***The Book of Life and Eternal Security

RV39-01***

We continue with Revelation 3:1-6 in the letter written to the church in the city of Sardis in Asia Minor. So, we read in Revelation 3:5, "He that overcomes (that is, the born-again person), the same shall be clothed in white garment (a symbolic expression of eternal life and of ultimate sanctification). And I will not blot his name out of the book of life." He says, "I will not erase his name from a book – a book called the book of life."

**The Book of Life**

There is a book on the human race. There is a book in which God keeps a record in heaven, in which there is recorded everybody who has been born into the human race. The first name on the list is Adam. You go right down the line from Adam, to Eve, systematically, and someplace along the line, you find your name recorded in the book of life; that, is the book of the living.

This is referred to elsewhere in the Scriptures. For example, in Luke 10:20, the Lord Jesus Christ referred to this when He said, "Notwithstanding, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." This is not symbolic language. This is language that means what it says. That's how you have to treat the Bible. Whenever you read the Bible, your first approach to it is to let the words tell you what they mean in their normal meanings. You treat the Bible just the way you're going to treat your Sunday newspaper. Whatever the words say, that's what you understand that the words mean. There are not hidden meanings, and these are not symbolic means. So, here you have a statement that there is a record in heaven in which names are written down.

You also have this declared in Hebrews 12:23: "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are written in heaven." So, here, again, you have the statement that the church of the firstborn (those of you who are born again) are written down someplace in heaven.

This, of course, is a concept which is also found in the Old Testament because God has always had this book of the record of those who have been born into the human race (the book of life), and a secondary emphasis upon a special listing in that book of those who are born again. This is referred to way back in Exodus 32:32, where Moses is speaking to the Lord. Moses is pleading in behalf of the people of Israel who have fallen into gross sin right off the bat. As far as God is concerned, He's ready to just destroy all of them; rub them out of existence; and, start over again with Moses. So in Exodus 32:32, Moses says, "'Yet now, if You will forgive their sin, and if not, blot me, I pray, out of Your book which You have written.' And the Lord said unto Moses, 'Whosoever has sinned against Me, him will I blot out of my book.'"

So, here, the Scriptures make it clear that there is a record in heaven. There is a book which has names in it. That book has names which can be removed. God says that in certain conditions, He blots a name out of the book. Here, in our passage in Revelation 3:5, that same expression is used in terms of the name not being blotted out of the book – not being erased. There is in this book a roster of those who have been born again.

Another passage indicating that is Philippians 4:3: "And I entreat you also, true yokefellow, help those women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life." Here, Paul is referring to those who are specifically believers, and they are in the book of life.

**Eternal Security**

Now you have kind of a problem. Here you have a book with the names of people; here you have a book from which names are blotted out; and, here you have a book that records the names of those who are believers and who are born again. Naturally, the question arises: are we connecting those two lists – a list of those who are born again, and the act of erasing? Is it possible that these Scriptures indicate that the name of a person who is recorded in God's book of life as possessing eternal life can be erased from that book because he has lost his eternal life?

Well, that, of course, first of all, would be contrary to other Scriptures. The idea that you can lose your salvation is very clearly contrary to other Scriptures. Of course, that's how you have to interpret a difficult passage. First of all, you say, "Well, what does the rest of the Bible teach on this subject?" And you establish, first of all, what you do know that the Bible teaches, and you go from there.

For example, there are many passages, but we'll just look at one. John 10:28-29 make it very clear that once you have received eternal life, you have entered a condition of birth. That's why we call it the new birth. Since it is being born into the family of God, you cannot reverse that any more than you can reverse being born into your natural family. Birth is irreversible. In John 10:28, Jesus says, "And I give unto them (that is, believers) eternal life, and they shall never perish." Do you know what the word "never" means? That's what it means: never. "Neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."

That is a very dramatic, definitive, absolute statement that once you're born again, you're protected in that position by both God the Father and God the Son. If you think that you're bigger than that team (that you can overcome that protective care), then you are sadly mistaken. So, from a passage such as that and many others like that (the whole principle that the book of Romans lays down for salvation by grace, apart from human doing), because there is no human doing involved, there can be nothing that a human being can do to undo what is related to salvation. We have clearly conveyed to us that you cannot lose your salvation.

