

REVELATION 3:7-13 PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

“‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”¹

The Eighteenth through the Twentieth Centuries witnessed decades of rapid expansion for the Faith. As evangelicalism flexed long dormant spiritual muscles, the boundaries of the Faith were pushed beyond anything experienced since the days of the Apostles. The names of missionaries so greatly admired in modern church literature were quite often men and women who laboured throughout the two centuries concluding with the first half of the Twentieth Century. Without question, these were glorious days for the Faith. Not since the days of the Apostles had the Faith penetrated so deeply into territories Satan had long dominated. I fear, however, that the expansion witnessed throughout that period is now drawing to a close.

British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey stood in the window of his room in the Foreign Office. It was getting dusk, and the lamps were being lit in the space below on which he was looking. A friend standing with him heard Grey remark, “The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our life-time.”² I sense a somewhat similar sentiment as I cast my gaze over the church era now passing and as we step boldly into this brave, new era.

I am not negative in saying this, though I have serious doubts about the spiritual vigour of contemporary Christendom, regardless of how popular the Faith may appear at this moment. My confidence has never rested in the churches, but in the Risen Lord Who is Head of the churches. The rapid expansion of the previous era serves to encourage us as we read of men and women imbued with faith and courage that cannot be accounted for without appeal to the Spirit of God.

I am not suggesting that we are to live in the memory of the glory days of the past, but it is reasonable to remember that those who preceded us were men and women of great faith. Convinced that God was leading as they advanced into darkened regions, they were prepared to labour to ensure that the Faith was established throughout the world. The vast majority of major missionary organisations were established during this period, though many no longer vigorously pursue the goals that first marked their labours among the churches.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Viscount Grey of Fallodon, **Twenty-Five Years 1892-1916** (New York 1925) 20, https://books.google.ca/books?id=d68gSzbih8QC&q=%22lamps+are%22&redir_esc=y, accessed 26 July 2018

I do not recommend that we again fight denominational battles such as those fought when gifted spokesmen of the Faith stood firm for the Fundamentals of the Faith against the rot of modernism that infected a majority of multiplied Christian organisations in the western world. Neither do I suggest that those who hear form a committee to organise reoccupying some of the great old church buildings that once dotted the land. Those days are fading rapidly, if they are not gone entirely. I do recommend that we recapture the zeal of those earlier saints, if perchance the Lord would employ us to His glory in these waning days of the Church Age. In order to pursue this goal, I look at the words of the Risen Son of God to the congregation in Philadelphia.

EXPANSION COMMANDED — “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you” [**REVELATION 3:8-9**].

The Master charged those who would follow Him to spread the knowledge of His grace. The salvation promised through faith in the Risen Son of God is announced by those who follow Him as they declare His mercy to the world. Though you know the passages well, refresh your memories of the repeated commands of the Risen Saviour. Perhaps the best-known of the several commissions sending saints into the world is that which is recorded at the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [**MATTHEW 28:19-20**].

Not as well-known, but just as valid is the charge which Mark recorded. In **MARK 16:15** we read, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

Luke provides a slightly different perspective in the Gospel bearing his name. We read that the Master charged timid disciples, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” [**LUKE 24:46-48**].

For a full understanding of the charge as Luke has recorded it, it will be beneficial, perhaps even necessary, to hear what the Saviour charged as recorded in the Book of Acts. As He was preparing to ascend to the Father, Jesus charged the assembled disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” [**ACTS 1:8**].

John’s account of the commission we have received is the most concise of all the Evangelists. However, that does not invalidate the import of the charge the Master delivered. John details Jesus’ charge as, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” [**JOHN 20:21**].

Jesus anticipated that His disciples would advance the Faith throughout the world. The work that He assigned will not be complete until all peoples have heard the message of life. Throughout the history of the Faith, the faithful have advanced the cause of Christ through their witness; however, during the Nineteenth and the Twentieth centuries, the labours of the churches were strenuous, and many regions that had long lain in darkness were illuminated with the light of the Gospel message. The great Asian continent received the message with renewed vigour and the Dark Continent of Africa was penetrated with the message of life. Great revivals swept North America and England as God worked in power through His churches.

