

## **The Nearness of the Lord's Return (How Close Are We?)**

A few years ago, when I first started studying what we're going to look at tonight, I couldn't see how what the Bible was saying about where we were in history could be real – that our world could change quickly enough for the end of this age to happen. It was very hard to believe that all of what we were used to could somehow change overnight and the whole planet become a place of global chaos – the perfect conditions needed for the rise of the kingdom of Antichrist.

Then the birth pangs (the “beginning of sorrows”) kicked in.

First, it was the pandemic and simultaneously there was an international push for a global government to deal with the virus, and the pope, among others, went into overdrive calling for a one-world religion. Then the riots started and chaos began.

There have been a multitude of other developments all pointing to the coming of the Antichrist and it was all rushing in just like birth pangs – increasing in frequency and intensity. It was like looking at the face of clock and seeing the hands moving faster as time went on. As this author puts it,

“The events of the end time will not be drawn out. Once they begin, the same generation will see their full accomplishment. As the Lord stated in Mark 13:29-30, ‘When you see these things coming to pass . . . this generation shall not pass away, until *all* these things are accomplished’”

Most of the following examples of this are taken from Matthew chapter 24;

Global deception (Matt. 24:4) – the multiplication of false religions and an international unification of these religions

Wars and rumors of wars (Matt. 24:6) – primarily focused on ongoing conflicts in the Middle East

Famines, earthquakes and pestilences (pandemics) (Matt. 24:7)

Betrayal and hatred between nations (the word “nations” is “ethnos” in the Greek; in other words, intensified “hatred between races”)

False prophets and teachers (Matt.24:11; 2 Pet. 2:1) – like the ‘prosperity and healing’ charlatans on TV.

An increase of lawlessness and evil, and the deadening of natural affection; this is what we see in abortion, but also in child abuse and human trafficking (Matt.24:12; 2 Tim. 3:1-5)

The rebirth of Israel (Matt. 24:32-34)

Mocking of those who claim we are in the final generation (2 Pet.3:3)

An international push for global government, world religion and a cashless economic system (Revelation chapters 13 & 17)

It's not that many of these things haven't been going on for centuries, the Lord's warning was not that He would return when we see some of these events happening, but that we would know His coming is very close when we see *all* of them converging in a single generation (Matt. 24:34).

So, as I develop this framework for what's happening and what's coming, the conclusions I've come to are not based on documentaries, articles or YouTube videos. Some of those can help us see through the deception around us, but my belief about where we are in history is based on what was written 2000 years ago.

It's not just current world conditions; it's the study of eschatology that convinced me; especially looking at what the Bible says about the condition of the church at the end of the age. Here's what I mean by that – this is from an article I read recently;

“How then do I best know the coming of the Lord is near? Not just by signs, but by what is going within the hearts of the people of God. But maybe you are not interested in that. You would far sooner know what is going to happen between Iran and Russia and Israel, or when Europe will unite to form the revived Roman Empire. I am not saying there is nothing in prophecy; don't misunderstand me. But I do know there are multitudes of people who are simply engrossed in in prophecy as a thing, whose spiritual life counts for nothing, who really have no deep inward walk with the Lord. We have seen it so often. If you talk to people about prophetic fulfillment in current events, they are frantically taking notes. If you try to talk about principles like “Everyone who has this hope (of the rapture) . . . purifies himself, even as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3) – speaking on the spiritual effect of the hope of His coming, well, then the notebooks close and the pens are put away.”

Yes, absolutely we should “observe the signs of the times”. In Matt. 16:1-3, Matthew writes this,

“Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.”

But the spiritual condition of the church is a *major* “sign of the times” – and we'll look at that in a few minutes.

Let's start with a Biblical exhortation to all of us regarding the importance of knowing these things.

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.” (1 Thess. 5:17)

And in 1 Chron. 12:31-32;

“Of the half-tribe of Manasseh 18,000, who were designated by name to come and make David king. Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command . . .”

As Paul said, the “sons of light” know their generation; those who are spiritually asleep do not.

