

John - Commentaries by William (Bill) Prost

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Grace and Truth

“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa. 85:10).

In this our concluding article on the ways of God, we will consider grace and truth and some of the applications that flow from these two things. In the Old Testament, neither grace nor truth was fully known. As we have stated previously, God was only partially revealed in the Old Testament, and thus man was under law. It was the only way to govern fallen man, and he failed miserably under it. But “the law has been our tutor up to Christ” (Gal. 3:24 JND). Now that God has sent His Son into the world, grace and truth have come by Him.

Surely here we find two things that only God can bring together. Grace is the unmerited favor of God, and our blessed Saviour showed fully the heart of God in His pathway through this world. But grace could not be shown at the expense of God’s holiness. Man was a sinner, and the claims of God’s holy nature had to be met. Every believer realizes with joy how that all of this was fully met at the cross of Christ. All the claims of God’s holy nature were satisfied by the work of Christ, allowing God to come out in perfect grace to sinful man. Surely only God could have devised such a plan in His eternal counsels, whereby mercy and truth could meet together and righteousness and peace could kiss each other. Well might we exclaim with the Apostle, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

Yet how difficult it seems for us to grasp the full import of this! God is now dealing with man in grace, yet perfectly in keeping with truth, and we cannot understand one properly without the other. True grace will never be at the expense of truth, and truth can be known fully only in the presence of grace. Yet only God could reconcile these at the cross, and only in God’s presence can we as creatures reconcile these things in our lives.

Left to himself, man will always emphasize one at the expense of the other. If grace is not properly understood, man will turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 4) and use his Christian liberty as an occasion to the flesh (Gal. 5:13). All kinds of fleshly excesses will be allowed in the name of grace, even to the point of excusing a sinful walk on the ground that all has been covered by the blood of Christ. May our souls rightfully shrink in horror from such a thought!

If truth is emphasized without grace, man will tend to go back under law, and even the highest truth of Christianity will tend to become something that is ministering to the flesh. Pride will come in, and instead of carrying out the exhortations of Scripture in the new life by the power of the Spirit of God, we will attempt to walk as Christians in the energy of the flesh. It is impossible to learn Christ legally, and doctrines separated from Christ only wither the vitality of the soul. The higher the truth contended for, the more sorrowful will be the results when it is pressed legally.

What is the answer then? Once again, we find that Scripture drives us back to the Source of it, when we attempt to understand it and walk practically in the truth. Only in looking to Christ can grace and truth be properly appreciated and brought together. Scripture says, “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Another translation of the Bible (J. N. Darby’s) uses the word “subsists” instead of “came,” for grace and truth not only commenced to be in this world, but also continue by Jesus Christ. Although it is difficult to render in our English translation, the verb “came” is in the singular in the original Greek, showing how grace and truth go together as one in the Person of Christ. Only by our walking in communion with Him can they come together in our own lives.

Related to this is the whole question of sectarianism and looseness, or separation and the recognition of the whole body of Christ. Separation from the world is always necessary for the believer, and many scriptures teach us the importance of the Christian’s being separate from this world. Through the cross of Christ the world has been crucified unto us and we unto the world (Gal. 6:14). But separation is not isolation, and again man has gone to extremes in walking in this truth. Scripture says that we are in the world but not of the world (John 17:11,14). In their zealous efforts not to be of the world, some would virtually go out of the world, as, for example, those who live as hermits or in a monastery. Others, while not going to this extreme, are so careful to avoid any contact with people in the world that they are practically inaccessible. On the other hand, some who seek to reach those in the world with the gospel virtually become of the world, mingling with its sin and thus losing their godly testimony to it. Only by being in communion with the Lord can I be in the world but not of it. Our blessed Saviour could eat with publicans and sinners, yet never in any way was He identified with sin.

The question becomes even more difficult when separation from iniquity in other believers is necessary. Even before the apostles passed off the scene the church began to give up those blessed truths given to them from a risen Christ in glory. The church ceased to be the “house of God” and the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). In 2 Timothy 2:20 the house is referred to as a “great house,” no doubt because of the empty profession that had come into it, as well as the moral and ecclesiastical evil. Separation became necessary, not only from the world, but also from vessels to dishonor (2 Tim. 2:20-21). But although neither the church nor the body of Christ is mentioned in 2 Timothy (the one has failed, and the other is known only to the Lord), both still exist in this world. Thus we must balance the truth of separation with the necessity of continuing to recognize the whole body of Christ. As J. N. Darby said, “Satan is busy, seeking to lead us one side or the other:

to destroy the largeness of the unity of the body or to make it mean looseness in practice and doctrine. We must not fall into one in avoiding the other."

According to 2 Timothy 2:21, it is necessary for a man to "purge himself from these" (vessels to dishonor) if he is to be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work. But if the truth of separation is carried to an extreme without the recognition of the whole body of Christ, it will make me legal, harsh, sectarian and narrow-minded. On the other hand, 2 Timothy 2:22 tells us to "follow righteousness, faith, charity [love], peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." This is the recognition of the whole body of Christ and the recognition that God will preserve a collective testimony on that ground in spite of the failure. If this aspect of things is carried to an extreme, I will tend to have fellowship with a member of the body of Christ wherever I find him, without regard to his walk or his associations. The result will be that I will dishonor the Lord by condoning much that is contrary to His Word.

It is easy to see that I can emphasize separation by itself or the recognition of the whole body of Christ by itself, in the energy of the flesh. Not much exercise before the Lord or communion with Him will be required, and thus it will be a comparatively easy path. But to keep the two in proper balance I must be in communion with and in constant dependence on the Lord. It is this that makes the path much more difficult, although a most blessed one, for it is a path in the Lord's company and with the conscious sense of His approval. I can walk it only in the Lord's strength, and it is this that makes many throw up their hands and say, "It is no use. The pathway is too difficult today. I cannot go on any longer." While we surely would not minimize the difficulties in the path of faith, God gives the grace if we look to Him. He will never give us instruction in His Word without giving us the strength to carry it out.

It is noticeable that between these two exhortations are the words, "Flee also youthful lusts." This is not necessarily addressed to young people. The phrase "youthful lusts" can apply to all of us. Another has made the remark that he feared worldliness more than he feared bad doctrine among the people of God. While bad doctrine is surely serious, it is not so subtle as worldliness, and thus worldliness is to be feared the more. Generally when we are unable to carry out these exhortations before the Lord, or when we complain that we have no strength to do so, it is because we have allowed something of self and our lusts to go unjudged before the Lord, and thus our hearts are not free to go to the Lord for His strength. May the Lord preserve us from this in a world that is becoming more wicked and more materialistic as time goes on!

Time and space fail us to consider all of the various things in Scripture that must be kept in balance in communion with the Lord. We have mentioned self-esteem in the first article, in that the dignity of man as being created in the image and likeness of God must be balanced against his utter ruin in the fall. Many others come to mind, such as the responsibility to submit to our elders or guides versus individual responsibility before the Lord.

In reading the Word of God, we will find continually that we must go back to the Lord Himself in order to lay hold of these precious truths and walk in them before Him. Through His Word, may the Lord become ever more precious to us, and may our hearts bow in adoration and praise as we learn more of Him and His ways!

W. J. Prost

Editor's note: There are three other articles available in this series. They may be found in the March, April and May 1997 issues of the Christian Shepherd.

