

Philadelphia and Laodicea

Rev. 3: 7-22.

(BT Vol. 16, from p. 268: 4 episodes)

W. Kelly.

My task now is to show that the Lord Jesus had something much more definite in His mind than the ordinary profit that one may and ought to derive from the word of God, which is written for every believer. For instance, what was written in the Epistle of James, or in those of Peter, or in the Epistle to the Hebrews, or in any other of the Epistles of the New Testament, is all of God. I need not say that the Christian believes that every part of them is divine; that every word of them is profitable, and so intrinsically for all days, if we have not all the elements that men possessed by the church at the time they were written. At that time there were outward powers manifested; there were persons in the highest position of authority for rule as well as in revelation of the truth; which thing we do not possess at the present time. And one presumes that all persons of sobriety would acknowledge this. There may be shades of difference, and some may claim more as perpetuated at the present time; but, among sober Christians who may differ as to other things except that which is fundamental, there is no question that the apostolic church did possess not a little that does not exist at present. But all that is needful for the edifying of Christ's body — for God's service and worship — we have assured here in scripture itself, with the certainty that it abides till we all come to the unity of the faith.

Now, I claim for the scripture which has been read something more precise; for the Lord was here contemplating such a scene as is unrolled before the eye at the present time. There is no doubt that the Churches existed when the Lord told John to write to the angel of each; there is no doubt that instructions were given at that time for each church, as well as the whole book which connected them with a great deal that followed the Epistles. But the contents of these Epistles in themselves, and very particularly the character of the book, show that the Lord had a larger view than any ordinary thing that was realised in the day of the apostle John; for it is entirely unusual to present Epistles as here in prophecy. If the Lord was pleased to give certain Epistles as a preface to the great prophetic book of the New Testament, there was clearly a distinct object in it, and I believe that object was twofold: first, to meet existing wants in John's day (and no doubt, in that point of view, Epistles were sent to each of them, according to the instructions given to the apostle); and, secondly, to make those Epistles to be a vehicle of the widest instruction for days that had yet to come to pass. But now they are come. And the Lord has brought out the light of them, when we read the closing scene of these seven churches. They were all there when He originally gave them messages; but now they have come into being in the prophetic point of view. There is, however, a division to be made among them, which is of much consequence to lay hold of; and this is, that the first three were not permanent states. They were passing ones. This is marked even outwardly by the fact that the call to hear changes its place at the fourth church.

But one need not go into this to demonstrate the character of the Epistles. All prove the same thing. For instance, mark the feature of the Epistle to the church at Ephesus. Of old it was a question of first love. This could only apply prophetically to the state of things which followed in the day of St. John. There never was a time when it could so aptly apply as then.

They had the full grace and truth of the Lord brought out for them, and it they had abandoned, or were beginning to abandon. They were letting in waves of vain thoughts — doctrines soon after — which altogether weakened their sense of Christ's love, and therefore of their own love to Him. They were relaxing from their first love. Evidently, this could not apply in the same precise manner afterwards as then, and for the simple reason, that far more serious evils came up before the mind of the Lord.

Take again the second — Smyrna. It is plain that the heathen persecution is referred to. We know that this followed, that prison and death were used as engines against the church a little after the early days.

In the Epistle to Pergamos too we have the church of God establishing itself in a public manner in the Roman Empire; that is dwelling, as it is said, where Satan's throne was. Now, this could only apply then, and once, while other things of a much more serious import would afterwards call for the notice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do these admit of repetition? In fact, there was no such thing of the same character of persecution. There is a persecution of Babylon; but that is brought before us in a much later part of the Book of Revelation. The old heathen persecution assuredly could not be repeated after there ceased to be heathens within the bosom of Christendom. So, again, the church getting established in the world was not a question after it was established. We find her acquiring a place, a settling down, on earth. Afterwards much greater abominations were seen.

It is exactly at this point that the Lord makes a most strikingly new feature enter into these churches; and what makes it to be of so solemn an import for us is, that it is His account of the permanent conditions that follow. Thyatira is the first one; and the only or chief reason for entering into this now is to give a greater definiteness to what one has to say about Philadelphia and Laodicea. I want to show it is not the mere application of these letters, or that they illustrate truth by the past. There is much more than that. In fact they apply chiefly to what I am going to spread before you for our own spiritual judgment. At least, such is my conviction. But the word must be mixed with faith if it be really the mind of God to profit souls. It would not become me to speak so plainly and distinctly if I had not the firmest conviction of the truth.