So, whatever this passage means of blotting names out of the book of life, it cannot be associated with the names of those who are born again. Those whose names are in there (who are regenerated) cannot be blotted out. Of course, that's what Revelation 3:5 is saying: "I will not blot his name out." The reason the Lord will not blot his name out is because even He cannot do that. Once a person is in the family of God, God Himself cannot remove that person.

The book of life is, first of all, to be thought of, therefore, as the record of all mankind. It is the record of all those who have been born into the human race, beginning with Adam. Every time a baby is born someplace in the world, another name is added to the book of life. There are angels in heaven who are constantly engaged in recording the names of every baby born into the human race. The book of life is getting longer all the time.

Now, this is because Jesus Christ died for all mankind. That's why everybody is put into the book of life. Potentially, everyone is eligible for eternal life. This is taught to us in one passage, for example, in 1 John 2:2, which states that principle of unlimited atonement very clearly: "And He (Jesus Christ) is the propitiation for our sins (that is, He is the one who has satisfied the demands of God against us), and not for ours only." Jesus Christ not only satisfied the integrity (the holiness of God relative to our sins) to us who are born again, but also for the sins of the whole world. This was also for the sins of everyone in the world, including the unregenerate, and the elect who have just not yet believed. So, the doctrine of unlimited atonement is the reason that everybody's name is put into the book of life. As a baby is born, that baby has had salvation, potentially, provided. There is the acceptance of that before it is applied, but potentially, it is there. So, God says, "I can put your name in the book of life," because once your name is in the book of life, you now potentially can go to heaven. Once your name is in the book of life, if it's left in there, it will indicate that you are eligible for eternal life."

However, those who die physically while they're in the status of spiritual death (that is while they are unregenerate), have now lost the benefits of that unlimited atonement. At that point, an angel comes up, and his name is removed. A person who dies physically while in the status of spiritual death has his name erased from the book of life. That is what is meant by this blotting out (this erasing of names) from the book of the living. The overcomers (or those who are saved), of course, can never have their names erased from the book of life, and they would not have their names erased from the book of life because they did not die physically while in the status of spiritual death.

So, in Revelation 3:5, when Jesus says, "I will not blot his name out of the book of life," while it does imply that names can be blotted out of the book of life, it does not mean that a believer's name will be removed from the book of life. It is saying, in fact, just the opposite.

**The Lamb's Book of Life**

Now, there is a special area of reference to the book of life which is termed specifically "the Lamb's book of life." If you'll turn to Revelation 13:8, we read, "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship Him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Here you have the book of life referred to in a more specific term as the Lamb's book of life. This same expression is used in Revelation 17:8 and in Revelation 21:7. What this expression indicates is that there is a portion of the book of life which has a permanent recording. That permanent part, of course, are those who are regenerated, and that is referred to as the Lamb's book of life. These are the overcomers who cannot be removed at all from this book. The reference here is to those who are regenerated. Only the names of believers are viewed as being in the special section called the Lamb's book of life.

Actually, Revelation 13:8 from the Greek could be translated (and perhaps better translated) in this way: "All that dwell upon the earth shall worship Him, whose names have not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb." That would be even a more accurate translation: "Whose names have not been written from the foundation of the world."

Now, whose names are written from the foundation of the world? That expression is a technical expression in Scripture, referring to born-again people. So, here He is specifically talking about a record written from the foundation of the world. We're getting back to the doctrine of election – the doctrine of being chosen by God before Christ ever died. Those who were destined for salvation by divine sovereign selection were already written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world. Translating that makes it a little clearer as to what the Lamb's book is – that it is specifically only born again people.

Another passage that would be good to look at is in the Old Testament: Psalm 69:19-28. I think this will amplify this a little more for you. The psalmist is speaking about Judas Iscariot, and about those who are associated with him in the betrayal of Jesus Christ. We won't read all of those verses. We'll just read verse 28: "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living." He says that they are to be erased from the book of the living. This is the same concept as we've been talking about here in the New Testament. Then notice the last part of the verse: "And not be written with the righteous." This is what the New Testament calls the Lamb's book of Life. In that one Old Testament verse, you have both sides. The first part of verse 28 says, "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living." What is that? That is the record, from Adam on down, of all who have lived in the human race: "And not be written with the righteous" means the specific area of the book of the living, which is called the Lamb's book of life, which is those who are permanently inscribed in that roster – those who are born again.

