

The Synopsis

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1 THE REVELATION

1.1 Chapter 2

We may now enter on the series of particular assemblies; but briefly, in connection with the whole structure of the book, rather than entering into the instructive details, which I have done elsewhere in a series of lectures. The first great fact is, that the assembly in this world is subject to judgment, and to have its whole existence and place before God as light-bearer in the world set aside; secondly, that God will do this if it departs from its first spiritual energy. This is an immense principle. He has set the assembly to be a true witness of what He has manifested in Jesus; of what He is when Jesus is gone on high. If it be not this, it is a false witness, and it will be set aside. God may have patience, and has blessedly so. He may propose to her to return to her first love, and does; but, if this do not take place, the candlestick is removed, the assembly ceases to be God's light-bearer in the world. The first estate must be maintained, or God's glory and the truth are falsified; and the creature must be set aside. But no mere unsustained creature does this, none as such. Hence all fails and is judged, save as in, or upheld by, the Son of God, the second Man. Ephesus had gone on well in maintaining consistency, but that forgetfulness of self and thinking only of Christ, which are the firstfruits of grace, were gone. As heretofore remarked, there were works of labour and patience; but the faith, hope, and love had in their true energy disappeared. They had rejected the pretension of false teachers, and laboured and not fainted. All that can be said of them is said to shew Christ's love, and that He is not forgetful of them, or of the good manifested in them. Still they had left their first love; and this unless repented of and the first works done, involved the taking away of the candlestick.

Another important principle is found here, that when the assembly had departed from faithfulness, when collectively it had ceased to be the expression of the love in which God has visited the world, God throws back individuals on the word of God for themselves: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." The assembly is judged, and thus cannot be the security for faith; the individual is called to hear what the Spirit says. The warning of taking away the candlestick here is specially worthy of notice, because

there was a great deal the Lord highly approved of—encouraged them by shewing He did; but, for all that, if first love was departed from, the candlestick would be removed.

The character of Christ and promises are general, as the assembly is characteristic of the whole principle on which the assembly stands. Christ has the stars in His right hand and walks amidst the candlesticks. It is not a special character applicable to a special state, but the whole bearing of His position in the midst of the assemblies. The assembly, viewed as having left its first love, is never promised anything. It cannot direct a believer when it comes under reproof and judgment itself. The promise is then to the individual overcomer: a very important principle. The promise given to him that overcomes is the general one—is the contrast to Adam's ruin, but in a higher and better way than that in which he enjoyed the good which he lost. He that overcomes shall eat of the tree of life. But this is not the tree of life in man's paradise in this world, but the paradise of God Himself. We must remark, too, that it is not as the first Adam now, individually keeping one's first estate, but overcoming. And what is before us to overcome in is, not only the world and its hostilities (though that may be), but within the sphere of the assembly itself. It is the call to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies which gives occasion to the speaking of overcoming. This, in respect of the claim of the assembly to be heard, is an immensely important truth. The message is addressed to the assembly, not by it to individuals, and she is warned of her delinquency, and the individual saint is called to overcome.

The word to Smyrna is short. Whatever the malice and power of Satan, at the utmost, if permitted, he has but the power of death. Christ is First and Last, beyond as before death, God Himself; but more than that, has met and gone through its power. The saints were not to fear. Satan would work, be allowed to sift, to imprison. Let the saints only be faithful to the extreme point of his power; all beyond was beyond him, was Christ's; and the faithful one would receive from Him the crown of life. Tribulation, poverty, the contempt of those who pretended to have the legitimate hereditary claim to be God's people—always the persecutors, be they Jews or Christians was the portion of the assembly here; and God suffered it. It was really mercy to the declining assembly. Their hope was beyond it all when Christ gave the crown of life. This made the assembly, sliding into the world, or about to do it insensibly through decline of its first love, sensible that the world was in Satan's hands—was not the rest of saints. But, if the Lord permitted, He limited, the tribulation. All was in His hands. Not only was there the crown for the sufferers, but whoever overcame, his portion was secure: the death of judgment, the second death, would not hurt him.

We now need a closer judgment. Christ appears as the One having the two-edged sword of the word proceeding out of His mouth. It will be remarked here, that, in Smyrna and Pergamos, a special character of Christ applies to a special state. There is no general result for the assembly. In Ephesus we have Christ's position as Judge in the midst of the candlesticks, and the assembly threatened with removal from its place of witness upon earth. In Thyatira He

takes His place as Son of God, Son over His own house, and, as things are (as to the assembly) got to the worst, is revealed in all-piercing and immutable judgment, and the whole blessing of the new state is promised to the overcomer. In Pergamos we have faithfulness found in its previous path, Christ's name and faith held fast in spite of persecution. It differs from Philadelphia, that His word is not said to be held fast as that of Christ's patience (that the assembly, in its Pergamos state, did not do), but it did hold fast the confession of Christ in the midst of persecution. But another kind of evil came in—seduction to fall in with the world's ways by evil teaching within. The doctrine of Balaam was there. Idolatry flowed in. There were also sects within, which taught pretended sanctity but evil practice. These the Lord would judge.

The general truth of removing the candlestick had no place here, neither as a general truth, when the assembly could be called on to keep its first love, nor as fiery judgment, because it was gone wholly astray; but there were corrupters, and Christ's servants were led into idolatry and evil. Individual approbation by Christ, communion with Himself in future blessing (in spirit then), as the once humbled and rejected One (which the assembly was ceasing to be), a name given by Christ, and so of tenderness on His part, a link known only to him who had it. In a word, individual association and individual blessing of secret delight—this was the promise to the overcomer when corruption was advancing, not yet dominant and unhindered in the assembly.

In Thyatira the assembly reaches to the close. There was found, in what Christ owned in this state of things, increasing devotedness. But Jezebel was allowed; and both connection with the world, idolatry, and children begotten to it in the assembly itself. All would be judged, great tribulation fall on Jezebel, and her children be killed. Christ searched the heart and reins, and applied judgment in unchangeable righteousness. The faithful ones of this epoch, the "you" that Christ specially addresses, are but a "rest," a remnant, but specially and growingly devoted. It is, we may remark here, what the assemblies are towards Christ, which is especially in view. What Jezebel did towards the faithful ones is not noted. The Lord's coming is the time looked to; and the whole millennial blessing is promised to him that overcomes; both to reign with Christ, and Christ the Morning Star Himself. "He that hath an ear" is now put after the overcoming; not said in connection with the assembly, but with those who overcome in it. The state is the state characterised by this. Thyatira may go on to the end, but does not characterise the witness of God to the end; other states must be brought in to do that. It is, I have no doubt, the Popery of the middle ages, say to the Reformation; Romanism itself goes on to the end. The judgment on Jezebel is final. The Lord had given her space to repent, and she had not repented. It would be a forced association with those whom she had once seduced to the ruin of them all. The whole character here is piercing judgment according to God's own nature and requirements; special trial and judgment, yet the blessing not special, but the portion of the saints at large in that which they have with Christ; as the departure and judgment were complete—adultery, not merely failure in first love.