Thyatira is the first, then, in which there is the marked outward change referred to. But there is a more remarkable characteristic than the call to hear. It is here, for the first time, that we have the Lord distinctly bringing in His coming again. That is, the Lord intimates to these that the state goes on till He comes again. It is not so with the first three. With Ephesus, the only coming described is a providential coming, "or, else, I will come to thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place;" and so with Pergamos, fighting with the sword of his mouth, but not His coming to receive the saints. nor yet to introduce His kingdom. Here it is in Thyatira for the first time; and, what is more, He introduces it in the body of the Epistle before the promise. See that which we have in the twenty-fifth verse of the second chapter: "That which ye have already hold fast till I come." The plain intimation is, that what He describes here goes on until He comes.

Now, this is evidently very much to be weighed, in order to have a sound judgment of these Epistles. When we look into that to Thyatira, it becomes still more manifest. Here we have that portentous personage Jezebel, the false prophetess. I do not mean that Thyatira is embodied in Jezebel; far from it. We shall find, on looking into it, there is a remarkable

conjunction of opposites. In Thyatira both good and evil are brought together. But still here we have Jezebel. It is a most apt figure of that Popery which, I have no doubt, is also brought before us in the symbol of Babylon given much later. Here she is presented as a false prophetess. We know how thoroughly this represents the character of Popery: that is, her pretension to continuous inspiration, a claim to pronounce the voice of God on whatever point may come before her, is really setting herself above the written word of God, as if she alone had His living voice. We know that such a procedure always does set aside what is written.

It is not altogether a peculiarity of Rome to indulge in a self-assertion which enfeebles scripture; but in Rome it takes its most determined and most pronounced form. Here then, first of all, we have Jezebel: "Thou sufferest that woman, Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants." It is a striking fact that the Lord Jesus intimates that, in Thyatira, there were persons whom He characterised in the face of all drawbacks as "My servants." And so it has always been. Not a few, there is every reason to believe, who were God-fearing had a conscience about the word of God, with a love for the Saviour, that never really left Romanism; while, at the same time, there was still plainer the fact that they were stupefied by the acceptance of fleshly unity, and by the doings of Jezebel. There was thus a most painful issue, the alliance of those that were the Lord's with a system which, in itself, was the most cruel enemy of those that He loved.

This, then, is the first thing here called to your notice. It is a picture of the Middle Ages. We find that, if the Lord had His servants there, Jezebel had children not only then but later. There is a perpetuation of the evil race — a continuance of the same character of persons. Then, thirdly, and this may go along with the rest, there is another distinct feature, only found in connection with Thyatira, namely, a remnant; that which must neither be confounded with Jezebel's children on the one hand, nor with His servants on the other. Surely this is a very remarkable state of things. And what demands all your attention is, that it was found here only for the first time, while it continues up to the present day. That is, you have what may be called the Romanising or Ultramontane school; the Papistical party, thoroughly determined in carrying out the system to the uttermost — Jezebel and her children; next, those whom the Lord called "My servants," in the Middle Ages, such as St. Bernard, or, in later times, Pascal and Fenelon, if I may mention the names of such, down to M. Boos — saints who really had a moral abhorrence of what was enforced by Jezebel. Yet there they are, at the same time, all mixed up together.

But mark, contemporaneously, another party, which had its spring in those early times before Protestantism — the remnant or "the rest," mentioned in Thyatira, as it is said, "As many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak." Who are they? They are such, in my judgment, as the Waldenses, that is, a body of Christians who feared the Lord, though in ignorance, who lived before the days of the Reformation, yet quite refused the wickedness of Rome, and who were, therefore, distinct from "My servants" found in and seduced by Rome. These rejected the overtures of the harlot, but, at the same time, they were more known for their practical godliness than for any clearness in the truth of God. They were exceedingly unintelligent, as we should call it. They but imperfectly understood even justification. Compared with the measure of the Reformation, they were far behind; and it is remarkable that they have remained much in the same state. They seem to have paid little attention to light from without, which is common in these days of ours. Substantially they only retain their old attitude. They were, no doubt, undermined, abused,

attacked by everything that either the power or wiles of Rome could do to destroy them. But there they abode in their secluded valleys, and there they are still, and I believe there they will remain till the Lord comes — not merging into Rome on the one hand, nor Protestantism, nor fuller light on the other. They retain the peculiar place, which they had even before the Reformation. Here, then, is the picture; and I ask, Is it not striking that from the first the Lord should have so sketched it out? There is nothing like it previously, and nothing like it in what follows. It began at that time and no other; and let us always remember that this state of things goes on till the Lord comes.

