

Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Revelation 2 and 3
(Part 2)

Are the Living Overcomers Only from Philadelphia?

In another audacious example of recklessly disregarding the apostle Paul's charge for women not to assert authority over men by teaching with authority, a dissenting sister wrote and published in her website on May of 2010 an article entitled "Wake Up Call," where she alleged that *only* the church in Philadelphia has living overcomers:

"The Lord needs both living and dead overcomers for Him to return. As we go through Revelation 2-3 we shall see that only Philadelphia has living overcomers; naturally it also has dead overcomers.; [sic] we can even definitely say our dear brothers Nee and Lee are of this category. However, the other six, we all know that the situation of the first three namely: Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos already passed; although Thyratira, Sardis and Laodicea are still present with us they could only have dead overcomers." [Emphasis Added]

Does Revelation 2 and 3 really show us that only Philadelphia has living overcomers, as the sister contended, or is this yet another one of her different and erroneous teachings? In this second installment of our study on these two chapters of Revelation, we present the truth concerning the overcomers in the last four churches in Revelation 2 and 3, and compare what brothers Nee and Lee taught us against what the sister is teaching.

CONCERNING THE OVERCOMERS OF THE LAST FOUR CHURCHES IN REVELATION 2 AND 3

There are two ways to study the seven churches in these two chapters. One is to consider these seven churches as actual churches during the time of the apostle John to which he was commissioned by the Lord to send these letters (1:11). Another way is to consider them as types of the condition of the church throughout the church age.

The seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 both typify prophetically the progress of the church in seven stages and the seven kinds of churches in church history: the initial church (Ephesus), the suffering church (Smyrna), the worldly church (Pergamos), the apostate church (Thyatira), the reformed church (Sardis), the recovered church (Philadelphia), and the degraded recovered church (Laodicea). The initial church had its continuation in the suffering church; the suffering church turned into the worldly church; and the worldly church became the apostate church. Hence, the first four churches eventually issued in one kind of church, that is, the apostate church – the Roman Catholic Church. Then, as a reaction to the apostate church, the reformed church came into existence as another kind of church, a church that is not fully recovered – the Protestant Church. Following this, the recovered church was raised up as a full recovery of the church life. Then, by the degradation of the recovered church, the degraded recovered church came into being. These four kinds of churches—the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant church, the recovered church, and the degraded recovered church—will remain until the Lord comes back.

According to church history, the Lord's recovery with His overcomers began in the second century. The divine revelation was fully completed in the first century with Paul's ministry and John's mending ministry. Within the first century, however, there was also the degradation of the church life. Even within such a short time after the completion of the divine revelation, the church fell into degradation, so there was the need of overcomers.

The calling of the overcomers from the churches is the last demand that the Lord made in the entire Bible. In the Bible the Lord required many things of men: first of mankind, later of His chosen people, and then of the church. However, from these three groups of people the Lord did not get what He desired. Finally, the Lord sounded His call to the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3. Today, the Lord needs overcomers from the churches throughout the church age to answer His call.

In her article, the sister propounded that **“although Thyratira, Sardis and Laodicea are still present with us they could only have dead overcomers,”** yet the ministry of both brothers Nee and Lee had these to say regarding the subject matter which are different from what the sister claimed:

“We are born in this age, the age of Philadelphia, which has existed just over a hundred years. The Lord put us in the age of Philadelphia that we may be Philadelphia. Today there are many overcomers in Laodicea, but they are but overcomers in Laodicea. In the entire history of the church, there has not been an opportunity that is better than ours.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 12, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“Although we all have come into the Lord’s recovery, we should not say that everyone in the recovery will be an overcomer. We have no warrant for saying this. We can only say that those in the recovery have a greater possibility of being overcomers. Whether or not you will be an overcomer depends upon you; it depends upon how much you share of God’s grace. How much you share of God’s grace will determine whether or not you will be a strong one among God’s people in the Lord’s recovery.” (*W. Lee, Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 36, Section 1, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Any percipient reader can understand that by saying we who are in the Lord’s recovery today have “better opportunity” and “greater possibility” of being overcomers, both brothers Nee and Lee meant to say that there is also opportunity for and possibility of overcomers to be called and raised from churches other than Philadelphia, since churches such as Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea will remain until the Lord returns. Surely, these overcomers, after having overcome the degradation of their respective churches, do not necessarily have to die physically in order to be overcomers. In other messages we were told that:

