Bible with a margin in it? My margin says, "Which is more sure than what we heard." Peter is referring back to what he saw, and what the others heard, on the mount of Transfiguration, when he heard the voice of God say, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Peter is saying that prophecy is more sure than an eyewitness or an "ear" witness account. The Lord by wisdom not only founded the earth; the Lord by wisdom founded His Word.

II Timothy 3:16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is*
profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in
righteousness,

And it can easily be translated that all scripture is "God breathed," personifying God as a man, showing that it came directly out of Him.

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God *is* pure; He *is* a shield to those who
put their trust in Him.

The word that is translated "pure" is actually more closely related to the English word "refined." Pure is not wrong but the word "refined" means "reduced to a pure state." Look it up in the English. It means that every word of God is reduced to a pure state.

Revelation 1:9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience [remember this word patience] of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Now he wasn't there because it was an island populated by a lot of people. He was there because he was being persecuted, and was in exile there having been imprisoned, as it were, on this island. Because of the Word of God, because he was preaching the Word of God, the authorities got rid of him by putting him on the island of Patmos.

Revelation 1:10-11 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and, What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

Verse 10 teaches us that the book of Revelation is designed for the Lord's Day. The Lord by wisdom designed the earth. The book of Revelation was designed by God to be applicable primarily for the Lord's Day: The Day of the Lord—the time that is very shortly going to be upon you and me. Undoubtedly, we are in the opening phases of it, the preparation for it. We're not yet into the Tribulation, which we understand is going to precede the Day of the Lord. And I would have to understand from the things written in the book of Revelation that the Tribulation indeed precedes the Day of the Lord. So, both the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord are encompassed within the theme of the book of Revelation. Now remember the book of Revelation is designed for this period of time in which we live.

If there is any group of people for whom the book of Revelation ever applied, more directly than to those of us living now, I don't know who they are.

It was also designed according to verse 11 for the seven churches that existed in Asia Minor, which is western Turkey today.

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him...

So now we see that the Father designed this. He in turn gave it to the Son, and He in turn gave it to His servants through the apostle John.

Revelation 1:1 ...to show His servants things which must shortly take

place....

My Bible has a marginal reference for "shortly" and it means "quickly," or "swiftly." Now this word "shortly," or "quickly," has to be seen in what it was designed for. Verse 10 tells us that the book was designed for the Day of the Lord. Therefore, the word "shortly" has to be seen in the light of verse 10.

I want you all to answer this question: When was the apostle John on the island of Patmos? All indications are that he received this vision somewhere in the 90s AD—Somewhere between 90 and 100 AD. The Temple had already been destroyed.

I bring this to your mind because I want you to think about this word "shortly" in reference to the time in which the prophecy was given. Did Jesus Christ mean shortly after He gave it? That's the question I want you to answer.

What happened historically quickly or shortly after Christ gave this prophecy to the apostle John? The answer is nothing. Nothing happened. And, by and large, here we are, almost 20 centuries later and very little has yet happened.

What does that tell you about the design of the book of Revelation? It tells you that its primary intent—that is, what it was designed for—is what we are living in right now! And when Christ said that these things must shortly come to pass, what He meant was that once the things in the book of Revelation begin to occur, they are going to occur very quickly! That is, quickly in terms of history. They are going to begin unfolding. When they begin unfolding, they are going to happen so fast, it is going to take our breath away! How quickly they begin to occur!

I also want you to think of this in terms of whom the book was written to. Who was it written to? It tells us in verse 11 that it was written to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

If the book was written to the end time people, and that is its primary intention —that's what it was designed for—then we have to reach the conclusion that the message as it was delivered to the churches in the book of Revelation was only secondary. It was not its primary intention. It was secondary in that the attitudes, the conduct, the things that were going on in those seven congregations, were only models of what was going to come later. They had the problems, or the characteristics, that are listed there.

However, I would have to say, that Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea are somewhere extant on earth today. Not just in the form of attitudes, but maybe (and I use the term "maybe" to cover myself) in the form of true church organizations. So, I would have to conclude that all seven churches must be in existence at the end.

Now that only makes sense to me because it was addressed to the end-time primarily, and not to those people back in the 1st and 2nd century AD.

