

6,9,20

I've prepped the next section of Colossians, but I need to cover some other issues first. So, we'll see what happens.

I have a few comments about the riots.

Keeping in mind the enemy's goal of creating global chaos and especially doing so in the last nation on the planet that's been a threat to the 'new world order', here's a summary of their actions:

Corona virus initiated the process of bringing the nation to its knees financially.

The riots have intensified the national fear that the virus started.

And now, to make sure that order will not be restored civilians being forced to take self-defense into their own hands, here's the globalist's latest move. The following are headlines from various national online publications; CNN, LA Times, New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.

"Los Angeles mayor and city officials cutting \$100 to \$150 million from LAPD budget, funds to be reinvested in communities of color."

"Poll finds that Americans are more troubled by police actions than by violence at protests."

"Defunding police; what it means and what it could look like."

Here's how this last article opens,

"There's a growing group of dissenters who believe Americans can survive without law enforcement as we know it. And that America may even be better off without it. The solution to police brutality and racial inequalities in policing is simple, supporters say: Just defund police."

Is this a fringe group with no real widespread support? No. Here's a few more headlines;

"Cities push to defund police and reimagine public safety."

“De Blasio Vows to Cut Funding for the N.Y.P.D.”

“Minneapolis City Council members announce plans to disband police department.”

And if that isn't bad enough (and I'm not making this up) Looney Toons has announced that Elmer Fudd will no longer be chasing the rabbit with a rifle and Yosemite Sam will no longer have his pistols.

I doubt our nation will defund our police departments; but as crazy as things are getting, I'm not placing bets either.

So, in the light of all these things, many churches in America have decided to move into a greater focus on addressing the cultural problems in our country. One pastor even said, “We need to set aside our emphasis on the soon return of Christ and take some time to fight for social justice.”

That emphasis won't solve anything; especially now. The problem is deep inside human nature.

Social Justice as a movement is the spirit of Antichrist moving the world, and in some cases the church, away from addressing the real problems this nation faces; away from the issues the church *should* be addressing – which is reaching people who are lost and challenging a Christianity that is floundering in spiritual infancy and deception.

If the church in the United States wasn't 'salt which lost its savor', the influence of the spiritual and moral dynamic of the church would be affecting the culture – not the other way around.

We're simply not seeing *behind* the scenes; we're just *examining* the scenes.

The early church didn't turn the world upside down by filling the streets of Rome with social justice protestors and activists; they showed the Roman empire who and what citizens of heaven are – a race of people who were not from, or of, *this* world – they revealed the power of the indwelling Christ to them, and forced the world to have to confront the Lord through the living testimony of His followers.

In the form we are seeing in the church in our generation, social justice is basically self-righteousness masquerading as compassion. Pastors and believers move into

this because they have no real understanding of spiritual life or of God's ultimate purpose for the body of Christ, so they have to go with what their natural mind and their five sense see around them and try to apply moral principles to the pain in society.

Giving a cup of water to someone in Jesus' name is not social justice, it's building a bridge for the gospel. The same is true of giving housing, clothing, and food to orphans in Africa. The man who was considered the father of modern missions, Hudson Taylor, as a medical doctor took his training to China; not just to heal their bodies, that wasn't primary with Hudson, but to open their hearts to him and to the gospel.

Demonstrated love opens the door for the gospel; but there's a huge difference between that and Christians just picking sides in a culture war for the sake of 'being right'. The Biblical, moral stance is right; it's always correct and we should live by it, but we should live by it as those demonstrating the reality of the new creation, not trying to fix the old creation.

In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. That's the ecclesia of God. So, why are we talking about race? What world, what kingdom are we adapting to and representing?

You say, 'I'm not talking to Christians about race (which many actually are – check out Facebook), I'm talking to non-Christians trying to help them understand.'

Really? Does any rational person, Christian or otherwise, not know that there are good and bad cops? And if they aren't rational, what do you hope to accomplish by trying to convince the invincible?

