

*Group Self-Denial and
Separation {Christ for
Individuals¹}*

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1. "Christ for Individuals", on the 5 books of the Apostle John is the title for volume 4 of the LEARN CHRIST FROM THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS commentary. Much of the material of this chapter originated in that Bible commentary.

The call of "separation" from other Christians without promotion of more splits that can be the opposite of "spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives" (Ephesians 4:3), as introduced in the first session of "Life and Letters of Paul", demands further explanation; and since it is based as much on the part of the Word of God written from the human side by the Apostle John as well as Paul, it is included here in the Appendix of BELIEVE AND BE BAPTIZED. In fact the title of this appendix chapter, "Christ for Individuals" is borrowed from the previously desktop published volume 4 of the LEARN CHRIST commentaries. It was chosen to be the most dominant theme of the 5 books from the Apostle John, and written in this order²: Revelation, the Gospel of John, and the 3 little epistles of John.

John, the humble but gracious apostle of love, received new impetus to prophesy to all of Christianity after he was forced by an angel to eat the message

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2. Publication out into the First Century Christianity world, the sequence shown in the book order of our New Testaments, does not necessarily reflect the order in which they were originally written. It is so obvious that the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation before the Gospel of John because: (1) John was inclined to stay more in the stealth mode for many years after the crucifixion of Christ and while pastor at Ephesus because of the care of Mary, the mother of Jesus, that the dying Christ entrusted to him; and (2) the word for Christ of "Word", given in the prologue to the Gospel of John, did not even exist in the first century vocabulary for the Lord Jesus Christ until it was revealed to the Apostle John captive on the isle of Patmos.

of the book of Revelation. Times were bad, much like today, and a message was needed that was larger than the problems not only in the world but in the many Christian churches of the first century world, a message of personal victory in spite of group demise and of separation. That renewed commission to John reminds the participants in the Bible course, "Jeremiah and Prophecy" of God's commission to Jeremiah as a "Prophet to the Nations".

"Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, 'Go take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.' So I went to the angel and said to him, 'Give me the little book.' And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.' Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.'" (Revelation 10:8-11)

Gist: The messages to the 7 churches of Asia Minor of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 describe the extent of the internal problems in first century churches {like today in our churches of the Falling Away³}, as well as explaining to the individual Christians {church members} how they must separate themselves from the group.

AI-1. The problem in the church at Ephesus was that they had left their first love {remember Jesus said during the Falling Away "sin would abound and the love of many {Christians} would wax cold}, the indication of this to the Ascended Christ was because they had ceased to do their "first works" (Revelation 2:1-6), and the message of SEPARATION {"what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes..."}

Here this whole matter of individual separation from the group of the church body is introduced: you see how in Revelation 2:7 it starts with a contrast with first the group, "what the Spirit says to the churches", church bodies

3. While you might call the problem in the 7 churches a mini Falling Away, it was not the Great Apostasy of today called in II Thessalonians THE Falling Away that must happen before the Second Coming.

and even all of Christianity sometimes called "the church"; and then goes from a general application to an individual application of Separation with "to him {each individual HIM⁴} who overcomes". And this is the biggy of salvation and church membership {some think}, the matter of eternal life.

"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7)

Even though your church is going down the drain in the sight of God, like most churches of America and the world during the Falling Away, some in your church can win the individual victory by finding and holding on to salvation as in the words of Paul, they "work out their salvation with fear and trembling".

The problem in churches today⁵ is that most, especially among Mormons, Roman Catholics, and Church of Christ who think salvation comes from their church membership and that they are the only Christians, think that salvation is a matter of group fellowship, attendance and membership at the local church of their choosing. Most church members cling to their local church for salvation just in order to eliminate that very matter of "fear and trembling" about salvation. {How to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling comes from one of the letters of the Apostle Paul, Philippians 2:12, and thus will be covered in the main body of "Life and Letters of Paul" {alias "Believe and Be Baptized" or "One Baptism"} as we come to the chapter on the exegesis of the book of Philippians.

NOTE: Just let it be stated now that no church, organization, or group can save you. Continuing in salvation, alias working it out, is an individual matter:

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12)

Yes, there was a day when all the people of God were of the nation of Israel, when God called them as a group out of Egyptian captivity; but one of the

4. "Him" in the Bible is like always in the case of "he", a generic him of men and women.