So, we will need to look at the timeline we’re given in the Bible. This first part I want to discuss can give us a *general* timeline; it can help give us a visual to allow us see where we are now.

From Adam to Abraham (2000 years); Abraham to Christ (2000 years); Pentecost to the Second Coming of Christ (2000 years); the Second Coming to the End of Millennial Reign (1000 years).

So, from the fall of Adam to the end of the millennium is approximately 7000 years; after that, God will destroy the heavens and the earth and bring in a completely new creation.

“. . . the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10)

“(Then) I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1)

So, God has determined that the history of humanity from Adam’s fall to the beginning of the eternal state will be 7000 years – which is the Biblical number of completion or consummation.

Regarding our generation, we are at the 6000-year mark and there remains 1000 years for the reign of Christ on the earth before everything is completed.

Matthew 24:32-35 tells us that the generation that sees the regathering of Israel to their land following their dispersion in A.D. 70, would be the *last* generation prior to Christ’s return. The rebirth of Israel took place on May 14, 1948. So, then the big question becomes, “How long is a generation?” And all sorts of debate surface around this.

I found four possibilities in the Bible.

- 1) The genealogies in Matthew have a generation being appx. 48 years – Matt. 14:17 says,

“All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.”

That’s 42 generations. If you divide that by the approximate number of years from Abraham to Christ you get 48-year generations.

- 2) Each of the generations of Israel in slavery in Egypt was approximately 100 years

“Then the LORD said to him (Abraham), “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there” (Gen. 15:13)

Then in Gen. 15:16 we see this: “In the fourth generation your descendants will return”. However, something to keep in mind with things like this is the context of the time it was given.

As Ellicott’s commentary points out:

“Since the four generations are identical with the four centuries of Genesis 15:13, we have here an undesigned testimony to the *long duration* of human life. Abram was 100 years old when Isaac was born, and Isaac was 60 at the birth of his children, and Jacob 64 years of age at his marriage.”

A “generation” at the end of this age would more likely refer to life expectancy than the longevity we see in the time of the patriarchs.

3) The Exodus generation was 40 years

“For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD” (Joshua 5:6)

4) Psalm 90:10 says, “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures.” So, this passage shows that a generation as related to life-span at David’s time would max out at eighty years.

And this is the one I settled on for these reasons:

- 1) Historians have the life-span in David’s generation and those in the time of Christ at about the same – and current stats around the world put our present-day life-span also at between 70-80 years.
- 2) We can eliminate the forty and forty-eight-year theories because those trains left the station a long time ago. The return of Christ would have happened in either 1988 or 1996.
- 3) The one-hundred-year generation doesn’t work, partly for the reason I gave earlier and partly because every other sign we see happening tells us that we don’t have that much time left. It would put the Lord’s return at around 2048. Anyone who think we have another 25 to 30 years before this world explodes isn’t paying attention.

In case you’re freaking out because I’m using math, here’s how important “math” is in Bible prophecy. In Daniel 9:25 Gabriel gave the exact number of years from Cyrus’s command to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity until the coming of Christ. Here’s the verse,

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until the Messiah, the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of distress. After the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah will be cut off.”

Here’s what that means;

Seven sevens plus sixty-two sevens equals 483 years. Gabriel predicted that after 483 years Messiah would be cut off. Detailed chronological studies have been done that show that Christ’s death occurred then. If one calculates 483 years from 444 B.C., one might conclude that the date for Messiah being cut off is A.D. 39. However, both the Jews and the Babylonians observed years of 360 rather than 365 days per year. If one calculates the number of days involved in the Jewish and Babylonian calendar year, the year Messiah would be cut off comes out to A.D. 33.

One scholar, Sir Robert Anderson, calculated that the day Jesus entered Jerusalem in his triumphal entry was the last day of this period.

The Lord wants to make sure we know in every way possible when He's coming, just as He let Israel know when He was coming the first time.

So, based on our Lord's promise in Matthew 24:34 - that those who see the rebirth of Israel will be the last generation; 70-80 years from 1948 would be 2018-2028. If we assume this generation runs a full 80-year course and since the removal of the Church has to take place 7 years *before* the return of Christ, the rapture will occur sometime between 2020 and the end of 2021.