Chicago Conference: 1989, Overcoming

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I have been particularly impressed in the last little while. With that word overcomer. Overcomer. And I'd like to speak a little bit this afternoon from the Word of God on the subject of overcoming. Let's turn first to John's Gospel, chapter 16. John's Gospel chapter 16, and we'll read just the last few verses. John's Gospel chapter 16, verse 31. Jesus answered them. Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh. Yeah, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world, you know that word overcome has the sense of gaining a victory. And I believe we have here in the Word of God the blessed truth that our Lord Jesus Christ has already gained the victory for us. Satan is a defeated foe, The Lord Jesus. We know when he was tempted of the devil in the early part of his pathway down here, answered the devil with the word of God, and he was from that point powerless against the Lord Jesus. He bound the strongman, as it were. For then the Lord Jesus we know went to that cross of Calvary, and there we know that through death. He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to *****. And you know, it's very precious to my soul to see that the Lord Jesus in this precious Upper Room ministry just before he went to the cross, gives particular encouragement to his own. And you know, just to make a little remark here, we find the subject of overcoming spoken of primarily in John's ministry. You don't get it so much in Paul's ministry, although the word is mentioned, but you don't find it so much it's characteristic of John's ministry. And so you have the overcoming mentioned in John's gospel, you haven't mentioned in John's epistle, and you have it mentioned in the book of Revelation all three of those broad categories of John's ministry we find overcoming mentioned. Why is that? Well, I've wondered in my own soul why it is, and I'll just pass this subject or this remark on to you. Especially to our beloved young people. And, you know, I don't think our brother Yule Ton, who's sitting here will mind my mentioning this, but he mentioned this dear brother Sammy Razor last night in the prayer meeting in Addison. And he mentioned him as being a young brother. But then he told us how old he was, and he was older than I am. So that made me feel good. So maybe we can all take this subject to heart, because it's not just for the so-called young people in the sense that we usually think of it. I need it. We all need it. And I say again, I believe it's characteristic of John's ministry for this reason. That Paul gives us the truth of the church in which everything is displayed. The purposes of God from eternity to eternity. The Church of God and all God's purposes concerning it. And everything connected

with it. But John speaks more of the family of God. John brings before us more of the family of God. And you know, to be an overcomer, it is not a question of how much truth I hold or how I should I. Let me correct that. It's not a question of how much truth I know. It's how much I walk in what I do know. And so what we have in John's ministry is the new life. Encounter distinction to the old nature, the family of God, and contrast distinction to the family of the devil. And I use that word advisedly because if you don't belong to Christ, you're living under the authority of the God and Prince of this world, the devil. And those two are contrasted in John's ministry. So the question of overcoming is more a question of the enjoyment of my position as a child of God and my living in the truth.

That God has given me not a question of how much I know. I say that because there's sometimes a tendency in those of us who are younger to think that we can't go on in the same way as the older ones. And we sometimes read the ministry and listen to the ministry of those giants in the truth who perhaps are older than we are, and perhaps those who went before us. And we say, my, I could never get a grasp on something like that. Well, I don't say that you can't, because with God's help, I believe we can. We may not be able to give it out in that way, but there's no such thing as a gift in taking in the truth of God. But I say this that overcoming is not connected with how much I know, but with how much I walk in of that which I do know. Notice here then in John's gospel we find overcoming spoken of, and it seems to me that there are some very precious thoughts here. We're going to go over to John's epistle in a few moments and then to the Book of Revelation and just make a few remarks about overcoming that I have been enjoying lately here. First of all, the Lord Jesus. Answers the. Remarks made by his disciples, how that they Well, let's read the verse. Verse 29 and 30. We probably should have read them to get the connection. His disciples said unto him, Lo now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee? By this we believe that thou cameest forth from God. And so there was perhaps, if we might say, a little confidence in the disciples, that they knew the Lord, and that they knew who the Lord was. And I'm thankful as I look around the room, that there are many here who know the Lord and know who the Lord is. And maybe you too, by the grace of God, as you sit in that seat, can say. Oh, I know who the Lord Jesus is. I know he's the Son of God. I know He's my savior. I know that God has set him up on high as head over all things. But with that knowledge alone, keep them. Know the Lord Jesus has to speak to their consciences, and say, Do ye now believe? Oh, he says, the hour is coming, His end is now come, when ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall lead me alone. O beloved young people, I tell you from personal experience, it's not how much you know up here that keeps you, it's how much you enjoy down here. It's not what I eat which nourishes my body, it's what I digest. And is made good to me. It's not what I know of the truth that keeps me going on. It's how much I enjoy in my own soul and walk in. And so the Lord Jesus, as it were said, don't don't think that you've arrived if I might use that expression, because shortly you're all going to be scattered. But then he gave them the secret of overcoming. What does he say? And shall leave me alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father. Is with me. Our blessed Savior had to go on his way to the cross alone and we don't need to go over that account again because you all know how that the Lord was forsaken by everyone, literally everyone, even those disciples who were nearest and dearest to them to him. They forsake him. But yet he says I am not alone because the Father is with me. You know, if you're going to be an overcomer in this world, you may have to go it alone. And yet you are not alone because first of all, you can say along with the Lord Jesus, the Father is with me. And then you have the blessed promise of that one. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. You will never be alone the way the Lord Jesus was, because He has promised to. With you, but you may see everyone else on whom you may have depended. Fall away from you and so it has to be a pathway of individual overcoming. I'm not sure that overcoming is spoken of in a collective sense. It's spoken of in an individual sense. And we can be thankful for other overcomers who are an encouragement and help to us. But never forget, it has come down to the end of a dispensation, when overcoming is characterized by individual faithfulness, not necessarily by collective faithfulness. And so the Lord Jesus could only fall back on that blessed communion with his Father. But yet he says, I am not alone, but the Father is with me.

Then he goes on to say in verse 33, These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. Oh, I love that peace. Does he mean the peace that comes as we get it in Romans 5 and one, Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, I'm sure that's included, but I feel that the peace here goes deeper than that. It's like. What the Lord says in the 14th chapter, where He says, My peace I give unto you. It was that peace on the one hand that accepted every possible circumstance from His Father, and that in return took every difficulty to the Father, seeking from Him that guidance as the perfect dependent man to walk the pathway down here. Oh, the Lord Jesus has left you, beloved young people, and me, a legacy of peace. Isn't that something my peace I leave with you, he says. And here he says that she might have peace. You know, these are days of pressure and hurry. I don't know how it is with some of you young people, but I know some young people that have a rough time sometimes. I know the pressures that you run into at school, pressures that I never had to face, pressures of mountains of work, perhaps, that you scarcely know how to cope with, pressures of persecution and difficulty that I never had to encounter in the days, perhaps when there was a little more respect for the name of God and for the question of what was right and proper before the Lord, I never had to encounter some of that. Peace. The Lord Jesus wants you to have peace in your soul. He wants you to have peace, but how can you have it? Oh, in the world ye shall have tribulation, he says. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Isn't that blessed? And so I just suggest to you, if we could perhaps speak of it in this way, these verses bring before us aspect of overcoming, and that is the individual enjoyment of Christ and the abiding in His love and in the love of the Father. Isn't that blessed? You know what we're never spoken of as being in the Father. The Lord Jesus could say I am in the Father and the Father in me, but we're spoken of as being in Christ and he and us and by our relationship with him. We enjoy that love with the Father. We are complete in him. Oh, what I long for my own soul, as I long for your soul is a deeper enjoyment of all of that blessed. And the realizing that he walked the pathway alone and that he's gained the victory already for us. And that now we have by grace only to follow him in that same pathway. Turn over now to First John Chapter 5. Well, we'll read some from chapter two. First of all, because it's connected. Read from chapter 2 and then from chapter 5. Chapter 2 of 1 John and verse 12. I write unto you, little children, or as it should read simply, children, because it's addressed to all the children of God here. I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known Him, that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. There's the word again. I write unto you, little children, and hear. It's correct, little children, because it has the sense of those who are babes in Christ, because ye have known the Father. But notice the next verse I have written unto you, Fathers, because you have known him, that is from the beginning. Same thing I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you. And ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loved the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world, and the world passeth away in the lust thereof. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

Isn't that blessed? We'll read in the 5th chapter in a moment or two, but just to comment on this. First of all, I would just say this, that in John we have him writing. We have his writing 3 broad categories. We have the Gospel of John. We have the Epistles of John. And we have the

