

## WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT OF US?

### C. Objectives (Value, a.k.a. Blessings) of this Study

#### C2. Blessing: Discernment

The book of Revelation, the unveiling of the things that are and the things that are to come<sup>i</sup>, contains wisdom and instruction in addition to revealing mysteries and imparting prophecy. In particular, chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation give us the most important illustration of how Jesus brings all of these objectives together. For, here Jesus gives wisdom of correct and incorrect conduct, instruction in actions to take and forsake, reveals the mystery regarding the spiritual architecture of his presence within the church, and imparts his prophecies on how all of His word is for all churches<sup>ii</sup> then and now. Indeed, we receive in these chapters insight into Christ's view of the church. And, just as Jesus wrote to the churches that were in existence then, so he was also writing to us – the church that exists today. Therefore, His letters are prophetic in that they remain true throughout the time of the church. Our responsibility, then, is to discern Christ's expectation of us and to respond according to his desires for us.

Jesus wrote seven epistles, each written to a specific church, and each with a special message to those who overcome. A terse read of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 reveals the advantages of becoming one who overcomes. This should raise the question: what are the qualifications of an overcomer, and how do we become one? Most of the qualifications are listed in the same chapters of Revelation, and they only need to be applied to our everyday life. Perseverance and patience are two such qualifications that are required. Several of the churches displayed these

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<sup>i</sup> REV 1:19, Write therefore the things which you have seen, and *the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter.*

<sup>ii</sup> REV 3:22, He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says *to the churches.*

attributes and thus favored well in Jesus' report. Other qualities, we learn, are to be avoided: apathy and apostasy are two examples. Some who leave the faith do so as a result of following the empty ruminations of the world. These dangers are explained in 2 Timothy 2:14-18,

“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. <sup>15</sup>Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. <sup>16</sup>But *shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.* <sup>17</sup>And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, <sup>18</sup>who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.”

To keep ourselves from such failings, the remedy is also given in this passage, by ‘*rightly dividing the word of truth*’. Thus, we must learn to discern the truth that we may avoid fallacy in our understanding.

Thankfully, we are assisted in this endeavor to discern the truth. For, we are given the Spirit that “we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God”<sup>iii</sup>. We may then rely on God and not on our own understanding<sup>iv</sup>, to guide us in all truth<sup>v</sup>. The blessing we receive in discernment is directly related, therefore, to our surrender to the Spirit’s guidance. Unless we forego our natural, preconceived views, we resist and cannot discern spiritual truth. Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 2:11-14,

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. <sup>13</sup>These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. <sup>14</sup>But *the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they*

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<sup>iii</sup> 1COR 2:12, we have received, not the spirit of the world, but *the Spirit who is from God*, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

<sup>iv</sup> PRO 3:5, Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And *lean not on your own understanding*.

<sup>v</sup> JOHN 16:13, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, *He will guide you into all truth*; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Therefore, we must overcome our worldly tendency of attempting to discern spiritual things by natural means. Instead, being born of God<sup>vi</sup>, we possess the ability to overcome the world and its faulty methods that fail to comprehend the ways of God<sup>vii</sup>.

We should surrender our flawed understanding, and instead embrace the teaching of the Holy Spirit; thus, we mature in Christ. We ought to more easily now recognize the ways of God than when we first believed. This may not be the case for all believers, however. The writer of Hebrews revealed our failure in this regard, as we read in Hebrews 5:12-14,

“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; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup>For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. <sup>14</sup>But 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*.”

So, too, we mature in Christ by exercising our ability to recognize the ways of false teachers, those who would take us away from the truth of God. Jesus commends the church in Ephesus for recognizing such imposters<sup>viii</sup>, these so called, ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’<sup>ix</sup>. We are told to test even the spirits of these deceivers<sup>x</sup>, yet this requires wisdom and maturity on our part. It is essential that we abide in God’s word in order to recognize those who distort the truth, who do not align with the

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<sup>vi</sup> 1JON 5:1-5, *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. <sup>2</sup>By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. <sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup>For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

<sup>vii</sup> PSM 25:4-5, *Show me Your ways, O Lord*; Teach me Your paths. <sup>5</sup>Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day.

<sup>viii</sup> REV 2:2, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And *you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not*, and have found them liars.

<sup>ix</sup> MATH 7:15, Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but *inwardly they are ravenous wolves*.

<sup>x</sup> 1JON 4:1-3, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; *because many false prophets have gone out into the world*. <sup>2</sup>By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, <sup>3</sup>and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

cornerstone. For, the word of God is efficient to assist us in this, as we learn in Hebrews 4:12-13,

“the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is *a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*.<sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

Thus, surrendered to the Spirit of God and abiding in the word of God, we are equipped to discern both good and evil.

The instruction we receive from Jesus in his letters helps us to persevere as we patiently await his return. During this time, we have certain responsibilities, as Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 5:21-23,

“*Test all things; hold fast what is good*.<sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil.<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jesus also urges us in several of his epistles to hold fast to what we have<sup>xi</sup> until he returns. His instruction should provoke us to consider thoughtfully what it is that we have. For, Jesus commends the church in Pergamos that we “hold fast to his name”<sup>xii</sup>. He also instructs the church in Sardis to remember how we have “received and heard, hold fast and repent”<sup>xiii</sup>. To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus writes in Revelation 3:10-11,

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup>Behold, I am coming quickly! *Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.*”

Here we find a sign, a clue that we have much to hold on to and much at risk if we fail. So, it is worth our time and effort to discern what we can know, of that which

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<sup>xi</sup> REV 2:25, *hold fast what you have* till I come.

<sup>xii</sup> REV 2:13, I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And *you hold fast to My name*, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

<sup>xiii</sup> REV 3:3, *Remember therefore how you have received and heard*; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

we may be certain; also, that we hold fast to what we have as Christ expects of us, and thus qualify us to become an overcomer.