5. While most Christians tend to think of their church as the only church of Christians, these 3 mentioned denominations have as official doctrines that they are the only church and the only Christians.

things you saw from the book of Jeremiah was that God realized His own mistake, along with the promise of an individual new birth instead of a national rebirth making also accountability for sin and eternal salvation, an individual matter, not a group matter; stating that the "soul that sins shall die", and no matter as in the past of Old Testament days allowing the kingdom of God to be taken by violence! However, this is a matter for the next section of A1-2; and now we must get on with SEPARATION in the other 7 churches of Asia Minor.

A1-2. Without trying to impose by isogesis the whole history of man and churches on Revelation 2 and 3 like Scofield, it is possible that at the local church of Smyrna where Christ had no reprimands, as also at another one of the churches, that during this Falling Away from God, Christ, and the Bible that churches of America are now in, that these first Christianity figures of 5 out of 7 bad churches also hold true today; that is, that 5 out of 7 churches are in the Falling Away.

NOTE: This gives us some hope that we can look around and find those 2 out of 7 Christian churches that are not Falling Away, if this is true. This would give us an obvious outlet on the SEPARATION and split problem!

After 3 verses {Revelation 2:8-10} of observations of the whole church by Christ {to the angel of the church at Smyra, "your works", "you" as a church in the plural} with a group admonition of "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"; then the concluding remarks of Revelation 2:11 is with two individual "He"s:

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." (Revelation 2:11)

More obvious assurances about eternal life as both the crown of life and as salvation from the second death.

AI-3. Truly churches of America today in the Falling Away where the 5 stages are (1) intolerance toward sound doctrine, (2) purpose driven “wants”, (3) the heaping up of itching ears Bible teachers and preachers, (4) turning away from truth, and (5) being turned into fables, can appreciate the problems of the church at Pergamos with sound doctrine, where the church was carried away with the unsound doctrine of both Balaam and of the Nicolaitans; and the individual promises of SEPARATION came through the avenues of: (1) “hidden manna to eat” (2:17), for individuals that the rest of the church body would not get, without repentance (2:16) as Christ was about to “fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Revelation 2:16); and (2) a new, personal and individual name to distinguish and SEPARATE them in the sight of God and Christ from other church members at Pergamos, “on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it” (2:17). Obviously if no one else in the local church knew of this “new name”, it was both (1) individual from the group, and (2) a matter of SEPARATION from the group by God and in the mind of Christ and God.

NOTE: Here we have a clue that quite often, depending on the situation in the local church or denomination, the SEPARATION can be more an isolation in the sight of God from the ways and doings of that church without a complete separation from the church which is difficult.

Certainly the “few things against them” of unsound doctrine today against the churches of the Falling Away in America would include those bad habits of behavior of the last days of II Timothy 3:1-5.

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come {boy, are the perilous times already here upon the churches}: For men will be lovers of themselves {a very unChristian attitude but one we now often see among church members and one dominant as the fundamentalists fought and killed careers and reputations of moderate brethren to take over the SBC}, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers {in the church, yes, taking the name of God in vain}, disobedient to parents {more departing

from the heritage, beliefs, and traditions of their forefathers}, unthankful {especially of the elder leaders}, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, with self-control {democracy in churches has just made members free to speak out what is on their minds regardless of the hurts to pastors and other members}, brutal {especially in the way members will run off pastors of faithful service and sound doctrine, practicing the kind of brutal behavior even unknow in large secular companies}, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.⁶ And from such perople turn away! {This speaks of the Separation of individuals from the church member group!} (II Timothy 3:1-5)

The tradition of "a form of godliness" like previously in Bible Baptist churches, religion without a 9 month new birth⁷ if you would, allows for customs such as the taking of God's name in vain as did our parents, boasting about our traditions, etc.

A1-4. Many churches of America, no doubt, will in this present day Great Apostasy called the Falling Away by the Apostle Paul, will have Christ now and then God at the judgment, talk about anything of church membership "as for your works, the last are more than the first" (Revelation 2:19), anything of the works of church membership now as compared to only a generation ago before the start of the Falling Away in approximately 1968: "works, love, service, faith, and patience" (2:19). Now SEPARATION for individuals in today's churches of America, like for individual church members at Thyatira, namely those individuals "who do not have this doctrine {the doctrine of the prophetess Jezebel⁸} and to

6. By the way, this is where you see the ultimate self-denial in churches as religion replaces Christ and the new birth, denying God Himself.