The principle of this concept of God's record, of those who belong to Him, is stated for us in 2 Timothy 2:19: "Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal. The Lord knows them that are His. Let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." The Lord knows them that are His. That is the whole point of this record of the redeemed. God knows who belongs to Him, and He has a very specific and exact and precise record to that extent, in order to make it very clear who's in and who's out.

This is in great contrast to the church record rolls on earth. The rolls of the record of people here on earth are filled with people whose names will never be permanently inscribed in the Lamb's book of life. Millions of human beings, literally, have died who had their names on church rolls, but at their moment of death, an angel erased their name from the book of the living, and they were not permitted to enter the Lamb's book of life.

There is one other passage – a very sobering one, that you should remember therefore, in dealing with a God who keeps records. Daniel 12:1 says, "And at that time, Michael shall stand up: the great prince who stands up for the children of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time. And at that time, my people shall be delivered; everyone that shall be found written in the book." That's how God works. He works on His particular and absolute records.

Let's go back to a Revelation 3:5: "He that overcomes (the born again believer), the same shall be clothed in white raiment (signifying ultimate sanctification). His name, therefore (the Lord says), will never be blotted out of the book of life" (specifically the Lamb's book of life). He's in for good. Then He gives another promised blessing: "But I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." The word "but" is actually the Greek word "kai," which is a conjunction and should be translated as "and," because he's adding another reason why the salvation of a believer is forever secure.

Remember, that that's what we're talking about here. This passage is one of those passages that's making it clear that once God has done His work of covering your sins, and you have accepted, the transaction is permanently sealed and closed, and it cannot be reversed. To indicate that, He adds another promise: "And I will confess." The word "confess" is the Greek word "homologeo." This is the same word as in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins." The word "confess" means "to acknowledge," or "to declare." This word connotes the opposite of denial. The very word "confess" indicates an affirmative statement. It indicates something of agreement. It refers here to the official recognition by Jesus Christ that an individual is entitled to spend eternity in heaven. It is future, indicating that it looks forward to the rapture of the church. At that point, Jesus Christ is going to acknowledge this person. It is active. Jesus Christ does the acknowledging, and that's important to remember. Do you know who is going to get into heaven? Only those that Jesus Christ acknowledges. If the Lord Jesus Christ will not acknowledge you, and you find yourself out there on the other side, you're not going to get it.

Therefore, that's very important to realize that He is the one who has to be consulted as to the basis upon which He will acknowledge you, and upon which He will recognize you for entrance into heaven. It is amazing how stupid human beings are – that they can read the Word of God and actually think (and this is part of the perversion of humanism) that you come along with a man-made system of relating yourself to God, through your own reason as to how God should deal with you, and think that you're going to get away with it when you actually face Him. The Bible makes it very clear that there's only one person that's going to look at you and say, "You're accepted. You're in. I acknowledge you." That is Jesus Christ. And I'll guarantee you that He's not going to acknowledge you or me or anyone else on any other basis than that which He has declared in Scripture – that which is compatible with divine integrity. The sin question has to be handled.

**An Individual Basis**

So, this word is an action of Jesus Christ Himself. It's indicative. It's a statement of fact. What you have here is the picture of a formal court hearing in which Jesus Christ is the witness for the accused sinner. This is part of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ as our High Priest in heaven. It is going to acknowledge, "His." This is the Greek word "autos." That refers specifically to the born again overcomer of this context. It is his name – his "onoma." The word "onoma" refers to the individual believer in the book of those who are regenerated. It stresses the fact that salvation is a personal issue. "His name" are two important words in the Greek text. As an individual, you must make the decision. God does not permit names to be left in the book of life for entrance into heaven on the basis of the nation that you were born in. He does not decide that on the basis of the race that you belong to. He does not decide that on the basis of the family that you were born into. He does not decide that on the basis of the religious group that you're affiliated with. It is an individual personal basis. Here is one thing no one else can do for you.

There comes a time in every human being's experience when he has to deal with God on a one-to-one basis. Everyone else is out of the picture, and at that point, your decision determines your destiny for all eternity. "His name" connotes an individual who is recognized as being in the family of God. Everyone has to believe the gospel for himself in order to become an overcomer destined for eternal life. Then that individual, represented by this word "onoma," becomes secure in God's dealings relative to the entrance into heaven.

