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IN MEMORIAM: GEORGE A. BARTHELDS

George August Barthels was born on April 11, 1914, in Mishicot, Wisconsin, the son of George C. Barthels and his wife, Louise nee Wolter. He was baptized in infancy. He became a communicant member of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Mishicot through confirmation in 1928. He attended high school and college at Northwestern Preparatory School and College in Watertown, Wisconsin, graduating in 1935. He attended Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin, for three years, graduating in 1938. He was joined in marriage with Anita Zarling on October 20, 1940, at Iron Ridge, Wisconsin, and the Lord blessed them with a large family.

As a pastor he served congregations in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Two Rivers, Allenton, and Burlington, Wisconsin, and in Red Wing, Minnesota, from 1938 to 1958. For a short time he served as the president of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod.

In 1958 he felt conscience-bound to leave the Wisconsin Synod. Those in his congregation who agreed with his position formed a new congregation in Red Wing known as Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, which Pastor Barthels served from 1958 to 1967. During this time Pastor Barthels also found other employment to support himself and his family. Pastor Barthels took a leading role in the formation of the Interim Conference that led in 1960 to the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. For many years Pastor Barthels served as the moderator of the new church body, also serving for a time on the CLC Board of Doctrine.

From 1967 to 1983 Pastor Barthels served as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church of Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, and from 1983 to 1989 as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church of Okabena, Minnesota, before retiring in 1989 after 51 years in the pastoral ministry. In his retirement he was a member of Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire.

George was preceded in death by his parents, a sister, Elsie Lorenz, and a son, Martin, who died in 1950. He is survived by his wife Anita; a brother Oscar Barthels and his wife, Hazel, of Mishicot, Wisconsin; daughter Eunice Heffernan of Littleton, Colorado; daughter Lois Wentz and her husband, Vic, of Morris, Minnesota; son Lyle Barthels of Houston, Texas; daughter Doris Theneman and her husband, David, of Sleepy Eye, Minnesota; son Pastor Theodore Barthels and his wife, Denise, of Addison, Illinois; son Leonard Barthels and his wife, Sandra, of Eau Claire; son Teacher Daniel Barthels and his wife, Kathy, of Markesan, Wisconsin; son Pastor Jerome Barthels and his wife, Ruth, of Hayward, California, and 21 grandchildren.

Pastor Barthels participated regularly in worship and Bible Class until the middle of October, when pain diagnosed later as a fast-spreading cancer made it impossible for him to attend. His physical condition deteriorated rapidly. On Saturday evening, November 24, he participated in the celebration of the Lord's Supper with his family at the Clairemont Nursing Home. A few days later, on Wednesday, November 28, 1990, his earthly life came to an end, he having attained the age of 76 years, 7 months, and 17 days.

Pastor Barthels will be remembered as a conscientious leader who cared about doing the will of the Lord and who cared about people. As a moderator in charge of CLC conventions, he took pains to be orderly, fair, and loving. As a pastor, he enjoyed particularly working with the little ones and teaching them to know their Savior.

The funeral service was held on Saturday, December 1, at 1:30 p.m. The body was buried at Lakeview Cemetery in Eau Claire. The message at the funeral service was based on Psalm 73:23-28: "*Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*" We know that the Lord guided Pastor Barthels with His counsel, and we are confident He has received Him into glory. Blessed be his memory.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

As a memorial to Pastor Barthels we are publishing an essay, delivered by him in 1977, which was particularly appropriate and meaningful. — Editor.

Restore Unto Us The Joy Of Thy Salvation *

* Presented to the General Pastoral Conference of the CLC, meeting at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, July 12-14, 1977. — Editor.

George A. Barthels

When this prayer of penitent King David is assigned as the topic for a conference essay it carries with it a depressing implication. The implication is that something precious has been lost, or is in the process of being lost.

In the case of King David there was an awareness that something that he had previously cherished was missing. It was an intangible thing, spiritual in character, that had the added quality of being able to slip away gradually. Its decline or disappearance was, therefore, unnoticed until it was suddenly brought to his attention by unusual circumstances.

We observe a similar situation in the congregations at Ephesus and Laodicea, which was set forth in the special letters that the Lord Jesus addressed through the Apostle John to the seven churches of Asia Minor. In the letter to Ephesus He said (Rev. 2:4): “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love.**” To Laodicea He said (Rev. 3:15): “I know thy works, that thou are neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because **thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,** I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

In all these instances something precious was disappearing, gradually, and unnoticed by the owners, until the Lord Himself intervened and emphatically pointed to the loss. It would appear that the Lord is graciously doing something similar to us by having an essay such as this assigned for this conference.

I. An Alerting To A Serious Loss

The alarm has been sounded! The assigned topic proclaims the loss in the framework of a solemn prayer: “Restore unto us the joy of Thy salvation.” The word “restore” acknowledges the loss. If the item were still present, we would not be pleading that it be restored. The item that is lost is called “the joy of Thy salvation.” Joy is intangible and invisible, but its presence and absence are noticeable and evident by its results in the words and actions of the individual. The experiencing of joy cannot help expressing itself in the outward conduct; and if these genuine outward expressions and evidences are generally lacking, or even, waning, a disclosure is being made about the condition of their cause or source. Is it fading, or withering, on the way to extinction?

But we are speaking here of a special kind of joy: the joy that is identified with the added phrase: the joy **of Thy salvation**. This is then the specific joy that arises from knowing and believing most certainly that we are saved from sin and eternal death through the merits of Christ and His redemptive work.

In this connection we must be cautioned against attempted reading or judging the **hearts** of others, and must be strongly urged that each one restrict himself to a thorough examination of his own heart and inner experience. Has the degree of my joy in respect to the salvation that my Savior has won for me declined over the years? Am I thinking less frequently of the blessed benefits that are mine for this life and for all eternity because of God’s grace and the Savior’s love for me? Do I speak less frequently and with less excitement about them to my relatives and friends? Do I make a willing **sacrifice** when I plan my thankofferings to the Lord for all that He has done for me? Has my church attendance and communion attendance degenerated into a perfunctory exercise that is expected of me with but little inner reaction in my heart and soul? Have my preaching and teaching of the Word of God and my other pastoral activities taken on the semblance of merely a means to support myself and my family? Has the insidious apathy and indifference on my part toward our undeserved eternal salvation not had a negative and cooling effect on the members of my congregation and on my brethren in general? If my brethren are experiencing a similar loss or recession of spiritual joy as I am, what must be the cumulative effect upon the thoroughness of the work which the Lord has assigned to us as a church body? Each of us must keep his own score in this self-examination.

II. Causes Of The Loss In Spiritual Joy

The causes of the loss in spiritual joy are many and of various kinds. In the case of King David the causes were pride and the lusts of the flesh. They drew him away from a sensitive consciousness of his sinful condition and of his unworthiness of any joys whatsoever before his heavenly Father. His mind and heart soon became thoroughly occupied

with how he could gratify the desires of his sinful flesh even at the expense of his fellow human beings, with very little thought, if any at all, about his heavenly Father's attitude and reaction toward what he was desiring and doing.

With the congregation at Ephesus the cause for their loss of spiritual joy seems to have been a plain case of forgetfulness, for the Lord admonishes them (Rev. 2:5): "Thou has left thy first love. **Remember** therefore from whence thou art fallen." No further explanations are given as to what caused their change of attitude.

At Laodicea the cause for their loss was a failure to evaluate properly their salvation in Christ. This great gift and high honor had become commonplace and unexciting to them, because they, too, failed to remember what they really deserved from God on account of their many sins and had become interested in numerous earthly and material benefits and pursuits. The result was that the Lord found them disgustingly "lukewarm: neither cold nor hot."

All these causes, and many more, can be condensed into one main cause: Satan is determined to separate the true children of God from their heavenly Father and from the life-giving Gospel of salvation. He enlists many allies from the world and every "old Adam" that resides in the hearts and lives of the children of God. He employs either force, or apathy and indifference, or alluring temptations to attract the true believers to other glittering but deceiving enjoyments. In short, we as the true believers and children of God are to be reminded that every loss of spiritual joy that we may suffer is caused by the fact that we are still in the Church **Militant**. The bitter war between God and His true children, on the one side, and Satan together with all his allies on the other, rages on! The stakes are high: the immortal souls of even the elect! God in His grace is determined to preserve them to eternal life! Satan with all his guile and power is determined to snatch them away to eternal death!

Here lies the real and basic cause of our trouble that prompts us to cry with King David: "Restore unto us the joy of Thy salvation." It is most wholesome that we become increasingly aware of the position that we as the true children of God occupy in this war. Indeed, we are enlisted in the ranks of God to fight against Satan and all his forces. Moreover, the Lord supplies the armor and the weapons that insure for us the victory!

At the same time we are the prize targets on which Satan has set his sights. Again and again he tries to infiltrate our ranks with false doctrine and unfaithfulness to God's Word in order to confuse us and to break up our firm stand against him. He makes use of our Old Adam in order to cause dissension, strife, envy, and even hatred toward one another in order to weaken us and to further his cause. As we discuss and debate questions of doctrine and practice at our conferences, or even informally in our visits with one another, we are at times insidiously induced to stray away from objectivity and to become personal and subjective in our discussions, which consequently even develop into quarrels. Such incidents cannot but dampen "the joy" of our salvation in Christ. They also paralyze our zeal in being witnesses for Christ and His Gospel to others, because we have greatly expended our strength and our funds in arbitrating the differences among ourselves.

III. Plea For Restoration

As we become increasingly aware of our sad condition, we search for a remedy and a cure. To whom else shall we go but to our gracious heavenly Father? We herewith pour out our hearts before Him; we give voice to our sorrow and sadness over what we see in our self-examination and which He was noticing as it developed in us. We are confident that He will never forsake or reject us.

Our confidence is based on God's love for us in Christ and not on any merit on our part, as though He would uphold us as a recompense for trying so hard as a conservative church body to keep our doctrine and practice pure.