Maybe this verse needs to come into play at some point in our thinking:

“Do not speak to fools, for they will scorn your prudent words.” (Prov. 23:9)

If they are rational, they already know what reality is in regard to cops and ethnic groups – there are good and bad everywhere. If they *aren't* rational, you're wasting your time and theirs.

I've mentioned before that this is the generation of the potential deception of the elect – that deception is more subtle than ever before. It's obvious to me that

there are still millions of Christians who are not taking last-day's deception seriously and are simply going with the flow of political and societal tides.

The Bible makes it clear that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood. We know that. It's great to want justice and to push for it – peacefully. But neither cops or blacks or whites or any human on this planet is the real enemy.

We don't want to lose that perspective.

There's nothing that's happening that is not caused by principalities and powers moving as fast as they can toward global chaos in order to bring in the antichrist's kingdom.

As long as we remember the enemy's goal in everything from the virus to famines to riots to economic collapse to potential civil war, or whatever his next move on the chessboard is, we'll be safeguarded from becoming distracted from God's goal for us personally. If we don't hold these things in mind, our *real* purpose here will be clouded by the tear gas in our cities.

We have to stay within the framework of what the Bible says is happening and just as importantly - *why* it's happening.

I'll give an example and then we'll move on. And I'm using the riots because they are the most recent phase of Satan's activity; so, they are on everyone's mind.

In 2 Tim. 3:1 Paul wrote,

“But understand this, that in the last days perilous times will come.”

“Perilous” is literally, “harsh, fierce, violent, hard, injurious, dangerous, brutal . . .” You get the picture.

It's only used two places in the New Testament – one is 2 Tim. 3:1 and the other is in Matt. 8. I'll read the section in Matthew:

“And when (Jesus) came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce (*there's our word*) that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast

us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” And he said to them, “Go.” So, they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned.”

And there’s an Old Testament parallel to this concept; it’s found in Gen. 6:13;

“And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with *violence* through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”

What we’re seeing in our world now is the foreshadowing of the global violence of the tribulation. I’m not going to look at the forms this takes during that time, but Revelation has several indications that what has begun in our generation will reach full development during the time of Jacob’s trouble.

Except for the sake of curiosity regarding the *means* Satan is using to accomplish his goals, we don’t need YouTube videos nearly as much as we do a knowledge of what the scriptures say about our time in history.

And “perilous” is a major sign of the times.

In Heb. 12:26 we see this;

“At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”

The end time shaking of the heavens, the realm in which the principalities and powers operate, is reaching a climax and we are seeing the reverberations of that battle rippling into our world.

But it’s not just the home of fallen angels and demons that is being shaken, the heavens are also our position in Christ and our experience in the Spirit. The warning in Hebrews is to the church. God is shaking the church to remove everything that is man-made and reduce Christianity to Christ.

This author describes it this way,

“There is a universal shaking to take place in the economy of God; in the sovereign ordering of God, a universal shaking. What for? In Hebrews it says in order that there shall be nothing left but what God Himself has established. Note the little phrase: “As of things that have been made.”

Who made them? If they are man-made, they must go. The things that God made and established are the only things which will ultimately remain, and the shaking is for that purpose.”

We won't take time now because we've talked about it before, but God is separating between soul and spirit, the sensual and the spiritual in the people of God. The increasing intensity of the shaking of this world and of the heavens will bring this about in a final and full way.

And it's also happening inside each of us. As the Lord brings pressure into our lives, our faith is tested and we see whether our eyes and desires are set above, or on the things of this earth. Everything earthly will be burned away to make room for the Lord from heaven in our hearts drawing us to Himself as those who are “not of this world; just as He is not of this world.”

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Now, we're going to change directions and talk about something that has come up numerous times over the last couple of years and again more recently – and that is the question about how to identify what an “overcomer” is.

I want to start by reviewing a portion of how we closed our last study. I ended with a quote by Alva McLain – here is part of that quote;

“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.”

And another author puts it this way;

“A governmental union with Christ in the ages to come. Not only a heavenly citizen; certainly not one of those of whom Paul wrote to the Corinthians as being ‘saved, yet so as by fire’ but called to the highest place that Heaven affords believers – sharing the very throne of Christ. Unto this there may of necessity be chastening. It will be a disciplined, chastened people who will attain unto this completeness.”