Book of Revelation. And I might just mention it was a help to me as a young brother to see this and I pass it on. That we could categorize John's ministry in this way. The Gospel of John is eternal life come down to earth. In the person of Christ, John's epistles are the blessed consequences for those who accept that Blessed One is Savior and who have that eternal life. The revelation is the awful consequences for those who have rejected him and do not have eternal life. And so here we have in John's epistle something perhaps added to, if we could put it that way, what we have in John's Gospel. In John's gospel, it was the enjoyment of Christ himself. In all that he is. On an individual basis, but here we have the overcoming in connection with being strong and the word of God abiding in us. And I think it's particularly noticeable here that three categories are suggested. He writes to the fathers and those I believe are the fathers spiritually, those who have perhaps that more mature knowledge and what characterizes them in both cases. You have known the Father. Nothing beyond that, nothing beyond the knowledge of the Father. But what about the young men? And think of this. And it's not only young men. I believe it's young sisters too. But what characterizes them? Oh, it says you have overcome the wicked one. But then in the second verse that we read, verse 14, it tells how and why. Because you are strong. And you have the word of God abiding in you. Isn't that blessed? I think that's a particular voice to you young brothers. You know, it's not that we can boast and say, well, I'm strong enough. I can overcome the wicked one. No, we'll sing a hymn at the end which I have in mind, which reads like this. By meekness and defeat He won the Mead and crown, trod all our foes beneath his feet by being trodden down. And it's only in His strength that we can overcome. But if that precious word is abiding in us, then I believe we can count not on our own strength, but on His strength. You know we have the word of God referred to as the sword of the Spirit. In Ephesians 6, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. A brother in our home assembly made a remark once which I have never forgotten. He told how that in a meeting many, many years ago. There was a brother. By the name of Mr. Fleck, who sat in that meeting and asked the question, What is the sword of the Spirit? And someone said it's the word of God and he said. Yes, you're right, but it's more than that, he said. It's the word of God that you have read. And made your own and walked in. He said, that's the sword of the Spirit. Beloved young people, you can't have the sword of the Spirit unless you walk in what you read. And so let me get very basic. Let me encourage you to read the Word of God for yourself. Never let anything take the place of reading the Word of God because it is the way that the truth is brought before us and it's the only way that it can enter. It takes the Spirit of God to do it, but the Spirit can't bring the Word before me if I don't read it. Oh, but then what do I do? Oh, may I walk in the good of it? I said it before, but I'll say it again. Overcoming and victory in this world is not characterized by how much I know, but by how much I walk and what I do know. But the more I have in the things of God, the more I want. And you know what's the opposite of natural things? Because if I go to the table over here at noon hour and eat the good food that is prepared, I get full and I don't want anymore. Whereas at least this is the way it works with me. Anyway, if I have to miss a meal, I feel like making up for it on the next one. But you know, in the things of God. May I suggest you that it works the opposite way? The more I have, the more I want. And the more I neglect the things of the Lord, the less I want. So that once I start neglecting the things of the Lord, pretty soon what we have in these next few verses starts to take over.

The world, the things that are in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. And pretty soon I don't seem to want those things of the Lord anymore. Maybe I could be even more practical. And I hope that I may be forgiven if this remark offends anyone. But it shouldn't. It's wonderful to read the word of God for yourself. But it's wonderful to be at the assembly meeting where the Word of God is read, because there I get the rough edges knocked off me. There I get the wrong thoughts that I may have had about the passage straightened out. There I get the complete thoughts presented by other brothers that add to what I have so that I get rounded out. I tend to be a little warped if all I do is read on my own and never have the fellowship of my brethren, because no matter how much. Might read None of us knows it all. I was reading just the other day a remark made by one of our old brothers in the last century. And he was quoting someone else and this was the remark he made. Someone said to him, you make a great deal of going to an assembly meeting. His answer was, I cannot make too much of being where my blessed Lord is in the midst. Isn't that blessed? By the grace of God, dear young people, I can stand here and say I have found it so to my own soul. And I know there are many here who would say the same thing. Never let the pressures of work, the pressures of school, and I know what they are. Believe me, I do. But never let it interfere with what we have here. Otherwise you won't be able to be an overcomer, you won't be able to be strong, you won't be able to meet the enemy. And as someone has said, suddenly you'll need the sword of the Spirit and you find yourself fumbling for it, and you can't find it because you haven't been using it regularly. And so here we have the Word of God brought before us. But as we said a moment ago, there's a warning here. Oh, there's a world out there that wants to rob us of all of that. And I suppose, I suppose there never was a tug on our souls and on our hearts more than there is today. And I want you to know that I stand here not necessarily having learned all that I say to you. I say it to my own heart just as much because the world has at least as much a tug on my heart as it does on yours, and quite possibly even more. There is a world out there that holds out all its attractions for us. And there are opportunities today for young people, perhaps at least in these favored lands that have never existed before. And if you have any ability at all, at any ambition? And any, shall we say, get up and go as the world says, oh, there are opportunities out there to go into all of these things. Well, I don't say that the Christian shouldn't work hard. The Scripture tells us to do that. I don't say that the Christian shouldn't necessarily have a good job. The Lord gives you a good job. You can be thankful for it. But where is my heart? The Lord Jesus could say where your treasure is. There will your heart be also. He didn't say where your treasure is. There should your heart be? He said where it is, there will your heart be. Is my treasure down here? Is my objective to have things down here? Then that's where my heart is. Is my treasure up there? Then that's where my heart is. How blessed to have that treasure up there. And you know, we need to take the long range of you. And perhaps they may speak plainly, because I have seen many not so young either. I don't mean just young people, but I have seen many who have, as we said here a moment ago, neglected the word of God, neglected that personal enjoyment of the Lord, neglected their heavenly portion, and then instead of being an overcomer, they had been overcome by the world. The Lord Jesus could say I have overcome the world, but oh how many I can think of at this very time. And I say it with fear and trembling, because my own heart is no better. Who? Have not been able to overcome who have allowed the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life in some way, shape or form to take hold of their souls. And so the things that are not seen, which are eternal, tend to be forgotten, and the things which are seen that the apostle Paul says are temporal, tend to have first place in their lives. Oh, how solemn, because it says here the world passeth away, or is passing away.

Might more accurately read, and the lust thereof. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. I can remember several years ago sitting down with a young man. And he told me a lot about all his ambitions and all the things he wanted to do. He had a good deal of ability. He had a fairly good job for someone who was only in his late teens. And he had all kinds of ideas of where he was going to go and how he would be the youngest manager in that particular company for the whole area and how he expected to go on from there to hire things. And after he finished it all, I addressed him by name and said, you know, that's all very good. And you know that I'm glad to see someone who works hard. The word of God tells us that. But I said, where is it all going to go when you sit down before the judgment seat of Christ? He was a believer.

He knew the Lord as his Savior. I said, where is it all going to go? And more than that, even before that time, where are the Lord's things and where are his interests going to be in all of what you've. Saying to me, well, he kind of sat there, he didn't say anything, kind of hung his head a bit and then he changed the subject. Well, it's very sad. I won't go into the history of that young man, but he's not an overcomer today. He's not an overcomer. He's been overcome. Which is it going to be? Let's turn over to the Book of Revelation now. Revelation is primarily a book of judgment. As we said a moment ago, it's the awful consequences for those who reject that eternal life which came down to earth. But you know, Peter tells us that judgment begins at the House of God. And so we find in Revelation chapters 2:00 and 3:00. That God, before he takes on the judgment of this world, the Lord Jesus Christ walks in the midst of the candlesticks, and he tells what he sees. And those candlesticks that we have, those seven churches in Revelation 2 and three, as perhaps many of us are aware, were actual assemblies that existed in that day and age. But I believe the Spirit of God has put them together in the particular order in which they occur. In order to bring before us what we might call a panoramic history of the Church of God down through the ages. And so we have Ephesus, the condition of the church. Shortly after the apostles left the scene where they had left their first love. Everything outwardly OK, but then having left their first love, the Lord addresses them. But there was no turn around of the state of things. So then we have Sardis, and there you find a period of persecution in the second and third centuries that occurred under the Roman Empire. Terrible persecution. Why did the Lord allow it? Oh, he allowed it in order to recall the Church to its heavenly calling. Was it effective? Oh, many wonderful tales of faithfulness during that time, things which I commend all of you to read. But it didn't result in a turn around. The devil was trying to stamp out Christianity, but he couldn't succeed in that way, so he tried a different tack and it was all too successful. And under Pergamos, which would speak perhaps of the beginning of the era under the Emperor Constantine in the year 330 AD, we find that instead of Christianity being persecuted as a religion, and instead of Christians being hounded to death and thrown to the lions in the Coliseum and so on. We find that here was one who outwardly embraced Christianity, and so it became the religion of the Empire. By infiltrating and connecting the church with the world where he couldn't succeed. By open and outright persecution. Well, once again God makes a call to the overcomer, and no doubt there were overcomers in Ephesus and in Sardis and in Pergamos. But once Pergamos had come to the scene and once there had been no turn around there, then we might say it and say it reverently. God said there's no hope to turn the situation around. I am going to speak only to the overcomer now. I'm not going to expect that the church as a body will turn around and come back to where it was at the beginning. I'm going to speak only to the overcomer because each of those next.