“In Revelation 2 and 3, the overcomers are not yet because the Lord is calling for them. Through the centuries, in the period of time from Revelation 4 – 20, the Lord has gained and is gaining a number of overcomers.” (*W. Lee, The Overcomers, Chapter 3, Section 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“Finally, please remember that the Lord speaks the same words seven times to the seven churches: ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ (Rev. 3:22)... What the Lord says, He says to all the churches. The Lord’s eyes are not only upon these seven churches; His eyes are also upon all the churches in the whole world, past and present, here and abroad.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 12, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

From the ministry of both brothers Nee and Lee we are shown that in the period of time from Revelation 4 – 20, which cover mainly the church age, past and present, here and abroad, the Lord who has been speaking and sounding His call for overcomers *has gained and is gaining a number of overcomers* in the whole world. The calling of the overcomers is not a thing of the past; it is an ongoing call to the living saints in the churches that continue to exist until the end of times, until His return.

The Calling of the Overcomers in the Church in Thyatira

The church in Thyatira is the church in apostasy. Thyatira in Greek means “sacrifice of perfume” or “unceasing sacrifice.” In typology, the church in Thyatira prefigures the Roman Catholic Church, which was fully formed as the apostate church by the establishment of the universal papal system in the latter part of the sixth century. This apostate church, which is full of sacrifices, as demonstrated in her unceasing mass, will remain until the Lord’s coming back.

In Revelation 2:26, the Lord says to the church in Thyatira, “And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.” To overcome here means to overcome the degraded things in Catholicism. The overcomers, the rest in Thyatira, do not have Jezebel’s teaching (v. 24), have not known the deep things of Satan, hold fast the Lord’s testimony until He comes (v. 25), and keep the Lord’s works until the end (v. 26).

The keeping of the Lord’s work until the “end” in verse 26 does not mean the end of the overcomers’ life; rather, it refers to the end of this age – until He comes – of verse 25. Certainly, genuine believers in Thyatira who overcome the degraded condition of Thyatira will have the chance to be overcomers alive, like the ones in Philadelphia, when the Lord returns. Today, we may not be in the apostate Roman Catholic Church, but we may and we must, in the same manner, overcome the heretical teachings and the paganistic practices of the degraded state of the church to be the overcomers, as Brother Lee said:

“We need to be those who stand strongly against the Romish teaching of Jezebel, which is full of fornication, idolatry, and the deep things of Satan (Rev. 2:20, 24a). The Romish teaching of Jezebel is the teaching of the apostate Roman Catholic Church. This is clearly seen in the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2.” (*W. Lee, The Satanic Chaos in the Old Creation and the Divine Economy for the New Creation, Chapter 3, Section 9, LSM*)

Both brothers Nee and Lee explained clearly that the Lord’s promise to the overcomer is for him to receive authority over the nations, to shepherd the nations with an iron rod as the Lord has received from the Father, and to have the morning star.

“Finally, in verse 28 the Lord gives a promise to the overcomer, saying, ‘I will give him the morning star.’ At Christ’s first appearing, the wise men, not the Jewish religionists, saw His star (Matt. 2:2, 9-10). At His second appearing, He will be the morning star to His overcomers who watch for His coming. To all the others, He will appear only as the sun (Mal. 4:2).” (*W. Lee, Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 13, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“[B]efore He comes again with His saints and manifests Himself in the world as the Sun, He will first rapture the overcomers unto Himself. Thyatira is at the darkest hour of the church. However, it is at this darkest hour that the morning star is revealed.... Since our life at present and our thoughts are all above, we can enjoy the full brightness of the morning star. The farther we are from the earth and the closer we are to the realm of the morning star, the more we will receive the brightness of the morning star.... Hence, the Lord is speaking here of the future rapture and reigning of the saints so that their hearts will not take the present age as their goal, but will take the future glory as their focus.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 1, Section 14, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“The fourth promise is to the overcomers in Thyatira. They will be given the authority over the nations to shepherd them with an iron rod and they will also enjoy Him as the morning star (2:26-29). The morning star appears when the night becomes darkest. This shows us that at the darkest time, within us there is a star shining.” (*W. Lee, God’s New Testament Economy, Chapter 22, Section 3, LSM*)

“Many people see the sun, but few have seen the morning star. One day the Lord will be seen by the whole world, as recorded in Malachi 4:2: ‘The Sun of righteousness [will] arise.’ Before everyone sees the light, some may see it first while in darkness. This is what it means to receive the morning star. Just before the day breaks, it is really dark. But the morning star appears at that very moment. The Lord promises the overcomer that he will receive the morning star at the darkest time. This means that he will see the Lord and be raptured. When we see the sun, it is always during the daylight hours, but he who sees the morning star is one who makes a special point of rising to see while others are asleep. This is the promise to the overcomer.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 8, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Immediately upon His return, Christ will manifest Himself as the morning star or daybreak star to the overcomers who stay awake to watch for His coming. Many will eventually see Christ as the Sun of righteousness, but only few – the overcomers – will see Him as the morning star. Before all others see Him openly in the noon day light, only *few* may see Him even while it is still dark. We know for a fact that the first batch of overcomers who will see the Lord and be raptured upon His return are the firstfruits, who are the living overcomers; they would even precede the dead overcomers in meeting the Lord. Today, the Lord is calling such overcomers in Thyatira to have Him as the morning star for their reward.

