

THERE IS SOMETHING MORE THAN THE economy, who will win the elections, the increasing persecution against Christians, the moral decline, and the great disasters, that should concern everyone claiming the name of Christ it is—
THE GREAT TAKE-OVER OF CHRISTIANITY.

The Great take-over of Christianity

THE BOOK OF REVELATION is the end time play book describing the last seven years of this present earth. It describes the events that will take place under the Antichrist, the great tribulation, the judgment of Christ, the judgment of God, the rapture, and our eternal reward in heaven or eternal punishment in the lake of fire. Before any of these events appear, an event is revealed that is affecting each one of us right now...that event is what I call

THE GREAT TAKE-OVER OF CHRISTIANITY

The GREAT TAKE-OVER is what the Apostle Paul calls *a falling away*, which is to take place before the events of the earth's last seven years, as recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2:3:

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first [apostasy], and that man of sin [antichrist] be revealed, the son of perdition.”

This falling away is the great apostasy that precedes the earth's final events and which has now taken over Christianity. After the apostasy reaches its fullness, the Antichrist and the events of Revelation will appear upon the world scene. It is this apostasy that has overshadowed Christianity, causing the removal of its most essential ingredient and robbing it of its power. This apostasy is outlined in Revelation 2 and 3 and describes Christians in their deceived, powerless condition, and is a call to all claiming the name of Christ to examine themselves and to repent of their sin.

In our twenty-first century, we are over two thousand years closer to the rise of Antichrist than when the Apostle John first recorded his words; therefore we must recognize that the deception is also greater and more deceptive. We must recognize that the majority of Christians are greatly deceived. You must examine yourself with the Bible in hand and the Holy Spirit in your heart as you talk to God about your own deception. You must not think it cannot happen to you, as these Scriptures warn us:

“Wherefore let him that thinks he stands TAKE HEED lest he fall.” (1 Corinthians 10:12)

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, BEWARE lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.” (2 Peter 3:17)

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall DECEIVE THE VERY ELECT.” (Matthew 24:24)

Though we will briefly look at Revelation 2 and 3 together, it is essential that you look at these churches on your own with the Holy Spirit as your teacher. It is essential that you understand these messages, follow through on them, and ensure that you are truly Christian. These messages are given *to Christians* in all generations and they indicate that most claiming the name of Christ do not belong to Christ...chances are great that you are among the deceived.

I emphasize as strongly as I can: *it is imperative—not an option—that you examine your Christianity in light of Revelation 2 and 3 to consider if you are truly Christian by God’s standard.*

Let’s now consider Revelation 2 and 3 and

THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The seven churches chosen by God represent the character of all Christians in all generations. What John records here should be a wake-up call to all claiming Christ. Essentially John records three categories of Christians:

1. Those that appear to be Christian in works, but lack the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Those that appear to be Christian in works, but compromise with unchristian teachings.
3. The true Christians.

As we look at the messages to the seven churches, keep in mind that the messages are to each single individual that makes up the church. Each individual Christian is responsible for hearing the message, repenting, and living in relationship and obedience to the living Christ. The word repentance should sink deep into the spirit of every person claiming the name of Christ. What does it truly mean to repent? *Do you have the courage to repent?* Our present age demands a heart wrenching battle *to be* a Christian versus an image and shadow.

The First Category of Christians

The Christians in this first category fully exemplify the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy:

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...” 2 Timothy 3:5

The Christians with the image and motion of a Christian without the Holy Spirit are those at Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea (Revelation 2:1-7, 3:1-6, 14-22). Each did the right Christian works, and according to those who saw them, they were God’s people, yet they were not headed for heaven in their present condition. Here’s what John records concerning these Christians:

<i>Church at Ephesus Lacks First Love</i>	<i>Church at Sardis Reputation for Being Alive</i>	<i>Church at Laodicea Lukewarm, Without Passion</i>
<p>The Christians here were hard workers for Christ, patient, did not tolerate sin in the church, purged the assembly of false prophets, and hated the unrestrained behavior many of God’s people had become involved with. The works of this church are exemplary, but they have one major fault...God is not with them, they have left their first love. Their works are without the power of God through the Holy Spirit. They have the image of a Christian without the power of being a Christian.</p>	<p>The Christians here had the reputation of being alive, but were in fact a dead church. A lot of teaching, Bible reading, and good works...but God was not there. They did not strengthen what was left of the true church and were letting it die. These Christians need to remember what happened when they first received Christ and hold firm to that living, relational experience and repent. They too have the image of a Christian without the power of being a Christian.</p>	<p>The Christians here were what many call “blessed” by God with riches, possessions, and had no needs they could not satisfy. However, all their resources did not keep the fire of the Holy Spirit alive within them as His power dimmed. The Christians became lukewarm, without passion for Christ, and without power. They also had the image of a Christian without the power of being a Christian.</p>