Churches, all characteristic of certain things, I believe, go on to the end until the Lord comes. Thyatira. I'm sorry, I said sorry to secondly, I meant Smyrna. They both begin with an S and I got them mixed up. The second church where the persecution occurred is Smyrna. Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea all go on to the end. And so we're going to read what God says to the overcomer in each one of those because I suggest that there is a voice to each one of us, to your heart and to mine. Revelation chapter 2, then remember we're finished with Ephesus Smyrna. And pergamos, they have passed, and now God says, I'm going to speak only to the overcomer. And so that's why the word of encouragement, he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, is at the end of the dissertation. It's addressed only to the overcomer. I ask each one here as an individual to ask, do I want to be an overcomer by the grace of God? Revelation 2 and verse 25. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to Him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of a Potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father, And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Thyatira. Is the case where the church rules the world? It started up. Shortly after the era of Pergamos. Where instead of the Church courting the world as it did in the time of Constantine, it ruled the world. And for nearly 1000 years, the Church held sway over this world, at least outwardly. But what was the result? All kinds of evil crept in by that unholy alliance. And God addresses the overcomer here by saying that would she have already hold fast till I come? Oh, I say to you again, beloved young people, there is a danger of losing what we have. And how do we lose it? We lose it by not walking in it and when we're surrounded by so much evil. How easy it is to lose what we have. And the first passages we were talking about in John 16. And in first John, we find that we were talking about, first of all, the Lord Jesus Christ, and secondly, his word as overcoming the world. But here it's more a deeper thing because the world has become mixed in with the church and the church with the world. And so I suggest here it's a question not merely of overcoming the world, although that is the real. Bottom line, but it's overcoming that spiritual wickedness, it's overcoming that unholy alliance and all of those things that would drag us down in the religious and spiritual realm as well as in the world. Well, here we have He that overcometh verse 26 and keepeth my works under the end. Keepeth my works under the end. O how many there are who have started out well and who have not gone unfaithfully to the end. But God gives encouragement here, and he doesn't point us to any recovery in this world. He points us on to the end. Are you misunderstood in this world? There's a day coming when you're going to rule. Are you having to endure a lot of difficulty down here? The Lord Jesus says you will reign with me someday. And then he mentions the Morning Star for the first time in connection with the seven churches. The Lord's coming is mentioned, and you can't be an overcomer unless the coming of the Lord is bright before your eyes. And you know, as we get occupied with this world, we tend to lose the sense in our souls of the proper hope of the church, the Lord's coming. That's what went out the window, we might say, first of all, and then the church settled down to enjoy the world. But if the Lord's coming is before us as an ever present hope.

Then I believe it will give us that sense in our souls that we don't belong here. And that encouragement to go on in that day when we'll reign with him. Let's turn over now to Sardis. Chapter 3, Verse two. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. For I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember, therefore how thou hast received and heard. And hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment. And I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Oh, this is very searching. Sardis brings before us Protestantism, and we might make this remark that the Reformation was of God. Protestantism was not. The Reformation was a work of God, but what arose out of it? Oh, the Lord has to say, and we didn't read it, but in the first verse thou hast to name that thou live a standard dead. And oh, this is a very solemn thing to my own soul, when I think that there may well be those sitting right in this very room who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. What a solemn thought to be sitting in the place of privilege. Surrounded by others who are on their way to glory and waiting for the Lord's return. And yet deep down in your heart, perhaps you know and realize that if the Lord were to come right now. You would not go up to meet him. Oh, how solemn to have a name to live and yet to be dead, dead spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, as it says in Ephesians 2. But oh, here we have. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, which are ready to die. Oh, there are things which remain, and perhaps they might seem ready to die, but you know, I would encourage your heart to go on. If God has revealed something to you of his precious truth to walk in, oh, may I encourage you to walk in it. I may be perhaps forgiven if I tell a story

that concerns my father. I've told it before, but I think it's worth telling again. My father worked for a very wealthy man who has been gone now perhaps 15 or more. For years, and he was a very wealthy man, he owned a very nice farm not too far outside the city of Hamilton where I live. And as so often happens, as the city grew, it gradually came out and the surrounding farm started to be bought up for building. Well, I don't know how it is down here in the United States, but in our area at least, farming is not as profitable as it used to be, especially fruit farming. And this man, he only kept the farm basically as a hobby. His income came from other sources. And that farm didn't even pay the expenses that were involved in running it, but he ran it just the same. And he hung on a wood until every other farm surrounding his was bought up and built on. And one day he said to my father as we were sitting eating our lunch there in the summer. He said. Why do you go to that little meeting where you go? Why do you be bothered going there? Don't you think it would be just as well to give it up and go in with some larger group? Or go in with something else. Why do you bother hanging on to that? Well, Dad said, why do you hang on to this farm? Why do you hang on to it when every other farm around you is being built up upon and you're left like an island here in the middle? Why do you hang on to the place when it doesn't even pay expenses? Why didn't you sell out long ago? Oh, well, he said. You know very well that as all the other farms surrounding me are bought up and built on, the value of mine goes up. And when I do sell it, eventually I can command the highest price for it. Because it's surrounded by all the others that have been built up all, Dad said. It's the same with the truth of God. It's the same with the truth of God. If it weren't the truth of God, I would have given it up long ago. But if it is the truth of God, if anything, let me hang on to it all the tighter as I see it being given up by others around. That's that's what characterizes an overcomer. It's not one necessarily who goes out and boasts of great things know.

Nor was someone else has said how inappropriate in this day and age to boast of Greek things when the light from God's precious Word has revealed how little we have done. But by the on the other hand, individual faithfulness and what God has given us, I believe the Lord will reward in a coming day as we have here to walk in white before Him. What a blessed hope. All our time is nearly gone. Let's turn to Philadelphia verse 8. I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou hast a little strength, and has kept my word, and has not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogues of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not but to lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee, because thou hast kept the word of my patience. I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation. That's the tribulation. Which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is near Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God. And I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Oh, I wish we had more time to dwell on this, because I suggest to your heart and mind that there is no greater encouragement in the whole Bible than what we get here, no greater encouragement in the whole Bible than what we get in the address to Philadelphia. Oh, there's nothing to boast of, only a little strength. Despised and rejected, I believe that characterizes the recovery of the truth in the last century. And by the grace of God, I believe there will be a Philadelphia till the Lord comes. I wouldn't want to say that I was connected with it. I hope I am. But I do say that there will be a Philadelphia because each of the last four go on till the Lord comes. May it be the exercise of your heart and mind to want to be connected with it. I covet this place because it has the Lord's approval. And what characterizes them is what we've already had before us, kept His word and not denied His name. Oh, those two things never fail. And the Lord Jesus in John's gospel connected us with himself, and in John's epistle with His precious word. May we ever have those two things before. And so it says here. Behold, I come quickly. Oh, he doesn't just say I will give him the morning Star. The morning star he was going to give them. But now he says I come quickly. Oh, the time is getting closer and closer. But he says, hold that fast which thou hast that No man take thy crown. What does that mean? Take thy crown? How can someone take my crown? Oh, I suggest to you that it means this. That God is going to have those who are connected with Philadelphia when he comes. But if you and I will not be overcomers, if you and I succumb to the pressures around us, if you and I do not, by the grace of God, lay hold on. What God has given us, and if His precious truth does not lay hold of us, then God, as it were, is going to raise up someone else to do it. But you and I will be the losers. Oh, how solemn to think and how touching to think that in that coming day I may see someone else receiving a crown. That I might have received and hear my Savior say at the judgment seat of Christ. Bill, you could have. You could have had that crown too. You could have had that crown. But you didn't overcome. And now I'm giving it to someone else. Well, I say that very humbly. Here we have hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. And then the word of encouragement, Oh, I say again, there's no more better word of encouragement in the whole Bible. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God. I may not stand out as a pillar in this world. I may not stand out as a pillar in the religious world or in the Christian world. But if I'm part of this. I'm going to be a pillar in a coming day, the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem.