Even though we can't know "the day or the hour" of our Lord's return (Matt. 24:36), as mentioned earlier we are *commanded* to know the generation.

I don't know exactly how much time we have left; no one does. I gave a mathematical example to illustrate the nearness of our Lord's return, not to set a date. All I know for sure is that we are extremely close to the end and we need to take seriously the warnings of scripture related to what the Lord desires the spiritual condition of the church to be in this generation.

Even those in the world who don't belong to Christ or who may be Christians but aren't paying attention are becoming increasingly aware of the tension and the spiritual, moral, social and political 'shifting' that is happening all around us.

The world is in crisis on numerous levels and those who are awake to these realities feel the intensity of the unseen spiritual warfare even if they don't know what that is.

We are at the very end of the final generation of this age; and as Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7, we are instructed to know what our time is. Other generations, other believers in the past, have known *their* generation. The final torch has been passed to us to take our place among those who are "sons of light" in a darkened world.

Spiritual discernment (the ability to give a spiritual interpretation to everything happening around and within us) is the most vital ability needed in the church today. If ever there was time in the history of the church *not* to be unaware, *not* to be spiritually asleep, this is it. As Charles Spurgeon put it,

"Discernment is not a matter of simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather it is telling the difference between right and almost right."

Another way to say that is, "There will be those who are genuinely open to the truth and those who genuinely *believe* they are open to the truth."

Let's look at the rapture for a few minutes. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 we read:

"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord."

This is also taught in 1 Cor. 15:52-53

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

We know that the church, at some point in time, will be “caught up to meet the Lord in the air”. I think one of the reasons so many of us find it hard to wrap our minds around this is because although we may intellectually believe in the rapture, it seems so unreal that an openness to believing that it could be soon is not natural for us.

However, since it’s God Who promised this, it will happen just as He said it would. There will be a generation of Christians who are “caught up” to Him; and *some* in that generation will be awake and aware, they will know the time is near because God will have revealed it to them through their study and prayer.

We need to also look at the context of the rapture and at the wording Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. I’m going to try to give a brief summary of the principle brought out in that section of Paul’s letter.

“Then we who are alive (and) remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air . . .” (1 Thess. 4:17).

The word that is translated “remain” is partially correct, but it leaves us with a limited understanding of the etymology of this word. It should be translated “survive” or the “surviving ones” (there’s no “and” in the Greek).

Isaiah 1:9 gives us an example of this “survival” principle from the Old Testament.

“Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah”.

According to the Englishman’s Concordance, the word “remnant” means – “*remains, survived, survivor, those who survived*”. Here’s an overview of this concept:

Survivors of a catastrophe (like Lot surviving the destruction of Sodom).

Jewish survivors of the Assyrian invasion in 721 BC.

Jewish survivors of the Babylonian invasion in 585 BC.

The remnant of Jews who returned to Judah from Babylon.

The remainder of physical Jews after the Great Tribulation.

As Holman puts it, “A remnant is something left over, as in the (spiritual) people of God after divine judgment”.

There is a consistent pattern in the Holy Spirit’s use of what this word represents. The remnant in the Old Testament refers to a small number of people who survive a catastrophe which has killed the majority of this same group. It’s always a small number among a larger population. The majority is judged and the remnant escapes.

Just as the Lord removed apostate Israel during the times of their rebellion, at the end of our age He will remove all man-made Christianity.” Throughout the Bible, judgment always begins at the house of God before the nations are judged. You can see this in passages like Ezek. 9:3-6 and 1 Pet. 4:17.

All that represents a human organization, a structured, superficial, denominational ‘Christian religion’ will be in complete contrast to the small, loyal, spiritual remnant committed to the truth and the Lord’s purpose for their generation.

Following the judgment of Laodicea, and the removal of the overcoming remnant by the rapture, judgment then spreads to the nations during the tribulation period in fulfillment of the prophecies related to Daniel’s 70th week (which is Revelation chapters 6-19).