As in the case of penitent King David, this plea to the Lord for restoration marks a turning point in our condition. Now that the Lord has graciously made us aware of the crippling spiritual disease that has been creeping over us, He has also brought us to the determination and resolution that we find and apply the only effective remedy with which to bring about the cure.

IV. The Assured Remedy

Sadness and depression must depart and be replaced by hope in the presence and application of the assured remedy in an otherwise hopeless situation. That remedy has been prescribed by the Lord in numerous similar situations that are reported in Holy Scripture. It can be condensed into one word, "repent." John the Baptist prescribed it when he proclaimed (Matt. 3:2): "**Repent** ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus repeated it when He said (Mark 1:15): "**Repent** ye, and believe the Gospel." Peter stated it after his famous Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:38): "**Repent**, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remissions of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." St. John was directed to write to the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:5): "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and **repent**, and do the first works"; to the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:19): "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and **repent**." The same remedy is prescribed in the letters to the other churches of Asia

Minor and in countless other incidents in Scripture.

The word “repent” is not used for a mere abstract concept. It has a rich and very interesting meaning. It implies an inner struggle and conflict of the heart, followed by a favorable outcome. The favorable outcome constitutes a victory over an opposing force. The victory becomes evident when the individual confesses, without alibi or excuse, that he has done wrong, or has been guilty of neglect and serious failure.

Although the remedy has another part, we pause to apply the first part to our present case. Is each of us experiencing genuine sorrow and confessing his sin of deterioration to a certain spiritual “lukewarmness” and a loss of our “first love” toward the Lord and His precious Word to us? Such a sincere confession is basic and essential toward a cure, although it is not the cure itself.

The second part of the concept of “repent” brings with it the cure, for this second part is implicit **trust** and **faith** in what the Lord says (Matt. 9:2): “Be of good **cheer**: thy sins be forgiven thee.” (1 John 1:7): “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” (Isa. 43:1): “Fear thou not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.” (Phil. 4:4): “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” (Ps. 100:1-2): “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.”

V. Joy Over The Recovery Of The Loss

When the lost sheep and the lost coin are recovered in the parables of Jesus, then there is great **joy**: genuine, heartfelt joy! This joy is spontaneous: it comes as a natural sequence.

So the joy that we speak of in our current topic is the renewed joy in our salvation, the plan that the Lord in His grace has devised and executed to save us unworthy sinners from eternal death, that we may enjoy heaven with Him forever. This joy includes amazement and appreciation over His complete forgiveness of our past neglect and lukewarmness toward the wondrous message of His Word.

This renewed joy in our hearts is also a product of the Holy Spirit. Paul includes it as a precious link in the chain that he presents when describing the results of the Holy Spirit’s work in us (Gal. 5:22): “The fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace . . .”

This joy cannot help expressing itself in various forms. Our prayers of thanks will be more sincere and from the heart. A new zeal will drive us to a more concentrated study of God’s Word and an excitement in sharing the glorious message of that Word with others. Our offerings to the Lord will be more generous and more in the nature of a real **sacrifice** instead of a perfunctory giving of “leftovers.” Our homes and our family life will give ample evidence of our **joy** in the Lord and His salvation to us. Our work in the local congregation and in our synodical meetings and conferences will reflect that holy joy in the way we address our brethren, cooperate with them, and show consideration for their feelings. Differences of opinion, doctrinal discussions and debates will be carried on objectively and in an atmosphere of genuine brotherly **love**.

These are some of the desired fruits that are assured to us as we confidently and penitently address our Lord in sincere prayer:

“RESTORE UNTO US THE **JOY** OF THY SALVATION!”

THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

#4: TO THYATIRA

John K. Pfeiffer

BACKGROUND

Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities which Christ addresses in the book of Revelation. It was located on the trade route that ran from Byzantium to the great cities of commerce along the coasts of Asia Minor. Thyatira itself was a city of commerce, noted primarily for its dying industry. It also dealt in wool, leather, linen, bronze, pottery, and the slave trade.

One outstanding feature of this city was its trade guilds. There was a trade guild for almost every kind of business. In order for a tradesman or artisan to have the kind of business and social contacts necessary for success, he had to become a member of the appropriate guild. Those who refused membership were ostracized.

This created a serious dilemma for the Christians. Each guild adopted its own guardian deity. (One cannot help but think that the Roman church's concept of a designated "saint" for every kind of industry arose from an attempt to make it easier for the heathen to adjust to the monotheism of Christianity.) Guilds would often hold common meals in the temples of their gods. Even outside the temples, business meetings began and ended with formal sacrifices to some deity. In addition, guild feasts regularly degenerated into drunken orgies. For a Christian to belong to a guild it became necessary to compromise his principles.

The desire on the part of some to be allowed to accommodate themselves to the ways of the heathen guilds may have provided the fertile ground that brought forth the particular error of the church in this city. No doubt there were those who believed that it was possible, for business purposes, to meet the world half-way. Therefore one like the Jezebel-woman could come along and tell them that it was acceptable before God to participate in temple feasts and to engage in fornication. When the ears itch to hear something different, teachers will always show up to do the scratching (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3f.).

We do not know exactly how the church was started in Thyatira. The city is not listed on Paul's itinerary. Since it was on a trade route, it is possible that Christian businessmen brought the Gospel there. The theory that is most favored is that Lydia was the first to tell friends and neighbors about the Savior. Paul had met Lydia in Philippi. There the Gospel had turned her heart to Christ. When she returned to her home in Thyatira, she surely shared her joy with those around her (cf. Acts 16:12ff.).

By the time the words of this letter reached Thyatira, the church was well-established, having its own pastor or pastors. No doubt some of the epistles of Paul had reached Thyatira. Even if the church did not have the benefit of his writings, it did have the Old Testament Scriptures. These were clear enough in refuting the errors that were being taught in its midst. They were without excuse.

EXEGESIS AND COMMENTARY - Revelation 2:18-29

18. Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον· τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρός, καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·

AND TO THE MESSENGER OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA WRITE: THESE THINGS SAYS THE SON OF GOD, THE ONE HAVING HIS EYES LIKE A FLAME OF FIRE AND HIS FEET LIKE WHITE BRASS:

ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ - Christ's manner of introducing Himself to a church seems to have some bearing on the problems and needs in that group. Considering how He concludes His message, it appears that His divine authority was at stake in this congregation. The people were being led to observe the deep things of Satan (v. 24), rather than the deep things of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10).

ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρός - Christ reveals Himself as One who can see all. His eyes are like a welder's flame, capable of piercing into the hardest of hearts. "There is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 12:13). The wicked in Thyatira were to know that they were not fooling Him. He knew the inner thoughts of their hearts. He knew the real reasons for their wickedness.

χαλκολιβάνῳ - This refers to brass as it would appear when it is very hot. With white hot feet, Christ will tread upon the wicked. Those whom the eyes of Christ have searched and known, whom He has discovered to be inwardly wicked, will become as ashes under His burning feet.

Truly, their first vision of Christ is a fearful one, one to strike terror in the heart of the sinner. This is just what was needed. Things were going on in Thyatira that required His personal intervention. No one else was taking a hand in

disciplining the errorists. Now Christ would come, not in peace, but in fierce judgment, upon all who refused to repent.

19. οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων.

I KNOW YOUR WORKS, BOTH THE LOVE AND THE FAITH AND THE SERVICE AND THE ENDURANCE OF YOU, AND YOUR LAST WORKS are GREATER THAN THE FIRST.

οἶδά - This refers to clear, complete, first-hand knowledge. His all-seeing eyes make Him fully aware of what is going on, good and bad. There were some terrible things going on in Thyatira, but there were also good things. Christ mentions these first. Perhaps this is done for the purpose of encouragement. Or, perhaps He speaks of the evil after the good, because He wants to leave them with thoughts of what needs correcting, so that they will apply their energies to this.

τὰ ἔργα - This congregation was not dead. Their faith showed itself in many good works. The words that follow define sa eqca.

τὴν ἀγάπην - This was a loving congregation. They truly cared about each other. When there was a need among them, they reacted and supplied the need. As is the nature of true acapg, what they did they did as unto Christ.

τὴν πίστιν - This could mean “the faith.” However, since it is set amidst the other terms, which describe the fruits of faith, I do not believe that it refers to saving faith. This was probably faith such as Abraham possessed, when he had faith in the promise and ability of God to grant him a child (cf. Rom. 4:19-21). Faith is spoken of also in 1 Cor. 12:9, where it is mentioned among the charisma of the Spirit. Since Paul says that this “faith” is not given to all, it must be something other than saving faith, which is given to all believers. This is probably that faith which deems the impossible possible (cf. Heb. 11:17-19,29; 1 Cor. 13:2; Matt. 17:14-20).

This congregation had faith in the power of God to do what He promised to do. They were the kind of people, who are fervent in prayer, casting all their cares on God and **leaving them there**. This faith may even have wrought miracles.

τὴν διακονίαν - They rendered service to God and to one another with no other thought but the benefit that others would gain by this service. In Rom. 12:6,7 “service” is listed as one of the “gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.” There are different kinds of service that can be rendered, beginning with the “ministry [service] of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). The use of any gift for the benefit of others is a work of service: “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another . . .” (1 Pet. 4:10). The various teaching ministries were given by Christ “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service . . .” (Eph. 4:12). Therefore, we conclude that the people of this congregation were employing their various gifts for the welfare of one another.

τὴν ὑπομονὴν - Literally, this is an “abiding under” something, the quiet bearing-up under the heavy burden of suffering. The fact that endurance was needed shows that there was persecution in Thyatira, even as in other churches of Asia Minor. Taken with the other expressions of their faith, we are amazed that even in the midst of persecution they did not make hermits of themselves. Rather they openly exercised their faith and love.

