



"Meditate
upon these things;
give thyself
wholly to them;
that thy profiting
may appear unto all"

I Timothy 4:15

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Editor Prof. emer. C. M. Gullerud
218 Grover Road
Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701

Managing Editor Prof. Clifford M. Kuehne

Circulation Manager . . . Mr. Benno Sydow
2750 Oxford Street North
Roseville, Minnesota 55113

Staff Contributors . . . D. Lau, J. Lau, P.F. Nolting,
J. Pfeiffer, L.D. Redlin

Correspondence regarding subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, etc., should be directed to the circulation manager. Correspondence regarding material published in the JOURNAL should be directed to the editor.

TEACHING THE LOVE OF GOD

The designation of our schools as CHRISTIAN Day Schools should be a proclamation to the world that Christ and His atoning work lie at the center and core of all instruction in these precious institutions. That very fact, in itself, gives notice that the LOVE OF GOD will be taught and inculcated in all the subjects and branches of the school's curriculum. This is indeed what makes the Christian Day School such an important agency in the nurturing of our children. It is our joy and privilege that we can, without interference or hindrance, teach the love of God in our schools.

THE TEXTBOOK

Any teacher who is faithful and consecrated to his task will be careful and conscientious in making selection of the textbooks to be used. Any workman who wishes to build well will not only seek the best training for himself, but he will also select the appropriate materials and will, with care, choose the tools which will assure him of accuracy and endurance. If this is true of the workman who deals with the temporal things of this life, how much more must it be true of the Christian teacher who is charged with the tremendously important mission of teaching the LOVE OF GOD!

There are many who claim that in teaching the love of God, we need nothing more than nature itself as the textbook. By some this is used as an idle excuse for neglecting the one thing needful, but by others it is seriously proposed as an adequate means of learning to know God. Now surely we know that the visible creation does teach us something about God and in many ways reveals His goodness and power as well. This is something which no Christian teacher will overlook in the teaching of geography and the natural sciences. However, those who seek to know God only through the visible creation are doomed to despair and utter hopelessness. In the final analysis, they will find themselves

in the same situation as the heathen who come to look upon God as an angry God who avenges Himself upon a rebellious generation. They will find no answer to the question of how they may be reconciled to God, and they will find no peace for an accusing and guilty conscience. By the works of their hands, by the worship and adoration of things which they themselves have fashioned, by sacrifices and offerings and deeds, by exertion of their own intellect and meditations, they vainly and foolishly seek to find peace and the means with which to placate the God whom they fear. Of them it is said: "They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). They lean unto their own understanding and make flesh their arm. They join the Pharisee in the temple and self-righteously declare that they are performing their duty to God by doing what is commonly considered over and above the usual call to action. This false philosophy can be traced back to the soul-destroying error which sets forth *nature* and the "diggings" as the textbook for learning all about origins--if not, indeed, the activity of a higher being and the destiny of man. Following this false philosophy men are led to acknowledge all religions as leading to the same goal. The end is the acceptance of Universalism now so popular on the campuses of our universities.

But we must know that this false philosophy will in the final analysis end in despair and will not teach the LOVE OF GOD. For what must men say when hurricanes are spawned and tidal waves wash away some of the proudest structures and take the lives of those who found their joy in them? What can men say when droughts, nuclear disaster, and plagues bring woe and suffering to living things? Those who have not learned that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28) will see in these things only the wrath of God which they cannot stem or avoid. He then who chooses nature as his textbook for learning to know God and find peace for his soul will never be able to teach the love of God. Nor will he ever be able really to understand

nature or place the wonders of nature into the right perspective.

The only way in which we may learn of the love of God for sinful man is by *revelation*. And that revelation we have, namely, the Holy Bible which testifies of itself: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). *This* is the textbook for teaching the love of God. It is a book infallible and inerrant in all its words and parts, whether it treats of the things we must know for salvation or purely historical and geographical matters. It is a word which is not just a dead letter but THE WORD through which the Holy Spirit works, so that the material is not only transmitted to the mind but is impressed upon the heart and is accepted in faith. Whether you use the Catechism, the Explanation, or the Bible History, the textbook still remains the Bible. For these other books of religious instruction all have as their source the Holy Bible!

What a privilege it is that we who are but broken vessels may have as our daily joy the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, which not only set forth the love of God but also produce and preserve faith in the love of God for sinners.

THE SUBJECT MATTER

While indeed we must teach the law by which is the knowledge of sin, this is done for the prime reason that we might bring the Gospel message of the love of God. In doing this, namely, in teaching the Gospel, we must be careful that we do not make out of this a new law with stern demands and grievous judgments. For when we speak of the love of God we deal with that disposition of God's heart which bespeaks grace and mercy.

While indeed the love of God is ever bound up with His *purposes* of sending His Son and with the *actual* sending of His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, we must guard against presenting the love of God as

though it had its first manifestation with the birth of the Savior. To the Israel of old the Lord had said, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). That the love of God is from eternity is attested to in these words to the Ephesians and to us: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:3-6). The promises of the Savior were given already to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and were thereafter repeated to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and so down through the years by the holy prophets until the fulness of the time was come when God sent forth His Son. This love of God is so great that it is described as far surpassing the love which a mother has for her infant child. The Lord says: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. 49:15). Thus in teaching the love of God it is proper to make comparisons to show that it far surpasses even the greatest love that man may have in his heart.

The love of God is inseparably joined to the sending of His Son. This should be brought out repeatedly. Here one can take as an example the first epistle of John. Not only did he write: "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but he also wrote: "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10, NKJV). Without the work of redemption, love in its truest and fullest sense would be a totally unknown quality. "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16, NKJV). "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we

were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The love of God is not a quality of the Father and the Son as separate from the Holy Spirit. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:14-17, NKJV). The Holy Spirit manifests God's love to us through the Word which He Himself has given by divine inspiration. Indeed, the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification covers the whole life of the Christian from his rebirth to his resurrection from the dead, as we confess in the third article of the apostolic creed.

The love of Christ which passeth all understanding is not only shown in the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross as a full satisfaction for our sins, but also in His active obedience, namely, in His perfect fulfillment of the law. This is important, for we are held to be perfect even as the Lord our God is perfect. This is possible only through Christ, who has kept every detail of the law in complete perfection. This is imputed to us and accounted to us as though we had kept the law in all its parts. The Christian teacher will not omit to place this truth before the minds and hearts of the children, for it is an integral part of God's love.

In teaching the love of God the teacher will do well to make use of the concordance as a helpful tool in locating passages which set forth the love of God. In this searching of Scripture he will be enriched in his own life and will be ever better prepared to teach this wonderful doctrine to the lambs whom he is to feed.