So, the rapture is the deliverance of a spiritual remnant at a time of intense pressure from the enemy and the world.

In Rev. 3:16 our Lord gives a warning to Laodicea which contains the phrase ‘spewed out’;

“ . . . because you are neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of My mouth.”

That’s is a term of judgment. When we follow what’s called ‘the law of first occurrence’ in the history of God’s dealing with His people, in passages like Leviticus 18:28 we can see what our Lord meant when He said that;

“ . . . so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you.”

Here’s what I *don’t* know yet about all this.

We’ve seen how the judgment of those who were rebellious in Israel played out in the Old Testament, and it’s likely that the judgment of Laodicea will take the same form. But like everything we study, it needs to move from intellect to spiritual confirmation before it’s presented as true.

Regardless of how it happens, some kind of corporate judgement will take place; that much *is* clear.

Right now, the church is being divided into two camps of awake and asleep, and God will judge the Christians that are asleep and are spiritually out of sync with the Lord and with His purpose for this generation.

Believers have been incorporated into the Body of Christ for 2000 years. Some have grown spiritually. These are the Christians in whom, in a growing way, Christ has been formed (Gal. 4:19).

The majority throughout this age have stagnated spiritually; especially in the Laodicean generation we are living in now.

Here’s the way one author explains this:

“In the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation we have the Lord’s survey of the seven churches. As those eyes that are as a flame of fire peer into the inner spiritual state and lay bare the condition - analyze, dissect, separate, place on the two sides of debit and credit, and form and pass their final verdict - we see one thing to be at issue with regard to them all.

“There may be particular differences in them; the aspects may vary; the elements may be very different: yet when all has been surveyed and gathered together it is to establish but one fact, namely, the presence or absence of that which, from the Lord's standpoint, constitutes justification in the continuance of the Lord's full committal to anything which claims to represent Him.” (T.A. Sparks)

So, the principle of the remnant shows that most will be in a Laodicean state at the end, but fortunately many will not.

2 Thess. 2:1-3 tells us that there will be a great ‘falling away’ or ‘apostasy’ prior to the tribulation. This is also taught in passages like 1 Tim. 4 and 2 Tim. 4. Here’s the Thess. verses;

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first . . . “

As a side note: There is a growing number of pastors who have determined that the “apostasia” Paul is addressing in 2 Thess. 2 refers not to a spiritual departure or falling away but to the rapture (a physical departure). When I explored this, here’s what I found:

The term is used only one other time in the New Testament, which means a religious or doctrinal departure:

“. . . and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs” (Acts 21:21).

In the Septuagint (Greek translation from the Hebrew of the Old Testament) this word is used three times: Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:19; Jeremiah 2:19. Every time it means apostasy or rebellion in a religious or political sense; it’s never used in a spatial or physical sense. In addition, Paul Feinberg states:

“If one searches for the uses of the noun “apostasy” in the 355 occurrences over the 300-year period between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D., one will not find a single instance where this word refers to a physical departure.”

And I knew someone who would be able to provide a more in-depth documentation on this subject, so I contacted him and this is what he gave me:

“Hi Dennis,  
The problem with interpreting apostasia as "the departure" is that you have to base this meaning on the partial usage of the cognate verb aphisteemi. In fact, the three verbal uses of this term in Luke 8:13; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12 demonstrates this very point. All sound exegesis is never based primarily on the etymology of a word but its contextual usage. This noun apostasia with the definite article does point to a specific event or time frame within history. The only



other place this noun is used in the NT is in Acts 21:21 where the meaning of a religious defection or apostasy is clear.

There are many good reasons for not taking apostasia as a simple movement from Point A to Point B.