If the other works are taken in connection with this one, we might see them as follows: “love” —they showed love toward those who suffered as well as toward those who caused the suffering; “faith” —they clung firmly to the promises of God and went forward in the exercise of their religion; “service” —they did not cease to bring aid to those who suffered loss, but were willing to ally themselves with such people by their acts of service.

τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα - This is the opposite of what was found in Ephesus. They had left their first love (2:4). Their last works were poorer than the first. In Thyatira, the last works were greater than the first. The love of the Ephesians grew duller amid the struggles. In Thyatira, the love grew brighter. This is quite a tribute to this congregation. They were a shining example of love and trust in the midst of opposition.

20. ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἣ λέγει ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν, καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἔμοῦς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα.

BUT I HAVE AGAINST YOU this THAT YOU TOLERATE THE WOMAN JEZEBEL, THE ONE DECLARING HERSELF to be A PROPHETESS, AND SHE TEACHES AND SHE SEDUCES MY SLAVES TO FORNICATE AND TO EAT MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS.

ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ - The Lord holds this against the whole congregation. When a false teacher is found within a congregation, the fault does not lie only with the teacher, but with the whole congregation. They tolerate (a!ei@) the false teacher. The same can be said of church bodies that allow false teachers to continue spreading their error within the body. The Lord holds it against the whole body.

The Ephesian church would never have allowed the Jezebel-woman to continue in its midst, but then its battle had become more mechanical than love-motivated.

In Thyatira, the problem was reversed. The pendulum had swung in the opposite direction. The congregation

rejoiced in the peaceful exercise of love, while they lost their will for what has been called “tough love,” i.e., the exercise of love which is painful. In this case that exercise was in the area of church discipline.

This can be found in many churches today. They rejoice in acts of charity, in the lifting of physical burdens, etc. But they do not like to discipline impenitent sinners and those who propagate error. Such congregations are admired for their acts of service, but the Lord still holds it against them that they tolerate error and impenitence. This is something that must change.

Also in the CLC, such variation in practice may occur. We dare not let the pendulum swing to either side. Congregations need to practice both intense love and faithfulness, which manifest themselves in acts of service and in endurance and in church discipline.

ἀφεῖς - This comes from ἀφήμι: send away; forgive; let go, let alone; disregard, omit, neglect; permit, allow; tolerate. The concept of toleration would appear to come from the idea of “sending away” from one’s consideration. Thus, this congregation omitted from their consideration the idea that the Jezebel-woman should be disciplined.

τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ - There are various theories as to the identity of this woman: (1) this was the pastor’s wife (based on the alternate reading τὴν γυναῖκα σοῦ; (2) this was someone involved in the popular Thyatiran shrine of fortune tellers; (3) this was Lydia; (4) this was not a person, but a sect; (5) we do not know who this was.

(1) and (2) are guesses with little support. (3) amounts to unfounded slander. (4) is possible. However, the language and the content favor an individual. There is a differentiation among the woman, her companions, and her children.

“Jezebel” is, no doubt, a symbolic name meant to bring to mind the wife of King Ahab (1 Kings 16:29ff.). Jezebel led Israel astray by persuading Ahab to introduce the worship of Baal. She is also noted for her harlotries and witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22). The woman in Thyatira was also guilty of leading God’s people to flirt with idolatry and commit fornication.

ἢ λέγει ἑαυτὴν προφητιν - This woman claimed to have the gift of prophecy. At this time in the history of the Church, the prophetic gift was needed. The New Testament Scriptures had not yet been completed and compiled. Therefore God continued to give direct revelations through the apostles and prophets. As Joel had foretold: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy” (2:28). Not only men, but women also received the gift of prophecy. Anna was a prophetess (Luke 2:36), as were the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).

The Jezebel-woman took advantage of this and claimed for herself the gift of prophecy. At a time when such gifts were present, it was easy for a false prophet to intrude himself into the fellowship of believers. New revelations were coming from the Lord and anyone could claim to have received one. The weak and ignorant might say, “How can I know? Maybe it is genuine.”

What so often happened is the same thing that happens today: people fail to test the spirits of the teachers (1 John 4:1). They plead ignorance and inability. However, this is to despise the gift of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has been anointed with the Spirit. “His anointing teaches you about all things” (1 John 2:27). We are no longer natural man, devoid of spiritual discernment, but we are spiritual, having the mind of Christ and are, therefore, able to judge all things (1 Cor. 2:14-16). No Christian should plead inability to test the spirits. With the Holy Spirit in heart and the Holy Scriptures in hand, we are able, indeed, commanded to test the spirits.

διδάσκει . . . τοὺς ἑμοῦς δούλους - The Jezebel-woman did not merely lead people by example, but she set herself up as a teacher of the slaves of Jesus Christ. It would seem as though she assumed a position in the **public** ministry, since *dotkot@* is plural. It was not just one or two being taught in private, but a group. Furthermore, it cannot be said that these were only women and children. Jesus declares that her adherents committed adultery with her (v. 22). Such public teaching of men was wrong in itself (1 Tim. 2:11ff.). Besides this, the content of her teaching was blatantly false.

πλανᾷ - “cause to wander,” “lead astray.” The translation “seduce” seems appropriate here. Not only did she teach them to fornicate; she also seduced them to sin with her.

πορνεῦσαι - There were many committing fornication in those days. It was even a part of pagan religious practices. However, the followers of Judaism and Christianity knew this to be an abomination, a violation of the holy will of God.

In Thyatira, however, was a false prophetess, who wanted to make fornication acceptable within the sphere of Christianity. The nature of her teaching may be revealed in verse 24: “who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them.” Apparently she was telling the people that one had to experience evil in order to know or understand it. Perhaps she added that one cannot do battle with Satan unless he first “knows Satan’s depths.” However, this is like saying that one must climb into the jaws of the shark before he can know the dangers of the shark.

There have been those who claimed that one cannot know the meaning of forgiveness until he has experienced the depths of sin. By this they apparently mean the grossest sort of iniquity: murder, adultery, robbery, etc.

There were also those among the early Gnostics who declared that the body is evil while the spirit is good. Therefore, they claimed that one can allow the body to wallow in the depths of Satan, while the spirit remains untouched. “The real achievement was to indulge in pleasure to the limit, and not to be captured by it” (*The Revelation of John*, Wm.

Barclay, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, vol. 1, p. 137).

φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα - When an idolater would bring an animal to be sacrificed to his god, the following would happen: the useless parts of the animal would be burned upon the altar; the priests would take a portion of the meat for themselves; part would be used in a feast, in which the people saw themselves as feasting with their god; the remainder would be sold to the local butcher.

It was to such feasts that the idolater would invite friends and neighbors. The invitation might have read: "I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Zeus." To attend such a feast would be to acknowledge the existence of that god. At the same time, it would be a denial of the claim of the Triune God to be the only God.

Paul told the Corinthians: "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21). He had explained that sacrifices to idols were really sacrifices to demons (devils). To partake of such a feast was to "provoke the Lord to jealousy" (v. 22).

On the other hand, Paul told the Christians not to worry about what is purchased from the butcher. Though much of it did come from the temples, it did not belong to the idol. It belonged to the Lord (v. 26). The same held true for meat served at someone's home. The Christian was not to investigate to determine the source of the meat (v. 27).

The only concern was for the spiritual well-being of one's neighbor. Thus, if someone made an issue of the source, that the meat originated as an idol sacrifice, then the Christian should abstain from eating. Obviously, if someone makes an issue of it, he must either have conscience pangs or be trying to taunt the Christian. It was for the sake of the Jewish Christians that the convention at Jerusalem urged the Gentile Christians to "abstain from things sacrificed to idols" (Acts 15:29).

When Christ says that the Jezebel-woman taught the Christians "to eat things sacrificed to idols," it should be understood that she was making an issue of the fact that these were sacrificed to idols. In all probability, she was encouraging them to go to temple feasts.

This teaching, too, may have been related to "the depths of Satan." Paul's teaching regarding things sacrificed to demons may have been known. Thus, eating at the feasts may have been one way of experiencing the depths of Satan.

This wicked woman's teaching may have been connected to the trade guilds referred to in the background. Christian businessmen were sorely tempted to be members of these guilds. It seemed the commercially expedient thing to do. Yet, when they came to faith in Jesus Christ, they necessarily abandoned their idolatry. Now, since membership in the trade guilds meant some involvement with idolatry, they were faced with a problem.

It may have been that the Jezebel-woman was a leader of the compromise movement. She could have claimed that she received a revelation from God, to wit: "God does not expect you to lose your business. He allows you to join in the practices of your guild. We are allowed to make certain accommodations to the world, since we must live in the world. You do not have to give up Jesus in order to do this. Jesus wants you to have success."

What does the Lord say? "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

Modern counterparts to this error can be found in liberal churches, which are more than willing to compromise the truth for the sake of certain social benefits. They are willing to "feast" in any temple. They go further than the Jezebel-woman in the area of immorality, for they give their support to the practice of homosexuality.

τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους - The sphere of the Jezebel-woman's activity was in the church at Thyatira, not outside. She aimed her teaching and her seductions at the slaves of Christ.

By calling them "My slaves," Jesus still owned them as His own, even though they had been deceived. We would conclude that they were acting in ignorance, believing that it really was all right with Jesus to commit such deeds. Thus, there was still faith in their hearts, weak though it was. However, now that Jesus had spoken against their evils, the situation changed (v. 22).

Why does Jesus use δούλους here? The probable answer is that they were giving themselves into the slavery of sin. Paul's words to the Romans (ch. 6) are appropriate here. Being united to Christ in His death and resurrection, we have been freed from sin (v. 7). Therefore, we are no longer slaves to sin (v. 6). Sin does not have the mastery over those who are under grace (v. 14). We are now the slaves of Christ and present the members of our bodies as slaves to righteousness (v. 19). Those who continually present the members of their bodies as slaves to sin are in grave danger of themselves becoming slaves to sin (v. 16). This was the danger among the Christians in Thyatira. By speaking of them as "My slaves," Christ reminded them of who their true Master was.

21. καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

AND I HAVE GRANTED HER A TIME SO THAT SHE MIGHT REPENT, AND SHE DOES NOT WANT TO REPENT OF HER FORNICATION.

ἔδωκα . . . μετανοήσῃ - Who can sufficiently thank and praise God for His monumental grace? How patiently

He bears with sinners, because He desires our salvation. “He is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Though we humans commit abominations against Him, though we lead others to sin against Him, yet He is long-suffering. Praise the gracious and merciful Lord, who gives to each of us a time to repent and does not strike us down at the moment of our rebellion! How kind He is! — Even so He was patient and merciful to the Jezebel-woman.

οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι - “Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). The Jezebel-woman did despise His rich kindness toward her. She had no desire to repent but fully intended to continue in her wickedness. Her time was up.

Let every sinner take heed. The lack of judgment from the hand of God is not a sign that He approves of sin or that He doesn’t care if a person sins. Judgment, when it comes, is final and offers no escape. The lack of judgment is a sign of the astounding patience and love of God. While there is time to escape, let the sinner repent and praise the Lord for His kindness. If there be any reader, especially among the teachers of the slaves of Christ, any who has been toying with the patience of God, let him beware. It could happen to him as it did to the Jezebel-woman.

22. ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἔὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς,

BEHOLD I CAST HER ONTO A COUCH, AND THE ONES COMMITTING ADULTERY WITH HER INTO GREAT AFFLICTION, IF THEY WILL NOT REPENT OF HER WORKS.

βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην - In Matthew 9:2 the same expression is used for the paralytic, who was “cast upon a bed” (cf. also Matt. 8:6,14; Luke 16:20 for similar use of βάλλω). This expression refers to someone who is laid up in illness. Whatever illness the woman finally received, it must have been of such a nature as would reveal to all that this was divine retribution for all her evils.

Such judgments from the hand of God are not to satisfy some blood-lust, but to demonstrate to all that He is serious when He condemns sin. It is a gracious call to repentance for all who see.

Had God refused to reveal His disapproval, the judgment would have been greater. He would thus be allowing them to go “from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). More would have been drawn in by the error of the Jezebel-woman. The leavening process would eventually have spread through the whole congregation. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9). What Christ was about to do to the Jezebel-woman and her entourage was an act of love meant to purge out the old leaven, so that the congregation might become a new lump (1 Cor. 5:7).

In this present age, one cannot but think of the plague of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). This affliction can be directly connected to the abomination of homosexual practices. That some get the affliction from the use of infected needles or infected blood transfusions does not change the facts. The Lord has condemned the practice of homosexuality. He has given the wicked a long time to repent, but so many have not wanted to repent. Now He casts them upon a bed of illness. (I apply this only to those who are afflicted as a direct consequence of their immorality.) Hopefully, some will see and repent, while others will be warned away from ever experimenting and thus toying with the wrath of God.

τοὺς μοιχεύοντας - There are some who maintain that this was spiritual adultery, not physical. It is true that the Old Testament Israel was accused of spiritual adultery when they went awhoring after false gods. It is possible that Jesus had this in mind. However, the fact that eating things sacrificed to idols is mentioned with the adultery, and not as a part of it, indicates that He is speaking of physical adultery. It does not seem to be correct to be metaphorical and literal in the same breath. Furthermore, the use of πορνεῦσαι in verse 20 and μοιχεύοντας in verse 22 would seem to emphasize the literal. To this we add the fact that fornication and idol-feasting commonly went together.

I cannot determine if τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς means that they were her bed-partners or that they followed her leadership. μοιχεύω usually takes the accusative of the person with whom the act is committed. Therefore, it may have been that they joined her in the act, but this passage appears to be referring to all, male and female, who followed her teaching.

εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην - Again, whatever the nature of the affliction, it must have caused the people to draw a connection between their sin and their affliction.

ἔὰν . . . - This is a third class condition: undetermined, but with a probability of fulfillment. — This was their way to escape the affliction. If they repented of her works, they would be spared. Time was now granted to them, time to see the judgment upon the Jezebel-woman, time to apply the words of this letter. Her punishment would be like God’s signature to this letter. Anyone who continued in her evil ways would be without excuse.

ἐκ τῶν ἔργων - “out of the works” - Repentance does not involve only the declaration that something is sinful, but also an inner determination to get “out of” that pattern of living. μετανοέω itself involves the mind: μετα - “with, after”; νοέω - “perceive with the mind.” — The thought is that the mind perceives something after the fact (as opposed to προνοέω, wherein the mind perceives something beforehand and adjusts itself accordingly: provide for). It came to mean a changing of the mind after the fact. Thus, repentance involves the perception that one has done wrong and the determination to disengage oneself from such doing.

23. καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ, καὶ γνῶσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν.

AND HER CHILDREN SHALL I KILL OFF IN DEATH; AND ALL THE CHURCHES SHALL KNOW THAT I, I AM THE ONE SEARCHING KIDNEYS AND HEARTS, AND I SHALL GIVE TO EACH ONE OF YOU ACCORDING TO YOUR WORKS.

τὰ τέκνα - Those who understand the adultery to be spiritual say that “the children” are the adherents to her teaching. If that is so, then who are τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς? Furthermore, is God then saying that He will kill them spiritually or even eternally?

I believe these to be actually children born of her adulterous relationships. It may strike the ignorant as a cruel thing for God to do: killing “innocent” children. They would probably say that God was cruel in taking the child of the adulterous relationship between David and Bathsheba. The truth is that there would have been great and terrible consequences if God had not taken such action (cf. 2 Sam. 12:14). The fact that man cannot see the need for drastic action and a certain, specific action does not mean that he has the right to accuse God of injustice or cruelty. “The Rock! His ways are perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He” (Deut. 32:4).

Rather than making blasphemous accusations, we ought to find, if it be possible for us, the good benefits of God’s action. If we cannot discover them, we must simply trust God.

Considering the situation in Thyatira, if God had ignored what was going on, this would have resulted in the leavening effect. By taking this drastic action, Christ was doing what had to be done in order to rescue His slaves from everlasting destruction. In other words, by taking the physical lives of a few, Christ was saving the spiritual lives of many.

What about the spiritual lives of the few? It is clear that the Jezebel-woman was carrying out her activities in the sphere of the church. Therefore, her children were, in all likelihood, baptized. Baptism had become an integral part of church life. It is not likely that anyone who wanted to claim the prophetic gift within the church would have rejected baptism. Therefore, despite her apostasy, her children had the benefit of the working of the Holy Spirit.

Based on this **assumption**, we could say that the children were far better off being gathered to the bosom of the heavenly Father than they would have been in the clutches of their earthly mother. If this assumption is wrong and the children died in unbelief and went to hell, we could still not accuse God of anything. Each day there are hundreds of thousands who die in unbelief. The blame for this is to be put on man, not God.

γνῶσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι - The reports of this drastic action would reach all the churches. We can hardly imagine that news of the Jezebel-woman’s ailment, the affliction of her followers, and the death of her children would have been contained within the environs of Thyatira. Pergamos, especially, would have profited in learning what the failure to discipline could bring (cf. 2:14ff.). Yea, all churches down through the ages could benefit from the knowledge of what Christ did at Thyatira.

ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν - This is what all can learn. Christ begins with a double subject for the sake of emphasis: “I, even I, am the one searching.” The terminology in this verse is an echo of the Old Testament: “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind (i.e., kidneys), even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds” (Jer. 17:10). The divine characteristics of omnipotence and judgment are here claimed by Christ.

Christ had introduced Himself as the one having eyes “like a flame of fire.” The Jezebel-woman and her followers were to know that they were not fooling Jesus. His eyes pierced through any facade they had put up; He saw their innermost thoughts and desires. He knew that they were not concerned about Christ and the truth. They were only guided by the lust of their hearts and their “gutlessness” (kidneys?): they were unwilling to take a stand against idolatry.

After this action against these errorists, all the churches would know that Christ can see our thoughts and intentions. A dark and ominous cloud would be on the horizon of those who imagined that they could “pull the wool” over the eyes of God. Former idolaters never imagined that their gods could read their minds. Now they would know that Christ, the true God, has all-seeing eyes.

νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας - “kidneys and hearts” (KJV has “reins” for νεφροὺς; others have “mind”). These two are often joined together in the Scriptures (cf. Ps. 7:9; Jer. 11:20; 20:12). The kidneys (together with the bowels: σπλάγχνον) were regarded as the seat of the emotions. I used the expression “gutlessness”; we, too, speak of things like courage as coming from the lower viscera. The heart was regarded as the seat of moral and spiritual activity. Jesus knows our emotions, desires, motivations, thoughts, etc.

κατὰ τὰ ἔργα - κατὰ has the basic meaning of “down along.” It can be symbolized with two parallel lines. One runs “down along” the side of the other. The two are in agreement. Thus, in many instances, the two parts of a clause, which are joined by κατὰ, would be in agreement.

Jesus states that He will give to each one “according to his works.” What Jesus gives will run exactly parallel to a man’s works. The two will be in agreement. The situation will never arise in which the retribution or reward will not be in line with the works.

On what basis does Christ examine the works? As this verse shows us, it is not the outward action that Christ ex-

amines, but the inner motivation. The good or evil of a deed is not in the hand, but in the heart. “The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil” (Matt. 12:35).

What does Christ look for in the heart? The first thing He wants to find is faith. Where faith is lacking, there can be nothing good. “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Where He finds faith, there He will also find love. Faith without love does not exist. “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (Jas. 2:17). Love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The same Spirit, who is responsible for creating faith, also creates love. Where faith and love are behind the deed, it is counted as good. Where these are lacking, the deed is evil. Thus, only those who have the faith-love connection with Jesus Christ are able to bear good fruit (John 15:1 ff.).

24. ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις, ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσι τὴν διδασχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ, ὡς λέγουσιν· οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βᾶρος·

BUT I SAY TO THE REST OF YOU IN THYATIRA, AS MANY AS DO NOT HAVE THIS TEACHING, WHOEVER HAS NOT KNOWN THE DEPTHS OF SATAN, AS THEY SAY: I DO NOT CAST UPON YOU ANOTHER BURDEN.

τοῖς λοιποῖς - There were those in the congregation who did recognize the evil of the Jezebel-woman. They did not have “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness”; however, they did fail to “reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). They did not agree with her teaching; they did not join in the fornication; they did not eat meat offered to idols. Yet, they tolerated the presence of her and her followers. No disciplinary action was taken. Thus, while they did not have fellowship with her works, they did continue in fellowship with her. This is what the Lord had against them (v. 20).

τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ - cf. notes on verse 20.

οὐ βάλλω. . . - The fact that members of their congregation would suffer affliction, some even dying, and the fact that news of this would spread throughout the churches was burden enough. It would take years for them to live down the shame that this would bring upon them.

25. πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρις οὗ ἂν ἦξω.

YET HOLD FAST TO WHAT YOU HAVE UNTIL I COME.

ὃ ἔχετε - “what you have” - There was good in this congregation, as is mentioned in verse 19. Christ Himself was about to get rid of the evil. What remained, including the lesson He was teaching them, they should grasp firmly and not let go (κρατήσατε = “be strong; take a strong hold on”).

Some exegetes join the phrase πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε to the last part of verse 24: “I do not cast upon you another burden, except what you have.” They refer the “burden” to the recommendation of the Council at Jerusalem: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden (βᾶρος) than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication . . .” (Acts 15:28f.). This interpretation is possible. However, the various uses of βᾶρος in the New Testament do not mandate making this connection.

ἄχρις οὗ ἂν ἦξω - “until whenever I come” - Does this refer to His second coming or to His coming for the purpose of carrying out His judgment? Similar words are used in chapter 3:3, concerning which one exegete speaks of His judicial coming in spirit, while another speaks of His final coming in glory.

A study of ἦξω reveals that this term is used to refer to Christ’s incarnation and to His Second Coming. However, there appear to be no examples of this term being used to refer to His coming to carry out temporal judgment, unless it would be these two in Revelation. In chapter 2:16, Christ speaks of coming for the purpose of temporal judgment, but there He uses ἐρχομαι.

As one reads this letter, the impression is left that the burden (v. 24) would be upon them before this coming. Therefore, the coming would not be to place the burden upon them. Verse 26, following immediately, speaks of the rewards for those who gain the final victory. This reinforces the thought that Christ is referring to His Second Coming.

26. Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν,

AND THE ONE OVERCOMING AND KEEPING MY WORKS UNTIL THE END, I WILL GIVE TO HIM AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS.

ὁ νικῶν - This phrase occurs in each letter. The Ephesians had to overcome error and lovelessness. The Smyrnans had to overcome tribulation. The Pergamians had to overcome persecution and laxness in church discipline. The church in Thyatira was faced with a battle against error, immorality, compromising doctrine and morals, and the failure to discipline. Thyatira had sunk deeper than Pergamos. Now that the Lord had taken them to task and was about to lay a burden on them, they were to rally their spiritual forces and actively engage in continuing warfare. A great reward awaited those who were victorious.

ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου - τηρῶν = “watch over, preserve, keep”; this is used with reference to keeping the commandments (John 14:15), keeping the saying of Christ (John 8:51f.), keeping the words of Christ (John 14:23), God’s keeping of His children (John 17:11), the keeping of a prisoner (Acts 12:5), keeping the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3), keeping the faith (2 Tim. 4:7), etc.

It is obvious that τηρέω does not mean only “obey.” Consider the concept of a guard keeping his prisoner. The prisoner is secured and watched over, so that he does not escape. — Even so we keep the works of Christ: we discover what they are; we secure this knowledge within our hearts; we watch over it lest it escape our memories. His works become a constant part of our lives. Part of watching over them is using them, doing them. — A machine that is not used becomes lost to the owner. It will rust up beyond repair. Even so, if one does not do the works of Christ, he will forget what they are. However, τηρέω expresses more than the English words “obey” or “do.” I believe that the word “keep” is still the best translation. If it involves some explanation on the part of the teacher, then so be it. There are many Biblical terms which can be understood only through study.

τὰ ἔργα μου - In verse 23, Christ spoke of “your works.” Here He speaks of “My works.” It is when His works become our works that our manner of living is approved by God.

When Christ was asked, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God,” He answered, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:28f.). This is the first and foremost work, without which no one can do any other work. Without faith in Christ, we can do nothing, as is mentioned above. All one really needs, then, is to believe in Christ. As is pointed out under verse 23, where there is faith, the deeds of love will follow.

We “keep” His works by learning of them, by treasuring them up in our hearts, and by making them a part of our lives. For the Thyatirans this meant, particularly, leading a chaste and decent life and keeping themselves separate from idolatry. The Jezebel-woman had invented her own works, which some from the congregation had followed and which all of them had tolerated. Jesus now calls upon them to keep **His** works, for “in keeping them there is great reward” (Ps. 19:11).

ἄχρι τέλους - This refers to the end of the world or to the end of a person’s life in the world.

δώσω - This corresponds to the same word in verse 23. In that verse, Christ was putting emphasis on what would happen to those who did evil works. Here He speaks of what He gives to those who keep His works.

ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν - These and the words that follow ring with the tones of the Messianic conquest: “Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt shatter them like earthenware” (Ps. 2:8,9). Christ had already gained this authority: “As I also have received from my Father” (v. 28). He was already sitting upon His throne. Now He promises that those who keep His works until the end will share in His dominion. Even as the nations attempt to dominate here on earth, try to exert their authority over the Church, so the Church will dominate in eternity.

27. καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντριβεται,

AND HE WILL SHEPHERD THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE SHATTERED.

ποιμανει - Shepherds carried their wooden rods. With these they would gently nudge the sheep to keep them from straying. With them they would also fiercely fight off the predators. It is obvious that the latter use of the rod is alluded to here. The victor in the struggle against the idolatrous and lustful world would be given an unbreakable rod of iron, with which he would be able to shatter the enemy.

This appears to be a reference to the ultimate judgment, in which the unbelieving nations of the world will be cast into the everlasting fires. None shall be able to resist the authority of those who make this judgment. It is the victors, who will join Christ in exercising this authority (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2f.). Then shall the Church be avenged of the blood of her martyrs, whom the nations have killed (cf. 6:10).

The Lord seems to give promises that directly relate to the problems that the people were facing. One possible connection may have to do with the teaching that one had to experience evil (“the depths of Satan”) in order to gain the mastery over it: “You have to go into the lion’s den in order to beard the lion.” This may have been the contention of the Jezebel-woman. She promised dominion to those who were ready to face the lion in his den. The nations could be dominated only by entering their hallowed grounds: the temples of idolatry.

Christ now assures His slaves that only by holding fast to His Word and overcoming error, immorality, the temptation to compromise with the world or to be lax in discipline, would they receive the authority over the nations.

28. ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν.

AS ALSO I HAVE RECEIVED FROM MY FATHER, AND I GIVE TO HIM THE MORNING STAR.

ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ - cf. notes on verse 26. The translators are divided on the matter of where to begin verse 28. Some place the ὡς clause with what comes before and some with what comes after. If the ὡς clause is as Nestle has it (cf. the

Greek above), then Christ would be saying that He has received the morning star from His Father. If that clause is to be construed with verses 26 and 27, Christ would be saying that He has received authority from His Father. As will be seen in what follows, Christ has not received the morning star from His Father. He IS the Morning Star. As for authority, this He did receive from His Father: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). "He [the Father] gave Him [the Son] authority to execute judgment . . ." (John 5:27). "As Thou [Father] gavest Him [Son] authority over all mankind . . ." (John 17:2). For these reasons, I have taken the ὡς clause to be a part of verses 26 and 27.

τὸν ἄστῆρα τὸν πρωΐνον - Revelation 22:16 - "I, Jesus . . . am . . . the bright Morning Star." In 1:20, the seven stars in the hand of Jesus represent the messengers, who brought the Gospel message to the seven churches. In 2 Peter 1:19, the enlightenment produced by God's Word is referred to as "the daystar" (φωσφόρος - "light-bringer") arising in the heart. In Luke 1:78, the coming of Christ is called "the dayspring" (ἀνατολή - "a rising-up") from on high. In Malachi 4:2, the coming of Christ is called "the sun of righteousness" rising.

All that relates to God is light. The incarnation of Christ was the rising of the sun in the world of darkness. The coming of Christ into our hearts by the preaching of the Gospel is the rising of the sun within us. In each instance, Christ is the "Light-giver." "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

In our passage, Christ says that He will give the Morning Star to the ones who overcome. Since He is the Morning Star, this must mean that they will share in His glory. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." "We suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:17f.). "You also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). Thus, the light which has dawned within our hearts will shine through our whole being, much as it did in Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1ff.).

Since knowledge is included with light, we shall be filled with the fullness of knowledge. We shall know, even as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12).

This promise is made to those "who have not known the deep things of Satan." The errorists claimed that knowledge can be gained only by experience. This is the same thing that Satan told Eve. Satan has always passed himself off as a messenger of light (2 Cor. 11:14), claiming to give the light of true knowledge. The errorists of Thyatira were duped by a similar claim. Christ shows the faithful that the true knowledge, the true light, emanates only from Him. The **fullness** of knowledge, "even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10), would be theirs, when they come into perfect and complete union with Christ in paradise.