Viewing the great sweep of church history, we witness the Lord moving in power among His people from the earliest days of the Faith. The first disciples were scattered by the first wave of persecution that drove them into all the world. Though the Apostles remained in Jerusalem, others began to penetrate into Judea and Samaria. Doctor Luke records the account, noting, “Those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ” [ACTS 8:4-5].

Somewhat later, we read, “Those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord” [ACTS 11:19-21].

Later still, following his conversion, Saul of Tarsus was appointed by the Lord and tutored by Barnabas, equipping him to carry the message of life even beyond these immediate regions. It is still exciting to read the words Luke recorded as the Spirit of God worked in the New Beginnings Baptist Church of Antioch. “There were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” [ACTS 13:1-3].

The history of the Apostles and Evangelists would indicate that Peter may have journeyed to Rome and his brother, Andrew, travelled to Greece. We are informed that both declared the message of life in those places. Philip is thought to have served in Egypt. Bartholomew and Thomas both carried the message of grace to India, while Matthew is thought to have preached in what is today Iran and Ethiopia. Simon the Canaanite is said to have preached in Mauritania and later in England. Thaddaeus, also known as Jude, preached in Greece. Mark carried the Gospel to Egypt, whilst Luke preached in Greece.³ Of course, Paul declared the message of the Son of God in Rome, having evangelised throughout the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea on the north. Some scholars believe that he may have reached Spain before his death. All this occurred during the first fifty years or so following the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God!

Church history is the story of expansion into unevangelised territories; it is the penetration of the darkness with the light of the Gospel, always accompanied by persecution and opposition as the Faith challenged the old gods that had long held people in thrall. Wherever the Faith has gone, people are set at liberty, given hope and peace in the midst of a world marked by turmoil and fear. And yet, the history of the Faith is an unending story of persecution by those who most need the message of life, the grace of God and His mercy.

In a message preached earlier this year, I noted, “Scholars estimate that seventy million (70,000,000) Christians have been martyred since New Testament times. What is surprising, and no doubt frightening, is that the same research estimates that over half of these saints were martyred in the last century. About one hundred thousand (100,000) Christians are martyred each year. A quick calculation leads to the conclusion that eleven (11) Christians have been killed every hour for the past ten years.”⁴ The martyrs are not saints killed for their faith in the distant past, these are witnesses who sealed their testimony with their lives to this day.

³ Cf. Michael Stark, “Dangerous Discipleship,” (sermon) 29 July 2018, <https://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/John-12.09-11-Dangerous-Discipleship.pdf>

⁴ Michael Stark, *ibid.*

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After they are dead, we praise martyrs; however, we are less enthusiastic about supporting them with our finances or, more importantly, with our prayers and by standing with them while they are engaged in pushing into darkened corners of this fallen world. This is, of course, the charge that the Master levelled against the Pharisees and their scribes. Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus, you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar” [MATTHEW 23:29-35]. Ouch! That is rather pointed!

A similar charge could be levelled against contemporary Christians in multiple instances. I was deeply disappointed by the responses of a surprising number of Christian leaders, when during the Ebola crisis of a few years past, several physicians and nurses serving as missionaries were infected through their ministrations to people who were dying of the infection. These physicians and nurses had to be transported home to North America when they were infected.

It was discouraging to witness professed Christians condemning these gifted men and women for endangering themselves and others by going to such a dangerous place. Some Christian leaders openly questioned why anyone would expose himself or herself to such obvious danger; and doing so in the Name of Christ the Lord seemed mystifying! Reading comments attributed to these supposed leaders, I wondered what must have been said about the believers who ministered to the sick and the dying during the multiplied epidemics of the black plague during the Middle Ages? I wondered whether people in Rome censured followers of the Master who rescued babies cast aside to be eaten by dogs because a father didn’t want the child or because the child was less than perfect?

We praise the missionaries of that first century, though most were slain. We praise their obedience. We honour the memory of Eric Liddell though his courage would lead to his death. We even made a movie of his courageous obedience, because of his faithful obedience to the Saviour’s command. However, when Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry were taken captive by the Taliban, we condemned them for daring to be in that benighted land; and doing so just to bring the message of Christ was outrageous. Kenneth Bae, Kim Hak Son and Kim Jeong-wook were all condemned for being in North Korea where they were taken captive by the regime. “These missionaries should have stayed home,” we solemnly intone. Was John Chau a fool for approaching the North Sentinelese in an effort to tell them of Christ?

