

Title: **WARNINGS FROM THE MASTER**

Text: Revelation 2:1-3:22

Subject: *Christ's Warnings to the Churches*

Readings: *Merle Hart and David Burge*

Introduction:

In Revelation chapters two and three, we have seven letters which the Lord Jesus dictated to the apostle John, which were sent to the pastors of the seven churches in Asia. Each letter was sent to a specific local church in the cities named: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

These were literal local churches in the apostolic era. However, these seven churches represent all the churches of Christ in this world throughout the Gospel Age.

They do not represent all the churches in the world, but all the churches of Christ in the world. They are representative of all New Testament churches. The seven churches of Asia do not represent seven different periods of church history, but the various conditions of local churches at any time in history.

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In a word, these are letters from Christ to us.

They are just as pertinent to the life and ministry of Grace Baptist Church in Danville, KY as they were to the seven churches to which they were originally sent. Our Lord's commendations, warnings, and promises in these two chapters are addressed to you and me.

I want us to look at these seven letters together, asking God the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher. May it please him now to take the things of Christ and show them to us.

In these two chapters, our Lord Jesus repeats this admonition seven times. — **"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."**

This admonition is given seven times in these two chapters because our Lord Jesus means for every believer to pay particular attention to the warnings contained in these seven letters. The title of my message is **WARNINGS FROM THE MASTER.**

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Proposition: In these seven letters, the Lord Jesus Christ himself warns us (both as individual believers and as believers assembled together as a local church) plainly of the most prominent dangers we must face in this world.

Divisions: I want to show you four things in this message.

1. A Fact We Must Never Forget
2. Some Dangers We Must Labor to Overcome
3. The Counsel of Our Compassionate Savior.
4. Our Lord's Promises to Those Who Overcome.

A FACT

1st — Here is **A FACT WE MUST NEVER FORGET**. Our Lord Jesus Christ says s, **"I know thy works."** He makes this statement seven times (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15).

Ephesus — (Revelation 2:2) "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast

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tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”

Smyrna — (Revelation 2:9) “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan.”

Pergamos — (Revelation 2:13) “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”

Thyatira — (Revelation 2:19) “I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first.”

Sardis — (Revelation 3:1) “And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith

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he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

Philadelphia — (Revelation 3:8) “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”

Laodicea — (Revelation 3:15) “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.”

Our Master, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, our God says to every church, to every professed believer, to the true believer and to the mere false professors of faith in him, “*I know thy works.*” He does not say, “I know thy feelings,” or “I know thy desires,” or “I know thy profession.” He says, “*I know thy works.*”

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The works of God's elect are important. Our works have no merit before God. Our works can never atone for our sins. Works cannot save us, justify us, sanctify us, or earn us some imaginary special place of honor and reward in heaven. Anyone who is even faintly familiar with the teachings of Holy Scripture knows that God's grace and God's salvation in Christ are absolutely free. All who know the Bible know that the believer's standing before God is a matter of free grace alone! We earn nothing from God by our works, except his wrath.

But, if you think good works are insignificant, useless, and of no value because they are not meritorious, I am afraid your religion is but a sham, a show, a pretense. Grace always produces good works. All true believers walk in good works for the glory of God. **There is no such thing as a saved man or woman who does not live in willing, voluntary, submissive obedience to Christ as his Lord.** Our obedience and works are far from perfect. In themselves, they are just filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), of no merit whatever before God. Yet, God's saints

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do perform good works. **It is the nature of spiritual men and women to walk in the Spirit** (Romans 8:5-10). Let me show you this from the Word of God.

All who are saved by the grace of God, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, perform good works because of inward grace, because they are born of God. The apostle James tells us, most plainly, that “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:14-26). Good works are those things which give evidence to others that our faith is real Our Lord says, “*Every tree is known by its fruit*” (Luke 6:44).

- **Noah** believed God; and he proved it by building the ark and entering into it.
- **Abraham** believed God; and he proved it to all who knew him by his works of obedience toward God.
- **Rahab** believed God; and she proved it when she hid the spies.

God has ordained that all who are saved by his grace walk in good works for the honor of his

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name (Ephesians 2:8-10). And what God ordained God brings to pass.

(Ephesians 2:8-10) "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

I repeat, that which God has ordained, God will bring to pass. He will see that his people walk in good works.

The indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit makes all believers new creatures in Christ (2

Corinthians 5:17). If we walk in the Spirit, Paul tells us, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). And all who are born of God walk in the Spirit (Romans 8:9). The Scriptures do not teach that we shall not have the lusts of the flesh, but that we shall

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not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Believers do not live after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Romans 8:12-13).