THE AIM AND GOAL

The aim and goal in teaching the love of God will not be an academic one, as though all we are interested

in is that the pupil shall be able to recite the Bible passages, explain them, and give the right answers in a test. The aim and goal will, of course, be the salvation of the soul, a matter which every Christian teacher will have uppermost in mind at all times. When the Christian teacher bears this in mind, his disposition toward the children in the classroom will be greatly affected. The love of God which he teaches must surely also be reflected in his disciplining of the children. He should not be known as a hard taskmaster but rather as a teacher of the Gospel, with a kindly and sunny disposition. It surely is not good if our classrooms are thought of as places of gloom, stress, and strain.

That the love of God has its end and goal in the salvation of the world is shown in that passage so well known and oft repeated: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

The child should be impressed with this truth that his salvation is *assured* and *secured* in the love of God and will not fail under any circumstances. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

He who teaches the love of God as though it were a dead and inert thing in the life we lead here on earth, is missing the mark. While our salvation is from beginning to end dependent upon God's love for us and is in no part conditioned on our love to Him, yet so surely as the love of God dwells in our hearts, just so surely will we show this in our lives. "Beloved, if God so

loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11). This opens up the wide field of sanctification in its narrower sense and has to do with the leading of a Christian life with its stewardship of talents, time, money and property, and physical strength. The practical value of this in connection with Christian teaching may easily be seen. The fruits of this will be seen as the child grows into the teen age and adult life. It would seem that it is self-evident that the one who has experienced the love of God will automatically show this in his daily life in thought and deed. But, because of the flesh, it is necessary to be reminded of the opportunities to show our love to the God of love. John found the need for this when he wrote: "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). And again when he wrote: "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. . . . And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3:18, 23). Again and again we should remind ourselves and our charges that the love of Christ moves us in all our life and so in our relations with our fellowmen.

In our Christian schools we have the real instrument of discipline, for we have the Word which gives the motive and the power—the love of God. How helpless are those who can say only: "You must do this; you must do that or you will be punished." We have the wondrous privilege of teaching the love of God from which comes the fruit of Christian obedience. This will not come to perfection in this life, it is true. But again we come back to the love of God in redemption and in obedience to the law through Christ as our vicar. The love of God supplies all our needs for the teacher's personal life and for the lives of the children committed to his or her care. "The God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

C. M. Gullerud

EXEGESIS OF REVELATION 2:1-7

(Conclusion)

1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας
 γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ
 ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν
 ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνίων τῶν χρυσῶν·

The Lord Jesus begins by addressing the first letter "to the messenger of the church in Ephesus" (τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας). An alternate reading could be "to the messenger from the church in Ephesus." The genitive (τῆς ἐκκλησίας) allows for the understanding that the messenger was "owned" by the Ephesians and had been sent out by them. In the same way, when Paul left on his first missionary journey he could have been called "the missionary of the church in Antioch." However, since Christ had a message to be delivered to the Ephesians, it is better understood that this was a messenger sent "to" the church in Ephesus. For purposes of translation, it is probably best to leave the simple genitive "of," leaving it to the reader to interpret.

There is some disagreement as to whether this messenger was an angel or a human being, e.g., a pastor. Jesus orders John to write (γράψον) the message down. Since it would conflict with good reason to assume that John who was here on earth would be asked to write down a message for an angel or spirit in heaven, it seems more likely that the messenger was a human being. (Where reason does not conflict with doctrine and grammar, its voice should be heard.)

Furthermore, we note that the messengers are represented in the vision by "seven stars" (ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας). In another highly symbolic book we are told that "they that turn many to righteousness [shall shine] as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3). This is obviously a reference to human beings, since the previous verse speaks of the resurrection from the dead. Those who turn many to righteousness are the preachers of the Gospel, for only in the Gospel is "the righteousness of

God revealed from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17). As we set these two symbols side by side, it fortifies our conviction that the "seven stars," the seven messengers, are indeed pastors of the seven churches. (It is essential to an understanding of the symbolism in Revelation that the reader take into account other places in Scripture which speak in a similar vein, especially the prophetic and symbolic books.)

The very fact that Jesus addresses these letters to the pastors of the churches should cause all pastors to sit up and take notice. These are probably addressed because of their position as leaders. It lies upon their shoulders to lead their congregations in the ways of God. When a congregation as a whole becomes guilty of a given error, the pastor ought to be the first one to look at himself and ask, "What is my guilt in this?" Then it follows that the pastor must take it upon himself to lead the congregation back to the paths of truth and righteousness. Woe be unto that pastor who complains about his congregation to others, as if to say, "I am innocent, but they are guilty."

Likewise, if there is something praiseworthy within a congregation, the pastor ought to be the first among men to be praised. So it is that throughout the letters Jesus uses the second person singular of the pronoun when addressing the congregation, whether He is praising or rebuking. Upon receipt of the letter the pastor must be the first to correct himself and the one to take the leadership in correcting the congregation. Likewise, he should be the first to take note of those things which are being done properly and the one to continue directing his people in these righteous ways.

A conscientious pastor might quickly despair if he received such a letter from the almighty Lord Himself. Indeed, Jesus does want the pastor to know that these words do come from Him. The expression *τῷδε λέγει* ("these things says He") corresponds to the Old Testament expression "thus saith the Lord." A personal message which begins with "thus saith the Lord" is enough to make the believer's knees buckle and his hands shake.

The Lord identifies Himself as "the One grasping the seven stars in His right hand." I translate *κρατῶν*

with "grasping," because this seems to convey the thought of the Greek better than "holding." κρατῶν means, first of all, "to be strong, mighty," and then "to rule, hold sway"; with the accusative it means "to hold fast, seize, secure." The thought of strength is basic to the word. The Lord's grasp on the seven stars is one of strength--a firm grasp.

Coupled with κρατῶν is the expression ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ. This magnifies the thought of strength, since the right hand is the symbol of strength in the Scriptures. The hand which holds the messengers is powerful indeed!

Perhaps it is better to refer to this as a "secure grasp," since this is the final thought conveyed. Jesus does not mean to instill terror, but comfort and confidence. In John 10:28 Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (NKJV). Thus He fills us with confidence. So also here, those who spread the truth in a hostile world should have the comfort of knowing that they are secure in the powerful right hand of Christ.

There seems to be a distinction in Scripture regarding the various positions in relation to God's right hand. Being "at" or "beside" His right hand signifies a sharing in power and pleasures. Being "under" His right hand signifies a crushing judgment. Being "in" His right hand signifies safety. Exodus 15:6: "thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy." Psalm 16:11: "at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Psalm 110:1: "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Psalm 118:16: "the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly." Mark 14:62: "sitting on the right hand of power."

Pastors have often been frightened into submission at real or imagined opposition from within or without their congregations. For the sake of external peace they have sacrificed truth and righteousness. Jesus wants the Ephesian pastor to know that he is secure in His right hand. He should proceed in the strength of that knowledge.