That cometh down out of heaven from my God. Oh, if you turn to Revelation chapter 21, you'll find that New Jerusalem described. And what is it? Oh, it's the bride of Christ. The bride of Christ. Oh, what a blessed thing it is to be part of the bride of Christ. And every Christian saved in this dispensation will be part of that bride. But oh, I believe there will be a special joy for those who have kept His word and have not. His name. And then it says I will write upon him my new name, Although that, that that goes beyond my mind. The only thing I can say about it is this, and that is that I wonder, I say it in that way, I wonder if his new name is the name of Son of Man. Because the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and we all know that he was always the Son of God, but he is Son of man, and the Son of man is perfect man and perfect God. He is there risen and at the Father's right hand, and he's going to be a man for all eternity that he might enjoy your. In mind and God is going to write his new name upon us. Well, I just suggest the thought. We don't know, but I wonder if that's the new name that is referred to here. Our time is nearly gone. Laodicea verse 17 or verse 15 perhaps? I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would though Wert cold or hot. So then because thou art Luke warm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth, because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear. And anoint thine eyes with oil, that thou mayest see as many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him, and will Sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father in his throne. Oh, you know, the worst state of all that a Christian can be in is to be. In a state where we don't realize what we really are. It's one thing to feel our weakness and to own it before the Lord. And no matter how weak we are, if we own our true state before the Lord, the Lord delights to come in and blessing, and He blesses according to our need. But if we pretend to be what we're not, oh, then the Lord has to occupy us with our failure before he can bless us and fill us with Christ. And yet that is what is characteristic of the last state of the church. A saying I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. Beloved brethren, that tendency is in my own heart, and

it's in all of our hearts if we're not careful. The tendency to think we're doing fine and then the Lord perhaps has to speak to us. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Oh, brethren, young people, the Lord is speaking to us in many ways. In ways that he perhaps has not done before in the same way. Serious ways, the Lord wants our ear. Is it because there is a Laodicean state that he is speaking about? I don't know. I know what my own heart is like though, and I know that God did not write these things merely for us to read and say, Well thank God that's not me. Oh no, Oh no, no. I believe there is a tendency here. And so he says, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Well, we know that could never happen to a true believer in Christ. I believe that that properly speaks of the false church that will be here after the true church. Home but I do suggest that the state of things that is spoken of here is equally abhorrent to God and not realizing our true state and are pretending to be what we're not. And if the Lord in his wondrous love to us rebukes and chastens. May we hear the word, may we listen to what he says to us. May we not say well have to go on these things happen, you know. Didn't happen to me. Oh no. As many as I love and rebuke and I rebuke and chase and be zealous therefore, and repent.

And oh, how blessed if any man hear my voice. Oh, it comes down to the individual. And by the grace of God, beloved young people, I've said this before, but I'll say it again. There is no reason why you, in these last years of the Church's history, cannot enjoy the Lord just as much in your own soul as the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John and others did right at the beginning of the dispensation. The collective testimony may be in ruins. We know it is. And we may all like the Apostle Paul on the voyage to my leader. The church may get to the glory to the shore just like his shipwreck. Someone boards and someone broken pieces of the ship, and so on. It may be a mess, but there's no reason why you can't enjoy the Lord individually just as much as anyone did at the beginning of the dispensation. God and the Word of His grace have not changed. And then there's the blessed encouragement. He that overcometh. Will I give to sit with me in my throne? Oh, you may be despised and rejected down here. You may be misunderstood by other young people, other Christians even. Never mind. There will come a day when it will be all worthwhile. Our time is gone, I said. We turn to one verse in one John 5, and I'd just like to read it. I, John. Chapter 5. And verse 41, John five and four. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Or may we have faith to lay hold on these things in order that each one of us might be an overcomer. Don't say I can't be an overcomer. I've heard more than one say that I can't do it. I can't do that. I can't be like this one or that one. Don't try and be like this one or that one. Try to be like that blessed one in the glory. He has walked the pathway for you. He has gained the victory. You have only to draw on His strength. It's all there for each one of us. Even in these difficult days.

Toledo Conference: 1981, Our Eyes on Christ

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Address—W.J. Prost

That verse How about the apostle, when he was writing to the Saints, could remind them that what he was going to tell them was nothing new. And he said for me it is not grievous and for you it is safe. And how our hearts need to have these things repeated and pressed on us. And so this afternoon, with God's help, I would like to consider. The importance of keeping our eye on Christ. First of all in our personal lives, then in our assembly life. Thirdly, in service for him and lastly, in the midst of difficulties and problems. Could we turn first of all, then, in connection with our personal life, to the 14th chapter of John John's Gospel, chapter 14? And verse 23. John's Gospel chapter 14 and verse 23. Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man loved me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him. And we will come under him and make our abode with him. Now just hold that place for a moment and turn over to Philippians chapter one for one short part of a verse there, Philippians chapter one. And verse 21. Just the first clause of the verse. For to me. To live is Christ. And then finally, in the 10th chapter of Luke's Gospel, Luke's Gospel chapter 10. And the last verse, verse 42. But one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. I have enjoyed in connection with the 14th chapter of John, as our brother brought out so beautifully in a reading meeting yesterday. But the thought there is joy through communion. A thought in the chapter that we have been considering, the 15th chapter is joy and fruit bearing. But before that comes the chapter where there is joy in communion. And you know, I'll tell you something, we get joy in the 14th chapter, we get it in the 15th chapter and we get it in the 16th chapter. But I have looked in vain for that word joy in the 14th chapter. And I have asked myself, why is it not there when communion with our Lord Jesus Christ is paramount? It mentions that in the 15th chapter about our joy being full in connection with fruit bearing. It mentions it in the 16th chapter when it's a question of answer of prayer. But in the 14th chapter we don't get it brought before us in that way. Well, may I suggest to you humbly that it means this, The verse that we read, that 23rd verse brings before us the desire of the Lord Jesus to make His abode with us. He doesn't mention joy. He leaves it to our hearts to realize and to feel for themselves the joy that will come with His presence. Supposing a young man is engaged to a young lady and they live apart. For the time until their marriage. And one day he phones her up and he says, addressing her by name. I have some time. I'm going to be able to come for a visit. Does he go on to say I'm coming for a visit because I want you really to be happy when I come? Oh, you say you wouldn't need to add that, would he? Would he need to add that? Oh no, he would count on the fact that when he told her that he was coming. When he expressed his desire to be with her, that her heart would respond. And that she would look forward to that time with joy.