“And (the Lord) has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is perfected *in* weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9)

So, the Lord's strength does not work through us by removing our weakness but by perfecting His own strength in *the midst of* our weakness.

The overcomer, first of all, is one who is aware of his weakness and inability to live the Christian life. It's similar to what the Lord said in Matt. 5:3,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”.

Those who, in an ongoing way, fully recognize their own spiritual poverty are the ones God can work with and bring them to a place of kingship.

In one sense, an overcomer is the opposite of what we would imagine it to be.

Revelation chapters 2 & 3 have the most extensive treatment of the overcomer in the New Testament. Let me give you a quick overview of the sections that deal with this. The following is from Donald Barnhouse's commentary on Revelation;

“Ephesus had lost its first love; the overcomer returned to it. Smyrna was in the midst of persecution; the overcomer stood fast in the face of it. Pergamos was about to be drowned with worldliness; the overcomer resisted the flood; Thyatira was being seduced by Jezebel; the overcomer resisted her blandishments. Sardis had a name that it was alive but was dead; the overcomer did not defile himself with the corpse. Philadelphia had no blame, just a warning; don't let slip what you have. Laodicea had no insight into their actual spiritual condition. The overcomer accepted the Lord's exhortation to them: ‘ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent.’”

Sections of scripture like these, coupled with a thorough examination of the lives of all those throughout history whom the Lord has presented to us in the Bible, paint a very clear picture of what the overcomer is and what he isn't.

The Bible gives us constant living examples of overcomers – from Abraham to David to Paul. And when we think of these men, we tend to focus almost exclusively on the qualities in their lives that are amazing and far beyond anything we feel we could ever be.

But, for example, listen to what Abraham did in Gen. 12. This author has a unique way of explaining this passage;

“. . . and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.” (12:12-13). Way to go Abraham. Gutsy move. Seriously. Way to pimp out your wife. How about having some faith in God here? The same kind of faith you just showed when God called you out of your home in Haran to move to Canaan, and you simply up and left. Now, at the first sign of trouble you press the panic button: ‘Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me’. But here’s the thing. This story doesn’t exactly present Abraham as a model of virtue . . . Abraham is simply forgetting God’s promises and instead he’s kicking into fight-or-flight reptilian brain mode.”

That’s not faith flowing from Abraham who is considered the Father of faith; that’s cowardly; it’s unbelief in full force.

We could illustrate the same character flaws in nearly everyone in the great Heb. 11 chapter of “faith heroes”.

But look how these men ended their lives; Abraham offering Isaac to God; David is called a man after God’s own heart, and Jacob worshipped God, leaning on his staff (that staff, by the way, was a very visible reminder of God’s severe dealing with him to break his pride and bring about the kind of weakness needed for him to become Israel – a prince with God).

And Paul, the greatest example of an overcomer in the New Testament, experienced depression, confusion, fear, doubt, despair and felt sorrow for his sinfulness in the presence of a holy God. And he took a legalistic Jewish vow, then wrote Galatians attacking legalists.

At a site on Biblical Hermeneutics, this writer says,

“Paul tells the gentiles that they are not under the Jewish law, yet three times in Acts, he contradicts this by taking the Nazarite vow in the presence of gentiles.”

Jesus told His disciples that whoever denies Him before men, He would deny before God. Peter denied the Lord three times, then in his letters he challenges the church to *not* deny the Lord who bought them with His own blood.

We all know about David’s sins which were huge – but as I mentioned earlier, God calls him a “man after my own heart”.

The overcomers in the Bible have histories, even patterns, of failure. But two things stand out about them that make them overcomers:

- 1) Though all of them (and all of us) grow at different paces, moving forward characterizes all of them. They didn’t let their failures prevent them from continuing to learn, to grow, to hunger for more of Christ and to increasingly reject compromise and the pull of the world and the Christian religion to entrap them.
- 2) At the end of their lives, they were still standing. They may have been broken and defeated a million times, but in the end, they were “leaning on their staff and worshipping God.”