Jesus identifies Himself also as "the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands" (ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν). As was mentioned in the the March issue of the *Journal*, the lampstands represent the seven churches. Jesus portrays Himself as One who is actively present in the midst of His Church. The fact that He is "walking" (περιπατέω) and not "sitting" signifies activity.

This active presence makes a pastor more conscious of what he is doing; likewise, the congregation. They should not fall victim to the idea that the Lord is so busy with "bigger" matters in the world that He doesn't have the time to get involved with them. Such a frame of mind breeds laxness in doctrine and practice. Jesus wanted the Ephesians and us all to be aware of the fact that He is present and that He is actively concerned about what is going on. Thus when Jesus says "I know your deeds," the Ephesians realized that this was firsthand knowledge, not hearsay.

Furthermore, the active presence of the Lord verifies the fact that He is capable of carrying out whatever promises or threats He makes. The Ephesians should take Him seriously when He says that He will remove their lampstand if they do not repent. On the other hand, they can find sure comfort in Christ's promise to let them eat of the tree of life if they overcome.

1. To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: These things says the One grasping the seven stars in His right hand, the One walking about in the midst of the seven lampstands of gold.

2 Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοὺς, καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς.

"I know," says Jesus. He uses οἶδα, which indicates a clear, complete, firsthand knowledge. Jesus was

fully aware of all that they were doing and all that they were enduring.

The first thing that Jesus mentions is praiseworthy. As to why He presents the good deed first and then the sin, one can only surmise. The hearer tends to remember the last thing mentioned. Whereas there were praiseworthy things being done in Ephesus, the evil that had sprung up outweighed the good to such a degree that they were in danger of losing their status as a Christian congregation. Therefore Jesus mentions the evil last, because He wants them to remember and repent.

"I know your deeds and your labor . . ." Jesus uses ἔργα and κόπον. ἔργα denotes the deeds; κόπον denotes the action. An ἔργον may be difficult or easy. The addition of κόπον reveals to us that the deeds they were performing were wearying. The clause might be understood thus: "I know what you did and how you did it."

When a church is going through a struggle and trying hard to be faithful to the Lord, it is comforting to know that Christ is fully aware of everything that is happening. He is not only aware of the deeds which they are performing, but He is also aware of the toll on strength that this is exacting from them. If they are assured of this, then they know that Jesus will also increase their strength or reduce their labor.

Indeed, the Ephesians had received the necessary help from God. They were enduring (ὑπομονή). ὑπομονή characterizes the person who holds his ground regardless of what comes upon him. The basic meaning of the word is "a remaining under." The person who "endures" is the one who remains faithful to the Lord even under the greatest affliction.

In the story of the sower and the seed (Luke 8:4-15), while others give way under persecution, temptation, and earthly lusts, the "honest and good heart" brings forth fruit with ὑπομονή. Such endurance yields the glorious reward of ruling with Christ: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12, NKJV). "The one who endures to the end, it is he who shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13, NASB). Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians that they "may be filled with the know-

ledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Only in this way could they be "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience" (Col. 1:9,11, NASB). By the means of grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments, Jesus strengthens us for endurance.

The Ephesians' dedication to the Word of God is evidenced in the fact that they refused to tolerate false apostles. They could endure (ὑπομονή) the evil thing, but they could not endure (βαστάζω) the evil men. βαστάζω means "to take up with the arms" (in order to carry), "to bear, endure, tolerate." In Romans 15:1 we are exhorted to *bear* the infirmities of the weak. In Galatians 6:2 we are told to *bear* one another's burdens. However, the false apostles in Ephesus were evil men, not weak men. Furthermore, such men are not a part of us (cf. "one another," Gal. 6:2). They have a different spirit. Bearing with the weak is a sign of strength; bearing with false teachers is a sign of weakness.

These false apostles are described as "evil" (κακός) men. κακός means "bad, evil; of a bad nature; base, wrong, wicked." πονηρός denotes a person who does evil things; κακός denotes a person who is evil in nature, morally bad.

Throughout the Scriptures, false apostles and false prophets are characterized as being inwardly evil. Christ refers to them as wolves in sheep's clothing: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but *inwardly* are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15, NASB). Paul declares that false teachers "are slaves not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites" (Rom. 16:18, NASB). He warns the Corinthians that false apostles are Satan's "servants also disguising themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:15, NASB). To the Philippians Paul describes the Judaizers (those who wanted to mix the Mosaic Law in with the Gospel) as "dogs" and "evil workers" (κακοὺς ἐργάτας). If we have come to the conclusion that someone is a false teacher, we dare not fool ourselves into believing that he is some poor, deluded soul who really means right. If we do, then we are the ones who will become poor, deluded souls.

In order to determine whether a self-proclaimed apostle was one in fact or not, the Ephesians tested all of them. *πειράζω* means "try, test" ("for the purpose of ascertaining his quality, or what he thinks, or how he will behave himself" [Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* 498]). A synonymous term is *δοκιμάζω*. *δοκιμάζω* refers to testing whether a person or thing is worthy to be received or not. *πειράζω* refers to testing to discover what is good or bad in a person or thing. The former is usually used when there are hopes for worthiness; the latter's use depends on the context. (Cf. Trench, *Synonyms*)

Christ taught His disciples to examine those who claimed to be prophets, telling them, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20, NASB). Paul instructed the Corinthians regarding the orderly procedure of examining prophets: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment" (1 Cor. 14:29, NASB). John wrote: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test (*δοκιμάζω*) the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1, NASB).

The only basis for testing is, of course, the Word of God, which Paul calls "the teaching which you have learned" (Rom. 16:17), and John calls "the teaching of Christ" (2 John 9). Faithfulness to the Word is a prerequisite for God's teachers. "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD" (Jer. 23:28). "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). "Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Tit. 1:9, NASB). The clear command of Christ is that they were to instruct the people "to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:20, NASB). Anyone who thinks that he can judge a teacher on the basis of whether or not he "seems" to be a godly man has forgotten what Paul said: "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:14-15, NASB). The only valid

way of testing is to compare a teacher's words and actions with the Word of God. If there is full agreement, then he is to be accepted. If his teaching or life in any way departs from the Word, then he is to be corrected. If he refuses to be corrected, he is to be recognized as a false teacher and rejected.

About thirty years prior to the writing of Revelation, Paul had warned the Ephesian elders of the impending danger from such evil workers: "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29, NASB). Therefore it is reasonable to assume that they began to be watchful and may even have developed a creed by which to test those who claimed to be teachers and apostles. Whatever the test may have been, when they found an "apostle" to be false, they refused to allow him to teach in their midst.