Apostasia is only used twice in all the NT, once in 2 Thess 2:3, and one other time in Acts 21:21. In the passage in Acts it clearly refers to religious apostasy, for what is in view is the forsaking of the Law of Moses by Jews. And it is no accident that apostasia is the word used in Acts 21:21 for religious apostasy, for in every one of its appearances in the LXX we find it used in exactly that sense (see Jos 22:22; 2 Chron 29:19; 1 Mac 2:15; Jer 2:19). Also, every occurrence of the related noun apostasia has the meaning "religious apostasy" or "political rebellion" (cf. 2 Chron 28:19; 2 Chron 33:19; 1 Esdras 2:21; Ezra 4:19). Similarly, the noun of agency apostasia describes a "deserter," "rebel," or "apostate" in a religious or political sense (see Num 14:9; Jos 22:16, 19; 1 Esdras 2:17; 2 Mac 5:8; 3 Mac 7:3; Odes 7:32; Job 26:13; Isa 30:1; Dan 3:32). Admittedly, there is not a huge pool of data for apostasia, but as far as the Greek Bible is concerned, apostasia unanimously refers to religious rebellion, unless 2 Thess 2:3 is the only exception. And as another contributor to the list pointed out, this word has a long history in Greek literature of describing rebellion.

Second, there is conversely a total lack of evidence for apostasia in the sense of a "catching away" associated with the parousia unless 2 Thess 2:3 is the only known occurrence. Instead, Paul uses the verb *harpazw* to describe this event in 1 Thess 4:17.

Third, and related to the last two points, it seems highly unlikely that Paul would use a word with such a negative connotation to describe what he elsewhere refers to as "the blessed hope" (Tit 2:13). In light of its unanimous use in the Bible to describe rebellion against God, it should not surprise us that it is not used with respect to the parousia."

The Church has severely underestimated the intelligence and deceptive capability of our enemy. As Vance Hafner puts it,

"The devil is not fighting religion. He's too smart for that. He is producing a counterfeit Christianity, so much like the real one that good Christians are afraid to speak out against it. We are plainly told in the Scriptures that in the last days men will not endure sound doctrine and will . . . heap to themselves teachers to tickle their ears. We live in an epidemic of this itch, and popular preachers have developed ear-tickling into a fine art".

Another of the unique conditions of our time is the rapidly growing division we are seeing among the people of God. It's the final, global formation of Laodicea on the one hand and Philadelphia on the other. The primary characteristics of both these churches described in Rev. 3 are prophesied to be in existence at the end of the age.

Most of the church in the West (i.e. Europe and the United States) is Laodicean; many in the China, North Korea and Iran (as examples) and in some third-world countries are being 'purified through fire' and are Philadelphian in character.

This division will ultimately lead to a determination of who will and who will not share the throne of Christ in the millennial kingdom. In Paul's writings (and in the letters to the churches in Rev. 2 and 3) there is a major emphasis on "the throne".

At present the world is governed, under God's sovereignty, by Lucifer who is given titles like "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:20), the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan currently rules – he holds the throne of earth.

Adam forfeited his dominion to Lucifer at the fall and instead of the humanity that came from Adam bearing the image of God, it bears the image of God's enemy – it's flesh; this world is hostile to its Creator (John 1:11).

But in the resurrection of Christ, a new creation, a new humanity began ("If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation", 2 Cor. 5:17), which is why Jesus is called the "second Man": Adam was the "first man". 1 Cor. 15:45-49;

"So also, it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Each "Adam" acts as the representative head of a race of humanity. The destiny of those in Christ is to be perfectly conformed to image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29).

Within this new creation there will be those who have the honor of sharing the throne of Christ. So, though all who belong to Christ will bear His image eternally, only those who make up the overcoming remnant will rule with Christ because among other qualifiers given in the scriptures for this privilege, the precondition of reigning with Christ is enduring with Him rather than settling for something less than God's full purpose for us (Rev. 3:2).

"If we endure, we will reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12)

And at the center of that purpose is our training in this life related to the eventual crushing of the *current* god of this world under our feet.

"Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:3)

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20)

Satan is aware of this. If you have ever wondered why there is such intense spiritual antagonism, persecution and suffering brought to the followers of Christ, it's because we are God's administrative arm for the eventual judgment of Satan and all his forces.

And as time moves closer to that event, their fury increases (Rev. 12:12). The church is at war and the intensity of that war is greater than at any time in human history.