7. In the main body of this book, "Life and Letters of Paul, and as part of the "One Baptism" of the one salvation, we will get into differences between just a new birth and a 9 month new birth where church members do not first rejoice in the seed they have received and then have it choked out by cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches as in the parable of the seed and the sower. Also we will make a reconciliation between the Security of the Believer and the parable of the seed and sower.

those individual church members who have not fallen into knowing “the depths of Satan” {you might say like in I Timothy 4:1-5 who are not “giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”}...this Separation of individual church members from the majority of church members, like in Thyatira, is for the individual church member only, (1) who overcomes (2:26), (2) keeps the historical heritage and works of the past generation of the church, the original works at the beginning of the church, if you would, (3) this individual will be among the select group that after the Second Coming of Christ will have “power over the nations”, and (4) become a recipient from Christ of “the morning star”⁹.

NOTE: Do you begin to get the point that SEPARATION or splits in the Bible sense of the process is more from Christ and God, where they look at churches and denominations with a sharp focus on the few individuals who have not departed from the faith in the great apostasy now underway of the Falling Away. Of course beware, because as God, Christ, and the Spirit begin to separate you from fellow church members, they will become convicted and irritated, many practicing the bad behaviors against you of I Timothy 4:1-9, especially of the bad attitude and habit of the “despisers of good”. It is just plain true that increasingly the group, church or otherwise, just does not like or tolerate any separating behaviour or attitudes from the majority of the group! It seems strange, but like with the fundamentalists, such separating behavior and attitudes, become labeled as unsound doctrine to be purged from the church or denomination!

A1-5. You know in spite of even study courses on the book of Revelation, churches today remain in self-denial that they like the

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8. Who teaches and seduces the church members into sexual immorality and to eat meat offered to idols, in short identify with the practices of the world more than of Christ and of leaning their influence toward the ways of the world.
 9. See the exegesis of the book of Revelation in CHRIST FOR INDIVIDUALS, volume 4 of the LEARN CHRIST FROM THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS commentary from SunGrist_Bible. You can learn more about it from the website of SunGrist_Bible, www.biblecombibleman.com.

church at Sardis “have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (Revelation 3:1) Like God’s people of the temple in Jerusalem of Jeremiah, they were living on their past heritage as the people, city, and temple of God. They were counting on their buildings and their heritage for salvation. God however, through the Prophet Jeremiah, told them that the southern kingdom of Judah would soon be destroyed like Shiloh and the northern kingdom of Israel; already God had ceased to listen to their prayers, and told Jeremiah no longer to pray for them. “It just can not happen to us as it did to all of God’s people of Jeremiah, like it happened to the church at Thyatira” is the self-denial of churches today. You know perhaps Americans are beginning to wake up on this matter of self-denial. Recent news polls of Americans indicate that for the first time, citizens would like to see a recall of their own representatives to Congress and the Senate, no matter what party. Previously the American public showed a very low approval rating of these representatives, but like their own school and pastors, held onto an approval of their own representative.

1. Self-Denial of a church that has fallen away from God, Christ, and the Bible is actually part of the Falling Away itself, the whole church or a majority of the church like in 5 out of 7 of the churches of Asia Minor turn away from the truth or reality of the Falling Away itself. They claim that it does not exist, or they deny it as a Bible doctrine.

“and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (II Timothy 4:4)

NOTE: Why do you think the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the individual appeal to separated members of a Falling Church each time appeal to him “who has ears to hear and eyes to see”. Not a church body characteristic, but an individual one. All these churches had heard the Apostle Paul while still alive preach on “turning of ears away from the truth”, goodness they all could read each day their copy of the letter of Second Timothy.

2. Granted so much of the message to the church at Sardis (Revelation 3:1-3) was to the falling church, with a challenging call to "strengthen the things which remain" {not much good remained in the church at Sardis, but there was still hope, and the challenge like in "We Don't Have to Win, Just Fight", to continue the fight of faith against all odds: (1) be watchful of all things, (2) strengthen the things that remain (they are about to die} , (3) perfect your works before God, and in the sight of God¹⁰, and (4) hold fast to the faith you have received and heard, that heritage of the past of which you are so proud but have chosen to forget.

3. Separation is available for "a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments" (Revelation 3:4), the separation by Christ is that they alone of the church membership "are worthy" (3:4).