Does it not seem reasonable and logical that if Christ wanted to get a message across to each of the churches, and He only had a minute or two to spend with each one (I say a minute or two, because that's all it takes for a person to read each message), He would be extremely selective in what He had to say? Don't you think that He would very carefully design what He had to say

so that it would contain the nucleus of what it was that He wanted to get across? It would be quick, and concise, hitting the nail right on the head. Don't you think that what He had to say would be of the utmost importance to them in regard to their responsibilities at the end time? Because that is what it is written for—the end time.

Don't you think that if His church is going to be in existence at the end—and surely it is because He says that the gates of the grave would not prevail against it—that He is going to give His church what it needs most important of all in order to survive and endure that period of time?

You don't think that He would spend time talking about the weather, fashion, interior design, or ball game scores, do you?

He would be getting to things that are essential to His people in order to get them through the trouble, and get them into the Kingdom with as much growth as possible! This is the essence of those seven messages. It is the reason why they were written.

Now there are a number of consistencies that appear in each of the letters that show that the author of each was the author of all of them. There is design there.

Now one of the obvious repetitions appears at the end of each letter. And that's what we began with there in the book of Revelation 3:22, that he who has an ear, hear what the spirit says to the churches.

It is a solemn warning that what is addressed in one letter may also apply to the others in other congregations not dominated by the attitude dominating the congregation of which they are a part. In other words, a person might have an Ephesian problem while attending a Sardis congregation.

Each letter is written to each member of the body of Christ. And if the description fits, then we are to make the changes Christ commands.

Now having said that, what does He say? What does Christ say in the letters? I think that we also have to consider what He doesn't say, because that is relevant to this period of time in which we are living. There is no mention, either positive or negative, of preaching the gospel. I bring this up because I want us to see its relevant importance as compared to what Christ did say.

Again, these scriptures do not stand alone. Preaching the gospel is part of the church's responsibility, and I do not want to minimize it as though it was nothing. But, it is not even directly implied from these two chapters.

Instead, Revelation 2 and 3 is a ringing call for things far more important in regard to salvation, reward, and being able to be an effective witness for Him, and making disciples.

Revelation 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...

Revelation 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...

Revelation 2:17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says

to the churches...

Revelation 2:29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 3:6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 3:13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 3:22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now, let's look at something else: Another consistency.

Revelation 2:7 To him who overcomes...

Revelation 2:11 He who overcomes...

Revelation 2:17 To him who overcomes...

Revelation 2:26 And he who overcomes...

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes...

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes...

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes...

Now, if God did this by design, don't you think that He's talking about what is most important to His people at the time of the end? The scripture cannot be broken. God doesn't waste words. Seven times in two short chapters "To him who overcomes" are the promises given!

Let's look at another one.

Revelation 2:2 I know your works...

Revelation 2:9 I know your works...

Revelation 2:13 I know your works...

Revelation 2:19 I know your works...

Revelation 3:1 I know your works...

Revelation 3:8 I know your works...

Revelation 3:15 I know your works...

Now there are other consistencies. If you want to make a study of this, I think you will find it most interesting. Consider that this is Christ's message to His church just before the end, and

this is what is most important for His people as we approach the end. Doctrine is mentioned seven times. Is that interesting in the times in which we now live? We are seeing the largest body of the church going haywire on doctrine!

Is there something in regard to the letter to Thyatira which talks about things that are happening very quickly in that group?

There are at least eleven warnings to these seven churches, but there are also at least 12 promises.

Faith. Patience. Works. Conduct. Doctrine. But the two greatest related concerns for His church at the end are works and overcoming.

Now there are an awful lot of people who are interested in church government at this time. It's not even mentioned by Christ!

There are people who are interested in rituals, sacraments, and ceremonies, of which would be things like baptism, or the Passover. But, there's nothing in there about those things either.

There is nothing about preaching the gospel around the world. And again, I'm not saying that those things do not have their place. They do. But, what we see is Christ's concern with doctrine, conduct, warnings to repent, and promises of reward.

Now these other things that are not mentioned are less important than faith, less important than repentance, less important than holiness, all of which directly impact on doctrine, conduct, and the promises. And, all of these are bracketed between His statement about works and overcoming.

Now it is interesting to compare a similar situation the apostle Paul had when he addressed the Ephesian elders for the last time. I'm sure that you can recall that from Acts 20. It might be interesting to look at what the apostle Paul said during the course of that message to them, because it took place in a circumstance very similar to what Christ is faced with here in the book of Revelation.