2. I know your deeds and the labor and your endurance and that you are unable to tolerate evil ones, and you test the ones calling themselves apostles and they are not, and you found them false.

3 καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχετε, καὶ ἐβάστασας
διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου, καὶ οὐ κεκοπίηκες.

Jesus commends pastor and congregation for their endurance. Coming so closely upon verse two, it would appear that Jesus is referring particularly to the endurance which was necessary in the continuing testing process. We ought not assume that the false apostles meekly submitted to the test and humbly went their way. No doubt there were some bitter struggles. After a number of these, the temptation must have been great to give up.

In addition, there must have been persecution, for Jesus says that they "bore up" (βαστάζω). Using the same term in verse two, Jesus said that they did not "bear" the false teachers. Here He says that they did "bear." Here the bearing is probably the same that

Jesus spoke of to the multitudes: "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27).

It is impossible to know the exact nature of the cross which they had to bear. However, those who have had to endure struggles with false teachers can testify to the slander, the lies, the ridicule, and even the physical suffering that was leveled against them. No doubt the pastor and congregation in Ephesus experienced a similar cross.

Through it all they did not grow weary (κοπιᾶώ). In verse two Jesus spoke of their wearying labor (κόπον, from the same root as κοπιᾶώ). It is one thing to get tired IN the struggle and quite another to get tired OF the struggle. The Ephesians did not get tired of the struggle, even though they may have been weary in the struggle. I recall one of the sainted fathers of the CLC saying, "I am tired of fighting, but I can't quit." This expresses the spirit of these verses.

Those who grow weary of the struggle and want to quit fighting will settle for "peace" at the sacrifice of the purity of Christ's name. But the Ephesians bore up for the sake of Christ's name (διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου). ὄνομα includes everything that Jesus has revealed about Himself in His Word. The Ephesians wanted to keep Christ's name pure in their midst, so that they might always know Christ as He truly is and so that His name might be glorified among them. Therefore, for the sake of His name, they continued the struggle against false apostles regardless of the persecution that came their way.

3. And you have endurance, and you bore up for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary.

4 ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες.

As the battle ensued, they continued fighting. For this they are to be commended. However, something was

lost along the way. They gave up their original motivation for fighting. In the beginning they fought out of love for God and His Word and out of love for those for whom Christ died. As Paul wrote: "The love of Christ compels us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). What was now motivating them? Were they acting mechanically, as if to maintain some "constitutional" purity (dead orthodoxy)? Were they acting out of pride, as if they were the "fortress of orthodoxy" and needed to maintain a reputation? Had they developed a "crusade complex"? Whatever their new motivation, it seems clear that they no longer had a "feel" for souls inside and outside their own fellowship. Perseverance is one thing, but perseverance needs to be accompanied by godliness, and godliness by brotherly love, and brotherly love by love (cf. 2 Pet. 1:6,7). "He who lacks these qualities is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins" (2 Pet. 1:9, NASB).

It is possible for doctrinal purity to exist alongside suspicion, quarreling, and a party spirit. "During any prolonged strain put upon human nature, especially in a small society driven jealously to maintain its purity, temper is prone to make inroads on affection and forbearance" (*Expositor's Greek Testament* 5: 350). Those of us who are still concerned about the purity of Christ's name ought to take special warning here. It is not enough to shrug our shoulders and say, "Of course we still love everyone." If such a solid congregation as that of the Ephesians could lose its first love, so could we. Therefore we ought constantly to examine ourselves and see what our real motivation is. As we take up the weapons of our warfare, we should ask ourselves, "Just why am I doing this? What is to be gained?"

4. But I have this against you that you have abandoned your first love.

5 μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας, καὶ
 μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον·
 εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν
 λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν
 μὴ μετανοήσῃς.

Nostalgia seems to be a favorite pastime of middle-aged and elderly people. However, it seems to serve little or no purpose except, perhaps, to make them feel good for a moment. When Jesus calls upon the Ephesians to "remember," it is not just for nostalgic purposes. The purpose was to "call to mind" (μνημονεύω) in order to effect a change. It was to be an effectual remembering. Paul urged the Ephesian elders to engage in effectual remembering when he said, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35, NASB). Such effectual remembering is referred to also by the writer to the Hebrews: "Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

It often happens, when people have lost their first love and still continue in their struggle for "orthodoxy," that they imagine themselves to have ascended to greater heights of godliness, whereas they have actually fallen to a lower level. Jesus summons the Ephesians to look back and up, to remember from whence they had fallen. "Remember the old days, the days of loving and caring, of helping and sharing, the days when you struggled hand in hand toward a common goal." They had fallen from the height of love. Deeds not performed in love, be they ever so proper in an external sense, are unacceptable and constitute sin. Love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom. 13:10).

Some remembering causes people to weep in sorrow: "Oh, that things could be like they were in the good old days." Yet, these same people don't make any effort to change the present wrong and return to the former right. When Jesus calls for repentance, He is not asking for sorrow only but for a change (μετανοέω: to change the mind and purpose; repent). Such a change would, indeed, begin in sorrow, but it would be sorrow of a godly sort

which flees to Christ for forgiveness. Having found forgiveness, the repentant sinner would then be filled with determination not to return to the old, sinful ways. Such is the nature of the change.

"Do the first works," says Jesus. He clearly indicates what the fruit of repentance ought to be. The first works (τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα) are those works which were prompted by their first love (τὴν πρώτην ἀγάπην). The repetition of πρῶτος shows that this is what Christ has reference to, and not to a different kind of work. Their works did not flow out of a loving heart, and when the Lord looks at a man's deeds He looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Their failure to heed Jesus' admonition would have the most drastic of results. "I will come," He says. This is not to say that He was far away from them. It might be likened to the words of a father who hears his children scuffling in their bedroom when they are supposed to be going to sleep: "I'm coming up there!" The children know full well that such a coming is to be dreaded. Even so, when Jesus says "I will come," He is speaking of an entrance into their lives for a specific purpose, a dreadful purpose.

The purpose would be one of judgment if they failed to repent: "I will remove your lampstand from its place." What a judgment! They would lose their place within the Church of Christ. He would no longer be active in their midst (cf. v. 1). They would become a hollow shell of a church, looking in every way like a church but lacking the light that keeps it alive--the light of the Gospel.

Without repentance a church loses its character as a *Christian* congregation. Without repentance one is reduced to the level of the unbeliever. Those who do not seek the Gospel's forgiveness will lose it. Their lamp will be put out.

5. Remember, therefore, from whence you have fallen, and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place, if you do not repent.

6 ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα
τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν, ἃ καὶ μισῶ.

Verse six seems to come up like an afterthought, except, of course, that Christ does not have afterthoughts. He purposely and carefully places His thoughts where He wants them. Why then is this thought placed here and not in verse two with the rest of the commendations?