SUMMARY

The congregation at Thyatira was the opposite of that at Ephesus. The Thyatirans were strong in love, but weak in doctrinal discipline. In their midst was a "Jezebel," who claimed to be a prophetess. Her doctrine was that one must experience the "depths of Satan" (in order to understand and overcome sin?). She led her followers into idolatry and immorality. She refused the grace of Jesus, which called her to repent. Therefore, Jesus declared judgment on her and her followers. It would be a visible judgment, which all the churches could see. Thus, all would know that no one can fool the Lord. He reads the hearts and sees the true motivations. (The true motivation of the Jezebelites was sensual lust.) — As for the faithful of the congregation, they would have no further judgment. The shame that would come upon them as a result of Christ's judgment on the Jezebelites would be enough of a burden. They were encouraged to hold fast to the truth and the love that they had. — "And He who overcomes, and He who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received [authority] from my father; and I will give him the Morning Star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

To this I add the thoughts of William Barclay:

The necessary conclusion seems to be this. On the surface the Church at Thyatira was a strong and a flourishing Church. If a stranger went into it, he would be impressed with its abounding energy and its generous liberality and its apparent steadfastness. But, for all that, there was something essential missing; there was a canker at the heart of it.

Here is a warning. A Church which is crowded with people and which is a hive of energy and a dynamo of activity is not necessarily a real Church. It is quite possible for a Church to be crowded, because its people come to it to be entertained instead of instructed, and to be soothed and petted instead of to be challenged and confronted with the fact of sin and the offer of salvation. A Church may be so full of energy that it becomes a restless ferment instead of a haven of peace. A Church may be packed with many activities, but in the abounding energy the centre may have been lost, and it may be a highly successful Christian club rather than a real Christian congregation. The state of things in Thyatira is something designed to give us searchingly to think.

(*The Revelation of John*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, vol. 1, p. 129).

SELF - WORTH *

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John C. Reim

During a convention break on the Immanuel Lutheran College campus, a voice of experience is heard coming up from behind. It belongs to a man who is known for his refined theological insights as well as his merry and jovial wit. Without the slightest bit of encouragement, this voice mutters, “I sure like me.” There is comfortable laughter shared by both the addresser and the addressee, and that’s because the statement is intended to produce a chuckle. And yet, in an interesting way, it presents a healthy and serious example.

During a commercial break on the living room TV, many other voices are heard speaking up front. They belong to all sorts of physically fit or famous people. And without the slightest hesitation, they boldly declare that they use a particular product because they’re worth it, or because they believe in themselves, or because they love themselves. There is no laughter, for the statements are made in complete seriousness. And yet their seriousness is almost humorous in a pitiful kind of way.

These similar yet different occurrences introduce us to similar yet different approaches to a topic that is receiving a great deal of attention these days, and a topic that can affect our lives in very many ways.

Terminology

One of the challenges of the topic before us presents itself in connection with the gamut of terms that come into play. The subject matter is barely approached and a person is barraged with a battery of expressions. It is a topic of many titles: self-esteem, self-love, self-respect, self-confidence, pride, self-image, self-worth, and so on. Some of these terms are more synonymous than others, as presented in the following comparison:

Pride: “proper respect for oneself; sense of one’s own dignity or worth; self-respect.”¹ **Self-esteem:** “1. belief in oneself; self-respect 2. undue pride in oneself; conceit.”² **Self-respect:** “proper respect for oneself and one’s worth as a person.”³ (my underline)

Some of these words are found more frequently in Scripture than are others. Some present more negative overtones to the biblically sensitive ear than do others. For reasons which should present themselves during the course of this essay, I choose to work (and begin the evolution of a phrase with) the term “self-worth.”

Need

“Need” is a strong word. It can communicate a sense of urgency, even desperation. It can refer to something we need alive if survival is to survive. And, in this sense, Jesus informed Martha that “only one thing is needed” (Luke 10:42a). There is one thing that far surpasses everything else in necessity. Is a sense of self-worth that one thing? Is a sense of self-worth a need in the sense of being the ultimate concern? An affirmative response to these questions can easily be inferred from some of the statements written by Robert Schuller. He is certainly one of the most outspoken “prophets” in connection with this topic, and the importance that he places on a sense of self-worth is phenomenal.

Stating his opinion of the importance of self-worth from a positive point of view he says, “When a human being’s self-esteem is stimulated and sustained (like a branch in the trunk of a tree) in a redemptive relationship with Christ, we are truly saved from sin and hell.”⁴ In a horrifying manner, he associates salvation with self-esteem and connects eternal deliverance to a type of faith in oneself. And although the **person** of Christ is mentioned in connection with the relationship that he presents, Schuller’s words clearly oust the **Word** of Christ which declares, “Whoever believes in **him** is not condemned” (John 3:18).

Stating his opinion of the importance of a sense of self-worth from a negative point of view, he states, “I contend

that this unfulfilled need for self-esteem underlies every human act, both negative and positive. Every analysis of social or personal sins must recognize that the core of all sinful or unsocial behavior is a conscious or subconscious attempt to feed the person's need for self-esteem. Any analysis of 'sin' or 'evil' or 'demonic influence' or 'negative thinking' or 'systemic evil' or 'antisocial behavior' that fails to see the lack of self-dignity as the core of the problem will prove to be too shallow."⁵ But this, too, flies in the face of Scripture, which presents the core of sinful activity to be the lack of spiritual light, the lack of righteousness, the inherent love for that which is evil. "Men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light" (John 3:19b). And if any motivator to sinful behavior is to be seen, it is to be seen in Satan, since Jesus told some gross sinners of His day, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire" (John 8:44a).

In the light of such sections from Scripture, it can hardly be said that a lack of a sense of self-worth is the core of all sinful behavior nor that an abundance of a sense of self-worth is the cure for salvation. It dare not be presented, therefore, as **the** need of which Christ spoke.

Even though a sense of self-worth is not **the** need, in the sense of being the most important of all existing things, it is, nevertheless, **a** need in the sense of being something very helpful and beneficial. This fact can be seen through some of the negative results of a sense of self-worth that is too low (results that are less dramatic than those presented by Schuller, and yet quite serious). A partial list of potential results stemming from a very low sense of self-worth might include the following:

Defeatism: Such a person will likely see himself as being unable to accomplish much of anything that is worthwhile. The result of this attitude is that very little will be attempted. And the adage explains that, when nothing is ventured, nothing is gained.

Personal abuse: When something is seen as being without value, it is naturally treated without much care. The person with a low sense of self-worth, therefore, will likely see no reason to preserve and develop himself. This can produce the infliction of abuse upon himself, as well as develop habits that are known to be destructive.

Loneliness: Such a person will likely see no reason why anyone would want to be near him or associate with him. This might lead him to withdraw himself from others, resulting in the loss of friends and the misery of being alone.

Pessimism: Such a person sees no reason why good things should happen to him. He predicts difficulties or even disasters in his future. Such prophecies have a way of fulfilling themselves, and when they do, it enforces the individual's expectation of trouble.

Misbehavior: Such a person will likely demonstrate activities which correspond to his low sense of self-worth. He might do cruel things. After all, if he can make other people miserable, well, "misery loves company." (This makes a low sense of self-worth a potential cause of sinful behavior rather than the core of Schuller's thinking.)

Lovelessness: Such a person cannot understand why anyone would love him, with the result that he considers their expressions of love to be insincere. And when no love is felt, it's all the harder to love others.

These are probably only a few of the detriments that can result from a low sense of self-worth. And the potential of such detriments underscores the benefit, usefulness, and need for some sort of sense of self-worth. It is apparently in recognition of this that an organization such as the Big Brothers of America has made as its goal "to produce positive changes in the children, including a strengthened sense of self-worth at home, in school and in the community."⁶ It is apparently in recognition of this that many people seem to consider all the concern over this topic to be one of the greatest advancements of our time. And by helping people to avoid some of these detriments, a sense of self-worth is certainly a good thing. But to what degree should it be developed? To what extent should it be allowed to go?

Limits

Even as a very low sense of self-worth is detrimental, so also is the sense of self-worth which is too high. Actually, when a person's sense of self-worth is too high it could be said that it ceases to be merely a sense of self-worth. It has then become something else: pride, self-love, self-esteem. It has become that attitude which is so natural to man, which takes credit for accomplishments not his own, and which makes himself the object of adoration and praise. Cases in point: Nebuchadnezzar. We're told that "he said, 'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?'" (Dan. 4:30); Herod. He welcomed the address of the people who shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man" (Acts 12:22); All human flesh. It naturally produces what Scripture calls "the boasting of what he has and does" (1 John 2:16). When a person develops and maintains pride in oneself, self-love, and self-esteem (insofar as it is synonymous with pride), he avoids the detriments of a low sense of self-worth, but he also places himself into the line of God's judgmental fire. Nebuchadnezzar was made like an animal, Herod was eaten by worms, and "God opposes the proud" (1 Pet. 5:5b). Nothing is more disgusting to God than to make oneself the

object of ultimate love and devotion. Pride, self-love, and self-esteem remove the Lord from the throne of one's heart and fill it with oneself. This is ultimately a breaking of the first and foremost commandment, and therefore takes the first and foremost position in the line-up of offences found in 2 Timothy: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (3:1-2a,5). The Lord's disgust over an overly extended sense of self-worth (pride) is clear, and His disgust means the greatest type of detriment for the person thus afflicted. Proverbs presents no pro words for pride, but only cons: "A man's pride brings him low" (29:23); "Pride goes before destruction" (16:18-20). It's inevitable.

The persons who develop their sense of self-worth to the level of pride, self-love, or self-esteem will likely suffer from other detrimental results as well. In addition to the Lord's judgments, a partial list of these could be found to include the following:

Discontent: Pride can quickly convince a person that he deserves more than he is receiving. Earthly life will never be good enough in his sight ("Why me?"), thus producing a perpetual and miserable state of discontent.

Discouragement: Pride can quickly fabricate the idea that a person's level of performance and achievement will be extremely high. When reality then fails to match up with his own expectations about his ability, disappointment and discouragement can set in.