Then, in the next Epistle, we have a wholly different character. There is the absence of all the revolting features that were found in Thyatira, or even in Pergamos. Pergamos was what we may call the Catholic system; Thyatira brought in the Romanist. The first was the exaltation of the church in the world; it was what far and wide prevailed before the Pope set forth his aspiring and worst pretensions. The empire had become Christian in name long before. Thyatira, as we have seen, gives us the Roman system, but with these remarkable features which we have just endeavoured to indicate as predicted by our Lord.

But here, in Sardis, we know nothing of the persecuting or idolatrous queen. There is rather what we may call outwardly a respectable orthodoxy. One can understand how this came to pass when energy failed: a name to live, while ready to die. Sardis indicates what came after the Reformation. The Spirit of God does not describe that wonderful work as far as it went, the power which, in various lands separated souls from Rome. He gives us here the cold condition into which they settled down after form superseded the preaching of those stirring days: "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 were ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God." And one understands readily why it was that death is so marked. It was the universal doctrine of all the Protestant bodies that when souls are justified, they are put under the law as the rule to live by. Now, the necessary effect of this is the ministry of death, a most effective way to deal with a sinner to convince him of death. But the apostle, in the third chapter of Second Corinthians, sets forth a distinct contrast of the ministration of the Spirit, which is God's will about His people now, with the ministration of death under the law that which was written and engraven on stones. As no man can deny this to be the law written by Moses, so he contrasts the two, and insists on it that the ministry of the law has, for its effect, death and condemnation.

Now the Lord here contemplates the result. It was, indeed the inevitable effect of not going on, in the possession of life and acceptance of God, to walk in the Spirit as they lived in the Spirit. They attempted to embrace what was utterly incompatible; to put those born of God, and set free by His grace, on a common ground with the mass of men in all Protestant lands - that is, to bring in the whole population. Now the natural way in which this could be done was by the law; and the consequence was that, while the Lord might use the law in particular cases for the conviction of sin, the saints of God suffered irreparably. For the law provokes and condemns evil; it neither quickens, nor strengthens, nor justifies. Souls never enjoy settled peace; and the walk is as feeble as is the hold on God's grace. So He says: "I have not found thy works perfect." There was an incompleteness about them. The savour of Christ was not there, life in Him being little known, any more than full redemption. In fact the law displaced the Holy Ghost. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and

repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." So the Lord threatens, because the Protestant bodies fell back on the power of the world. Every one of them sought the patronage of the great. There were not any of them above thinking there was a mighty influence for good where there was an acquisition of worldly authority. And hence, therefore, it is that they were threatened by the Lord with the judgment which is to fall by-and-by on the world. The Lord, in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, brings it before the saints that He will come as a thief in the night, but not on the saints of God — they are distinguished: Christians have a different position from the world. In 1 Thessalonians 5. He threatens the thief-like coming; and this is the very thing that is repeated here. I scarce know a more solemn thought than that Sardis, having accepted the world to govern itself in the things of God, has the Lord speaking of His coming as He threatens it on the world itself. If men choose the world's power, how can they escape the world's judgment? Such a choice is the less excusable if they boast an open Bible; and this is the prospect of Protestantism. The bright hope of the church is wholly wanting.

But now we come to another thing. And if it has been shown that Thyatira affords us a prophetic picture of what would be in the Middle Ages, and Sardis of what followed the Reformation, let me ask you to weigh before God, beloved friends, what the Lord means by the new and most singular testimony that is implied in the message to the church at Philadelphia. It is entirely different, not only from Romanism, and from everything that is found connected with Romanism, but not less distinct from the picture of Protestantism. What does the Lord mean? What in fact does He characterise by it?