And now I speak to my own heart as I speak to each one here, but particularly you, dear young people. How is it with you and with me? Are we like the one mentioned in this 23rd verse of John 14? That the Lord can come and make his abode with us. Oh, you say, I have heard that over and over again. I have heard my older brethren hammer that point home over and over again. We must enjoy the Lord. And maybe you say, I don't know what it means. I don't know how to get it. I don't know how to arrive at that point. Well, let me tell you, you're not alone. I confess before you all this afternoon that many times when I was young and I heard, dear brethren. Loved and respected in the Lord sit in meetings like these and press home to me the importance of having the Lords presence with me and keeping the eye on Christ. And I said, how do I do it? How do I do it? Well, I believe we don't have to look too far for the answer. It says here if a man love me, he will keep my words. Keep my words. Are we willing, beloved young people, to take this precious book that God has given us? And make it the pattern for our lives. Are we willing to lay aside everything that may come in, whether from within or from without, and say yes, Lord Jesus? I want to follow thee. I want that company which can only come. From abiding with thee. Keep my words. Those here who are married will bear me out. When I say that in a happy marriage, it doesn't take much to spoil the happy communion. And the closer the couple is, the less it takes. I was

much struck in reading an article written on that subject by a worldly man, and he said something like this, which I'll repeat to you. Speaking of marriage now, he said if your partner in marriage does not have the ability to make you thoroughly miserable. Then you haven't got a very good marriage. Why did he say that? Because if the one, the husband and the wife, if their hearts were knit one with the other, then sorrow in one reflected on the other, and it took very little for the one. To make the other one miserable. But if they lived apart, if they lived in the same house but went their separate ways, then perhaps there was very little communion between them. And what one did made very little difference to the other. How true and natural things, and all my beloved young people, how true with our Lord Jesus Christ are we willing to lay aside everything that we might have His company. Let us never forget that if we are not enjoying his company. The difficulty always lies with ourselves and when we see the Apostle Paul there writing to those dear Philippians and he would say for to me to live is Christ. That was a lot to say. I can't say that. That was a lot for a man to say, but he could say it from the heart, because there was not a cloud between him and that blessed One whom he loved and who had died for him. Contrast that with what we read in Luke's Gospel chapter 10. Where Martha says was cumbered about much serving. And the Lord gently but firmly had to rebuke her and say, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but, Mary. But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part. And oh, may I try, if I can, to impress upon your hearts this afternoon that one thing is needful, one thing is needful. And nothing can replace it. Nothing can replace the company of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life. Nothing can replace the enjoyment of Himself. And yet how little we know of that.

We can be occupied with so many things, We can be occupied even with things which are not wrong in themselves. And I speak perhaps of the duties of everyday life. As someone has said, the most treacherous thing in my life is the robbing of my joy and robbing me of my joy in Christ through necessary duties. Because it is right that I should carry out my responsibility in this life, but if it comes between myself and my precious Savior, then it is wrong. And it is wrong. And yet how often that is the case, how often we can be occupied with so many things and there is no time to sit down and to read this precious word. For ourselves. I know you, beloved young people. Probably have a family reading in your home. I know that your father and your mother probably get out the Bible after breakfast or maybe after dinner at night and maybe both times, which is nice, and read the word of God. But let me tell you from experience, there is no substitute for reading this precious book yourselves. And I don't say this just to so-called young people. I say it to the children here as soon as you're ready to read, as soon as you know how to read this precious book. All cultivate the habit of having it by your bedside and reading it for yourself. Don't worry if you don't understand everything in it, because God can minister the Holy Spirit rather can minister Christ to your soul from it. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, read this precious book and spend time in prayer. Prayer. Oh, you say that's nothing new. I've heard that many times before. But does it sink into our hearts? And I say our. I remember many years ago our late brother Clifford Brown speaking at a young people's meeting like this and how he made this remark. He said a prayerless life is a powerless life, a prayerless life is a powerless life, and no matter what else may be right, if I do not find the time to kneel before the Lord in prayer to seek his face. To seek for him, from him. Direction for my life to bring to him the difficulties and problems that I have to bring before him things that concern me to seek his guidance in the days that lie ahead, but even more than that, simply to enjoy his company. Then I am missing. The main object that the Lord has placed before me. The person of Christ. If I do not find time to enjoy Christ for himself, then I will not have him when I need him, but the soul that has Christ for itself will have Christ when it needs him. And so may these things impress themselves upon our hearts. One thing is needful. But then the condition attached to it. Let's read that other verse that was quoted to us this morning in the reading in the book of the Acts Chapter 11, Acts Chapter 11 and verse 22, speaking now of Barnabas. Then tidings of these things came under the ears of the Church, which was in Jerusalem. And they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch, who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. Why does it bring the purpose of heart in there? Oh, I believe because in the day in which we are living, perhaps more than any other, it is going to take purpose of heart. To enjoy the Lord, it is going to take purpose of heart to have Christ before me. And God can give us that purpose of heart if we look to Him for it. If you and I have a new life from God, the very life of Christ himself, then that life responds to the things that please Him. And if you look to God, if you look to the Lord Jesus Christ as the object of your life, He will give you that purpose of.

He will give you the strength to keep His word, as we were reading in the 14th chapter of John, in order that you may go on and have Him as your object. We're living in very serious times. Times, I suppose, which in one way are of deepest blessing because we're on the very eve of the Lord's return. And yet times when perhaps we scarcely know which way to turn, when we see on the one hand, the breakup of things in this world and everything that once appeared stable, and on the other hand we see difficulties and problems amongst the Church of God with which it seems. We cannot cope. Sometimes it takes purpose of heart. But notice Barnabas didn't say purpose of heart to cleave under the apostles. He didn't exhort them with purpose of heart to cleave under the assembly with purpose of heart that they might cleave unto the Lord. While our personal life must be right before our assembly life can be right. And as I have said before, and I'll say it again, the assembly can never be more than the sum of its parts. And you and I as individuals bring that to the assembly. And so we cannot expect to have blessing in the assembly if we're going on carelessly in our own personal lives. We cannot expect the assembly to be a happy place if we are going on in a way for. A willful and wayward way. During the time that we're away from the assembly, no, there must be reality in the inward parts. And as our brother remarked yesterday, uprightness in the Word of God does not mean that we never make mistakes, but it means that we don't pretend to be what we're not. Oh, God looks down into each one of our hearts. He looks into my heart. He looks into your heart, and he knows the reality that is there or is not there. And yet his love is unchanging. If you and I have been walking in a pathway away from Him, if Christ has not been the object of our hearts, oh, then let the words of that hymn sink in that we have been singing together. Oh, keep my soul. Then Jesus, abiding still with Thee. And if I wander, teach me soon back to thee to flee. Well. Our personal lives, first of all, must be in order, but then our assembly life. What about that? Let's turn now to that well known scripture in Matthew 18 and 20. Matthew 18 and 20. Four where two or three are gathered together. In my name, there am I in the midst of them. I'll turn over for one other verse to Second Timothy 2. Second Timothy chapter 2. And verse 20. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some to honor, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor sanctified, and meet for the master's use and prepared. Unto every good work. We have all heard this scripture in Matthew 18 and 20. Brought before us many times. Once again, do we really believe it? Do we really believe it? Many years ago. And I mean many years ago, long before my lifetime, there were some problems and difficulties in an assembly. And one brother was very distressed about them. Distress to the point that he was about to leave. And as he was out in his field, plowing and turning the whole thing over in his mind and feeling very, very much cast down.

That verse came before him by the thief on the spoken by the thief on the cross, when he appealed to the other thief. Who was railing on him? And he said these words, This man hath done nothing amiss. This man hath done nothing amiss. Oh, he thought to himself, Suppose my brethren have gone wrong? Supposing I have gone wrong, This man hath done nothing in this. Why am I gathered to the Lord's name

anyway? Is it to my brethren? No, the Lord is in the midst. That's why I'm there. How can I leave if the Lord is there? Now I speak solemnly and I speak to my own heart. When we come together, beloved young people, to the Assembly, why are we there? Or perhaps, shall I say, why are we not there? Do we really believe that the Lord is in the midst or is it just some doctrine that we Yes, well. We pay lip service to it. But yet don't carry it out in practice. A sister once said to me, I don't like to go to meeting because there's a brother there who doesn't like me. And sometimes he makes things difficult for me and he doesn't miss an opportunity to check me up on my ways. While I knew the situation, I knew exactly who she was talking about. I didn't say anything. But I thought something like this and I speak to each one of your hearts and mind. Supposing a member of my family, my closest family, were lying sick in the hospital. And when I went to that hospital, those that worked there gave me a very difficult time, made it hard for me to visit that dear member of my family, so that every time I went, I wondered, well, what trouble and problem am I going to have to go through this time? In order to get to see my loved one. What would that loved one think if I said, well, I'm not coming to visit in that hospital anymore? They give me a hard time when I come? And I don't think I'm going to go back. I can't. I can't face that anymore. Oh, they would say, What about me? What about me? Can't you face the difficulties and the problems for my sake? I'm here. Doesn't that make the difference? But you know very well down in your own heart, and I know in my heart that that question would never even arise, would it? Oh, no. If anything, it would make the visit even more precious because of the fact that there were some difficulties to be encountered in getting there. And I say to you, beloved young people, that until you see the Lord in the midst, you will never rightly appreciate the privilege of being gathered to the Lord's name. And if you come to that assembly expecting anything but the person and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be disappointed. I speak again to my own heart how often we come together in the assembly expecting to receive something expecting. To have a good meeting. Expecting to enjoy the fellowship of our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Expecting that there will be an atmosphere which will raise us up and give us encouragement in the pathway, and so it should be and so it should be. But how sad when we go with only that in mind. The Lord may have to show us that our motives are not quite high enough, not quite high enough. And so the Lord may have to bring in difficulties and problems so that when I go, I say, well, what I looked for, I didn't receive, what I went for isn't there? What is my attitude then? Oh, if I say, well, I won't go anymore then. I am really saying that the Lord's presence in the midst means nothing to me. When we come together to remember the Lord on what is our eye? Is it on the meeting that it might go well? Is it that there might be harmony, and that the Spirit of God might be free to lead out various ones, and that the hymns that are given out, the prayer that is offered, and everything might be in accordance with His mind? Well, we trust that. But even over and above, beyond that, as someone has said, let us never confuse the means by which grace is brought to us with grace itself.