Perhaps the answer is to be found in the connection between love and hate (μισέω). Jesus accused them of having abandoned their original love. If their motivation was not love, then what was it? The only thing left is hate. In the color spectrum there are black and white with a wide variation of shades and colors in between. In the spectrum of holy Law there is no wide variation. There is love and there is hate, and the two butt up against each other. If a person steps out of love, he steps into hate. There is no partial love nor shades of hate. Usually, there is a dizzying vacillation between love and hate. Taking a look at the whole picture, the human mind may come to the conclusion that what he observes is a weak love. Yet, if one were able to stop time and freeze action at any given moment, he would observe either love or hate in action, never both. Either one is keep the Law or he is violating it. He cannot be keeping and violating at the same time. To view it from another angle, either the Old Adam, who always hates, is having it his way, or the New Man, who always loves, is having it his way.

So it is that the Ephesians, pastor and congregation, had stepped over the line and were acting out of hatred, not love.

"But (ἀλλά)," says Jesus, "there is *one* thing that you hate which I also hate, namely, the deeds of the Nicolaitans." (This is not a translation of v. 6.) I stated above that love and hate cannot exist at the same time in the same person. I was speaking of one's thoughts, words, or actions as directed toward a person or thing. This applies here also. A man either loves or he hates sin. As for Jesus, He always hates sin: "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness" (Ps.

45:7). At this point, then, Jesus and the Ephesians were in agreement.

As to what it was that they hated, we are left with only conjecture. The Nicolaitans probably derived their name from some leader by the name of Nicolaus. It may be that these were libertines who latched on to the concept of grace and twisted it into an excuse for sinning (1 Pet. 2:16: "Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil" [NASB]; cf. 2 Pet. 2:17ff.). Another possibility is that the Gentiles were upset because the Christians did not "run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you" (1 Pet. 4:4, NASB). The desire for peace with and approval by the unbelievers led to compromise. Nicolaus advocated and defended a compromise with surrounding paganism in such matters as public festivals and in social and civic relationships: "In formal worship we shall remain by ourselves in our own church, but in social and civic affairs it is permissible to join with the heathen in their lawless deeds."

These are only possibilities. The fact is that the Lord does not describe the error. The purpose may be to show us that we should hate *whatever* the Lord hates and love whatever He loves.

6. But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which (deeds) I too hate.

7 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.

The Lord now issues a summons to the whole world: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." In this summons we learn that this letter bears lessons for every Christian church in every age of the world. Wherever the words of this letter are read, wherever there are ears hearing this message, there the hearers are to sit up and pay attention. This letter is for all the churches (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις). The

same sort of summons is given after each of the other six letters.

Here we see the possible reason for Christ's choice of these seven churches. They represent in a general way all churches. Each Christian congregation, in which the Gospel is still present, ought to examine itself repeatedly on the basis of these letters. In all probability a given congregation will see itself in one of the seven churches, or it will see a real danger which needs to be warded off.

In the beginning of the letter it was made clear that Jesus Himself was dictating the message. Now, however, we are told that it is the Spirit speaking to the churches. There is no contradiction. The words come from the mouth of Christ and are conveyed to the ears and heart by the mediation of the Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that this is what would take place: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak . . . He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you" (John 16:13-14, NASB).

Jesus closes the letter in His own gracious manner. He does not batter the Ephesians nor us into submission with the blows of the Law. To be sure, He did use the Law when He threatened to remove their lampstand. However, to those whose hearts were smitten by this threat Jesus now holds out the kind hand of His love. He paints for them visions of glory: "To him who overcomes, I will grant to him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God." What encouragement!

This "overcoming" (νικᾶω) is not the overcoming only of error, but also of lovelessness. When we look at our own flesh this seems like an impossibility. However, when we look to Christ we find every reason for confident hope. When confronted by persecutions we can say, "In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37, NASB). When otherwise threatened by the world, we take comfort in the words of Christ: "Take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NASB). "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4, NASB). In

these words we learn that we shall overcome Satan himself. The final victory is already assured in Christ. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57, NASB).

Whether or not there is an actual tree of life in Paradise remains to be seen. In all probability this is symbolic, expressing the fact that there will be no death in heaven; life will continue uninterrupted. Jesus is promising everlasting life to those who gain the victory.

The reference to the tree of life and Paradise causes us to think of the garden of Eden. In the Septuagint the term παράδεισος ("paradise") is used as a translation for גֶּן ("garden"). Jesus adopted the term when He told the penitent thief, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, NASB). Paul, also, spoke of a man who "was caught up to the third heaven . . . was caught up into Paradise" (2 Cor. 12:2,4, NASB). Thus God gives us the right to picture the new earth, in which we shall spend eternity, as a second garden of Eden. Paul fortifies this impression when he speaks of all created things anxiously awaiting the end of time. Then "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21, NASB).

It may indeed be wearying to keep up the struggle against false teachers and against immorality. The lawlessness around us may indeed be a drain on our love. However, the prospect of enjoying eternal life in the Paradise of God lifts our spirits and strengthens our resolve. The love which Christ shows to sinners such as us builds up our love. By His grace we shall indeed repent of whatever lovelessness of which we are guilty, and we shall once again perform the first works, the works of love.

7. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

SUMMARY

Jesus shows Himself to the Ephesians as One who is in the midst of His Church, fully aware of everything that is happening. At the same time, He wants them to know that He has them safely in His hand. He knows that the pastor and congregation are weary IN the struggle for the honor of His name, but they are not weary OF it. Regardless of opposition or persecution, they fought on. Whenever "apostles" arose among them, they put them to the test. If these apostles were found to be false, they were not tolerated. However, as often happens in prolonged and wearying struggles, they had lost the spirit they once possessed. Their struggle was no longer prompted by love. Jesus called for an immediate change. Without repentance they would lose their place within the holy Christian Church. Repentance is an essential part of the Christian life. If they fell from love to hate, there is one aspect of their hatred with which Christ agreed: their hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Jesus does not batter them into submission but encourages them with visions of glory: "To him who overcomes, I will grant him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God."

HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM
HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE
CHURCHES!

John K. Pfeiffer

A NEW PERICOPIC SYSTEM

(Continuation)

We are accustomed to preaching on texts, and we trust that our preaching ever remains textual. A pericope is just such a list of texts for each Sunday of the church year. The texts for the festival portion of the church year are chosen to reflect the history of our salvation—from the coming of our Lord until His sending the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The second half of the church year, traditionally called "Trinity Season" but now calculated in reference to the final festival as "after Pentecost," allows for greater liberty. We intend to make use of that liberty both in form and content by departing from the atomistic text approach and from texts chosen to reflect the response of a Christian in life to the salvation that is his in the Lord.