The first notable feature is Himself — His own person — and His own person judging according to the truth; His own self so revealed as to act practically, to insist on genuineness, to allow no longer a mere acknowledgment of truth that was not carried out. He will have moral reality. This is what I think the Lord intimates in saying: "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true; He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." He looks after all.

And when did the Lord distinctly thus work in Christendom? When did He make His own feel how useless it is to acknowledge truth that we do not live? When did He thus recall His saints back to His word, and to own the power of the Holy Ghost in making that word living? Where is this found? We all know that there are those in Christendom that have set up for the Spirit of God without the word; and we are not ignorant of others who have set up for the word without the Spirit; and in both cases with results the most disastrous and withering. But where is it that the Lord has recalled His own to His word, insisting also on that sovereign place and liberty which is due to the Holy Ghost?

It is freely granted that there is another thing calculated to cause distrust in connection with this, among the children of God — namely, mere assertion of the rights of the Holy Ghost. And for this reason, that the Holy Ghost is here to glorify Christ; and, therefore, if it were but the revival of long lost privileges of the church, there is only partial recovery here. If it were people seeking to set up the church again on its own foundation, we ought to hesitate, not as if it were not a right desire; but it is hardly a becoming aim in the present state of things. Ought we not also to feel its sin and ruin?

Supposing a man were to receive, for instance, the truth of the church of God in all its fulness of privilege and power, do you think, blessed as this is, that this alone — where the

recognition of the church of God filled his soul — would make him an adequate witness of God at this moment? Very far from it indeed; not because the thing itself is not true, but because alone it would be accompanied by high thoughts and hard measures. It would inflate the soul, and be no better than an utterly impracticable theory, too, as far as that goes.

Beloved friends, there are two things necessary — real faith in what the church of God is, as God made it; and, along with this, the sense of the utter ruin that has come in. For such is the state of soul that suits the man who feels he is part of the ruin as well as of the church. And how are these conditions produced? Not by looking at the church only, but at Christ. And this is the very thing that the Lord brings in here. It is the re-awakening of the heart to the place of Christ — to Christ as the Holy and the True. The effect then would be judgment of the present by the past — ah! how changed. Nothing is more needed than judgment of what man has made of it, by what God Himself set up in His own incomparable grace. There will then be no pretension to recover; no thought of setting up what once was, or rather no attempt, on a little scale, at what once was in all its fulness. This would be a denial of the ruin of the church.

No; there is a true path for faith; but it is a lowly one. There is a path that uses what God has given, what is imperishable and unchangeable — what God always makes to be the portion of faith. But then, it is in the sense of deep dishonour done to Him, and the going out of the heart to every member of that body, with the patient waiting for Christ's coming.

Now, the only way in which this is wrought in the soul is by looking not at the church or the Holy Ghost either, but at Christ. Hence you will observe here that He brings in no powers of the Spirit of God; it is "He that is holy, He that is true." I am sure there is a power deeper than miracles; but then it is a power that works morally. It is a power that effects self-judgment in the Christian, even as repentance is to the soul under conviction when being brought to God. "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." One may perfectly confide in His resources; He has got all under His hand. He opens; who shuts? He shuts: who opens? But the way in which He uses His power is to set before them the open door; and surely the man must be blind who does not own that it is precisely in this way that grace has been at work. Nor can one doubt that concurrently God has been working providentially in this way; for how often, while the Lord may exercise faith by difficulties, He also shows His own power by surmounting them all in a thousand different ways!

Thus there is nothing more ordinary in the way of God, than that He works in His own power providentially at the same time that the Holy Ghost works morally. And so it is at this present time. There is the greatest possible indifferentism growing up, breaking down the barriers on all sides; and though man misuses grace for his own licentiousness, the Lord, in every sense of the word, sets before His saints an open door. It is not a question of preaching the gospel (one can understand the importance of it for the service of God); but the church does not preach any more than teach. We must not think of narrowing it to evangelization. In that respect there may be an open and an effectual door; but here it is an open door simply, by which one understands that the Lord makes clear the path in the midst of all obstacles — opening a way for what is for His own glory in the doing of His own will. Will any one maintain there ever was a moment since the church fell into disorder, when the Lord has made the "open door" a characteristic of His working so much as at the present moment? "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." All mankind cannot open it; nor can all the power of Satan shut it. It is but for a little while. The Lord has opened the door to His people,

and they are using it. They see the way clear before them, and they act on His grace. And the reason, too, is remarkable: "Thou hast a little strength." He does not say so to Sardis or Thyatira. They might boast outwardly. Not so Philadelphia. And anything that takes us out of our weakness, anything strong, is incompatible with the mind of the Lord at the present time. Whatever is a seeking of greatness in any one way does not suit the testimony of the Lord or the church's state. "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name."