The messages here are for the individuals making up Christ’s body as indicated in the words at the end of each message, “He [singular] that has an ear, let him [singular] hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” You and I must examine ourselves in light of Revelation 2 and 3. Chances are your judgment of others and yourself as a Christian has to do with the works of Christianity as stated in the churches above. What must be recognized is that the measure of the Christian life is not in the works that we do, the love we exercise, or the sacrifices we make in the name of Christ, but in our relationship with him through the Holy Spirit and the power and works that flow from that relationship. The first category of Christians above, left their first love (relationship with the living Christ), were dead to Christ, and were without passion and power for the things of God. It is very easy to look at our good works in the name of Christ and be content with our Christian life—but that will not save us from the lake of fire. We must repent and return to a living relationship with the living God. Our works for Christ are ineffectual without that relationship and will do nothing to draw us near to God unless they flow out of a living relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. The majority do not have this relationship.

The Second Category of Christians

The Christians in this second category are those that do many good Christian works, yet they tolerate sin and false teachings. These are the Christians at Pergamos and Thyatira (Revelation 2:12-17, 2:18-19).

<i>Church at Pergammos Compromised</i>	<i>Church at Thyatira Compromised</i>
<p>Those claiming Christ in Pergammos held firm to Christ's name and did not deny him even in persecution. How deceived are these that would hold firm to Christ, yet hold the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Both of these names from the Hebrew and Greek means <i>to conquer the people</i>, indicating the lording over of other Christians by the leaders. They would lead them to use their Christian liberty to please themselves. They merged the things of God with pagan practices, encouraged the people to commit fornication, and to involve themselves in whatever pleasure and unrestrained behavior they pleased. They also denied God as creator and sold the gospel for profit. They have the image of a Christian without the power of being a Christian.</p>	<p>What more could you ask from a Christian than what we find here at Thyatira? They were filled with love toward others, service, faith, and patience, but they were deceived into merging their faith with pagan practices like those in Pergammos practicing and teaching the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. False teaching and sensual, sexual, unrestrained indulgence were all tolerated. So distasteful is this to God that He says He will kill the children of these deceived Christians and give to each of them according to the works that they do. They have the image of a Christian without the power of being a Christian.</p>

Like the three churches in the first category, these also look and act very much Christian, but in their steadfastness to the name and works of Christ, they tolerate sin and false teaching. Brothers and sisters, I hope you can see that Christianity is more than doing the right Christian things. It is more than upholding the right Christian rules and regulations and formalities. It is more than following a philosophy/religion where you make sure every dot and title is in place. Christianity is being *alive in Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:22). It is being merged with the living God through the Holy Spirit so that you truly become a new creature that is in character and spirit that which is of God. Out of this aliveness in Christ flows all the good character traits of the above five churches. The difference is that the works which were dead are now alive with power—a power that brings us into conflict with the world around us, which does not know or understand us.

Revelation 2 and 3 are a call to repentance, not to those without God, but to the Christian. It is a call for all claiming the name of Christ to examine themselves because most are not Christian at all. It is imperative—not an option—for all claiming Christ to reconsider whether they are in fact Christian. Revelation 2 and 3 will help in this quest.

This brings us to

The Third Category of Christians

The Christians in this third category are those assembling at Smyrna, Philadelphia, and Thyatira (Revelation 2:8-11; 3:7-13; 2:24-25). These are also filled with good works; the difference is that not only do they have the image of a Christian, but also have the power of being a Christian. As you will note in the following, this power brings them into conflict with the world around them. Why? Only because their works are righteous (made righteous by the power of God, the Holy Spirit) in contrast to the unrighteousness of those without God (1 John 3:12; John 15:19).