Inefficiency: Pride can motivate a person to view the help and support of others as being beneath his dignity and as unnecessary. The rejection of help from others will naturally result in a lower level of efficiency, since no one person can do all things.

Sorrow: Pride can easily develop the opinion that very few people are worthy of a person's time, friendship, and affection. This will keep a person from developing warm relationships with many others. And a feeling of isolation and of being alone in a time of need can result in a serious sense of sorrow.

Embarrassment: A good deal of humor is found in connection with a person's own foibles and flubs. Pride can cause a person to see any of his less-than-perfect moves as being disgraceful and unacceptable, resulting in a red face rather than a good laugh.

When a person's sense of self-worth intensifies to the point where it become pride, self-love, and self-esteem, it becomes something dangerous, detrimental, and deadly. It is a risky activity, therefore, to promote these activities, and a certain amount of risk is involved even in the use of these terms. Various adjectives may be used in connection with these nouns, e.g., "healthy pride" or perhaps "Christian self-love." But even these quality qualifiers seem to fail in softening the crassness of such biblically unacceptable things. By contrast, the phrase "self-worth" has a neutrality about it which seems to lend it to proper usage. Yet from what has been presented, this phrase requires some qualifying itself. Since a sense of self-worth can be detrimentally low and detrimentally high, that which is needed is a **balanced** sense of self-worth. As the Apostle Paul said, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment" (Rom. 12:3b). People can't help but have certain thoughts about themselves, and people have a need for a certain sense of self-worth, but it must be balanced. And a balanced sense of self-worth isn't determined so much by the intensity of that sense, as it is determined and produced by the **type** of sense a person has. A sense of self-worth will be balanced when it flows from a properly balanced source. It will be properly balanced when it's properly developed. So, what is the best way to develop a balanced sense of self-worth?

Development

Acceptable or unacceptable, helpful or unhelpful, there appear to be various ways in which individuals consciously or subconsciously attempt to develop their sense of self-worth.

a. Emphasis on Comparison

Perhaps the method of developing a sense of self-worth that comes most naturally to man is the one that involves the activity of comparison. After all, the value and the worth of just about anything can be determined on the basis of comparisons. A dime is not worth much when compared with one hundred dollars, but when compared with a penny, it becomes something that is ten times more valuable. A pot of lentil soup isn't worth much when compared with a banquet feast, but when compared with having absolutely nothing at the point of starvation, it can become something more valuable than a birthright (Gen. 25:29-34). Value and worth are routinely determined by comparing something with a different version of the same basic item. And this routine is easily transferred into the activity of comparing one's own self to others in the pursuit of developing a sense of self-worth.

This procedure is not difficult. For it's relatively easy to find some area in which another person performs more

poorly than oneself. And, oh, what a sense of personal worth is developed through such discoveries! The Pharisee presented well this natural activity, saying, “God, I thank you that I am not like all other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector” (Luke 18:11b). Even the Apostle Paul, in reviewing his original way of life, said, “I was advancing in Judaism **beyond** many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:4). He had developed a super sense of self-worth as the result of comparing himself with the elite of Judaism and finding himself to have surpassed even them. His conclusion was that he was “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5). And this activity of comparing oneself with others extends to all corners of the globe and can even develop into the activity of comparing oneself to **oneself**— all in the pursuit of a sense of self-worth. In Corinth Paul found that some people got to such a point that “they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves” (2 Cor. 10:12). Quite the innovate approach! “The standard by which they gauge themselves, and the model with which they compare themselves is always themselves. No wonder that they always achieve a rating of 100 per cent.”⁷ The activity of making comparisons is popular. But it’s not a good procedure.

Unless a person remains completely objective in the comparison of himself with others (which is impossible for natural man), this procedure will not produce a **balanced** sense of self-worth. In effect, it produces a sense of self-superiority, which puts a person right back into that dangerous crowd of the proud. What’s more, the Bible denounces the activity of this type of comparison. It is well-known how Jesus felt about the attitude of the Pharisees. When, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul was comparing himself with other people, he said, “I am speaking as a fool . . . (I am out of my mind to talk like this)” (2 Cor. 11:21b,23b). As for those who compared themselves with themselves, “they are not wise” (2 Cor. 10:12c), Scripture puts down all versions of this form of comparison, saying, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3).

b. Emphasis on rare talents well done

Value and worth can often be determined and established even apart from the activity of making comparisons. It is common to ascribe great value to that which is simply uncommon. Great worth is regularly attached to objects that are rare. Even though many different metals could easily hold a jewel in place on a ring, the gold ring is very valuable because gold is rarer than many other metals. Even though a photograph of Abraham Lincoln would be printed in black and white and would probably be fuzzy, it would be of great value because it would be very rare, and so on. In the pursuit of developing a sense of self-worth, therefore, a person might employ the same technique in connection with personal characteristics, talents, or gifts.

It appears to be quite natural for people to locate within their personal make-up one or more traits which are rather appealing and relatively rare. The thought-process is apparently this: “If a sense of value accompanies items that are appealing and rare, then I can obtain a sense of value in connection with those traits that are appealing and rare in me!” And there are a number of relatively rare items that people frequently use in this way.

— One such rarity might be found in a person’s rank or “roots.” An individual’s position in society can easily develop a sense of self-worth, as can be seen in the case of Saul. Near the beginning of his biblical account, he appears to have had a very low sense of self-worth, for he was hard to find. He had “hidden himself among the baggage” (1 Sam. 10:22b). But when he had served as king of Israel for a time, all of that changed. He had developed such a sense of self-worth that, when a warrior named David received great praise from the people instead of him, “Saul was very angry” (1 Sam. 18:8a).

— Another rarity which can easily establish a sense of self-worth is great wealth. Even though we’re given only a glimpse of the rich man in the Lord’s parable, he appears to have considered himself most valuable, for he found it very much in place and even necessary to be “dressed in purple and fine linen” and to live “in luxury every day” (Luke 16:19). It’s easy to see the value of a bank account as being reflective of the value of oneself. The Sons of Korah speak of “those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches” (Ps. 49:6b).

— An item that is somewhat rare and that is used by people to establish a sense of self-worth is found in a man’s handsomeness or a woman’s beauty. And a biblical example of this might be found in David’s son, Adonijah. When David was nearing death we’re told, “Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, ‘I will be king.’ So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him. (His father had never interfered with him by asking, ‘Why do you behave as you do?’ He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom)” (1 Kings 1:5-6). He had a strong enough sense of self-worth to envision himself as king, and the implication is that this was based on three uncommon characteristics, the **second** of which was the fact that he was handsome.

— Another quality that is likely to be used in the development of a sense of self-worth is physical aptitude and strength. From what is seen of Goliath, he was not lacking a sense of self-worth, for he said, “This day I defy the ranks of Israel!” (1 Sam. 17:10b).

— In addition to these, then, a person might attempt to develop a sense of self-worth on any number of personal

characteristics, individual qualities, things about himself. He might emphasize his successful career, his artistic accomplishments, his moral excellence, his famous relative, etc.

Serious problems arise, however, with this approach. Unless a person recognizes his talents, qualities, and characteristics as gifts from God, the sense of self-worth which they cultivate will, again, develop into a sense of pride, self-love, and conceit. It will not be balanced. And the sense of self-worth that is based on a personal trait is not at all healthy or safe, because all such personal traits are subject to change without notice. Saul was told, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you!” (1 Sam. 15:28). Riches and wealth are easily destroyed and stolen. Accidents, age, sickness, and disease can destroy one’s treasured handsomeness or beauty. A stone can hit the strong Goliath and bring him to his knees. “Change and decay in all around I see.” Consequently, the person who builds the sense of self-worth on variables builds on sandy, dangerous, emotional soil; for, when his basis is removed, he can easily plummet once again to the detrimental level of a low sense of self-worth.

c. Emphasis on human equality

The instability of these approaches is, perhaps, the frustration that began the search for an approach that is more stable. There must be some type of truth about individuals which can create a sense of self-worth and which is **not** subject to change! But what is it? Well, the answer that man is likely to produce is “Man!” There appears to be a trend of thought which promotes the idea that **all** people have what it takes to feel a sense of self-worth on the basis of the fact that they are human beings. On a recent episode of the television program “Kate & Allie,” the character Allie was resting at home after attending a high-school class reunion. Feeling rather low, she repeated to herself and to the audience the words, “We’re all successes because we’re all human beings.” Growing with popularity is the idea that every single human being—without any special qualifications and without any conditions—has within himself all that is needed to justify the feeling that he is valuable and worthy.

Now Jesus Himself did establish a certain value for all people, saying, “How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!” (Matt. 12:12a). And that statement reflected the sense of value that was given to man on day six when God told Adam, “Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28b). A human being has intellect and will at superior levels than that of animals. But the fact that a man is superior to other creatures in certain ways will hardly produce a whole of a sense of self-worth.

An attempt is made, therefore, by Robert Schuller to see **more** in man that can result in more of a feeling of self-worth. And to make his idea all the more plausible sounding, some Bible terminology is employed. He uses the phrase, “the image of God,” and builds his case on the old idea that all people have the image of God, even after the Fall (probably using Gen. 9:6 and Jas. 3:9). He writes, “Why is this need for self-esteem so all-consuming in individual behavior and so all-important? It is because we are made in the image of God!”⁸ This, then, is presented as being the best source of a sense of self-worth. He claims, “The human ego has been labeled as the ultimate sin, when, in fact, it is the mark of the image of God within people.”⁹ The implication seems to be that all people have some sort of innate greatness, an impression of God Himself, which results in a very high value and great amount of worth.

