

# Shadows Of Christ & His Bride

Lesson #43

Sardis: Call To Maturity

Nov. 13, 2024

Rev. 3:1-3a And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;  
I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.  
Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die:  
for I have not found thy works perfect [complete, mature] before God.  
Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

Powerful Truth: All Believers Begin As Babes In Christ. Command

I Pet. 2:2-3 Like newborn babies you should crave [thirst for, earnestly desire] the pure [unadulterated] spiritual milk, that by IT you may be nurtured *and* grow unto [completed] salvation,

Matt. 4:4 Man shall not live by bread alone,

but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

MacArthur: Your spiritual growth in Christ will grow out of a craving for His Word.

A ravenous appetite for God's Word = a strong, intense, and compelling craving for it.

Prayer: God, grant me a ravenous appetite for your Word, a deep hunger to consume and meditate on your truths, that I may be nourished and transformed by your living message."

<sup>3</sup> Since you have [already] tasted the goodness *and* kindness of the Lord. [amplified]

Ps. 103:4a He redeemed my life from destruction.

Powerful Truth: Spiritual Maturity Is God's Objective For All Believers

Eph. 4:13-14 Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature [perfect, complete] man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Gal. 4:19 My little children, for whom I am again in [the pains of] labor [travail]

until Christ is [completely and permanently] formed within you. [Amplified]

Powerful Truth: Many remain spiritually immature: Not Because We Have Not Had Time >

We Have Not Applied Ourselves

A.W. Tozer: The average Christian is NOT Christ-like and lives a sub-Christian life.

Average Christians are NOT willing to obey the call to spiritual growth and maturity. God will not compromise with anyone over the issue of disobedience to truth He has revealed to them. People are sitting all around in the church, just as though the axle has broken, and not making any progress for years. They are stopped by their disobedience.

Any who knowingly refuses to obey will be brought to a distinct halt in their spiritual life.

Truth: You are either drifting with regard to your salvation because of neglect, or you are growing because of deliberate effort and attention. But nobody grows by accident.

Do we not realize our spiritual life is a battlefield, a preparation for a greater life to come? At the moment of justification, all are entered in the race for the prize and are commanded to walk in the spirit so we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. The "reformation" we need is to allow the Holy Spirit to complete the work that was started in us.

Allow Him to mature us and "grow us up into the fullness of Jesus Christ."

The writer of Hebrews was gravely concerned about the Jewish Christians of his day. He feared they would stumble & not appropriate the working of the Holy Spirit to finish the work in them that had begun when they were justified. Sanctification was not happening. He feared they would depart from their confession and fall back into Judaism. He gives them 4 "Let Us" statements to admonish and encourage them to remain steadfast in Jesus Christ.

Heb. 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

Heb. 4:11 Let us labor [be diligent] therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Heb. 4:14 Let us hold fast our profession [confession].

Heb. 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb. 5:1-10 The writer begins his explanation of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, but he was not sure his readers were ready for what he had to teach.

➤ He has previously shown them Jesus the Son of God, Jesus our Savior, Jesus the Word, Jesus the Shepherd, Jesus the Mediator.

Underlying problem: Jesus Christ is not from the tribe of Levi; he is from tribe of Judah.

- He describes Jesus as a priest after the order of Melchizedek.
- This takes some study and thought. Must understand OT characters and dates.
- One must study it to understand how Jesus Christ was a High Priest like Melchizedek.

He wants them to have a deeper understanding of Scripture, but he now pauses between

Heb. 5:11-7:1 to rebuke, warn and admonish those who would cease from growing spiritually.

Question: Why were they tempted to go back into legalism?

They were not going on to maturity in Christ. The answer: Grow Up

As Gentile believers, we may not have the same problem, but the concern for us may be falling back into from whence we came, probably legalism, & trying to do things on our own, as opposed to the freedom in Christ.