I should like to put it to the conscience of any Christian person here, who doubts the soundness of what has been said, to answer me — Where do you find the word of Christ kept in any remarkable way? where do you find it treasured and carried out? One might ask even the enemies of the Bible, whoever they may be, where that word is heard and prized in away comparatively unexampled? Would any one say — without wishing to utter a word in disrespect of the Wesleyans — would any one say that it stamps that society? I do not care to be personal, and shall not go round the compass of the different Protestant bodies; but we ask any person who has a conscience, and who knows the facts of what God has been working, where they find Christ's word really kept. You may tell me of the extension of missions, and of the conversion of souls; and I do not deny it. Would to God there were far more zeal in spreading the gospel in foreign parts, and seeking the conversion of souls at home! But one asks, Where is it that you find the characteristic so marked, that the Lord Who weighs all could say of them, "Thou hast kept My word?" Where is the reproach of bibliolatry cast most, if we may put it in another form? Where in Edinburgh, or in any place whatever you choose around you, is this stigma to be seen?

Remark, that our Lord is not here speaking of the old bodies of the Middle Ages — that is to say, of Thyatira. We must leave them behind: it is not among such; nor, again, in the Protestantism of Sardis. It is a new action of God, distinct from both. Where will you find, then, those that love the Lord — disclaiming any kind of kindred in an ecclesiastical way with Romanism and Protestantism — who are content with Christ in His moral glory, and characterised by keeping His word here below?

But there is another thing. They are described as not denying the power of that name — His name as a centre. That name is one that must not be slighted. It is the resource for all difficulties from forgiving sin to the dealing with every kind of need. It is the only name of holy power; and, for this very reason, a name of unfailing avail in dealing with what is contrary to God in the way of false doctrine or unholiness. Where is it that there are children of God who love to confide in it, to gather round it, knowing what it is to trust it? Where then must we look for those to whom the Lord says distinctively — "Thou hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name?" It is not for me to say where they are. It is for you to find them out. And may the Lord give you to prayerfully search before you settle the question! For you ought to know well that no one here wishes to urge anything that does not commend itself to the conscience of the children of God. Christ's word and name concern them most nearly; and He assuredly speaks of those who cleave to both.

I should not, on any consideration, be here to speak of a party interest, or some object of man upon earth. Such aims must be always low and unworthy of those that, having Christ for their life and righteousness, are looking for Him to come, and know He is coming quickly. But here is His intimation of a peculiar blessedness. Let it be yours and mine not to let slip this grace! Is this presumption? It is rather faith, which unbelief counts presumption. How much

there is on the contrary to judge us in the words the Lord has addressed to us! I wish to show that these words concern you and every one of us here; and I cannot but say, that these words are either true of us as Christians, or they are not. If they are not, it is serious for us, for we are not in the current of what the Lord values most at this moment; if they are, blessed are we. Blessed are those that do the truth — wretched such as know and do it not.

But let us follow what He says: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Now it is remarkable that, at the very time when the Lord is making this special testimony, Satan has been forming counter testimonies. Take, for instances, the outbursts of Tractarianism, Irvingism, Mormonism, Christadelphianism, and I know not what — those enormous and frightful evils growing up so rank and luxuriant at this present time. What are they? Devices in order to bring discredit on the action of the Spirit of God according to the word. When the Lord is thus calling out and forming for Himself according to His own glory, the enemy would distract by novelties, or keep fast in the darkness of antiquity. But even the stoutest of them shall be compelled to acknowledge — "I have loved thee." He will at length vindicate His own grace.

But turn we to the words that follow: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth."