So, where does this take us?

First, if you want to be a member of the end-time remnant, then get ready to be reduced to dust. Never forget 1 Cor. 1:27, “God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.”

And especially in 2 Cor. 4:7-11;

“We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.”

And second, Amos 3:3 bottom-lines this for us, “How can two walk together unless they be agreed?” This is the capstone principle of ongoing fellowship with the Lord. As John says in 1 Jn. 1:5-7

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

It’s not perfection that God expects – that’s *His* work in us; “It is God Who works in us to both will and to do of His good pleasure”. And like Paul wrote in Rom. 8:32,

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

What the Lord wants from us is transparency, agreement, walking in the light and not hiding who and what we are. He’s the One who will complete what He’s started in us. From our side it’s a matter of being honest with Him and staying close to Him.

That’s fellowship and it lays the foundation for growth and overcoming.

Sparks writes this,

“Caleb, like Paul, and Paul, like Caleb, stood against the more general course of things amongst the Lord’s people. The majority were content with going only so far as to the inheritance (the inheritance was Canaan in Caleb’s case; it’s the Throne in ours). Most of Israel were only interested in staying on the wilderness side of Canaan and settling down. An unfinished course, a curtailed spiritual advance, an accepting of something less than what God had appointed and intended. The majority took that course, but Caleb was never content and he stood against the majority just as he had always stood against a majority that did not represent God’s full mind.”

In Ephesians, after we learn the incredible things God has given us in Christ shown in chapters 1 to 3, and then learn to walk in their reality in chapters 4 & 5; in Eph. 6 Paul tells us to stand. This is the final place we are to attain at the end of our lives.

In the last generation of Christians, the pressure will become so great that standing firm in the storm will be the best that we can do.

I know that everyone, including me, would like a simple checklist of “overcomer characteristics” that we could look at and then just check off things that seem Ok and pray about those that don’t. But the Bible doesn’t give us a check list, it presents the *lives* of God’s overcomers to us to examine. But that doesn’t work if we only focus on part of their lives – like David killing Goliath instead of David numbering Israel to how big his kingdom was.

The scriptures give us flesh and blood, in all their imperfections and weakness, but also in their determination to go on with the Lord in spite of all these things.

Last week I said that 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’ (He calls that overcoming) – not an endurance that has its source in us, but that which comes from the life of God’s Son in us.

Finally, before we move to Colossians, here is a quote by Sparks that Jerusha shared with her pastor in Olympia; it fits perfectly here:

“If God had dealt with this whole thing in naked infinity (the conflict between Him and Lucifer), it would have been like a snap of the fingers to wipe out all that. But it is by Man that He has done it: by Man and for man, and that represents a terrific conflict...all that we pass through as we seek to go on with the Lord and be faithful, it is all directed against this ultimate issue, the coming of the company of Overcomers to the throne. It is the explanation of what we are passing through now. The explanation of all trial on the one side, from the adversary’s side; suffering, persecution, pain, anguish, is to quench the testimony with a view to thwarting (or delaying) that rapture to the throne.”

Ok, let's go to Colossians and see how far we get. I'm going to begin by reading through the passage we'll be looking at;

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:9-14)

First, I want to show the meaning of a couple of phrases in the passage that are clearer in the original:

In vs. 9 the word "knowledge" which is taken from the Gk. root "epignosis" should be translated something like this - "the advanced and perfect experiential knowledge".

Even though both gnosis and epignosis are normally translated "knowledge" or "knowing"; as one author puts it, "There is a tremendous difference between having gnosis and having epignosis."

Gnosis is intellectual knowledge; epignosis is understanding that has moved from our intellect into spiritual revelation – into the part of our being that makes us who we are as well as what we know.

Hope that makes sense.

When we study the Bible apart from serious prayer for genuine spiritual understanding, what we get is nothing more than what even an unbeliever could get if they were serious students of the Bible. But when we couple study with prayer and faith, as those indwelt by the Spirit of God, much more than intellectual understanding takes place.