Finally, the following is a very important aspect of the remnant we need to keep in mind as we close tonight:

“The Lord wants something more than the enthusiasm of a revival. What the Lord wants is a heart-condition which has not departed from Him; not those who are caught up in a great movement, but those who have been true to Him in the tests of time. Those who in the midst of the spiritual declension of the church remained true to the Lord’s purpose; not those who have to be motivated by outward demonstrations and signs, but those whose hearts are steadily and firmly set upon God’s thoughts, His interests, that the Lord may have what He is after. The overcomer embodies the original intention of God and is God’s instrument of achieving His purpose.

“Everyone or everything else may have settled for less, but the overcomer cannot do this. Even if most of Christianity becomes something other than God’s original intent, the overcomer will pursue the highest and fullest of all that God is after no matter what the personal cost.” (Sparks)

It was Father’s intention from before the foundation of the world that the Son of God would have an unimaginably beautiful and wonder-filled creation perfectly reflecting His glory and personality and this creation would be ruled by Christ and those within His bride, the Church, whose hearts are given over to Him for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. These would be prepared for the throne of creation through suffering and endurance equipping them morally and spiritually to share His throne forever.

“God’s purpose then in the lives of His children while here on earth is to create, develop, strengthen, and refine that complete dependence on Him which must be found in those who, throughout all eternity, are to be the very closest to Him and share His glory . . . That is why God places so great an emphasis upon the trial of faith. He is preparing for Himself, within a new creation in Christ Jesus, those who will be in complete voluntary dependence upon Him and in living subjection to Him.” (Strombeck)

If we were to bottom-line what, practically speaking, an overcomer is; the most common characteristic of the remnant believer in both the Old and New Testaments is that he or she is one who “endures”; one who “perseveres” under pressure. Here are some verses that show how vital this is;

“To the one who overcomes, I will grant the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Rev. 3:21)

“You have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised.” (Heb. 10:36)

“Allow perseverance to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (Jas. 1:4)

“For the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, but with itching ears they will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own desires.” (2 Tim. 4:3)

“. . . for you have a little strength, have kept My word . . . you have kept My command to persevere . . . Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. . . He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev. 3:8ff)

Just a comment on this last section in Rev. 3 regarding the church at Philadelphia, we need to know, first, that they received no criticism; they got only praise from the Lord. This is exactly what He’s looking for in all of us. People with “little strength”; people

who are weak in themselves, but who are determined to 'hold fast' and are trusting the Lord to carry them through in spite of their inability.

For many of us the circumstances God has placed us in right now are extremely difficult; sometimes it seems they are impossible and *unendurable*. But the Lord is building a new type of humanity in Christ. As Alva McClain puts it,

“There is a special blessing for those who have believed without seeing, who against the often adverse testimony of human experience, continue to believe and trust in Him Who today is not visible, ‘Whom having not seen, you love’ (1 Pet. 1:8). In the Church, God is preparing a people, called out and tested in adversity, who are destined to occupy the highest place of responsibility in the future Kingdom of Christ.”

Here's what this process looks like in our experience.

What we *feel* is weakness; but because we *want* to press on and trust God, what we *discover* is His faithfulness and grace. God calls that 'endurance' – not an endurance that has its source in us, but that which comes from the life of God's Son *in* us.

Here are some passages that show this;

(2 Cor. 12:9-11) “And (the Lord) has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

(2 Cor. 8:12) “. . . it is accepted according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”

(1 Thess. 5:24) “Faithful is He who calls you, Who will also do it.”

(Gal. 2:20) “. . . it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

So, at the end, it's all going to come down to Laodicea and Philadelphia. Those churches will be the final division in the Body of Christ globally and will determine judgment versus sharing the throne of Christ.

The overcomer, then, is the person at the end of this age who is holding to the truth and is enduring the pressure we are all feeling to compromise; to settle for less than what God has purposed for us.

The remnant believers in the church age are the ones who glorify God in the final generation just as others like them have done throughout history. These are the Christians throughout the world who have gone on with the Lord. They are growing and awake to the fact that the Lord is coming very soon; they are *not* spiritually asleep.