From youth on we have memorized proof texts and listened to sermons preached on a few verses of some chapter in the Gospels, Epistles, or Old Testament books. Quite generally the preacher gives the immediate and general context of the text in the introduction or the development of his presentation. But it is the text, a few verses cut out from the flow of thought of the writer, that receives the emphasis. Such an approach has its value, but this writer cannot put out of his mind a sentence read in "The Fundamentals" of one of the bygone liberal-conservative theological battles to the effect that one has never really read his Bible until he has read it a book at a time. That is the way to get into the flow of the holy writer's thought. Listening to Bible cassettes while driving along the highways is an excellent way to be caught up in the flow of divinely inspired writers. Preaching on an entire book of the Bible, chapter by chapter, is another way. It's worth a try and may well be found refreshing and edifying by both pastor and congregation.

A book that lends itself to our KINGDOM OF GOD SERIES is the postexilic prophet Zechariah. He should

be immediately associated in the mind of the hearer with his fellow prophet, Haggai. The scribe Ezra and the cupbearer Nehemiah belong in the picture, together with the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem--both city and walls. The key year was 520 B.C., the second year of Darius. Haggai delivered four prophetic sermons within three months of that year. Zechariah saw eight visions that same year. Two years later he received another message from the Lord. The two "burdens," which conclude his book of prophecy, are undated.

Only a minority of the Jews had elected to return to their homeland--less than 50,000. It was a time of great expectation but little realization, of self-seeking and the dedication of self, of sin and faith, and so of judgment and promised blessing. The grand and glorious future so vividly painted in Isaiah's prophecies (chapters 40-66) seemed beyond reach, even that of faith. The situation called for encouragement and hope. Yet a note of judgment had to be raised for the covenant-breaking people. It was Zechariah who was chosen as one of two to fill his people with hope, while cautioning them with the threat of judgment both past and future.

The dispensational school of interpreters excludes all vision of the Church in the prophetic pictures of the future, and that by dogmatic fiat consistent with their theological presuppositions. They find in the prophecies only a great and glorious renewal of the nation of Israel in the millennium after the rapture and the great tribulation. We are compelled by reading the Old Testament prophecies in the light of the fuller New Testament revelation to categorize these expectations as religious fiction.

That, in turn, brings the charge of liberalism, specifically abandoning the literal interpretation of the prophecies by spiritualizing them. That charge is mechanically repeated by laymen under the influence of their premillennial and dispensational teachers. The literal/spiritual dichotomy is, however, but a smoke screen designedly or inadvertently obscuring the nature of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God (of Heaven or of Christ) is spiritual and has been from day one and

shall be throughout both time and eternity. During the Old Testament times the Kingdom of God was veiled within the nation of Israel--Israel itself being a spiritualized name! The Kingdom of God was veiled within outward, material, visible, tangible forms--the nation of Israel, Jerusalem, Zion, the temple, the priesthood, circumcision and Sabbath, sacrifices and rituals, and the institutions and very history of the people. But always the Kingdom was spiritual--the temple with the cloud indicating the presence of God who is spirit, the Passover lamb symbolizing Christ our Passover, the economic and political welfare of the nation dependent upon their spiritual relationship to their God who is spirit. The spiritual, which is invisible and intangible, was the real thing at all times and in all places. All things that were visible and tangible, including capital city, temple and people, land and institutions, were but the temporary props until the time of the Messiah. As the spiritual Kingdom of God (of Heaven) was veiled under the forms of a chosen nation, city, and temple, so the prophets used those same visible, material, tangible forms to prophesy of the coming era when all such forms would fade away, to be replaced by the greater reality of the spiritual perceived by faith, not by sight. That era is the times of the Messiah, the entire New-Testament era, in which the King established His Kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36) and that is not "food and drink" (Romans 14:17). The concrete gave way to the spiritual, the shadowy form of the concrete to the greater spiritual realities, the nation of Israel to the Israel of God, the land of Palestine to the ends of the earth, the temple made with hands to the Temple built by the Spirit of God, the holy Christian Church made up of both Jew and Gentile. The highly touted "literal interpretation" became a carnal interpretation which sought fulfillment only in the outward, the visible, the tangible and so missed the mark, as the Apostle Paul sorrowfully testified to the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:27). It was "literal interpretation" that caused the Jews to reject and to crucify their Messiah; it is this same "literal interpretation" that blinds thousands today to the fact that they are living

in the times of the fulfillment, while they vainly hope for a Jewish fulfillment of prophecy in a future age.

The book of Zechariah begins with a brief introduction in the form of a call to repentance and a promise of renewed faithfulness, followed by a series of eight visions covering the first six chapters of the book. The eight visions develop the basic call to repentance and promise in dramatic fashion. So the theme of the sermons remains the same for six weeks, but the successive visions throw the focus on one phase after another in the life of the nation. The message was relevant and personal for the generation to whom it was first given, but the call to repentance and the promise of continuing faithfulness is relevant for all believers of all times and so applicable to the Israel of God of the New Testament, the holy Christian Church. For wherever the Word of the Lord sounds forth, the cry of the Lord will be and must be heard: "RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU."

Seventh after Pentecost. The fathers had sinned and suffered judgment. The current generation was walking in the same old paths. The Vision of the Horses introduces the interpreting angel; the Angel of the Lord becomes a leading character, exchanging conversation with the Lord of hosts. The coming more full revelation of the relationship between the Father and the Son is being anticipated. The world is under surveillance. The covenant will be kept, for the Lord is ever faithful. The reconstruction of the city and temple will be the guarantee that the Kingdom shall come. But the future shall not be without peril. The Vision of the Horns recalls the dream of the Great Colossus of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2) and the subsequent vision of the four beasts granted to Daniel (7). The kingdoms of this world will not cease harassing the Kingdom of God, but the four smiths assure the ultimate and final triumph of the Kingdom of God. This was true for the Kingdom in its Old Testament form, and it remains true for the Kingdom in its Church form in the New Testament.

Eighth after Pentecost. Vision of the Measuring Line: The Man among the myrtle trees reappears as the Man with the measuring line—the Angel of the Lord. The

future of the Kingdom is greater than the wildest dreams of those struggling inhabitants of Jerusalem in the prophet's day. Jerusalem shall outgrow her historic boundaries and extend over the whole earth. The walls that Nehemiah came to rebuild will be replaced with a heavenly wall of fire. The population of the city will be increased by an influx of the Gentiles--a theme that the prophets love to proclaim and that rests upon the Abrahamic Covenant that all nations shall be blessed in Abraham (Gen. 12:3) and that the willing obedience of the people shall be unto Shiloh (Gen. 49:10). Who will guarantee this glorious future? It is the Angel of the Lord whom the Lord will send—who in the fulness of the time assured His people that He would be with us always, even unto the end of the eon.