What was the basic subject that the apostle Paul spoke on in Acts 20? He spoke on repentance toward God, and faith toward Jesus Christ; he talked about the gospel of grace (as he called it there), and he concluded by saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," talking about service.

Now when Christ says, "To him who overcomes" what does He mean? Overcoming what? What are the works associated with overcoming?

I think that in order to understand this, one has to look at the commission that was given by Christ to the church.

Matthew 28:18-19 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 18, the emphasis is on the word "all" which means that His authority is no longer as it was when He was a man preaching in Galilee and in Judea, but is once again universal. You see, "as it was when He was with the Father" before. Now He has died, and has been resurrected, and all authority is once again His.

Therefore, they are to understand that wherever they go, everything is subject to His authority. That is a good thing to remember. Everything is subject to Christ's authority. As they go, they are to make disciples. Here is where the emphasis is in this sentence—to make disciples. Teaching and baptizing do not make a person a disciple, though they play a part.

I think every minister can understand this. Just because a person is baptized, does not mean that they are converted. Just because a person is baptized, does not mean that they are a member of the church of God, or have been put into the Family of God. Just because they have been taught the way of God does not mean that they are going to fully accept and commit themselves to what they have been taught.

This is why the emphasis has to be on "making disciples." Baptism and obedience to teaching will be a response that a person who is being made a disciple will make.

The preaching of the gospel brings a person to faith, repentance, baptism, and seeking further instruction. These are outward responses.

Baptism, at this point, is something that is very important; because baptism is the outward sign of something that is exceedingly more important than the fact that one has merely been "dunked." Baptism is the outward sign of commitment—of coming under the authority of the Father, and the Son. They are baptized—you and I have been baptized—into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And it is only when one comes under the authority of—is committed to the authority of—the Family of God, that one is truly a disciple.

That may not seem important to you, but it is exceedingly important because it makes the difference between one who is truly a disciple, and another who has only been dunked. And it makes all the difference in the world to Revelation 2 and 3, as we will begin to see.

Once a person has been baptized—I mean truly baptized—and has truly committed himself to be under the authority of the Family of God—of the Father, and the Son—then the issue for the disciple is continued learning as a student, and loyalty as a member of the Family—as a new creation to the One who has been committed to.

Think about this, because this, which we are speaking about, has been the issue from the very beginning.

Lucifer was not loyal to the Kingdom of God. He broke its laws. He rebelled.

Adam and Eve, under the influence of Satan, were also disloyal to God through sin. They refused to submit through faith to the governance of the Family of God, and they began—through the unseen assistance of Satan—to create a world system alien to and antagonistic to God.

Please get the point about what the book of Revelation is about. It leads up to that final clash between the Kingdom of God and Satan, with the systems of this world. Revelation 2 and 3 and

their messages have very much to do with this final clash that is coming between the Kingdom of God and the systems of this world.

Let's go back to the book of Luke. Here is the issue not only at baptism, but also for a disciple. And that means all through his existence as a disciple:

Luke 14:26 If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Undertaking discipleship involves the entirety of a person's life all the time, everywhere. It is *the* issue in the Bible! Whether we by our lives are going to show that we are loyal to the Kingdom of God. This is the issue in Revelation 2 and 3.

Luke 14:27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Are you still doing that? Are you still working at bearing your cross? Are you still overcoming its weight? Are you beginning to get the picture about what Revelation 2 and 3 are really about? It's about loyalty!

Luke 14:28-31 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it, lest after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king...

Remember this lesson here! Remember this illustration.

Luke 14:31 ...does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

Are you able fight against somebody of exceedingly greater power and strength? Count the cost!

Luke 14:32-35 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. [Listen to these words!] He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

"Think this thing through," He says.

Revelation 2 and 3 is about the most basic fundamentals of conversion and growth.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

You see works does not pass from the picture because we are saved by grace. And that is made very evident in the book of Revelation because Christ in His last message to His people, at maybe the most important juncture in the history of mankind, says, "I know your works." His concern in those two letters is about conduct and overcoming and works.

In the conduct of our lives, to whom or to what, are we going to be loyal after conversion? That's why the mention by Christ—the consistent mention by Christ—in Revelation 2 and 3 of works, conduct, doctrine, faith, repentance, warning, promises and overcoming—he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, [that is, he speaks what is natural to him] for he is a liar and the father of it.