The Lord Jesus is the only one who decides. You can't make your own rules. No one is going to make a deal with divine integrity so that he will be acknowledged for entrance into heaven on any basis except the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. You will never get away with rejecting the grace-by-faith salvation. The worst tragedy of all involved here is that a lot of people actually deceive themselves. There are a lot of people who actually do think they are going to be able to handle God. That's what they think. They think that they will, by their sheer reasoning, be able to demonstrate to God how wrong He is to reject them just because they have not received Christ as Savior. What a shock after death! You and I are constantly hearing about people who are very famous in our society and in our day, who had a lot to say even about God, but who are going to go out and find that they did not qualify. When Jesus Christ looks at them to decide, they don't qualify. The hypocritical are words.

I was listening to a talk-program this week. They were interviewing a psychic lady. People were calling in, and she'd ask them what their birthday was, and then she'd tell them how things were going to go, and what was going to be happening to them. She had a pretty good batting average. They went through several things that she had said that were common knowledge. One time, even a big corporation rushed in and wanted to know who was giving her secret information about what they were doing, because she was giving secrets away that were exactly true.

That's very impressive, isn't it? Every time she would get through with speaking to someone and telling them what their future was going to be, she would say, "Oh, God bless you. God be with you. God love you." I mean every time. She never missed it. God was always in there.

Then suddenly, she said to the man who was interviewing: "Oh, Errol Flynn is standing right behind you. He's standing there." The man said, "What's he doing?" She said, "He's just looking at you." The man said, "Is he saying anything?" She laughed and said, "No, but there he is. Errol Flynn is standing there right behind you." Well, was she seeing someone, or was she faking it and pretending? She didn't have to pretend. She had said enough to people that were just calling in, that she had no way of having information on, and then she would ask them, "Isn't that true?" And they would say, "Yes, that's true." She would say, "Isn't this what's happening to you right now?" And they would say, "Yes, that's true." She would go right down the line.

This showed the vast information network of the demonic world. Errol Flynn writhes in the agonies of the destiny that he chose for himself in hell. But there was a demonic spirit who took on the form and the shape of Errol Flynn, and he stood right there, and she did see him. There's no doubt about it. And please don't come up and ask me, "Who was Errol Flynn?" My band kids asked me that yesterday. They just don't know anything at all – these kids. Just ask somebody else. Anyhow, you'll date yourself if you have to ask who that was.

In any case, when she said that, I knew that she was dealing with the spirit world. I knew that she was dealing with the forceful power of the spirit world. That was her source of communication. That was her source of information. But you would listen to this woman, and man, she was giving God the glory and the honor and the praise. But someday, she's going to stand out there for Jesus Christ, and she's not going to kid anybody. Her name is going to be in the book of life, or it's not going to be in the book of life, and the only person that is going to acknowledge that the name belongs in there is Jesus Christ. Some angel doesn't decide to put your name in. It is when the Lord Jesus Christ has put that name in – that's when it goes in.

So, the Lord knows those who are His own. John 10:14 tells us that the Lord knows: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of Mine." 2 Timothy 2:19: "The Lord knows them that are His."

**God the Father**

The audience for this statement is indicated: "I will confess his name before" somebody. The word "before" is the Greek word "enopion." It's an adverb, but it's used here as a preposition. It means face-to-face, and it indicates "in the presence of," or "in the sight of." That's the idea. It indicates that the Lord's acknowledgment of his true believers takes place in the very presence of someone. Where is Jesus Christ making this acknowledgment? He says, "In the presence of My (His personal) "pater" (His Father). This is the word for male person. "Pater" is the word for the male parent. It is not the word for the female parent. God, as an authority figure, is declared to be male gender. There is no pathetic, feminist, human viewpoint of asininity of a female God. If you know anything about the Greek Bible, right off the bat, you've got a word here, and that word "pater" can only mean a male parent. When God is spoken of, He is called a Father. God is not called your mother.

Furthermore, the Greek language says, "*The* Father," indicating that it is God the Father of the Trinity, before whom Jesus Christ identifies His true bride. That's what He's doing. The Lord Jesus Christ is like a young man who brings his fiancée (his girlfriend) home, and he introduces to his father the one that He has selected to be His bride. When Jesus Christ tells that angel to put your name in the Lamb's book of life (a permanent record), and he turns to His Father, and He acknowledges you as being one of His own, He is, in effect, introducing you to His Father as His bride. We, the church, make up the bride of Christ. This is what the Lord is doing. He is introducing His bride to His heavenly Father.