(Romans 8:1-14) “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

(2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (3) For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (14) That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who **walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**

(5) For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. (6) For to **be carnally minded is death;** but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. (7) Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (8) So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (9) **But ye are not in the flesh,** but

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in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (10) And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. (11) But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. (12) Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to **live after the flesh**. (13) For if ye **live after the flesh**, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (14) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

If I am in Christ, I have a new, holy nature, that which is born of God; and the bent of that nature is toward God (2 Peter 1:4; Galatians 5:17-22). But more — **That new man in you, that new man in me, cannot sin, because it is born of God** (1 John 3:9-10).

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And of this I am sure — **If I profess faith in Christ, but by my works deny him, my profession is an abomination to God, and I am reprobate** (Titus 1:16).

(Titus 1:16) "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

The same is true of you. Those who profess faith in Christ but by their works deny him are reprobate. This is not a debatable issue. True believers glorify God before men by their good works. — "*Faith worketh by love.*" Faith always works, not by law, but by love. But faith always works!

In the light of these facts, let all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ hear the words of Christ — "I know thy works!" For the religious hypocrite, these words are terrifying. — "*I know thy works.*" — "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" (Proverbs 15:3). His

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eyes are a flaming fire; and darkness is light before him. A man may deceive his pastor, his family, and even himself, but the Son of God is not deceived. All things are naked and open before his eyes (Hebrews 4:13).

He sees through the facade. All your “righteous” deeds, those things by which you hope to appear righteous before God are an abomination to God. He looks upon your prayers as blasphemy, your sacrifices as sacrilege, and your works of religion as evil works. In the end, our Lord will expose every hypocrite (Luke 16:15).

(Luke 16:15” “And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

That makes hypocrisy a losing game. — “*The hypocrite's hope shall perish*” (Job 8:13).

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For the believer, these words are full of comfort and cheer — "I know thy works." What a delight!

Our dear Savior looks not at our works themselves, but at the motive behind them. He looks into the heart and sees why we do the things we do. And he is well-pleased with the most feeble efforts of sincere, believing hearts. By the merits of his blood and righteousness, he makes our works a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God, acceptable and well-pleasing in his sight (1 Peter 2:5).

Imagine that, God is well-pleased with the faltering steps of believing sinners for Christ's sake, because they are steps toward him!

Illustrations: *Your Child's First Steps*
Faith's Dandelions

Mark 14:6-8 — "She hath wrought a good work on me...She hath done what she could."

God will not forget your works of faith and labors of love (Hebrews 6:10). The works of those who die

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in the Lord "*shall follow them*" into glory (Revelation 14:3). And they shall be named by Christ himself in the day of judgment (Matthew 25:37-39). The Son of God, our Savior says, "*I know thy works.*" What could be more comforting?

SIX DANGERS

2nd — **OUR LORD WARNS US OF CERTAIN DANGERS THAT MUST BE OVERCOME.** — In these two chapters, the Lord Jesus Christ identifies six conditions which, if they are not resisted and overcome, will result in apostasy and eternal ruin. If these conditions are allowed to go unchecked in any local church, it will soon wither and die. It may continue to exist in name, but that is all. Christ will withdraw the light of the gospel from it. Instead of being a house of light, it will be a den of darkness.

My soul, how often I have seen that happen, to individuals and to churches! If you find yourself described in these letters as one in a condition of

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decline, I warn you, no, the Master himself warns you to repent and turn to him again.

Here are six dangerous conditions into which we are constantly tempted to fall. The world, the flesh, and the devil all strive to pull us down into these pits. May God the Holy Ghost give us grace to overcome them and persevere, steadfast unto the end.

1. The first danger described is apostasy from our first love.

The Lord Jesus Christ says, "*I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love*" (2:4). Does the Son of God speak these words to me? Are they addressed to you?

These Ephesians were zealous in good works, patient in the trials and afflictions of life, and thoroughly orthodox in doctrine. But there was a dreadful decay in the matter of love to Christ!

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William Hendriksen illustrates this decay of love very clearly. — "A wife may be very faithful to her husband and may give evidence of bustling assiduity in all matters pertaining to him — and yet, there may be a decay in love. Her sense of duty may cause her to remain faithful in all the details of attention she bestows upon him"

Even so, you and I may be very faithful in all the outward forms of godliness and remain perfectly orthodox in doctrine, while our hearts' love and devotion to Christ declines and decays.