We are uncomfortable because the devotion and sacrifice of martyrs exposes our own disobedience. We are uncomfortable because the stance of those willing to be martyred draw attention to us. “They are foolish in taking such risks,” we say, all the while hoping that no one notices that we claim to believe the same things as those who hazard their lives for Christ’s sake. We know that if those who hate the Saviour learn that we hold to faith in Him, we may have to pay a price that we would rather not pay. We want to lay low, to enjoy the benefits provided by this fallen world while not being required to risk much concerning what we believe. Our heroes are more like Obadiah when he happened upon Elijah. You do recall that account, don’t you?

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When Elijah commanded Obadiah to tell the king that he was present, Obadiah replied, “How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, ‘He is not here,’ he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. And now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord, “Behold, Elijah is here.”’ And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD’s prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water” [1 KINGS 18:8-13]?

“Elijah! I know your courageous stand for God and for righteousness; but I felt it necessary to maintain my relationship to God in secret!” Much of contemporary Christendom could be described in the same way that Obadiah described his faith in the Living God. He was afraid of the consequences of openly confessing his faith in the LORD God. I remember a man who told me that he enjoyed working in the shadows where he could make things happen; he was speaking of his supposed service within the congregation. I responded at that time, and I would respond the same way today, “Only cockroaches and spiders lurk in the shadows. You are in poor company, my friend.” Our God seeks those who work openly, who stand boldly in His Name, who rely fully on Him.

I’m not suggesting that individuals who are timid are lost or even disobedient—God alone knows the heart. I am saying quite plainly that God seeks to embolden His beloved people. Our prayer should echo that offered by the first followers of the Christ when threatened. “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

““Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus” [ACTS 4:24-30].

When threatened, the disciples prayed, resting on the Sovereign Master of all creation. When they were told that they must remain silent concerning Jesus, the Master, they prayed for boldness. We would pray for wisdom to find some way out of the fix, but they prayed for boldness! They prayed that they might be more vocal still concerning the Master! They seem intuitively to have realised that the only way to deal with spiritual opposition was to face it. Marines are trained to run to the gunfire. Marines have learned through hard experience that the only safe response to a threat is to face it. Just so, Christians must not flee from spiritual attack—they must stand firm against those who are intent on dishonouring the Saviour.

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This is Paul's admonition when writing in the encyclical we have received as Ephesians. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" [EPHESIANS 6:10-18].

DIVINE PROTECTION PROMISED — "Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon" [REVELATION 3:10-11a]. As the Church of the Philadelphians pushed back against those who opposed them in their service before the Lord, the Master pledged that He would protect them. Just so, we know that we are kept by the power of the Saviour.

I don't want anyone to fall into the trap of thinking that we will never face death or that we will never experience the hardships that are common to all mankind. Christ does not deliver us from the experiences associated with the fallen condition of this ruined world, He stands with us in the trials of life so that His power may be displayed. However, He has pledged on His sacred honour to keep those who remain faithful in the trials of this life from the day when divine wrath is poured out on the earth. This is the comforting promise of the Risen Lord of Glory.

There is a dreadful day coming on the earth; I do not say that we should pray for it. Sinful people imagine that God will do nothing, and life will continue as it has always gone on. Yet, we are clearly warned through Peter's Second Letter to the saints of the Diaspora, "This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed" [2 PETER 3:1-10]. How awful those days shall be! Some who even now listen to my voice will face the wrath of God. They shall not escape, but they will know that their fate is on them because they heard the warning of the Word of the Living God.

Writing the Church in Salonica, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-10]. Note the ninth verse: “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” God’s people are spared judgement!

Christ promised to keep those in the Church of Philadelphia from the hour of trial. If the Seven Churches of Asia each speak of an epoch marking the course of this Church Age, then the Era of Missionary Expansion that is just ending would be in Philadelphian period. This would be the penultimate period before the Laodicean era of ecclesiastical death! I fear that we are now witnessing the transition to the final period preceding Christ’s return. Nevertheless, I hold the promise of the Master as comforting for those who stand firm in this moment. I do not anticipate that those who believe in the Son of God will see the judgements of the Great Tribulation.

The Apostle reminds Titus, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” [TITUS 2:11-14].