Ninth after Pentecost. Vision of the High Priest: The institution of the high priest was vital to the people of God, for they needed cleansing. The situation appeared ominous, for Joshua is revealed clothed in filthy garments. Like high priest, so people! But by divine command the filthy garments are replaced with rich robes. That inspires hope for the people. That hope is heightened when the Angel of the Lord appears again as the Branch—a symbol of the Messiah that Isaiah had introduced to earlier generations. He would remove the iniquity of His people in one day. This is a dramatic foretelling of the blessing of objective or general justification that occurred on the day that the Lord died and was confirmed on the day of His resurrection.

Tenth after Pentecost. Vision of the Lampstand: The Spirit of God worked on a restricted basis under the Old Covenant. Zechariah saw an automated system of olive trees, conduits, and lampstand that pictured the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Messianic Kingdom time. The vision is a parallel to the great Pentecost prophecy of Joel (2:28-29). The Spirit would work His wonders among the citizens of the Kingdom so that even as Israel was to be a light to the nations, so the Israel of God (the Church) is to be the light for the nations until the Lord comes again.

Eleventh after Pentecost. Visions of the Flying Scroll and the Woman in a Basket: The coming of the

Kingdom always means judgment upon the ungodly, blessing for the godly. The Flying Scroll reveals that there is no escaping the curse of sin. Israel had forgotten that time and again in its national history. It needed to be reminded of it in the postexilic days. Then came the Vision of the Woman in a Basket. It was a hard message, a repetition of the announcement of destruction for the nation that Moses had already made on the plains of Moab and that had been repeated by the prophets. Judgment would again fall upon the nation. So it happened to Israel, as it is this day. But the message is not for finger-pointing. Nation after nation has experienced the same judgment; the warning stands in place for us today.

Twelfth after Pentecost. Vision of the Four Chariots: The series is brought to a close with renewed hope. The Lord God would respond to the current situation and bring both judgment and salvation to the north country, the source of judgments that came upon Israel. But more! MR. BRANCH appears in the vision with the assurance that He would build His Temple and would rule. The fulfillment is not to be awaited in a future millennial age, but it is happening now before our eyes, even as MR. BRANCH, our Lord Jesus, builds His Church as He promised (Matt. 16:18). Thus the basic theme is carried out by means of eight visions, two of which are threatening--the Flying Scroll and the Woman in a Basket--while the other six reassure the people that their Lord has truly returned to His people.

Thirteenth after Pentecost. Chapters seven and eight form an historical interlude, occurring two years after Zechariah saw the series of eight visions. A delegation had come from Bethel with a practical question regarding a self-imposed day of fasting. The Lord did not give a direct answer but rather challenged His people with a counter question, "Did you really fast for Me--for Me?" The Lord was correcting a developing problem in the national life of His people--that of substituting self-devised works for true repentance and a life of faith that would manifest itself in love and justice. He reminded them again of past judgments because of their refusal to heed His call to repent. The issue was

that of religious formalism that leads to self-righteousness, the sin that replaced overt idolatry in the life of Israel and that caused their final rejection as the people of God.

Fourteenth after Pentecost. The question raised by the delegation from Bethel regarding fasting was answered by the Lord with a decalogue of pronouncements that go far beyond the immediate issue of fasting. This chapter (8) provides an opportunity to discuss the scope of Zechariah's prophecies and their fulfillment. The historic interpretation has been that the prophecies of Zechariah, as well as those of the other prophets, find their fulfillment in the development of the Church from the remnant of Israel. Thus the Kingdom marches on, no longer under the form of the nation of Israel but now in and through the Church, the new Israel of God. That places fulfillment in the current era. Dispensationalism with its new hermeneutic, developed since about 1830, has mushroomed in our country, especially through TV evangelists. It alleges that the Church never comes into view in the Old Testament prophecies but is rather a parenthesis or intercalation in the flow of Kingdom history. Dispensationalism looks for the fulfillment of the prophecies of Zechariah and the other prophets in a future age after the Church has been raptured, at which time the prophetic clock is to begin ticking again. The issue is too extensive to consider in detail in a single sermon. Furthermore the pulpit is not to be dedicated to polemics, especially with a heresy that is foreign to the religious conceptual life of most in the pew. Nonetheless, this chapter gives an opportunity to alert the sheep of the danger of the dispensational wolf in sheep's clothing.

Fifteenth after Pentecost. The last six chapters of Zechariah (9-14) contain two burdens, one against the land of Hadrach and the other against Israel. Hadrach is a symbolic name for the current Persian Empire in the days of Zechariah. The future history of the Kingdom is outlined with a graphic description of the campaign of Alexander the Great who brought judgment upon the enemies of Israel and thereby prepared the Gentiles for their future entering the Kingdom (9:1-8). The next

section (9:9-10) is the familiar Palm Sunday prophecy which emphasizes the lowliness of the coming King and His message of peace. The third section (9:11-17) points ahead to the Seleucid/Maccabean conflict and assures the triumph of the Kingdom despite its lowliness.

Sixteenth after Pentecost. Once again the theme of divine judgments becomes prominent. Divine judgments always have a purpose. Judgment had to fall upon the Lord's own people when they turned from Him (10:1-2), for the Lord is holy and must correct His people. The judgments by which He chastens His people are inflicted by the heathen nations who in the lust of power go too far and become too cruel. They then also must fall under divine judgment (10:3-6). But mercy is always mingled with judgment; the Lord remembers and gathers His people (10:7-12).

Seventeenth after Pentecost. The theme of divine judgments continues--in this chapter with the coming future judgment upon the nation of Israel. Judgment is announced in a dramatic manner with a command to Lebanon to open its doors for the judgment of fire (11:1-3). Then comes the distinctly Messianic prophecy of Israel's scornful rejection of the Good Shepherd by their offering Him a demeaning reward for His labors--but thirty pieces of silver (11:4-14). Their judgment is truly merited. This time judgment shall be executed by the foolish shepherd (11:15-17), who in the unfolding of previous prophecies became the fourth of the great anti-Kingdom-of-God kingdoms--the Roman Empire.

Eighteenth after Pentecost. The final three chapters (12-14) contain the burden against Israel. The chapter division is inexact, the section for this Sunday being 12-13:6. The previous chapter revealed judgment to come upon the nation. But what of the Kingdom whose history was intertwined with that of the nation of Israel? The Kingdom would be victorious, for "the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (12:1-9). But more important--Israel would gain victory over her sins when "they will look on Me whom they have pierced." That victory would be followed by sanctification effected by the fountain that would be opened in the house of David

(12:10-13:6).