It is clear that both brothers Nee and Lee, when touching the overcomers in Thyatira, were not referring only to the deceased overcoming true believers in the Catholic Church in the past, but also to its present overcoming ones and to us today – the church in the present age of grace. The Lord is calling the overcomers who are watching and waiting to be raptured alive when He returns.

The Calling of the Overcomers in the Church in Sardis

Sardis in Greek means “the remains,” “the remainder,” or “the restoration.” In typology, the church in Sardis prefigures the Protestant Church from the time of the Reformation to the second coming of Christ. The Reformation was God’s reaction to the apostate Roman Catholic Church, signified by the degraded church in Thyatira. The Reformation was accomplished by a minority of the believers, the remainder. Hence, it was the restoration by the remainder.

In Revelation 3:4, the Lord says, “But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments...” And in 3:5, we have the Lord’s promise to the overcomers of this stage. To overcome here is to not have our garments, which signify our walk and living, stained with deadness; it means to overcome the deadness of the Protestant churches, that is, to overcome dead Protestantism. The whole of verse 5 is the Lord’s promise to the overcomers. It will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom after He comes back.

“May everyone of us have an ear to hear the Lord's word to Sardis, and may none of us be lacking in the characteristics of the overcomers in Sardis.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 2, Section 17, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“An overcomer is a person who is strong, living, shining, and fresh. He gives the impression that he is fresh and living, not outwardly but inwardly. He is up when everyone else is down; he rises up when no one else is able to rise up.... This is the fifth requirement of an overcomer.... May the Lord have mercy on us and make us those who are living; these are the overcomers in Sardis.” (W. Lee, *Three Aspects of the Church: The Course of the Church, Book 2, Chapter 7, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“In the seven epistles in Revelation, the Lord condemned the church in Sardis for its deadness. The Lord said that in Sardis nothing was living; everything was dying (3:1-2).... Maybe the entire church where we are is like Sardis, but this does not mean that we need to leave it.... The church may be dying, but we need to stay in the church to overcome the deadness.” (W. Lee, *The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups, Chapter 1, Section 7, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

By the Lord’s word “you have a few names in Sardis...,” it means that in Sardis there are also overcomers, and these overcomers may not necessarily be dead overcomers as the calling for overcomers is an ongoing matter at this present time – the church age today – until He comes. While martyrdom may make an instant overcomer, it is not a prerequisite to be one. As in the church in Thyatira, in mentioning the overcomers, it is evident that both brothers Nee and Lee in the above-cited excerpts did not pertain only to the martyrs of the reformed church during the dark ages in the past, but also to us today who have our

eyes on the millennial kingdom in the coming age. There is no doubt that the Lord expects to find living overcomers also in Sardis when He returns. It is not without significance that Brother Lee exhorted us that even if the church we are in is like Sardis, we need to stay in the church and overcome its degraded situation. He can *make us* overcomers even if we are in a church with a condition like that of Sardis.

The Calling of the Overcomers in the Church in Philadelphia

Philadelphia in Greek means “brotherly love.” In typology, the church in Philadelphia prefigures the proper church life recovered by the brothers who were raised up by the Lord in England in the early part of the nineteenth century. Just as the reformed church, prefigured by the church in Sardis, was a reaction to the apostate Catholic Church, prefigured by the church in Thyatira, so the church of brotherly love is a reaction to the dead reformed church. This reaction will continue as an anti-testimony to both apostate Catholicism and degraded Protestantism until the Lord comes back.

The overcomers in the church in Philadelphia will be kept out of the hour of the great tribulation (3:10). This means that before the great tribulation the overcomers will be raptured. While the entire earth is suffering under the great tribulation the overcomers will be taken away into the *parousia*, which is the presence, of the coming One. While the other believers are suffering in the tribulation, the overcomers will be enjoying His presence. This is a reward of enjoyment to the ones who have experienced life and are matured in life.