This is reminiscent of the words in Matthew 10:32, where Jesus Christ said, Whosoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father who is in heaven." Those who accept Christ here on earth are acknowledged before God in heaven. And the Father is the supreme judge of the universe who makes a decision on the basis of what His Son tells Him. The Father is the supreme judge who decides who goes into heaven. If you do not have the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ, the Father does not accept you.

**Angels**

Jesus Christ says that He makes this acknowledgment also: "And." The Greek word is "kai" again – that conjunction indicating a second group. Again, He has the same word "enopion," which means face-to-face right there in the very presence of this group. That is "His angels." The word "His" is referring to the Father. The word "angels" is the Greek word "aggelos." "Aggelos" is the word for the spirit messengers and servants which God has created. They are not human beings. They are angel beings. Angel beings and human beings are two different kinds of creatures that God has created. The holy angels are referred to here – those who are loyal and obedient to the Father, in contrast to the demon angels who have been rebellious.

These angels surround the throne of God the Father. We have this taught to us in Revelation 5:11 and Revelation 7:11. Angels constantly surround the throne of God. So, naturally they are present to hear the results of the work of Jesus Christ in preserving His saints even in a church like Sardis. This statement that Jesus will confess before the angels of heaven is reminiscent of another statement that He made which is recorded for us in Luke 12:8-9: "Also, I say unto you, whoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God." And the opposite: "He that denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. So, here in Matthew, you have recorded a statement made by the Lord that he would confess believers (He would acknowledge them) before the Father. In Luke, you have the statement that he would acknowledge them before the angels of God who would be present before the throne of God. And here, in Revelation 3:5, both of these statements are brought together. Before God the Father, and before His angels, this acknowledgment of those who belong to the family of God is made.

This is fitting that this should be done in the presence of the angels, because, as you know, one of the roles of angels is to assist in divine judgments. In Acts 12:23, angels are involved in the judgment against Herod Agrippa. In Matthew 25:31-32, angels are involved in bringing judgment upon the gentile nations at the end of the tribulation. In Revelation 1:1-3, angels are involved in bringing judgment upon Satan in binding him and putting him into the pit of the abyss. When Jesus Christ returns to judge the world, Mark 8:38 tells us that angels will accompany Him to execute that judgment.

One of the responses (one of the results) of these announcements made in the presence of angels of those whose names are permanently in the book of life is related to us in Luke 15:10, where the Lord says, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." Every time that a name is permanently inscribed in the Lamb's book of life, the angels are delighted. There is a great joy and a great happiness among them. Why? Because the angels know from firsthand experience, having been observers of what Satan did and what the demons have done, and what happened to them as creatures – the base; the vile; the degenerate; and, the corruption that has taken place in the demonic world of the demonic angels, and they know the destiny that God has prepared. The lake of fire is already there. It's churning and boiling and ready to go. These angels have seen it. They know it. And boy, they just rejoice for every human being that's going to escape this. It's as much a relief to them as it will be the person to you and me when we get out there and we see hell, and discover what it's like and what God has preserved us from.

So, there is good reason for these angels to rejoice. This is the most important issue that a human being decides between himself and God. It is the most important issue which God decides about a human being – that he is in the family, or not. And the angels know the dire consequences. So, don't be off on this issue. Do not fail to be acknowledged by Jesus Christ.

So, let's close the letter to Sardis. Verse 6 is a familiar verse because it's been repeated to these churches at the end of these letters: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches." Let's review this briefly. The word "has" is the Greek word "echo." This is the word which means to possess something. The reference here is to the capacity to take information into the mind. It is in the present tense – constantly able. That indicates to take this information in. It's active voice. The person himself does his own learning. It is participle – a principle stated. Everybody has the capacity to take information in through what's called the "ous" (his ear). That refers to the physical organ on the side of the head. Everybody has ears, and everybody therefore can take in spiritual instruction into the brain. Jesus Christ has spoken here to the ears of the church in Sardis. He has given them instruction in this letter from which they are to benefit.

They are then given a command. He says, "Those who have ears, hear what I have said" (to have received this information), which means everybody. Those people are now "to hear." The Greek word looks like this: "akouo." This word means to listen in the sense of a positive response to what you heard. The exhortation is directed to the believer personally as an individual. You are to pay attention to what the Lord said. This is in what the Greek grammar calls the aorist tense. That means at the point of receiving this information about the Sardis church condition, and that is a point in the past where they have received that information. It is in active voice. They themselves must respond positively. They do the paying attention. And notice that it's imperative; that is, it's a command. God is telling you to believe. There are no options when God's Word has spoken; that is, you cannot evade recognizing the authority of God's revelation.