Nineteenth after Pentecost. This is the final section of the book (13:7-14:21). We take as a theme the concluding triumphant cry of Obadiah, "The Kingdom shall be the Lord's!" The Shepherd-Messiah appears to purge His people through His death (13:7-9). The Day of the Lord shall be a day of deliverance for His people. The picture is dramatic with the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives fighting for His people (14:1-5). There follows one of the favorite images of the prophets--that of life-giving water flowing for the benefit of the people (14:6-11). Judgment falls upon the enemies of His people (14:12-15), a remnant of the Gentiles is won over (14:16-19), and holiness is restored (14:20-21). Thus Zechariah concludes his book with a brief summary of prophetic themes that all of the prophets treat, each in his own manner. The book that began with a call to repentance ends with the reassurance that the Lord shall return to and for His people.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY SERIES: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

34. Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 1

"RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU!"

I. Vision of the Horses: The Kingdom is coming, for Jerusalem and the Temple will be rebuilt!

II. Vision of the Horns: The Kingdom is coming, for all opposing kingdoms will be destroyed!

Lection - Book of Haggai

35. Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 2

"RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU!"

Vision of the Measuring Line: The Kingdom is coming--in a more glorious way than anyone expects!

I. Jerusalem shall become a world city, extending over the holy land.

II. The Lord will be both a wall of fire about Jerusalem and will dwell within her.

III. Gentile nations will be changed from enemies of the Lord's people to being joined to the Lord.

IV. All this is guaranteed by the fact that the Lord of Hosts will send the Angel of the Lord--His Son--to achieve it.

Lections: OT - Psalm 72

Epistle - Romans 15:7-13

Gospel - Luke 24:44-49

36. Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 3

"RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU!"

Vision of the High Priest: The Kingdom is coming --glorious in forgiveness/righteousness!

I. O Israel, don't despair of the grace and mercy of the Lord because of your own sinfulness!

II. O Israel, My grace and mercy will effect a once-for-all-time removal of sin by My Servant, THE BRANCH!

Lections: OT - Isaiah 1:16-20

Epistle - Romans 3:21-26

Gospel - John 8:2-11

37. Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 4

"RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU!"

Vision of the Lampstand and Olive Trees: The Kingdom is coming--"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit!"

I. The Nation of Israel was to be the light to the nations, but failed in its calling despite the power of the Spirit.

II. The Israel of God (the Church) is the light for the nations through her Priest-King by the power of His Spirit.

Lections: OT - Exodus 25:31-32; 27:20-21

Epistle - Revelation 1:9-20

Gospel - John 8:12

38. Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 5

"RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU!"

The Kingdom is coming--with judgment upon the wicked!

- I. Vision of the Flying Scroll: The curse will pursue and destroy the sinners.
- II. Vision of the Woman in a Basket: Wickedness will be removed from God's people to Shinar.

Lections: OT - Exodus 20:1-6

Epistle - Revelation 19:17-21

Gospel - John 5:16-23

39. Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 6

"RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU!"

The Kingdom is coming--guaranteed by the coming of the Priest-King!

- I. Vision of the Four Chariots: The Lord through His chariots of wind would bring judgment/salvation to the north country and so give His Spirit rest.
- II. MR. BRANCH, the Priest-King, would come to build His Temple and to rule.

Lections: OT - Psalm 110

Epistle - Acts 13:42-52

Gospel - John 19:17-22

40. Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 7

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM ARE NOT TO SERVE THE KING WITH SELF-MADE WORKS, BUT ARE TO LIVE OBEDIENTLY IN FAITH AND LOVE!

- I. "Should I weep and fast?" (1-3)
- II. "Did you really fast for Me?" (4-7)
- III. "Execute true judgment . . ." (8-10)
- IV. "But they refused; I scattered them!" (11-14)

Lections: OT - Isaiah 58:3-9a

Epistle - Colossians 2:18-23

Gospel - Matthew 15:1-9

41. Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 8

THE KINGDOM OF GOD CAME, ACCORDING TO PROPHECY, AT THE FIRST COMING OF CHRIST AND CONTINUES TO COME IN AND THROUGH THE CHURCH.

WE REJECT AS RELIGIOUS FICTION THE BELIEF THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD SHALL COME, ACCORDING TO PROPHECY, AT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST WHEN THE NATION OF ISRAEL IS TO BE GLORIOUSLY RESTORED FOR THE MILLENNIUM.

Lections: OT - Micah 4:1-5
 Epistle - Revelation 20:1-10
 Gospel - Matthew 21:33-44

42. Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 9

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE: THE KINGDOM WILL BE GLORIFIED IN ISRAEL BUT IN LOWLINESS.

- I. The Kingdom will be enlarged by the entering of the Gentiles after judgment falls upon them. (1-8)
- II. The King will come in lowliness; He shall proclaim peace to the nations amidst the lowliness of Israel. (9-10)
- III. The Kingdom, though lowly, shall always triumph, for the Lord fights for it. (11-17)

Lections: OT - Psalm 45:1-9
 Epistle - Philippians 2:5-11
 Gospel - Luke 23:33-37; Matthew 28:18

43. Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 10

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE: THE KINGDOM MARCHES VICTORIOUSLY ON THROUGH JUDGMENTS!

- I. Judgment befalls the Lord's people when they turn from Him. (1-2)
- II. Judgment overtakes those who are the instruments of judgment upon His people. (3-6)
- III. Judgment never destroys mercy, for the Lord remembers and gathers His people. (7-12)

Lections: OT - Jeremiah 23:21-29
 Epistle - Revelation 18:1-8
 Gospel - Matthew 4:12-17

44. Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 11

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE: JUDGMENT SHALL FALL ON ISRAEL!

- I. Judgment shall again fall upon the land of Israel. (1-3)
- II. That judgment shall be merited because Israel shall reject the Good Shepherd. (4-14)

III. That judgment shall come when Israel shall be given over to the foolish shepherd. (15-17)

Lections: OT - Daniel 9:24-27

Epistle - 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

Gospel - Luke 19:41-44

45. Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 12-13:6

THE KINGDOM IN ISRAEL SHALL YET GAIN THE VICTORY!

I. Over her enemies through strength in the Lord. (12:1-9)

II. Over her sins through penitence and sanctification. (12:10-13:6)

Lections: OT - Obadiah 17-21

Epistle - Acts 13:26-39

Gospel - John 20:19-23

46. Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Zechariah 13:7-14:21

"THE KINGDOM SHALL BE THE LORD'S!"

I. The Lord's death causes the purging of His people. (13:7-9)

II. The Lord delivers Jerusalem, His people, from their enemies. (14:1-5)

III. The Lord creates life-giving water for His people. (14:6-11)

IV. The Lord brings judgment upon the enemies of His people. (14:12-15)

V. The Lord wins the remnant of the nations for His Kingdom. (14:16-19)

Lections: OT - Isaiah 66:5-13

Epistle - Romans 11:17-26

Gospel - John 10:14-18

Paul F. Nolting

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