Notice that Christ pointedly said to these people, "you want to do." They want to do what their spiritual father does. And he speaks what is natural to him. There is a very strong drive in all of us to follow the path of least resistance or, we might say, "to do what comes naturally."

Ephesians 2:2 In which you once walked according to the course of this world, [listen to this; *we* once walked according to the course of this world], according to the prince of the power of the air.

He shows that there is a direct connection between the prince of the power of the air—Satan—and this world. And that has to be because this world is Satan's creation through unconverted men and women—the sons of Adam as the Bible puts it. And, all of us have been sons of Adam.

Ephesians 2:2-3 ...the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature [speaking from our own resources] children of wrath, just as the others.

All of us have been children of that alien—and antagonistic to God—society. The one created by

Satan through Adam and Eve.

Now you might be able to think, "Yes, but, we're talking here about unconverted people!" True! But, see what the apostle Paul shows us in this next series of verses.

I Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.

Hey! He's talking about people in the church who are still doing what comes naturally, speaking from their own resources, speaking from the education in attitudes and way in conduct that they have learned from Satan and his society.

I Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

The division and the confusion that was taking place in the Corinth church was evidence, or proof to Paul that they were still following and submitting to the old nature. They were doing what comes naturally. And they were therefore disloyal to the Family values, and to the Head of the Church of God.

I John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.

Now that's pretty clear. Why would John say such a thing if it were not possible for us to be disloyal to the Family of God, to God Himself, and to the way of God? You see there is still an attraction for this world, and for Satan that dwells within us.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This world is still out there exerting its pull. Satan is still out there. And the two of them continue to have a profound effect upon us demanding loyalty to it, and we must resist with all energy, and overcome. That is hard work.

Now this is such a labor that involves a great deal of intensity that the Apostle Paul wrote about it in Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may

be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We are in a war! And the stakes are eternal life, or eternal death!

Can you begin to see Christ's concern about what is most important to Him at the end? As we draw into that period of time when the pressures are going to be more intense than they have ever been at any time in the history of man? When Satan is lining up all of his forces, all of his armies, all of his armory? And he is going to mount a persecution against the people of God to such an extent that he is going to throw the whole earth into convulsions? The like of which this world has never seen?

Christ, like any good leader, seeing what is coming, is going to take steps to prepare His people. He is going to focus their attention on what is most important to survival and growth during this period of time. And, that's why He talks about what He does to the churches in those messages in Revelation 2 and 3.

The word that is translated "overcomes," can just as easily, and rightly, and correctly be translated "conquers!" "To him who conquers...!" Can you see how it fits? We are involved in a war. And it would certainly be justifiable for it to be translated in that way. Perhaps, it would even be better!

We are in a war against Satan, and his demons. In a war against a world he (Satan) created through men, and against ourselves, to some extent, who carry about with us the self-centered nature, the habits, and the attitudes of him, and his system.

And so Christ's concern for us as we approach the end is whether we are carrying through in the warfare, whether we are becoming weary in well doing, and enduring to the end, because Satan is bringing about every pressure to make us give up.

Loyalty is not a quality that we Americans and Canadians are endowed with great quantities of. Our cultures tend to stress individuality—doing your own thing. Today forces are at work to destroy our loyalty to America and Canada in order to blend us with other nations under a one-world government.

The lack of loyalty in America and Canada perhaps shows most clearly in divorce, and infidelity, than perhaps anywhere else. Loyalty's synonym is "faithful." It means faithful in allegiance to one's lawful sovereign. It means to be faithful to a private person to whom fidelity is due. Or, it means to be faithful to a cause. It means to be steadfast in affection. It means to adhere to the performance of duty. It means to be conscientious. It means to give firm resistance to any temptation to desert or betray. Are you beginning to see what the works are that Christ is concerned about?

This is why every message says, "I know your works!" He does not say, "I know your profession." He does not say, "I know your desires." He does not say, "I know your sincerity," or "your wishes." He says, "I know your works!" Do you know why? Because works prove what a

person is doing with his knowledge, with his time, and with his energies.

Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him.

Notice that they "profess" to know God. Christ said, "I see, I know your works." Are you beginning to see why works are so important? They prove where our heart is! They prove our loyalty! They prove whether we are conscientious. They prove whether we are faithful. They prove whether there is fidelity there to Jesus Christ. They prove whether we are steadfast in our affection for the One we're going to marry.

Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him,
being abominable, disobedient, *and disqualified*.

Don't let anybody ever teach you that you and I do not have to qualify for the Kingdom of God! Works cannot justify us. Works cannot wipe out our sins. But, it does not follow that because they cannot save us they are of no importance. You might recall that James uses Abraham, the father of the faithful—the father of the loyal, the father of the conscientious, the father of those who are full of fidelity—as the illustration that faith without works is dead! Living faith works! Do you get the point? Living faith works! "I know your works!"

Revelation 2 and 3 is an examination of our works because Christ wants to see whether we believe Him! Living faith works! It is a test of our faith! If we are working, we will be overcoming Satan, the world, and our self-centeredness. That's what the works accomplish.

Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch
on the evil and the good.

Think of this in light of, "I know your works!"

I mentioned earlier that the messages to the churches are warnings. And one of those warnings is, "I know your works." In our lack of comprehension of the greatness of God, we easily overlook that He is omnipresent—that there is nothing that is hidden from His scrutiny. This knowledge doesn't have to be negative. But, it is essential that we know that we never can do an action, however private that we may think it is—whether a whisper under the cover of darkness of night—God has been witness to it because "darkness" is not darkness to Him! All things are open and manifest to Him!

I Samuel 2:3b By Him actions are weighed.

Evaluated—measured—compared! He knows the motives, and He discerns how much of what we do is done for His sake.

Revelation 14:12a Here is the patience of the saints...

"Here is the steadfastness of the saints." "Here is the conscientiousness of the saints." "Here is the faithfulness, the perseverance, the endurance of the saints."

Revelation 14:12b ...here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Now, think of this in terms of works, because verse 13 says,

Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: `Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

What does He mean, "their works follow them?" These people are blest whose works follow them! These people are working. It is very obvious from the context of keeping the commands of God.

Revelation 2:23 I will kill her children with death [this is one of the messages to the churches], and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.

Proverbs 15:13 "His eyes are open to everything." I Samuel 2:3 "He weighs what He sees—actions are weighed."

Revelation 2:23b And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Revelation 20:12-13 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Now you can see that works are very important to the book of Revelation—seven times in the book of Revelation 2 and 3, and four or five other times in the rest of the book of Revelation. Christ's concern is that His people be working.

Brethren, I believe that the main purpose for writing the book of Revelation is not merely to give us insight into what is coming. It is also to convince the Christian that his loyalty, his devotion, his steadfastness, his suffering, and perhaps even martyrdom, is not in vain; that he is assured of a wonderful future. And, that the reason for the stress on works, is that character

is not formed merely by knowing something, but by knowledge combined with putting it to work, until it becomes a habit, and habit becomes character, and character follows the person right through the grave. And there it is!

If we are not working, emphasizing in our lives loyalty to the Person of God, and to His Way, making every effort to overcome Satan, the world, and the self-centeredness that is within us, resisting with all of our being the temptations to do what is natural, to do what is carnal, to go in that direction—if we are not expending our energy, and spending our time working out our own salvation with fear and trembling—it is very likely, then, that we are not going to have the character necessary to go through the grave. The wrong works will follow us, and we will not be prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Thus, what a person has done, that is, what he has worked on in this lifetime, follows him through the grave, and either into the Lake of Fire, or the Kingdom of God.

And so, the book is designed to focus attention on what is of greatest concern to Christ for His people. That they don't give up, don't become weary because of the great pressure of the times, that they instead endure, persevere, be loyal and be steadfast to the very end.

Christ's great concern at this time is not preaching the gospel as a witness, but the salvation and continued growth of those He already has. The quality of the witness is directly tied to the quality of those making the witness. Remember that.

What good is it to have this wonderful, awesome message—the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—carried by those who are poor examples of what it says? Christ's first priority is to ensure the spiritual quality of those who make the witness, and then the quality of the witness is ensured. We cannot let the cart get ahead of the horse. The one naturally follows the other. First things first.

John 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Isn't that clear? A disciple is one who, in his lifetime, is continuously loyal to God and is always in the position of a student, of a family member, being prepared for the Kingdom of God.

John 15:16a You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.

Ah! Isn't that interesting when tied together with Revelation 14:12-13. Their works follow them, but their fruit should remain!

John 15:16b ...that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

God's Word shows that He thoroughly prepares those He's going to use before He sends them forth to do His work. And then, they can do it!