That's why it's dangerous to fool around with the Bible like you could make it mean anything you wanted it to mean, or that you could come up with a concept that is more advanced than what the Scriptures have. It is not unusual for liberal theologians to say, "Yes, what the Bible says – that was true, and that applied to people at a certain time. But our society has moved beyond that. We are in a modern age. We have advanced in understanding and knowledge beyond what these people had recorded in Scripture." That is not so. God says, "You pay attention." You better listen to what He has revealed to us.

He is directing our attention to "what." That word "what" is all summed up in this little word "tis" which means the contents of this letter to Sardis: what a certain person of the Trinity has revealed. That's the "pneuma," namely God the Holy Spirit. He is the agent of divine revelation. He conveys God's mind to man in written form, free from all error. Anyone who rejects the plain meaning of the Bible, therefore, is challenging God the Holy Spirit. The Bible is conveyed without mistakes. It is inerrant.

The thing you are to pay attention to is what the Holy Spirit "says." This is the word "lego." "Lego" is the word for communicating with emphasis upon the content of the message. The content is preserved in the Bible in intelligible form. You can understand it, and you can apply. This calls for an intellectual response, therefore, to what the Holy Spirit has actually said. You're to pay attention. You're to think through this information. You do not arrive at God's thinking by some emotional response. You don't feel that something is right or something is true. You know, on the basis of information that the Spirit of God has proclaimed to you. Like Paul says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Paul didn't say, "I just feel like God is really going to save me someday." He said, "I know He's going to save me because He has 'lego' me" (the emphasis of this Greek word).

There is another Greek word which emphasizes the words that are used. This Greek word for "saying" emphasizes the contents of the message – not the words that are used as such. It's the job of the local pastor-teacher to convey to the minds of the congregation what God has said. It is necessary for the pastor-teacher and the listeners to both be in the status of spirituality during instruction in what God has said. This word goes to the churches (the "ekklesia"). That word means "the assembly;" that is, the local body of believers who have been called out of the mass of lost humanity. The local church is God's agency for conveying His information in this dispensation. This message to the local church in Sardis is to be acted upon by the individual believers.

In this letter, notice again that in verse 5, He first spoke to the overcomers – the individual believers. In verse 6, He speaks to the "ekklesia" – to the church as a whole. In the first three letters: the letters to Ephesus; to Smyrna; and to Pergamum, it was just the reverse. If you look back at the end of those letters, you will see that first He speaks to the church as a whole. Then he speaks to the individual overcomer. The reason for that seems to be that, during the period represented in church history by those first three letters (Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum), the church as an organization could turn around. The church as an organization had not gone beyond the point of no return. It could still turn back to God's ways. But when you get to the letter to Thyatira and this one to Sardis (and it'll be true of the ones to Philadelphia and Laodicea), you find that He addresses first the individual overcomer, and then the organization. This indicates that, within the professing community of Christianity, only individual believers can hope to rise to a purity in the faith to sound doctrine. But the church organizations as a whole are going to be defective.

I had a man who spoke to me this week who says he's been a preacher – a pastor of a church. He is out of his church. He says, "I'm in the process of separating myself from my denomination because it will not take a stand for the inerrancy of Scripture. It is tolerating people in our seminaries and within our churches – men who do not believe that the Bible was a book provided to us from God without error. That is leading us into the destruction of the individual spiritual life of the believer." What was this man saying? This man was saying, "I can't change the organizational structure, but I, as a believer, can take action."

That's what's indicated here. When verse 5 speaks to the overcomer first, God is saying, "You can take a stand; you can take action; and, you can do something." But at this point in time, the organization of Christianity and the churches as a whole – you're not going to change them. They're defective, and they're going to stay defective, but you don't have to be, even though you are in such a defective structure.

So, God has given us a great message. This is a very informative letter. It has told us some things about having right doctrine without right practice. I trust that we've learned that lesson well. There is a lot at stake, and there is a great loss if we don't follow the advice of the Lord here to turn around and act in accordance with those who are destined to be clothed in the white garments of ultimate sanctification.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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