And when we come together, what should be before us? Even when remembering our precious Savior in death is himself himself in death, not what this brother may have or that brother may have, nor how the Lord may use even me in that meeting, but rather the fact that my precious Savior is there in the midst in death when we come together at the prayer meeting on what is my eye? Oh, first and foremost, let it be the precious Lord Himself. When I come together to the reading meeting on, what is my eye? Is it on my brethren? Those who perhaps I am hoping to receive something? Those to whom I look to bring those truths out from the Word of God which I would like to enjoy? Those whom I would like to create an atmosphere where I can feel rejoicing and happy in the Lord? Well and good, but first and foremost, I must see Christ Himself. And if I get my eye on my brethren. The Lord may have to show me otherwise, even if I get my eye on the best of them. The ones that God has used the most are in another young person to whom I look for stability and help. God may have to show me otherwise. If I get my eye on someone else, my joy in them will perhaps carry me for a while, but if they fail, then everything fails and pretty soon I find that I can't find the Lord. If I can't, if I can't have that individual, Have we ever gotten that way? But if my eye is on Christ, it won't lessen my love for those Saints of God, but it will perhaps be a little different. It'll be deeper, a deeper love. If not quite as passionate, it will be more tender. If not quite as exciting. That brother will mean perhaps less to me in one way. But more on another, because the attachment to him will be less needful but more useful. Because my eye is on Christ, and when that one is there I will enjoy it, but when he is not there, it will perhaps be an even greater blessing. Because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself wants to be precious to your soul and mine. I remember a few years ago, and you'll pardon this personal reference, but it meant a lot to me. This is going back about 10 years and we were on a short vacation in Florida. While I was there, I found out, to my great joy and delight, that a dear old brother, who often had been a big help to me, who is now with the Lord, was staying just a very short distance down the road from us. And so we went down to have a short visit with Him, and I can still see him sitting there. And enjoying the Lord so much that he was just bubbling over a brother whose physical ailments were many and who was compelled to go down there for his health, and yet who was rejoicing in Christ, much like that one about whom some were speaking yesterday in the reading. And I was struck very much. He pulled out his Bible, opened it up to the Book of Revelation, and proceeded to give me a bit of a talk on the side. But I think you young people realize that those seven churches in Revelation, as well as being individual assemblies which were present in that day and age, also give us a panoramic history of the Church of God. Throughout the ages until the Lord comes. And when he spoke of Philadelphia, he looked at me and he said Brother Bill. The reason that the Lord Jesus Christ raised up Philadelphia was because he wanted to have something particularly for himself. Just before he returned. He raises up Philadelphia in order that he might have something for his own heart, something for himself.

Just before he returns. All He wants our hearts, He wants our affections. And if we notice this verse in Second Timothy 2. You'll notice that it is individual if a man therefore purge himself from these. Not collective, individual. All that brings before us, beloved young people, that separation to Christ first of all must be individual. But then, when I have taken that step in my own heart, I find that I have the company of my brethren who are likewise minded. But first of all, I have to be prepared to take that step in my own heart. Individually. How often we can become discouraged if the assembly doesn't go on well, if there is funeness of numbers, if perhaps we don't see the blessing in the gospel that we would like to see, we don't see the blessing, we don't see the assembly growing well, I don't say that we shouldn't be exercised about these things. I believe that we should most definitely. But how often we are tempted to say, what can I do about it instead of saying first and foremost? Is my eye on Christ and on Him alone? But will it cost something? I'm afraid it will if a man therefore purge himself from these. More than once in my lifetime. With my head bowed with grief. I say it sincerely, and I trusted his soul before the Lord with my heart and head bowed with grief. I have had to separate from dear ones in Christ. Whose heart my heart went out to? But they weren't willing to walk what I felt was the pathway of Second Timothy 2. Beloved young person, unless you see that God's principle is always separation from evil. Separation from that which is not according to the mind of God is revealed in His Word. You will never see the truth of the Lord's being in the midst. How often we would like to enjoy that truth of where two or three are gathered together unto my name. They are My in the midst of them. But on the other hand, may we remember that when we come to be gathered to that name, we cannot presume to attach to that name that which is contrary to His precious word. What if there are only a few? Who want to take that step? Does that make the Lord's presence any less? Many years ago in South America. As our dear brother Eric Smith has told us, there were those who came to our dear brethren

down there and said to them something like this, we are thousands and you are but a few. Why not join up with us in order that we may all be one? And the answer of the dear brother down there was simply this. Can you have any more of Christ with your thousands than we can have with our few? All His presence is the great thing. The great thing is to get hold of the fact that the Lord is in the midst. So that when I come together, it is not a question of what I can receive, but a question that I come to meet my precious Savior. And if I look at it that way, oh, will the Lord ever send me away? Empty? Indeed He will not. Oh, if the Lord is in the midst, is He going to see his children come together and go away? Empty indeed not. There may not be much gift. There may be many things which are cause for exercise. There may be many things which we could wish were otherwise, but His presence is always blessing, always blessing. Well, what about service? Communion must come first, as we have been reminded many times. What about service for him? Let's read that verse again in John 15 that we had before us in the readings John's Gospel chapter 15.

And verse 4. Abide. In me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me. Now turn over to the book of the Acts. Acts Chapter 9. And verse 6. Now we're reading only individual passages here because I know that you, beloved young people, are familiar with these stories. These are not. Obscure verses, They're all well known. Acts 9 and verse 6. And he that is salt trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Oh, how many difficulties would be? Erased in a moment if this were the honest and true prayer of each one of our hearts. We must abide in Him if we are going to do that which is pleasing to Him. And we must remember one thing when it comes to service. It is not what you do that counts, but what you are. May I say that again, it's not what you do that counts. It's what you are. If what I am is right, then what I do will always fall into place. But if what I am is not right, then what I do can never be right. Again quoting our beloved late brother HE Hayhoe. If you did everything right, nothing would be right except the motive was right. You'll forgive another personal reference. As most of you know. I earned my living working with feet. And it has often been impressed upon me. How that one could do a very brilliant surgical operation on the foot, the best technique? The best operating room facilities. The greatest care taken in every way, both before and during and after the surgery, and yet the operation be a total failure. Why? Why? Oh, because the mechanics of that foot. Were perhaps not appreciated. Another surgeon comes along. He does a simple operation perhaps. Not necessarily, but perhaps a simple procedure. And it works. Why? All because he, on the other hand, has appreciated. The mechanics of that foot, he's working with that foot and not against it. I don't presume to say which category I fall into. But the point is this, unless we are abiding in Him, all the energy that we put forth may be for nothing. All the work that we may do may be contrary to God's mind. We must be abiding in Christ. I don't wish to throw stones. At those in Christendom. But it must be evident to any exercised soul here today how much there is going on in Christendom under the umbrella of that great house that we read about in Second Timothy. That is not according to the mind of God. How much is going on in the name of Christ? That is only of man's ambition, man's design, and I fear. Much of it contrary to the mind of God as revealed in His Word. But even those of us who can say yes, by the grace of God, I believe we are gathered to the Lord's name and that we have the whole truth of God. Are we doing what we do?