Now, I ask, how could such a promise affect a person looking for the progress of Christendom and the improvement of society, who was looking for all things to advance gradually, and improve on the whole? who thinks that the heathen are to be converted, and the present evils that afflict Christendom to be all expelled? Why, it would have no force at all. But take now the other side. To those who know that the hour is approaching — that hour of deceit as well as tribulation, who know that Satan is to be allowed a special power for a little season, who know that we are on the eve of what, when restraint is gone, will work both in a seductive and in a destructive way, how blessed to have His own voice saying, "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience!" Christ's patience is sweet and good for the people that are despised and scorned. As He waits to come, so they wait for His coming. They have communion with Him about it.

Let me ask again, Where are those found that are, as a whole, waiting for the coming of the Lord? Wishing not to be invidious, I put it to the conscience of any intelligent person, even of those who are opponents, where are the Christians that, as a whole, ever look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? That such are meant here, can scarce be denied. Do not imagine that great things are said of a particular position. It is a sorrowful fact, that those enjoying the most blessed privileges, if they prove unfaithful or turn aside, become the bitterest enemies. None will be keener to oppose. So it must be with a bad conscience; which has turned such away from what was once the deepest enjoyment. They affect to despise and deny what they once appreciated. It is the enemy which produces this fearful change. None become such restless antagonists of what the Lord is doing. No! it is somewhat to make good in faith, nothing to boast of. And the Lord says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience" (remember it may be given up if not kept), "I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth." Thus, those who keep the word of His patience are a people not settled down on the earth, but who, unknown by the world as Christ was, desire to walk by faith and in grace, as becomes persons united to Him Who is

heavenly. They are heavenly, and wait to bear His image shortly, purifying themselves as He is pure. But who would value this promise, except those keeping the word of His patience?

Mark the further words, "I come quickly." Blessed, indeed, is this for those that are waiting, for those that watch, for those that with joy welcome Him. Mark this also; it is only now, for the first time, so brought before any of these churches. Surely there is something significant in this fact: we have perhaps looked over these messages vaguely, and might have imagined it elsewhere. But here only it is thus. The Lord did give promises that referred to His coming, as for instance to Thyatira, and a solemn warning again to the church — world of Sardis. Here is quite another thing occurring, before the promise comes. And why so? Because it is a part of their spiritual life, and spring of their constant heavenly hope. The Lord, therefore, refers to it graciously as a thing that occupies their heart. He could not have given a word of sweeter comfort to those who enter into His patience. He says, (not, Behold) "I come quickly."

But there is another word: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." How little others understand your weakness and mine? Some are perhaps reputed so firm in convictions and ways, that it is useless to say a word to them. Oh! how little people believe that none require such sustenance of grace as those who are exposed to the difficulties we know every day. I should say, that if there are any apt to be swayed to and fro, and peculiarly open to be assailed by the enemy, if any exposed to danger in every shape, it is those who, abjuring forms, need the direct power of the Spirit of God to keep in obedience and hope. Hence you can understand how needed is the admonition in the Lord's message, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Let me tell those, if there are any here, that know what it is to be separate to Christ in every-day walk, who, without setting up to be, are Philadelphians in the reality of faith, who really and humbly are standing on that ground, not merely in name and desire but in truth before God — let me say this to them: Trifle not with it, suppose not that you have got a lease in perpetuity, or that you have any such insurance as would preserve you against the wiles Satan is seeking to ensnare you by. I grant that the grace of the Lord has not called you out for nothing, and that He means to have a testimony kept alive till He comes. We believe there is now such a thing as Philadelphia, to go on till the Lord comes. If, proud, you will be swept away; and if cherishing what is of flesh — what belongs to the objects of men, and not of Christ — you will learn, that, far from having prospered in such licence, on the contrary this very thing will bring the judgment of the Lord on you. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The crown will be there, the crown is sure; but it does not follow that the same soul will have it. The men may change, but the crown will be conferred. For the Lord will set aside the haughty, and exalt the humble; and He can gather those who might seem far off — the very persons who will be found faithful when He comes to receive us to Himself.