They care more about Christ than about anything else in this life, including and especially themselves. Their one desire is to know Him, to learn how to live by His indwelling life, and to see Him honored in everything.

## Appendix: An Exhortation to Pastors

According to Hebrews chapters 5 and 6, it is not only false doctrine that brings apostasy, it is also pastors who communicate very little beyond the basic truths of the Bible. This sets their people up to be unable to distinguish truth from error when it comes.

As S. J Andrews writes,

“Having ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, His children can know what the Lord is about to do, and be ready to take part with Him. But if they have not ears to hear, the Holy Spirit must cease to speak, and thus the church knows not the place to which she has come in the progress of the Divine purpose; knows neither her present duties nor her dangers... The Christians of the last days especially, when the spirit of pride and self-sufficiency is most prevalent, and deeply infected by the evil influences around them, least of all can know their own spiritual condition.”

And James Gray, who followed D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey as president of the Moody Bible Institute, wrote this;

“Pastors, missionaries, and teachers, bear with me: The Christian leader who does not know these things is no leader, but the blind leading the blind. And there are so many of such leaders!”

The church is meant to hear the “full counsel of God” (Acts 20:25-31). This can’t happen if the pastor is avoiding large sections of the Word of God for fear that his people will be offended. It also can’t happen if (as Paul puts it in 1 Tim. 4:3) those in our churches simply become bored and indifferent to any serious study or teaching of the Bible.

Some have argued that pastors who teach verse-by-verse can’t be guilty of avoiding parts of the Bible, but the style of teaching is no guarantee that the instruction given rises above the level of theological infancy. A prolonged, steady diet of “milk”, regardless of how it’s delivered, establishes a pre-apostate disposition. Listen to the author of Hebrews in 5:12-6:1;

“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity . . .”

Our largest churches in our nation are not known for the kind of in-depth study needed to develop spiritual discernment; they are characterized by that which appeals to sight, emotions and intellect (video clips, stage lights, celebrity preachers, performers, energy-charged music, etc.). And we’ve come to believe that these things have spiritual content. If they were removed, the church would no longer be popular.

As A.W. Tozer’s puts it;

“If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, ninety-five percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, ninety-five percent of what they did would stop, and everyone would know the difference.”

“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” (Jas. 3:1)

“Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God - Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to warn each one with tears.” (Acts 20:26-31)

Pastors who neglect to bring the complete truth of God’s purpose to their generation; who do not warn God’s people of the dangers they face or prepare them for this time in history, will find themselves facing the Lord in shame and silence at the judgment seat;

and same is true of non-pastors who bury their talents (their spiritual gifts) and neglect the stewardship entrusted to them.

We see this in 1 Jn. 2:28; “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink back from Him in shame at his coming.”

Or Jer. 6:14, speaking of God’s warning to the shepherds of Israel;

"They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially."

In our age, this would be pastors who neglect to provide more than milk, more than superficial teaching, to the churches.

Every Sunday across our nation Christians are getting emotionally charged up but their deep, inner brokenness remains. Rather than rising above and growing in Christ, they are becoming increasingly vulnerable to deception.

As Hosea 4:6 says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge . . .”

At the judgment seat of Christ, God will not overlook the theological laziness and selfishness of pastors who are more interested in personal acceptance and pleasing their people than in giving them what they need the most;

shepherds who rob their own congregations by avoiding to teach anything that might be controversial or offensive; withholding from them the information that could really help them.

And it goes much further than this, because pastors are to be watchmen over their people.

“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.” (Heb. 13:17)

I know pastors who literally refuse to even consider the implications of current world events in the light of Biblical prophecy; let alone warn and prepare their people.

Some don't believe we are near the return of Christ; others think it's possible, even likely, but they keep their thoughts to themselves and a few close friends.

Heb. 13 says that we will give an account of our ministry – and if we are out of step with the Lord or holding back the truth for whatever reason, then when we “give account”; we will have our eyes opened wide to our failure to do what the Lord desired of us.