The Spirit ministers the life of Christ to us through the Word of God. In John 6:63 we see this;

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh (the natural mind) profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”

It’s not just knowledge of the truth that we receive, it’s Christ formed in us; the living Word through the written Word becoming flesh and blood in us.

The Lord then takes epignosis and through our life experience, works the living truth of Christ into our moral and spiritual character through what Heb. 12 calls “chastening” to ultimately produce in us the “peaceable fruit of righteousness”.

It’s vital to know all we can about every part of the Bible, but the ultimate goal is not knowledge alone but being conformed to the image of God’s Son.

Now, listen again to this part of our passage in Col. 1 and I think you’ll see why Paul worded this as he did:

“. . . we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all *spiritual* wisdom and understanding, *so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord*, to please Him in all respects, *bearing fruit* in every good work *and increasing in the knowledge of God. . .*”

Paul is not just praying that we would have a correct interpretation of the Bible, as important as that is, but that *what* we learn and *the way* we learn it would “bear fruit” in our personal lives – and that this process would cause us to grow and to “increase” even more “in the (living) knowledge of God”.

As a brief side note: When we see the pattern of instruction of the Church by God’s apostles and teachers in the New Testament, and remember that God created the Body of Christ to be interdependent, we can see why so many Christians today have only a superficial or intellectual knowledge of God’s word.

Here’s what I mean

“There are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12: 20-21).

That’s true inter-dependence. We were never intended to be isolated or self-reliant as students of God’s word.

The gifts God has placed in the body of Christ include gifts intended to bring spiritual knowledge to God’s people. Christians who ignore or isolate from those with the gift of teaching never move from gnosis to epignosis.

Besides the need for inter-dependence that we saw in 1 Cor. 12, here are a couple of other passages that confirm this:

“Be mindful of those leading you, those who teach you the word of God” (Heb. 13:7)

“Respect the authority of your spiritual leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account” (Heb. 13:17)

“ . . .just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things that are hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16)

Notice the word “untaught” in this last verse.

They aren’t “unstudied”; they are “untaught”. They don’t see the need to come under the authority of those in the body of Christ who have the spiritual gift of teaching. It’s an issue of anti-authority running rampant in an anti-authority generation. Again, the church has been influenced by the culture rather than the other way around.

Also, many are hesitant to come under anyone’s authority because of the equally rampant abuse of authority by those in that position.

So, even if they go church or sit in a Bible study, they aren’t comprehending the necessity of taking seriously what they are hearing, or the fact that in

themselves, out from under the safety and input of spiritual authority, as Peter says - the best they can do is “distort the scriptures.”

We are all encouraged to be Berean and not blindly accept everything we hear no matter who it's coming from, but God doesn't honor passive-aggressive rebellion or the self-confident believer who lives in a “I'm interested in what you say, but I have no real need of you” attitude toward gifted men and women in the Body of Christ.

The church in our time has become a political organization. The people choose their leaders by voting, so the pastor will in turn give them whatever will keep him in office – whatever will keep the votes coming in.

You may have already known this, but “Laodicea” is a compound word meaning ‘the rule, and decisions of the people, in other words, the laity’. The church becomes the final authority and ends up completely oblivious to their spiritual condition.

One commentator I read puts it this way:

Laos means “people” and dike means “decision”). The Laodiceans trust in their ability to rule themselves, judging and deciding matters to the exclusion of Christ's rule through His delegated authorities within His Church.

The church that Christ said he would build is completely different than the ones men are building.

And all of this ties into the apostasy of the final generation.

I'll read a brief explanation of this from S.J. Andrews which addresses our relationship with the ultimate authority, Christ. Our relationship to the delegated authorities He establishes in His church exposes our relationship to the Head of His body.

“With these remarks on the nature and place of Christ's headship, we are able to see clearly what is meant by “the falling away” of the

Church. It is such a change in its corporate relation to its Head, that He cannot carry on His perfect work, first in it and then by it. The body is no longer filled with the fulness of His life; therefore, He is not able to put forth His full power, either in gathering and in perfecting its members, or His action upon the world. This is an indication of the Church having left their “first love”.

We will pick up in Col. 1:10 next week.