With our eye on Christ and Him alone. Oh, if that is the case, an insignificant place won't matter to me. Let's turn to a verse in First Corinthians 12 That has often impressed itself upon me. First Corinthians chapter 12. In verse 18, One Corinthians 12 and verse 18. But now hath God set the members, everyone of them, in the body, as it hath pleased him. Off my eyes on Christ. I won't be seeking great things for myself. If my eye is on Christ, I'll be content to fill. The little niche that He has for me, I won't be darting here and there looking for this and that. That I can do. I won't be looking necessarily for great things. I'll be like the apostle. Who could say, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? On the one hand, I won't be occupied with my own efforts, either the failure or the success of them. If I'm occupied with the failure of my efforts, I'll be cast down. If I'm occupied with the success of them, the little measure of success that God may give me, I'll be lifted up with pride. But if I'm occupied with Christ, neither of those things will move me. The apostle Paul, when he was going up to Jerusalem, he could say, neither. I count by my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy. Now I say to you, as I say to my own heart, have I gotten down on my knees before the Lord, and have I sought before Him what He would have me to do? Whether it's a question of service for Him, whether it's a question of the life work that I should undertake, whether it's the question of where I should go tomorrow? Even a little thing like that. Have I got down and said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Never mind yourself. We see many people today who are going around seeking to be happy, going around seeking to do that which will give them a sense of personal satisfaction before the Lord that they are doing something for him. But the great thing is, beloved young people, to be before Him, that we might fill the place that He has prepared for us. I can remember quite a few years ago now when I was in my first year of high school. We had a guidance book, a guidance book, and in that guidance book which brought before us various occupations that we could undertake, brought before us the pros and the cons, brought before us what one could expect in the way of the type of work, the difficulties, the problems one might encounter and so on. I can well remember a poem. That was written on the last page. I wish I'd kept that book. It was a good poem, but several of its lines struck home with me. And one of those lines was, it isn't by size that you win or you fail. Be the best of whatever you are. And then another stanza went on to say, if you can't be a muskie, then just be a bass. But the liveliest bass in the lake, well, that's worldly wisdom. But nevertheless. It's wisdom, I believe that God's word. Would back up fill the place that God has placed you? Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. He that is faithful and little shall be faithful also, and much. And if God has given you or me a place behind the scenes, a place out of the limelight, perhaps a place to do something for him where there isn't much recognition, there isn't much praise. Remember, the Lord is noticing. The Lord is noticing. And that reward in a coming day will not be for success. It will be for faithfulness and for devotedness to that blessed One who has loved us and died for us. But our time is nearly gone. But I want to say a little bit about keeping our eye on Christ in the midst of difficulties and problems. And I trust, beloved young people, that those of us who are a little older are not immune to the problems that you face. I freely own before you. And I'm sure other brethren here would stand here and say the same thing, that we cannot rightfully appreciate some of the things that you are going through.

Forces have come into this world to change it so radically. In the past few years that I suppose there has been more change in the last five, 1015 years than there has been in the previous half century or more. And some of the things that you face in the world of today, I freely own. I never had to face. But there is one who knows all about it. Let's just read one verse in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews, chapter 4. And verse 15 for we have not an high priest. Which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly under the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. The youngest one here can go through difficulties and problems that some of us have never experienced. You children in public school are facing things that I never had to face. You young people in high school and perhaps in college. And out in the business world are facing things. That I never had to face, but the Lord knows all about it. Are you passing through a night of affliction? Are you passing through difficulties that almost overwhelm you? Do you say there's no one I can go to? And brother phoned me up. Quite a while ago now, some years ago now, he said. There's no one I can go to with my problem. And I wasn't the one that he could come to either. At least he didn't feel so. There's no one I

can go to and discuss this problem with. It's too deep to. Bring it out to anyone. Oh, we have a high priest that has gone through every kind of suffering that it was possible for a man to go through in this world apart from sin. As we had brought before us in the meetings, it can be a more blessed thing to go through a trial with the Lord. Than immediately to be removed from that trial. And remember, beloved young people, the difficulties and problems that you are passing through. First of all, that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold, that perisheth might be found unto praise and honor and glory at his appearing. First of all, the trial of your faith is precious to him. But secondly. Let this be an encouragement to you. Sometimes he passes you through difficulties that you may be a help to others. I was reading some ministry in an old book. Many. Years ago. It was printed nearly 100 years ago, I suppose. And in that a dear brother wrote a letter and he said, if I am going through problems and difficulties, he said, may the Lord commend me to a brother or a sister who has been bruised and battered a bit along the way. Why? Oh, because they would be able to enter into it. The Apostle Paul could speak of the fellowship of his sufferings. The fellowship of his sufferings and I fear that we have gotten away from this in this day and age. We tend to think of Christianity as being a victorious life, and rightfully so, I suppose, but we tend to think of ourselves and our blessings, our pleasures, our joy in Christ. But when the apostle Paul was saved, you will recall that Ananias, who was told to go and visit him and baptize him, was told I must show him how great things he must suffer. For my name's sake. You and I aren't called upon in this day and age, at least not at this moment, to go through the kind of suffering that the Apostle Paul went through.

We aren't likely to be beaten with rods, to suffer shipwreck or shipwreck, to be thrown in prison, to be stoned half to death, and all the rest of it. But you may go through difficulties and problems which you say you cannot understand. The day-to-day energy that it requires, the spiritual energy to go on for Christ in a world that is increasingly against Him, may burn your heart to such an extent that you say, I can't take it any longer. That precious savior says take my hand. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Have you got rest in your soul as you go about your everyday life, all with your eye on Christ? It is possible, it is possible, it's not some. Mysterious thing. That your older brethren talk about, but which cannot be realized by every Christian. No, the youngest child of God here can experience the joy of walking through life. With the Lord in communion with him. And if there are problems and difficulties, if there is a rough Rd. then let the company of that precious Savior cheer us, that we may go on until He calls us home. Our time is up. I don't know whether I have been able to get across to you what was on my heart. But it has meant much to me in the last little while. To realize that in these last days our eye must be on Christ. Sad to say, there are those who will make shipwreck from not having the eye on him, and none of us is immune to that. And I can't stand here this afternoon and pretend to tell you these things without applying them to my own heart. And even the beloved Apostle Paul would have to say. I count not myself to have apprehended but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and pressing on to those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Oh, what was he looking for? His eye was on a risen and glorified Christ in glory. His whole purpose of life down here was that everything. Might be for the glory of that blessed One. And may it be so with your heart and mind. Could we sing together that hymn #218? This hymn has been very precious to me lately. Written by Beloved Brother JG Deck and this hymn that we are going to sing. These two verses are only the last two verses. Over him that originally had five stanzas. And it's evident if you read that whole hymn that it was written to a young person. And so I'd like you, dear young people, especially to take note of this hymn because it's evident from the way that that hymn was written that it was written to a young girl named Mary. Britain as a personal, personal piece of poetry, as an encouragement to her. I believe it begins something like this. Mary. Thy choices made the better part in former years. Another Mary's choice. The Lord delights to see thy youthful heart so ready now to hear the Shepherd's voice, and so on. Referring, of course, to Mary of Bethany, about whom we read in the 10th chapter of Luke. And referring to the fact that she had found in her young life the joy of sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus. And now thinking of these last two verses, these last two were the only two that were suitable for. Shall we say? Collective singing and so they were included in our Little Flock hymn book for that reason, I believe. And notice the last verse.

We shall behold him whom not seen we love. We shall be with him whom we long to see. We shall be like him, fit for realms above with him, and like him for eternity. Is now to sit at Jesus feed our choice. How will fruition then our souls rejoice. May it be your heart, the prayer of your heart and mind that we May 15th and foremost have Him before us as the object of our hearts, and then that the desire of our hearts might be to sit at His feet, as Mary did to hear His word. And to live for His honor and glory alone until He comes.

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