I therefore desire to submit my own conscience and heart to this test. I also, press on you, believing it a most serious thing to flatter ourselves as to any position, simply because we are here, and happily so, as we have been mercifully kept hitherto. Let us remember that faith dries up when it ceases to be dependent on the Lord, and becomes an outward creedism. On the contrary, it is then a source of the most imminent danger. Let us rejoice, but go on in dependence on that grace which, having called us out, alone can keep us: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The Lord could easily set aside those who pique themselves on their knowledge, and form from the stones, to take their place, truer children of

Abraham. Let us beware, lest in any way we presume on position instead of depending on Himself.

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out." This seems contradistinguished from the open door. It is supposed that there is a going out of heart now: assuredly a person whose heart does not go out in love is unworthy of the Lord, and does not understand what He is calling him out for. For beyond question, one of its most distinctive qualities is this very thing, this open-door exercise of heart. It is not merely the entertaining and making use of what the Lord gives for yourselves; but as witnesses of His grace and truth, the heart going out towards all that are His, as well as towards those who know Him not. It does not matter what their state of ignorance or need may be. Nay, to tell the truth, why should one mind persons who speak hardly of those they misapprehend? It is small on our part to think too much of it. The path of faith must be unintelligible to those who are outside it. How could such a place as this seriously interest the men of Sardis or Thyatira, or those of whom I have to speak in closing — Laodicea?

Holding in mind what I have said of those things, and of the forms in which the testimony, more or less according to God's mind, has been found in Christendom, beginning, one after the other, but continuing from Thyatira to the end, we see that it is an extremely serious thing for Laodicea. Do not suppose that Philadelphia turns into Laodicea. This is a false thought altogether. That there are persons who, once in Philadelphia, become active in Laodicea, one can well believe. It must always be that the corruption of the best things is the worst. No doubt there is a moral link in that fearful collapse. The Lord takes Laodicea as compared with Philadelphia. There is a thorough contrast, and this in all points. But then it is not true that the one falls into the other. After Laodicea begins, they coexist. It is to lose sight of what has been remarked, that they begin, like the rest, successively; but they are also contemporaneous states that go on till the Lord comes. So with Philadelphia and Laodicea.

But we, for a little, would look at Laodicea; and here we have what is more offensive than in Sardis, or even in Thyatira. There may not be that which looks so gross; and there is that which is truly doomed to destruction in Thyatira — Jezebel and her children for instance. This may not be so with Laodicea. But still there is a most repulsive character in Laodicea. With what exceeding disgust does not Christ mention it? I am anxious to show that this is the danger, the special danger, of the present moment. Christians in general do not go back to Sardis or Thyatira; but who will warrant against Laodicea? This is what we have to beware of. Laodicea is growing up rapidly. If Philadelphia is characterised as making Christ the object in everything, here self-complacency and indifference to His glory govern. There is plenty of knowledge if not of truth; for there is a great difference between the two. They are rich, and increased with goods. Where did they get them? They were never given in the grace of God, but borrowed or stolen. They were truths that others had got fresh from God's word. Here they are used for man's exaltation, and hence quite apart from conscience, and so without Christ. They, therefore, minister to self-complacency, and soon produce painful results, yet a certain appearance which satisfies the mind. There is nothing new you can tell them: they know it already. Truth has no power, because Christ is not the object first of all, and knowledge is not used for His glory afterwards.

And this is the reason why I think it is a destructive principle — the bringing of mere intelligence, as it is called, into the fore-ground, in the case of a soul that comes before us. In sober troth persons who make such a point of intelligence about souls do much to damage

them. But more, can those who do so be really intelligent themselves? It is then unfortunate on both sides. For the truth of it is, that you cannot get true intelligence apart from obedience; and, if you could get it apparently, is it worth having? The only thing that seems to be desirable, or of the Spirit of God, is a little light acted upon leading on to more; and this, beloved friends, found in the place that is according to God. And, therefore, it is sorrowful indeed when undue moment is given to knowledge. Suppose a person is not in fellowship, and wants to understand all about the nature of the church before he comes, and it is thought he will not make a good brother unless he be first intelligent ecclesiastically, the whole principle seems false from beginning to end, a mere substitution of knowledge for Christ.

For according to my observation the best men who have grown up into the truth of God are those who, many of us can remember, were unintelligent enough when they came in; and the men who complain, are they intelligent now?