<i>Christians at Smyrna Persecuted and Poor</i>	<i>Christians at Philadelphia Worn Out</i>	<i>Revisiting the Christians at Thyatira Great Burdens</i>
<p>The true Christians alive with the Holy Spirit were not blessed with prosperity or a good reputation, but were blessed with troubles on every side, poverty, and were spoken evil of by those claiming to belong to God. To these, God does not give hope of escape in this life, but that of being taken to prison and killed. There is a cost to being a Christian. Have you counted the cost? Are you willing to pay the price?</p>	<p>The true Christians alive with the Holy Spirit are those who are keepers of God’s words and have not denied Christ’s name through lacking the Holy Spirit or lukewarmness or compromise or toleration or for money. They have heard the word, do the word, and are empowered by the word through the Holy Spirit. To these keepers of the word are given an open door to be witnesses to the world around them. As with the true Christians at Smyrna, these also live contrary to the world which wears them out so that they have little strength. There is a cost to being a Christian. Have you counted the cost? Are you willing to pay the price?</p>	<p>We must also make mention of those in Thyatira who were true Christians in the midst of those who compromised their faith. They also were characterized by suffering, carrying great burdens. There is a cost to being a Christian. Have you counted the cost? Are you willing to pay the price?</p>

In light of what God outlines as the true Christian, to which category of Christian do you think the majority claiming the name of Christ belong? To which group do you belong? Now is not the time to build a life here on earth...now is the time to reconnect with the Spirit and to be a Christian as God planned it. Now is the time to count the cost and to put your hand to the plow and not look back pressing forward toward the mark of the great eternal inheritance that will be ours.

Brothers and sisters, we live in a dangerous age where we think we and others are good, faith-filled Christians based upon the works done; however, in light of Revelation 2 and 3, it is not our Christian works that make us Christian, but the power of a new spirit. Imagine if it were possible for a dog to merge his spirit with that of a man, how would he act? He would now have the power to act as a man. Unlike the dog, your human spirit *is able* to merge with God’s Spirit so that you no longer need to act like a human, but can now have the character and Spirit of God. Because we become a new creature, the world does not understand us and we find ourselves in continual conflict with it.

As we look through Scripture, it is clear that troubles and persecution are coupled with Christianity. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:12: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” Trials and persecution by those without God are normal experiences for the purpose of strengthening and purging our faith. The Apostle Paul taught that “Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12) The Apostle James encouraged us to “...count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” (James 1:2-3) Because of the hardness and struggle associated with Christianity in this life, Jesus warned those desiring to be his disciples to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28) and demands that they not look back once they begin the journey toward eternal life (Luke 9:62). Jesus is not looking for followers at any cost, but for followers willing to pay the cost.

THE GREAT TAKE-OVER

Revelations 2 and 3 are clear that the great take-over of Christianity paralleled true Christianity from its beginnings. Jesus was fully aware of this and taught that not all who receive him and his teaching would be a true Christian. The parable of the sower, the ten virgins, the ten talents, the parable of the wheat and tares, and those who call him “Lord, Lord” all warn that the majority claiming the name of Christ do not belong to Christ (Matthew 13:1-23; Matthew 25:1-12, 25:14-30; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Luke 6:46). Before his death and burial, Jesus warned his disciples that they would be hated of all nations, indicating the persecution that would follow...and follow it did (John 15:18-25; Matthew 24:9). For the first three hundred years of Christianity it would find itself in great conflict with the world around it, with some of the fiercest persecution coming from the religious, those claiming the name of Christ, and from family and friends (Matthew 24:10, Luke 14:26-27; 21:16; Mark 13:12). After 300 years of persecution by the Romans, peace finally came...but not without a price: that price would cost Christianity its power, its very soul.

It was Constantine, the Emperor of the Roman Empire, who brought peace in the early 300s by making a state religion to bring unity among the various, conflicting religions. Christianity then began to spread rapidly. Constantine became the head of the Roman Church, instead of Christ, and began to make changes in cooperation with the Roman Church. It was under him that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday, a regular day of worship was established, buildings of worship were erected, hierarchies were established, images were set up, and all manner of rituals and customs unheard of in the first 300 years of Christianity were brought in wrapped in the cloak of Christianity. This new form of Christianity was embraced in fear of further persecution and developed into an institution known as Catholicism. The consequence to the true Christian was that the compromise and conformity moved it away from a real, living, fellowship with Christ with him as its head, to an institutional relationship governed by regulations and traditions with a man at its head. From this point forward the great take-over of Christianity would advance rapidly.