Paul's concern for the believers in Galatia: The Galatians had by faith received Jesus Christ and been empowered by the Holy Spirit, but now were agreeable victims to a false form of sanctification. They were falling back into legalism.

<sup>3</sup> Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Galatians 3:1-3 O foolish Galatians! (spiritually dull: unable to listen, receive or act on the Word - You can't understand the impossibility of sanctification based on your works.)

Who has bewitched (cast under an evil spell by a malign influence; fascinated; hypnotized) you that you should not obey the truth, (You say Jesus isn't enough! You need to add something to your born-again experience?) before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? <sup>2</sup> This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

<sup>3</sup> Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Why would you trade in the supernatural power for human effort? You cannot achieve a spiritual goal by carnal means. The Holy Spirit produces the spiritual life initially and He sustains it. Are you living with energy and effort apart from the Holy Spirit - "fallen from grace?" Have you moved out of the sphere of grace into the bondage of performance, rules and regulations? Have you ceased to depend on God's resources and depend on your flesh? In God's sight, those works are wood, hay & stubble.

Paul's concern For Believers in Corinth: II Cor. 11:3-4

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!]

Gal. 1:6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

Important: The emphasis in this section: Make Spiritual Progress      Time To Mature

Heb. 5:11 There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull of hearing [poor listeners]

➤ The problem was not that he is a dull teacher, but they were Dull Hearers!

Heb. 6:12 That you be not slothful [dull, lazy], but followers [imitate those] of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

*Warning #3: Marks of Spiritual Immaturity: Hebrews 5:11-14*

1. Dullness Toward The Word

Heb. 5:11 Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Result: Dull of hearing = Slothful; condition of spiritual apathy and laziness that prevents spiritual development; to have no push

Unable to listen to the Word, receive it and act on it > Immaturity

Greek = nothros = person who has the imperceptive and lethargic nature of a stone

Gal. 5:7 Ye did run well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Started their "backward journey" by Drifting from the Word.

Heb. 2:1-4

Drifting led to Doubting the Word.

Heb. 3:7-4:13

## Spiritual Deafness - Dull of Hearing

Isa. 30:9-11 That this is a rebellious people, Lying children, Children who will not hear the law of the LORD; <sup>10</sup> Who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. <sup>11</sup>Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

Jer. 6:16 Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

But they said, We will not walk therein.

II Tim. 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; <sup>4</sup> and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.

Problem: They had stopped listening. They refused to hear new truth from the Holy Spirit.

- They are content to know only the fundamentals - what Jesus did for me.
- I've got my ticket to heaven.

Remember: This church had claimed:

The just shall live by faith, but they failed to go on in the truths of sanctification.

They put themselves under rituals, traditions, disciplines, etc. to "mature themselves."

Note: They must Overcome Their Deadness. They are spiritually immature and trying to perfect [sanctify] themselves with the works of the flesh. [wood, hay, stubble]

Tozer: Need an infusion of the Holy Spirit! Religious activity that does not encourage and stimulate personal, relational growth with our Lord is a waste of time!

- Empty religion is like digging your own grave.

Consider: The Pharisees established their own traditions from the Law and MISSED the MESSIAH because refused to hear NEW TRUTH.

Truth: Listen! Your spiritual life depends on COMMUNICATION with the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual growth comes from a vital infusion of new truth received daily from the Holy Spirit and the living, active Word of God.

I Thess. 2:13 "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." [Ears to hear]

Ps. 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

## 2. Inability To Share

Heb. 5:12a For though by this time you ought to be teachers,

you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God;

Regression; failing to advance; lack of development

Instead of helping others to grow, these believers were in need of learning again the simple teachings of the Christian life. A 2<sup>nd</sup> childhood!

Consider: Ability to share spiritual truth is a mark of maturity.

### 3. Failing To Use Time Wisely

Heb. 5:12a For though by this time you ought to be teachers...

By this time: They had been believers for a time - not recent new Christians

Every Christian who has been a believer for a few years should be knowledgeable enough in the teachings of Scripture to instruct a younger believer.