Are you like the Ephesians? Am I? Does our love for Christ decline? Do we find ourselves more and more concerned about the cares of this world and less and less concerned about Christ? Repent! Turn anew to Christ! Renounce all but him and set your affection on him alone (Colossians 3:1-3). — The correction for dead religious formality and dead doctrine is not no doctrine, emotionalism, or Pentecostalism, but steadfast commitment to Christ.

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(Colossians 3:1-3) “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Like Mary, let us take our place at his feet and have our hearts ravished with his love (Luke 10:39-42).

2. **Next we are warned not to embrace the doctrine of Balaam** (2:14).

(Revelation 2:14” “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”

When Balak called for Balaam to curse Israel, God restrained him. Much to Balak's disgust, God forced Balaam to bless his people (Numbers 22-24). Yet,

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Israel became involved in the worship of Baal (Numbers 25:1-3). Their sin, we are told, was the result of Balaam's counsel (Numbers 31:16). **The doctrine of Balaam is the doctrine of compromise with the religion of the world.** Balaam did not advise Israel to give up the worship of Jehovah. He simply told them it would be wise to accept the worship of Baal and go along with the religious customs, traditions, and practices of their pagan neighbors (Numbers 25:1-9).

BE WARNED! — Compromise with false religion is damning to the souls of men. Compromise is the way of least resistance, the way approved of by the world, the way that is easiest on the flesh. But any compromise of God's truth is an outright denial of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

(2 Corinthians 6:14-18) "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? (15) And what concord hath

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Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (16) And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (17) Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, (18) And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

(2 Corinthians 7:1) "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

- The only way to remove the offense of the gospel is to deny the gospel. We must never give any credibility to the religion of this world.
- Those who preach man's free will deny God's sovereignty.

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- Those who preach the freedom of man deny the sovereign freedom of God.
- Those who preach salvation by the will, works, or worth of the sinner deny salvation by grace.
- Those who preach universal atonement deny the efficacy of Christ's blood.
- To preach universal atonement is to deny that atonement was actually accomplished by the blood of Christ.
- Those who preach universal grace deny the efficacy of God's saving grace.
- Such people may talk about grace, redemption, and salvation, but their doctrine is free will and works, and results in damnation to all who follow them in the way of Balaam.

We must never seek agreement with such men, even in the name of peace, unity, and brotherly love. **The only way those who believe the gospel can get along with those who do not is for us to deny the gospel.** That we must not do!

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3. **We are all, by nature, tempted to embrace the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes** (2:15).

(Revelation 2:15” "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate."

The Nicolaitans were a group of heretics in John's day who taught that it was alright for believers to engage in the sexual immoralities of pagan religions.

They "committed fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness, and had their wives in common, and also ate things offered to idols" (John Gill).

They were antinomians. They were lawless, licentious rebels who wore the name of Christianity. These people really were antinomian, opposed the law of God. Their doctrine was, "Let us sin that grace may abound. Since we are saved by grace, it does not matter how we live." **The Nicolaitans were like many today who excuse sin by saying, "We are not under the law."**

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Without question, any man who preaches salvation by grace alone will be accused of antinomianism (Romans 3:8). It is not possible to preach redemption, justification, and sanctification by grace alone, through the merits of Christ alone, without some legalist crying, "That is antinomianism! That will lead to licentiousness!"

Having said that, this must also be declared — Any man who really is an antinomian is a lost man. God's elect seek holiness and righteousness. They are not self-willed, licentious rebels. Their hearts and lives are ruled by the love of Christ. And the love of Christ prevents lawlessness.

4. *Fourthly,* **the churches of Christ and individual believers are constantly pressured by the world to be tolerant of false prophets** (2. 20).

(Revelation 2:20) "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a

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prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."

The church at Thyatira was charitable, diligent in service, patient in trial, and well established in the faith of the gospel. But it was tolerant of "*that woman Jezebel*." There was a woman in the church who claimed to be called of God and gifted as a preacher, a prophetess. Our Lord calls her "*Jezebel*" after Ahab's wife, because she was a deceiver.

Though the Word of God clearly forbids the ordination of women and the tolerance of women as preachers and teachers in the house of God (1 Timothy 2:11-12), this church allowed this woman to teach and to seduce the people with her doctrine.

- Any church that has a woman for a pastor has Jezebel for a pastor.
 - Anyone who listens to a female preacher, listens to Jezebel.
- The flesh says, "Do not make a fuss about false prophets. It will only cause trouble."