**"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."
(Revelation 3:4)**

4. SEPARATION is the individual in a church body, the "He who overcomes" (3:5)

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." (Revelation 3:5)

What the individual Christian must overcome to fight the good fight of faith, to win the war of the Falling Away while the whole church inevitably must lose is: the war to strengthen the few things that remain in the church of imperfect works in the sight of God. There are those, contrary to sound Bible and sound Bible doctrine, who believe that any works a church has done is correct, holy, and blessed by God just because it is done by the church and in the name of the church. Not so, as the time goes by into the Falling Away, the works of the church become more and more imperfect, impure, and unsound. This is the very nature of the awesome Falling Away: (1) as sin abounds the love of many waxes cold; (2) the rising tide of the mystery of sin and lawlessness overwhelms the world and church; (3) intolerance toward sound doctrine leads to purpose driven wants, the heaping up of Bible teachers and pastors

10. One of the things we will notice during the Falling Away as the Holy Spirit is withdrawn from earth, is that there will be a lessening of accountability to God.

with itching ears, and by the way church members; (4) self-denial of truth and the truth of Christ and salvation and the Bible as church members increasingly turn away from truth and (5) are turned into fables. Let God's original people of the nation of Israel be a lesson to you, there are few now of Israel who believe!

6. Would that we had in America, and could find, more churches during this Falling Away like the church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) which have "a little strength" left to continue the fight of faith-- "have kept My word" and "have not denied My name"?

1. Undeniably Christ has a message for today in the "hour of trial" for He speaks of both the Great Tribulation that Christians of the first centuries went through, that time of which Jesus spoke previously when He said "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved" (Matthew 24:22), and then of the Final Tribulation¹¹ of which we must go through which is primarily a tribulation of the whole universe falling to pieces under our feet and over our heads.

"Because you have kept My command to persevere {"persevere was Christ's and John's way of saying like Paul wrote, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling"¹²}, I also will keep you from the hour of trial¹³ which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on earth." (Revelation 3:10)

11. The message from Christ {Matthew 24} on the Final Tribulation, and after the message on the Great Tribulation, like in most of Matthew 24 and Revelation goes in sweeps, often separated by "THEN", starts with the THEN of Matthew 24:23. Signs of the Final Tribulation as distinguished from the previous sweep of the Great Tribulation {the first sweep was the "beginning of sorrows" before the Great Tribulation}: (1) many false Christs; (2) many false prophets; (3) great signs and wonders in the heavens above and the earth beneath; (4) false rumors and dating of the Second Coming; and (5) the last great battle of the world, the army of the world being led by the final son of perdition and Satan, where God intervenes to destroy the army that comes against Jerusalem. See www.biblecombibleman.com on "The End" and on "The Future of the Middle East".

12. You have not made salvation yet, and your salvation is not complete until Christ comes again.

13. The first hour of trial was the testing of the first centuries, the Great Tribulation, where Christians were killed and tortured, often like in the case of Paul and Peter crucified on the cross by the Roman Emperors, promoted by unbelieving Jews.

2. Even in such a good church, there is a message to the GROUP to hold fast to what little you have of the faith that is left--"Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:10)

You have to fight the good fight of faith just to hold onto your crown of salvation!

3. Then even in a church that has kept from losing all in the Falling Away, there is also an INDIVIDUAL message of the OVERCOMING OF SEPARATION.

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name." (Revelation 3:12)

A1-7. What churches today that can deny identification with a church like Sardis or Ephesus, or even 4 out of 7 of the early New Testament churches, can hardly deny the lukewarmness of the church at Laodicea, nor neglect the SEPARATION message to individual church members to individual fellowship with Christ who "stands at the door and knocks" (Revelation 3:20)

This standing at the door is at the heart's door of the individual to come in at any time the invitation is extended, and you must see that the knocking is also very personal, at the individual's door of the heart. Please did not allow any group or leader to come between you and this personal relationship with Christ. We talk about the "separation of church and state" as a Baptist distinctive, but a distinctive Bible belief that allows the individual to win while the larger group is deep into the inevitable Falling Away is the belief and practice of CHRIST FOR INDIVIDUALS. Over and over in your Bible study and reading, from Revelation, the Gospel of John, and the little epistles you will encounter many ways it is described, and also you will find the Christian concept in the Life and Letters of Paul. As far as we know the Apostles John and Paul never met, and yet so strong was the influence of Christ and the Spirit in both lives that they wrote consistently on all issues. One of this

authors favorite writings was "A Harmony of John and Ephesians" where major {and even minor} doctrines of the 7 ONEs were compared one by one to show complete agreement. It is just one more validation that the whole Bible is the Word of God: divine in origin, absolute in authority, sufficient in its message, consistent in its content, and high fidelity in its communication. Enjoy this reveling in the Word during the coming weeks!