### 4. Constant Diet Of Milk With No Meat > You have a Restricted Diet

Heb. 5:12b are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat

Milk is predigested food suited for babies.

Milk = first principles of the oracles of God; refers to what Jesus did on earth >

His birth, life, teaching, death, burial and resurrection.

We begin our Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth.

II Pet. 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

➤ Meat = What Jesus is doing in heaven; His ministry as our High Priest -

We GROW in the Christian life based on the basis of His unfinished work in Heaven.

- Meat can only be handled with growth & development > with teeth to chew it.
- Handling the meat of the Word needs to be "worked up to." Need foundation first
- The meat of God's Word is not something that can be read and understood at a glance.

Quote: Surface level Bible reading will create a surface level Christian.

- Meat requires study, research, thought, reasoning and some struggle to understand.
- To understand, look at it in its context.

### 5. Unskilled In Using The Word > Failure to Apply What We Learn

Heb. 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe [infant].

Consider: An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether he is true to the Scriptures.

Research indicates that upwards of 70% of the contemporary church are spiritually immature/carnal. Is this why the church seems to be so ineffectual? Is this one of the reasons the false prophets are basking in the spotlight while true teachers are ignored?

The most obvious case in Scripture is found in I Cor. 3:1-3. Paul rebuked the Corinthian saints.

I Cor. 3:1-4 "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it [bear it]. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly [carnal = set on worldly things]. For since there is envying [jealousy] and strife and divisions among you, are you not fleshly [carnal], and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?"

Two kinds of Brethren in the Church: Carnal & Spiritual

Note: Being in The Body of Christ does not shield one from being carnal

## Spiritual Brethren in the Church

- Capable of eating meat = food for the mature
- Rom. 8:5                      Mind the things of the spirit
- Rom. 8:4                      Led by the Spirit

## Carnal Brethren in the Church

- Eat on milk for the immature
- Rom. 8:5                      Minds the things of the flesh
- Rom. 8:4                      Walk after the flesh

1. When one says he is a believer but will not respond to the clear teachings and authority of the Word of God, it is fair to classify him or her as an *infant*.

- His lack of response denotes the believer's inability to digest the Word of God.

2. Babes in Christ tend to avoid strong doses of the Word because they know the Word will convict them of their wrongdoing, and their consciences will prod them to change.

*Infants* may even attempt to discredit the Word in their desires to rationalize and justify self-serving actions.

3. *Infants Rebel: Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly [carnal]*

- They were passive and/or rebellious regarding their new life and position in Him.
- They were rebelling against God's commands for ALL believers.

4. Proof They Were Carnal: Immature Display Jealousy & Cause Strife

I Cor. 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Notice the progression: Immature believers don't listen to good counsel.

- They rebel and affect others in the body of Christ:

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

When we aren't feeding our souls with the Bread of Life, we quickly show signs of spiritual hunger. Discontentment      Impatience      Complaining      Unkindness      Selfishness  
The babe in Christ has difficulty putting away the old self, his self-centered ambitions and quest for significance. *Infants in Christ: walk like mere men. act like non-believers.*

It is Biblically infantile for one to name the name of Christ and yet continue to display spiritual immaturity and latent insurgency toward God by refusing to adhere to the precepts of His Word. "Throwing protein-rich food from the high-chair is unacceptable. It is rank rebellion."

Tozer: God calls us to "Go On To Maturity" GROW UP in Christ!

Truth: Spiritual growth is NOT automatic. Spiritual growth begins with a basic discontent with your present condition. You must be intentional, desiring, and diligent.

God's Word conveys strong appeals and commands for us to earnestly desire spiritual maturity.

Common words and phrases: be diligent to enter; strive or agonize for the prize;

mortify the deeds of the flesh; pursue holiness; be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Yet many born-again believers put on the brakes at the risk of being perceived as "fanatic."