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- The world says, "Judge not! To condemn the actions of another is bigotry."
- Satan tempts us to be silent, lest we create strife and division.
- **Yet, the Book of God warns us constantly to** *"beware of false prophets"* (Matthew 7:15). If they are not identified, exposed, and denounced, they will soon devour a congregation (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 2:16-18).

5. *Fifthly*, **we must guard against the tendency of our flesh toward hypocrisy, ritualism, and lifeless orthodoxy** (3:1).

(Revelation 3:1) "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

We are all prone to hypocrisy. We are all great pretenders by nature. Being natural born hypocrites, there is an innate tendency in man to substitute

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ritualism for worship, a creed for Christ, and orthodoxy for life. — **"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees"** (Luke 12:1). What is the answer? Give up the ordinances of divine worship? No! The answer is to seek grace from God that we may worship in the Spirit.

- We must take care that we live in the pursuit of true godliness, not a mere form and show of godliness.
- We must carefully observe the ordinances of Christ (baptism and the Lord's supper), but resist the mere outward practice of religious ceremonies.
- We must tenaciously adhere to the doctrine of Christ, but fear that form of doctrinal purity that has no heart.
- All who have, practice, and hold to a form of religion without Christ are like the church at Sardis — *"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead!"*

6. *Lastly*, **our Lord warns his churches of the most dangerous of all fleshly tendencies:**

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lukewarmness, apathy, and indifference (3:15-16).

(Revelation 3:15-16) “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. (16) So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

The Laodiceans were lukewarm. Nothing is more disgusting to the palate than lukewarm coffee, lukewarm stew, lukewarm gravy, or lukewarm milk. And nothing is more disgusting to Christ than lukewarm, half-hearted, apathetic, indifferent men and women.

Yet, we are ever prone to become lukewarm about the things of God. Every faithful pastor has seen many gradually sink into disgusting apathy. Once the gospel of the grace of God made the faces of men and women light up with joy, who now are unmoved by it. Once the story of redeeming love filled them with rapturous gratitude and melted their hearts to

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tears, but now nothing moves them. They are lukewarm.

What is the answer? Shall we fake it? Shall we pretend and put on a lively show? No! The answer is “Return!” As often as our hearts become lukewarm, let us fly away again to Christ.

CHRIST’S COUNSEL

3rd — Now, let us **HEAR THE COUNSEL OF OUR COMPASSIONATE SAVIOR.** If we would overcome these evil tendencies of the flesh, we must hear and obey our Master. There is no guesswork involved. The Lord Jesus tells us exactly what we must do.

- *"Remember from whence thou art fallen" (2:5).*
- *"Repent and do the first works" (2:5).*
- *"That which ye have already hold fast" (2:25).*
— Tenaciously adhere to the truth of God, the gospel of his free and sovereign grace in Christ.
- *"Be watchful and strengthen those things which remain" (3:2).*

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- *"Buy of me!"* (3:18).

Without money and without price, by faith alone, we must buy from Christ the gold of his grace and the white raiment of his righteousness, as we did in the beginning, and anoint our eyes anew with the eye salve of the gospel.

BLESSED PROMISES

4th — **HERE ARE THE PROMISES THE SON OF GOD GIVES TO THOSE WHO HEED HIS WORD, OVERCOME THESE DANGERS, AND PERSEVERE UNTO THE END.** Let us be wise and make personal application to ourselves.

Return to your first love, and Christ promises you the blessedness of eternal glory (2:7).

(Revelation 2:7) "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree

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of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

Hold fast the doctrine of Christ and confess him in the midst of his enemies, and he promises to own you as his (2:17).

(Revelation 2:17) "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*."

Continue in the way of faith, and the Son of God will give you power over the world (2:26).

(Revelation 2:26) "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations."

Awake, arise from the dead, and he will give you light of life (3:5; Ephesians 5:14).

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(Revelation 3:5) "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

(Ephesians 5:14) "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

Return to Christ with a true and fervent heart of faith, and he will cause you to reign with him forever (3:21).

(Revelation 3:21) "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, leans hard against the door of his church, knocking to his

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beloved. If anyone in his house will open to him, he will come in and sup with him (3:20).

(Revelation 3:20) "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Amen.

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- ¹ Danville — Sunday Evening — June 1, 2014
Danville — Tuesday Evening — February 13, 2018
San Diego Grace Fellowship, San Diego, CA — (AM — 05/25/14)
Katy Baptist Church, Fairmont, WV — 60th Anniversary Celebration
Men's Bible Study — Saturday Morning — January 2, 2016