Supposing the case of Christians seeking fellowship; some may object to a sort of back bench for catechumens, whereas you want them to understand about the church and the Spirit before they are received: how are they to get this? What are they about and where, while it is to go on? Perhaps they feel a certain need of remembering the Lord, and they are accustomed to do so. But they must not yet be received! they are not intelligent enough, it appears. Are they meanwhile to drift into churches and chapels in order to get intelligence? Is not the whole notion in every way wrong, and, what is worst, contrary to the word of God. For it is plain that, for the most part, persons will not leave denominations unless they have a substantial ground of attraction in the Lord. For more you can hardly look at first. But there is enough in them to discern what is according to God; and far better act on Christ's title than keep them out shivering in the cold. Receive them and welcome them as members of the body, of Christ. Of course, there may be a question whether they are His, and there can scarce be too much care here; but it is in the true place, according to God, that truth is divinely learned. There may be value for Christ before, just enough to attract them; yet do not look for knowledge first, but fidelity to Christ. Be sure they know the Father.

Have you not known persons in fellowship, who talked exceeding strongly of their ecclesiastical principle, yet let all principle go to the winds when something crossed their will? I have known tried and feeble souls who came in, attracted by the savour of Christ they found as nowhere else, and these grew up in the truth, and stood firm and true, whilst your intelligent persons fell away to nothing. Have no confidence in anything but the name of Christ. And when it is really Christ Himself, the grace and truth found in Him, it is found strongest, and ministers grace to the soul when acted on obediently.

Thus, it is a real evil to souls and far from Christ, when an undue place is given to intelligence. This is the material to build up Laodicea and not Philadelphia. "Rich and increased with goods," is exactly what results, and it is repulsive to the Lord, Who says, "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see." Is not this solemn? Where is now the place given to mere knowledge — not Christ, nor truth, but knowledge? These riches in the way of goods were acquired. There was a total absence of living truth, even as to

the fundamentals of Christianity, so much so that people constantly apply this to unconverted men; and it looks like it. Gold, that is, divine righteousness, white raiment or practical righteousness, and eyesalve, the power of divine discernment, are the very things that ought to characterise simple Christian men from their start; but there is a total absence of the needful, and the Lord counsels them to buy.

There is more too. After mentioning His rebuke and chastening of those He loves, He calls them to be zealous and to repent, saying, "Behold I stand at the door." It is not now the open door but the shut one. "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." For the same reason, it is a text applied or misapplied rather in the preaching of the gospel. But this shows the widespread latitudinarianism which grows up through the misuse of Philadelphian testimony. It is the state of things for people who are not satisfied with any Protestant body, nor perhaps with anything of the Catholic kind, but have not got the faith to go forth without the camp to Christ only, to keep His word, and not deny His name. They think they can get the truth without the coat, hate exclusivism, decry brethrenism, love nothingarianism, and keep a place of respectability in the world. Laodicea is the consequence, and the moral state that ensues on this is a total enfeebling — I will not say of the church, nor yet understanding of the heavenly glory of Christ but even — of God's gospel. Oh! is it not solemn? "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white garments, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." So the very elements of what a sinful man wants for his soul is what these Laodiceans inflated with the idea of knowledge and privilege, need at the last; the Lord brings before them this humbling testimony. Such is the result of man's self-complacent misuse of the truth God gave in His grace.

Let us mark the closing scene: we are on the verge of it. Let us, therefore, look to the Lord, for I am persuaded there is very imminent and increasing danger. No doubt there is the blessed hope that He is coming, and coming quickly. There is the grace that keeps us, if we look to Christ as the object of our souls: there is no other which does not lead astray. And I would press this on you, that the very fact of our indulging in any confidence in position will be found, not only a total failure, but a delusion and a snare. The result will surely be that these things will not stand the day of trial — the fatal leap will be taken. Laodicea is the new title of neutrality or indifferentism growing up rapidly around us at this moment. There is on one side what is of man, on the other what is of God; and the Lord introduces all that and more in this most affecting picture of the end of Christendom. Oh! may there be grace and power to deliver, and set souls in perfect freedom to worship and serve Him. May the Lord give us, cleaving to Him, first and last in fellowship with His Son, also to be found simple and earnest in our desires to make known His name. If there are those who leave Philadelphia for Laodicea, there may be others gathered to Christ out of that which is most offensive and nauseous.