As this new form of Christianity moved ahead under the leadership of the Pope, coupled with the state, it did so essentially unbridled in what it did. This eventually led it into all kinds of horrendous and oppressive acts that would have certainly destroyed it if it were not for those who thought it could be reformed. Martin Luther rose up in the early 1500's as the head of the reformation and would unwittingly advance the great take-over of Christianity moving it to its next level of deception. The result of the reformation was the removal of those works which were blatantly unscriptural, oppressive, and horrendous. However, instead of reforming the Catholic Church and taking it back to the Christianity of the first century, it merely replicated the Catholic structure through the Protestants. The two institutions were essentially the same: both were man created institutions lead by men through rules, rituals, and regulations cloaked in the language of Christianity. This gave the great take-over power to embrace the majority of those inclined toward Christianity to either serve God through works in the Catholic Churches or through works in the Protestant Churches. The sadness for God's people is that both lead people away from a real, living, fellowship with Christ through the Holy Spirit and moved them into an institutional, man governed structure. Both Catholicism and the Protestants became so much a part of the world's system that few today even consider the fact that both are essentially pagan without the Spirit of God, and unable to point anyone toward the living God, making those inside the churches essentially pagan Christians.

In our twenty-first century this great take-over appears to be at its peak in preparation for the rise of Antichrist. In the midst of this great deception, God is strongly calling His people to come out of these institutional images of Christianity with their works focus and man centered system and return to a living relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit. This call to repentance is a call to receive the Holy Spirit—the only means given to connect with God

in a living relationship with Him. Jesus strongly warned us to ensure that we were connected with the Holy Spirit before his return in Matthew 25:1-30.

JESUS' CALL TO BE A TRUE CHRISTIAN

One of the themes running through Jesus' teachings is the highlighting of the true Christian from the false. This teaching is summed up in the *Parable of the Ten Virgins* and the *Parable of the Ten Talents*. Jesus understood the tendency of people to hold onto "doing" and works as their Christianity and not relationship through the Holy Spirit. In these two parables Jesus strongly encourages his people to guard against being an *image* Christian by noting the great consequence that will follow if they do not repent.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

This parable speaks of ten who claimed to be Christian. Notice that all ten kept themselves pure for Christ, all were looking for Christ's return, all heard the voice saying to go out to meet Christ, and all went out to meet Christ at his return. In all appearances all ten virgins were Christians; but as the parable unfolds, we find that is not the case. When all ten went to trim their lamps, half of them found that they did not have the Holy Spirit. The result was that they did not enter God's kingdom and Christ answered them bluntly—

"I know you not."

Imagine thinking that all your good, Christ-centered works are going to get you to heaven only to hear Christ say, "I know you not," not a position we want to be in. The parable was told to encourage us to watch over ourselves to make sure that the Holy Spirit is active and alive within us before Jesus returns. There is a difference in doing Christianity and being a Christian. Now is the time to ensure that we are truly Christian and not just an image.

The Parable of the Ten Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

This is another incredible parable. It tells us how Christ gave a portion of the Holy Spirit to each of his followers according to their different abilities to let Him work and develop in their lives. When he returns, he will hold his followers accountable for what they did or did not do with the Holy Spirit he gave to them. In this parable, those who allowed the Holy Spirit to work were permitted to enter God's kingdom and were made kings over many things. To those who let the Holy Spirit remain in them unused, he took the Holy Spirit from them and cast them into hell. The emphasis here is to watch over ourselves to make sure that we have the Holy Spirit active and alive within us before Jesus returns. There is a difference in doing Christianity and being a Christian. Now is the time to ensure that we are a Christian in Spirit and not in works and image. The time to learn how to swim is before the boat tips over...the time to be a Spirit filled Christian is before Christ returns.

IS THE HOLY SPIRIT TRULY ALIVE WITHIN YOU?

It is the Holy Spirit that is the most essential ingredient of Christianity that has been stolen by the great apostasy. If we are to ensure that we are truly Christian, we must be certain that this living, actual, part of God is within us. We must not assume or take the offensive, "Of course He's with me!" Jesus contrasted the true with the false Christian way too many times for us to take his warnings lightly. The chances are great that you are deceived.

IN SUMMARY

In summary, this is what has been said:

1. A great take-over (deception) has over-shadowed the church so that the majority claiming the name of Christ does not know Christ.
2. This great take-over advanced globally with the rise of Catholicism and then through the protestant denominations. In this way the majority of those inclined toward Christianity would embrace one of these without ever knowing true Christianity.
3. The great take-over robbed the church of its power and fellowship with the living God by replacing relationship with works and ritual.
4. The great call of repentance to the church today is the same call Jesus gave over two thousand years ago: *ensure that the Holy Spirit is truly within you, alive and well*. There is a difference between a works oriented Christian and a Spirit motivated Christian.
5. Because of the dominance of the great take-over, it is essential that everyone claiming the name of Christ reexamine their Christianity to ensure that they are indeed Christian in power and relationship--not in works and ritual.

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