It is certain that the presence of the image of God would produce a value far in excess of anything else in existence. But “the image of God,” which refers to the knowledge and holiness of God, was lost by man at the time of the Fall. The distinction made in Genesis 5 is striking. “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God . . . When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth” (Gen. 5:1b,3). The image of God, which makes for outstanding value and worth, is lost to man by nature. (Cf. F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1, pp. 515-520.) While the thought that all people inherently possess the image of God might serve to give some people a sense of self-worth in this lifetime, it will be shown to be a false security on the last day. Also, it is an unbalanced approach, since it possesses nothing to keep such a sense of worth from developing too far and becoming personal pride.

d. Emphasis on Scripture in its Entirety

There is one approach to the development of a person’s sense of self-worth which is very unique. It is the biblical approach, the balanced approach. Interestingly, it does involve a certain comparison, it does emphasize a certain characteristic, and it does involve the image of God; but in ways that are completely different from the ways previously mentioned. It presents us with the proper and balanced view of a person, for it presents us with God’s view of a person.

Initially, His presentation of the truth concerning human beings is a startling one, and it shatters man’s natural

self-image (which is really self-imagination). For He provides this analysis of man in his isolated, natural, and untreated condition: “Dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19b). In determining the value of a man on the basis of what he consists of **physically**, this passage puts the value on a very low level. Man is dust—a fine version of dirt! And dirt is the very word that is commonly used to communicate a very low value: “dirt-cheap!”

When man in his natural and untreated condition since the Fall is considered from a **spiritual** point of view, the value scale is no higher. The divinely-inspired John described human beings in their original condition as being “chaff” (Matt. 3:12), and Webster shows that chaff stands for “anything worthless.”¹⁰ Sin resulted in the complete devaluation of the human being, for it completely dissolved in man the knowledge, the holiness, the image of God. And those who hear the clear Word of the Lord are brought to this conviction concerning themselves. Abraham expressed this recognition when he spoke to the Lord in deepest humility: “I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27b). In connection with his contact with the Christ, John the Baptist said, “He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (John 1:27). And it wasn’t only in contrast to God that biblical figures felt unworthiness. Paul analyzed himself in the light of Scripture, saying, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Rom. 7:18), and in speaking of sinners (a word which, in itself, presents a sense of low worth) Paul said, “I am the worst” (1 Tim. 1:15)—not even “I **was** the worst.” Such is the analysis of a person in his natural, untreated condition from the biblical perspective. And such an understanding is very useful in keeping any sense of self-worth from developing into pride. Such an awareness is what can keep a person from slipping into the self-love which is so thoroughly dangerous.

The question that might arise is whether **any** kind of sense of self-worth can exist with the above thoughts in mind. Does such an understanding about oneself tilt one’s sense to an unbalanced position in the negative direction? Well, did Abraham, John the Baptist, or Paul suffer from those detriments caused by a low sense of self-worth? No! They were emotionally fine! They were emotionally stable and joyful because they were aware of another divine truth. They knew what they were **in Christ**.

God in His grace determined to restore His dearest creation. He decided to recover the devaluated human race. And so He gave an inestimable value to man, achieving this by means of the price that He paid for man. The worth of an item is often determined by what people are willing to pay for it (whether or not it is actually worth that amount in comparison with other things). And God paid the greatest amount imaginable! Paul tells us that “you were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:20a). And that price was the priceless life and blood of God’s only Son, Jesus. Consequently, in our Redeemer-Christ the entire human race is declared righteous, is declared holy, is declared tremendously valuable. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19a). This is the marvelous and comforting doctrine of objective justification.

Righteousness, value, and worth have been made available to all people in Christ. Yet it is also true that not all people possess these treasures. Not all people have received to themselves the results of Christ’s atonement. Therefore, not all people are viewed by God as having this tremendous worth. Here there **is** a proper comparison to be made, for Jesus set forth an important distinction among individuals. He told His disciples, “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave” (Matt. 10:11). There **is** a difference between human beings. It’s a difference that determines true worth, and it’s the difference of faith.

When an individual rejects Christ as Lord and Savior, he pushes away from himself the greatest source of value and worth. The result of this is that he will be left in the dust and will remain the chaff that will be burned. Jesus explained that “Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18b). Paul said to the unbelieving Jews, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46b).

When, on the other hand, a person has faith, he has it **all** through his union with Christ! The Scriptures have this to say about Jesus: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev. 5:12b). And when we are united to Him as a branch to the vine, we are united also with His value and worth. Jesus said in connection with His believers, “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:2b). The truly valuable Christ lives within the Christian, and His presence, therefore, gives tremendous value to the Christian. Rather than basing a sense of self-worth on our position, our wealth, our looks, our strengths, our talents, we can base it on something eternal and unchanging: our Lord! **He** is the “thing about us” on which we can safely and beneficially base a sense of worth. In Christ, we are given the glorious restoration of the image of God which is so valuable. Those who have Christ by faith “have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:9b-10). What an expression of triumph and what a declaration of value is presented by Paul with the word: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Scripture resounds with the assurance that, when we are in Christ by faith, we are far, far more than two cents worth! It was to His **disciples**, Luke emphasizes, that Jesus said, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?”

Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7). Jesus used rather generic language to convey the superior worth of any human being to an animal and to show that the human race was the best of the Creation: "How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!" (Matt. 12:12). But His language was so rich and flavorful when He spoke of the value of His believers: "You are" (rather than "a man"), "many sparrows" (rather than "a sheep"). Those who are in Christ have the highest value, the greatest worth. Peter's epistle explodes with an elevation of those who are united to Christ by faith. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). And certainly, nothing is more valuable than royalty or more worthy than holiness. The Christian has it all! And in light of this, perhaps the object that we're after would properly be called "A balanced sense of **Christian-worth**" rather than "a balanced sense of **self-worth**," since the basis of our worth is Christ and not oneself, and since such a balance can be experienced only by a Christian.

When the believer, then, sees himself as the amazing thing that the Holy Spirit has made him—namely, a **Christian**, a Christ-person, one who is united to God Himself—true fulfillment will be found and those previously mentioned detriments will be removed.

— Defeatism is replaced by the sense of victory: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us!" (Rom. 8:37). Even the devil, death, and hell have no claim on Christians. Nothing can stop those in Christ, for Paul declared with utmost confidence, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

— Personal abuse is replaced by personal care, for we're given the ultimate reason to keep in shape: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

— Loneliness is replaced by the assurance of belonging to the family of God. "For we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink . . . If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:13,26). No matter what the outcome of other relationships might be, we believers always have brothers and sisters in Christ.

— Pessimism is replaced by optimism: Because of our attachment to the God with whom all things are possible, nothing needs to be viewed in the negative. Our bright Light still shines through the darkest of clouds, and He gives us His Word on the fact that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:38).

— A fear of what society might think of us is replaced by the confidence which regards public opinion very lightly. The support which the Lord provides is all the support that a person needs, and so Paul could say, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself . . . It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:3,4b).

— Misbehavior is replaced by the lovely fruits of faith. The Christian is the one who is truly liberated from the control of darkness and is enabled by Christ to live life as it should be lived. With the use of the imperative, Paul underscores the potential of the child of God. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

— Lovelessness is replaced by a love for others which is prompted by God's love for us. No expression of love **by** anyone **to** anyone is more emphatic or reassuring than God's expression of His love for us. He expresses His love in word—"I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3b); He expresses His love in deed—"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). And when this love of the Lord is experienced by an individual, a love for one another is the natural result.

These attitudes and activities are the very best and most beneficial of human behaviors. And they only begin the list of positive results that are available to those who are in Christ and to those who learn what their Christ-connection all means!

Holy Scripture leads us into a wholly unique, safe, foolproof, inspiring, uplifting, yet balanced sense of one's worth.

— Balance, as it is presented in the second chapter of Ephesians: While we are reminded in verse 9 that true success is "not by works, so that no one can boast," we are, nevertheless, described in verse 10 as "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

— Balance, as it is seen in Paul's understanding of himself: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

— Balance, as it seems to be found in that Christian at convention. He knows full well that in himself (as in us all) there

is little inherent value (and that knowledge is what gives the intended humor to the comment, “I sure like me.”). And yet, he is hardly a person who is “down on himself,” depressed, or pessimistic. He gives every impression of being quite comfortable with himself, and that’s apparently because of what he understands himself to be in Christ! In Christ there is a tremendous amount of worth; in Christ there is tremendous value; so the person who is covered and filled with Christ **can** surely like himself as a **Christian**!

Conclusion

This entire topic does seem to carry with it a certain aura of faddishness. A person might wonder just how long the emphasis on a sense of one’s worth and value will remain in the limelight of this world’s religious and philosophical scene. But as long as it does, we want to let our light shine in this area as well! Only Holy Scripture provides the means whereby a person can develop a truly beneficial, beautiful and balanced sense of one’s worth. Only Holy Scripture presents a person with the Christ—the Christ who takes simple piles of dust and makes children of God, priests of the Most High, saints of the Lord, those who are tremendously valuable, those who are truly worthy.

Consequently, whenever, wherever, and to whatever extent a person longs for a sense of worth, we do them no greater service than to present them with the clear and concise Word of God. By applying the Word of God to this subject a person is supplied with the truth about himself and the truth about his God, and those truths are the building blocks of a balanced sense of Christian-worth, which is a wonderful and helpful thing to have!

So let’s continue to proclaim the Gospel of our God, to emphasize all that a person becomes and receives through faith in Christ, to see ourselves and others as being truly and consistently valuable through our oneness with Christ, and to treat others in ways which show our recognition of their value in Him.

NOTES

¹ David B. Guralnik, ed., *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 2nd coll. ed. (Wm. Collins Pub., Inc., 1980) 1128.

² Guralnik 1292.

³ Guralnik 1293.

⁴ Robert H. Schuller, *Self Esteem the New Reformation* (Word Books Publisher, 1982) 20.

⁵ Schuller 15.

⁶ Taken from a brochure put out by Big Brothers of America.

⁷ Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1963) 239.

⁸ Schuller 16.

⁹ Schuller 31.

¹⁰ Guralnik 234.