Christ’s return is *the blessed hope* precisely because He has promised to come to deliver us from the judgements that are coming upon the earth. The Lord speaks of those who are delivered out of the Great Tribulation, but they are distinct from those delivered from the coming judgement. At His return, Jesus will receive to Himself those who are twice-born at that time. In Heaven and before the throne of the Living God, these are gathered to serve and glorify the Father. As they are engaged in worship, awful judgements are poured out on the earth.

As John writes of what will be taking place during those judgements, God provides this strange vignette. “When [the Lamb of God] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been” [REVELATION 6:9-11].

People will be slain because of the Word of God during the Great Tribulation. There will be martyrs even during the Great Tribulation. Instructing His disciples concerning the last days, Jesus spoke of events that are yet future. He had spoken of the awful days when He would return to this earth in response to the disciples’ question concerning timing of His return. They asked two questions, “Tell us, when will these things be [judgement of the earth], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” They were curious about timing and what signs would mark His coming.

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Jesus expanded His answer, saying, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” [MATTHEW 25:31-46].

During those days of unprecedented divine judgement, people will be saved. These redeemed people will reveal their transformed lives through the manner in which they interact with those who share in Christ through faith. The greatest revival the world ever witnessed is still in the future. That revival will be during the awful days of divine judgement on the earth. That revival will occur in no small measure because people left behind will realise that they knew the truth and failed to seize upon the truth before those judgements began. Thus, they will then be subject to all the wrath that the evil one can pour out on them because they refuse to receive him as their master. Rather, these tormented and tortured saints will be redeemed through faith in the Christ whom they failed to believe in this day of grace!

ENCOURAGEMENT IN OUR SERVICE — “Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” [REVELATION 3:11b-13].

Jesus’ emphasis anticipates Paul’s words. Paul wrote, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” [EPHESIANS 6:10-18].

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I cannot say with certainty that the Philadelphian Era in this Church Age is now past; however, I fear that we are in a period at the least best described as transitioning from the Philadelphian Era when the Faith was expanding throughout the world to the Laodicean Era when the churches will grow tepid, marked by a blasé attitude that promotes their own interest rather than pushing the boundaries. Whether this is the case or not, we who believe are still charged with responsibility to push the boundaries, spreading the Faith through declaring the message of life through every conceivable means. We have the divine promise of our God, Who has pledged to stand with us throughout this period if we are faithful. Our goal as those who follow the Son of God is to be counted among those identified as victorious conquerors through Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Our goal is to be counted among the saints of God who stand firm and overcome the world.

Until our Master does return, we who follow the Master are charged to stand firm; we are charged to hold the ground that He has won. We must not yield to the evil of this world; we must stand firm. The time for obedience to the cause of Christ is short. Almost two thousand years ago, the Apostle to the Gentiles wrote in his missive to the saints in Rome, “You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” **[ROMANS 13:11-14]**.

If the night was far gone when Paul wrote, how much nearer must we be now to the dawning of that day when Christ returns! If salvation was near then, how much nearer our salvation must be now! Surely, it is time for us to wake from our sleep. Surely, it is time to rouse ourselves, seeking to fulfil His appointment. Obedience, faithfully seeking to fulfil His command, accepting the responsibility we Christians have received collectively and individually, is the necessary mark of any who will honour God. This does not mean that we are to walk the circuit of some physical territory while refusing to extend the message of life to darkened corners of the world; it does mean that we are not to concede spiritual and moral ground for the sake of comity.

We must not fall into the trap of seeking peace with the world system, permitting it to mould our lives. We are admonished by the Apostle, “With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus, you will prove in practice that the will of God is good, acceptable to Him and perfect” **[ROMANS 12:1-2 PHILLIPS]**.

It is obvious that when I cite these words, I’m speaking to Christians. The world is not in conflict with those who belong to the world. However, the world will never make peace with the follower of Christ, the world will only be satisfied when it has imposed its will on the child of God, compelling that believer to accept evil as normal. The world does not want peace with those who follow Christ, the world wants to compel those who pursue righteousness to conform to the world’s ideal. The world wants to force everyone to accept that they are fine as they are, that any effort to appeal to a standard beyond measuring up to the lowest common denominator is cruel. The world cannot stand the thought that God judges the actions of earth-dwellers.