Question: Am I a "fanatic" who desires to continue maturing spiritually until He calls me home or am I guilty of merely "nibbling" at the truth of God's Word, content to be a common, mediocre Christian who will resist the call to spiritual maturity?

God is not honored by our arrested development. Mediocrity is NOT the highest Jesus offers. Don't settle for the "creed of contentment." Apprehended Bible truths will awaken your desire for the Holy Spirit to continue working in you and move you forward.

Heb. 5:14 Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

As we feed on the Word of God and apply it in daily life, our inner "spiritual senses" get their exercise and become strong and keen.

I Tim. 4:7-8 But refuse profane and old wives' fables and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.<sup>8</sup> For bodily exercise profits little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of That Which Is To Come.

Powerful Truth: God's Word is FOOD and NOURISHMENT for your SOUL.

Matt. 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Ps. 81:9-10 I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt:  
open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore, having left [once and for all] the elementary *principles* [ABC'S] of the teaching of Christ, Let Us Go On To Perfection. [5<sup>th</sup> Let Us statement]

Let us be carried forward. God enables us to progress as we yield to Him, receive His Word and act on it. He is emphatic: There is a peril in not progressing!

Powerful Truth: If you don't move on to maturity, you are likely to make an irreversible decision that will keep you in a state of spiritual immaturity. Your rewards & inheritance are at stake.

Problem with the Church in Sardis: The Christians were "sleeping" [the walking dead].

Sardis was well known as an active, vigorous Christian congregation, characterized by good works and charitable activities.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: "The appearance [of the Sardis church] is that of a beautifully adorned corpse in a funeral parlor, and the Lord is not deceived."

In the sight of God, all these religious activities were a failure because they were only formal and external, and not infused with the life-giving Holy Spirit.

The church needed to stir up the living Spirit of God in order to come to life.

Rev. 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;

Christ's Pronouncement - Rev. 3:1 - There is HOPE - I Am Able To Bring New Life

A. He Comes Proclaiming His Deity - Jesus comes to this church as One Who has the

"seven Spirits of God" and as One Who is holding the "seven stars".

Remedy: Jesus has the life-giving Spirit

The seven-fold ministry of the Spirit, defined in Isaiah 11:1-2, emphasizes the fullness and completeness of the Holy Spirit's ministry in His power and operation.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: <sup>2</sup> And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

Spirit of the Lord	Member of the Trinity
Spirit of Wisdom	Intelligence or right use of knowledge
Spirit of Understanding	Insight, perception, able to discern
Spirit of Counsel	Prudence or ability to give good advice
Spirit of Might	Force, power, strength (spiritual warfare)
Spirit of Knowledge	Personally experience or know God
Spirit of the Fear of the Lord	Profound respect or awe for God

Jesus Christ as head of the church brought HOPE in the gift of the Holy Spirit and the fullness of His power to bring LIFE. He is ALL we need to succeed and triumph as Christians and as the church.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore, having left [once and for all] the elementary *principles* [ABC'S] of the teaching of Christ, Let Us Go On To Perfection.

Press on = #5342 = phero = be borne along like a ship by the wind

The use of the passive voice:

- Emphasizes the exertion of power on the individual from an outside source.
- Conveys the thought of the need of the recipient to willingly surrender to this outside influence

The present tense emphasizes the continual need for this activity.

- The writer lumps himself in this group needing to be continually borne along.
- The idea is "Let us be carried along by God's Spirit."
- Let us be carried forward to maturity.
- God enables us to progress as we yield to Him, receive His Word and act on it.

Submit to the Holy Spirit whose transforming power will complete the work in you.

I Thess. 5:24 He who calls you is faithful. The One who calls you to a life of righteousness is the One who will live that life of righteousness in you and through you by your consent.

Phil. 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; [Promise> Reckon> Surrender>Thank Him]

Jim Elliot: Forgive me for being so ordinary while claiming to know such an extraordinary God. When you die, you will leave all that you have behind and you will take with you, all you are.

Question: Who are you?