We've often read those awful, dark words found in the opening chapter of the Letter to Roman Christians. Listen once again to those dreadful words that speak of the animosity and opposition of the world toward the Living God. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

"Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

"For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" [ROMANS 1:18-32].

When you witness the wickedness of this fallen world, what is your visceral response? Make no mistake, the world is wicked, and hostile toward the Faith. Though many of the professed followers of the Christ register their anger toward the world about them, such anger does not honour the Master. Distress should be normal for anyone who knows Christ as Saviour, anyone who longs for God's glory. We are informed in Scripture that "Lot [was] greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard)" [2 PETER 2:7-8]. What we do not read is that Lot was angered! We must be careful that our distress over the conduct and immorality of this fallen world is not permitted to become anger.

Therefore, here is the question—Does the gross immorality that is not merely tolerated by our society, but celebrated and actively promoted anger you? Or do you have the mind of Christ? Christ saw that same hostility toward righteousness and He wept. Jesus wept because He knew the awful price that sin would exact from people—a price that would be exacted immediately and then throughout eternity. Jesus wept because He understood the high cost of sin that would be demanded of God if anyone would be delivered from the consequences of sin. Jesus wept because His great heart was broken at the knowledge of the injury and the hurt that people would experience simply because they are resident within this broken world. That raises the question: Are you moved with compassion when you witness sinners as they promote evil? Are you grieved as you see the awful consequences arising from living in a sinful world? Do you have the mind of Christ?

Our society has undoubtedly lost its way. Within North American society, we no longer fear God and our culture is incapable of concern for others. Courtesy and consideration are concepts that have grown increasingly rare in our world, even among the churches of our Lord. The major cause for this transformation is that we have no respect for God, and since God has been excluded from our lives, out of necessity we have exalted “self” to a position of prominence. The capacity for concern, for compassion once marked the western world as “Christian,” because the faithful functioned as salt and light in our world. Today, society has pushed the thought of God far from our collective consciousness, and we wonder what went wrong.

The British philosopher, C. S. Lewis wrote, “In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect from them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.”⁵ Lewis was reminding readers that when we have excluded God from reigning supreme over our hearts, nothing is left to restrain evil? Without the Holy One holding back wickedness, why should we be surprised that the “self” is exalted in our culture? This is but a harbinger of conditions that shall be unleashed upon the earth when the Spirit of God has at last been removed and those who now serve the Living God are no longer present. That awful day when there is no longer a redeemed presence is perhaps being presaged by what we now witness in our world.

The Apostle cautioned followers of the Christ in his Second Letter to the saints in Thessalonica. It will be beneficial for us to recall that the Apostle has written as he urged believers to understand God’s perfect work. “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-7].

I want to encourage you who are followers of the Risen Son of God. At this time, you, the redeemed of the Lord, are playing a vital role, though the world does not, indeed, cannot, recognise how you are blessing them by your presence. The Spirit of God, working through you, is holding back the judgement that is so richly deserved by earth dwellers. It is the presence of redeemed saints of God that holds back His hand. Like the angels that hustled Lot and his family out of the city of Sodom, we are told, “Escape... I can do nothing till you arrive [over] there” [GENESIS 19:22b].

There is coming a day when we will be removed from this fallen world. On that day, the Spirit of God will be removed, and the terrible, frightful judgements of Holy God will be poured out on the earth. For the time being, we who are saved fulfil an essential role. God is working through us to advance His Kingdom and to call the lost to life. Keep up the good work. Don’t quit telling others of the Master and of the grace that He offers to all who will receive it. Keep on telling the lost of the love of our God, even though they resist Him. Know that the Spirit of God is working through you to glorify the Name of the Saviour.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, **The Abolition of Man** (Macmillan, New York 1947) 35

REVELATION 3:7-13
PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

To any lost who hear the message that is presented this day, we invite you to life as you believe Him. We urge you to turn to the Saviour so that you may be set free from condemnation, set free from the coming judgement, set free to know the Lord. Our call is for you to believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Hear the promise of God that is delivered to any who are willing to receive that promise in this hour. The Living God invites you to believe. He says, “If you agree with God that Jesus is Master over your life, believing with all your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and comes into a right standing with the Father; and through openly agreeing with God that one is set free.”⁶ God promises, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [**ROMANS 10:13**]. Amen, and Amen.

⁶ Author’s paraphrase of **ROMANS 10:9-10**