“The overcomers in Philadelphia keep the Lord's word of endurance and do not deny the Lord's name unto the last bit of their power, that they may be kept out of the hour of trial which is coming to try all those who dwell on the earth and that they may receive the crown of reward to be pillars in the temple of God with the name of God, the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, and Christ's new name written upon them (Rev. 3:8b, 10-12). The hour of trial will be the time of the great tribulation.” (*W. Lee, The Satanic Chaos in the Old Creation and the Divine Economy for the New Creation, Chapter 3, Section 9, LSM*)

Moreover, these overcomers will be pillars in the temple of His God with the name of His God and the name of the city of His God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from His God; also, His new name will be written upon them (3:12). Now the overcomers are not merely stones, but they are built into pillars. This means that no one can pull them out of the temple. The overcomers of the church in Philadelphia all have been built into the temple and are the pillars in the temple. These overcomers bear three names: the name of God, the name of the holy city, New Jerusalem, and the new name of this wonderful One. We do not know what this new name will be because it is a secret. The main point is that the overcomers experience the enjoyment of life and the building into God's temple as their reward.

The Calling of the Overcomers in the Church in Laodicea

Laodicea in Greek means the “opinion, the judgment, of the people or of the laymen.” In typology, the church in Laodicea prefigures the degraded recovered church, which will exist until the Lord comes back.

In Revelation 3:20b and 21 we have the Lord's promise to the overcomers of the church in Laodicea. To overcome here means to overcome the lukewarmness and pride of the degraded recovered church, to buy the needed items, and to open the door for the Lord to come in. In verse 20b the Lord says, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." According to the Greek, the word *dine* signifies the principal meal of the day at evening. To dine is not merely to eat one item of food but to partake of the riches of a meal. This may imply the fulfillment of the type of the children of Israel eating the rich produce of the good land of Canaan (Josh. 5:10-12).

"But in the church of the age of Laodicea, there are saved and overcoming ones, there are saved and defeated ones, there are unsaved and unregenerated ones, and there are unbelievers. Needless to say, the overcoming ones are free from the spirit of Laodicea, but other than the overcomers, all the others are under the direction of the self. However, because of the difference in their personal condition, they are different in their Laodicean conduct. This is why we say that there are many kinds of Laodiceas." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 11, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

"The lukewarm Laodicea is probably the condition of the church in the world after Philadelphia. Yet the Lord is still calling the overcomers there." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 3, Section 17, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

The clear speaking of the ministry tells us that in the church of the age of Laodicea, there are not only saved ones but also overcoming ones, for the Lord is *still* calling the overcomers there despite of the degraded state of the church. Our brothers are confident that there are many who will answer His call and be the overcomers in Laodicea even to today. [For more detailed study on Laodicea, please refer to part 1 of this series of study on Revelation 2 and 3 entitled "*What Makes Philadelphia a Laodicea?*"]

CONCLUSION

The Three "Isms" in Revelation 2 and 3

God's economy has passed through the Adamic race and also through the Abrahamic race, both physically and spiritually. Alongside this economy, there has been Satan's chaos, which has resulted in three accumulations, which are three "isms": Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Because of the failure among the previous races and due to the accumulations of the satanic chaos with Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism, the Lord needs another race – the race of the overcomers. In the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, the Lord has a sevenfold calling for the overcomers.

The Lord's Calling and Promise in Revelation 2 and 3

Today, the Lord's call for overcomers in the churches is resounding: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). It is noteworthy that in the first three churches, the calling of those who have ears to hear the words of the Holy Spirit comes before the promise to the overcomers. However, beginning from Thyatira and continuing all the way to Laodicea, it is first the promise of blessing

and glory to the overcomers, then the calling of those who have an ear to hear the words of the Holy Spirit to the churches. Since the last four churches – Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea – will remain until the Lord comes back, it is not impossible, but rather actually probable, that genuine believers who love the Lord and love His appearing in these churches would hear and receive His promised speaking and answer His call to be His overcomers, and live to see His return.

The Sister's Claim Concerning the Overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3

It is indeed an enormous blessedness for us to be in the Lord's recovery – the true church in Philadelphia today. But to merely be in the Philadelphia does not guaranty us to be overcomers. Brother Lee said that “we should not say that everyone in the recovery will be an overcomer, we have no warrant for saying this.” He continued, “We can only say that those in the recovery have a greater possibility of being overcomers.” This he said in confirmation to Brother Nee's words which said: “In the entire history of the church, there has not been an opportunity that is better than ours.” But for one to say, “As we go through Revelation 2-3 we shall see that only Philadelphia has living overcomers,” and “although Thyratira, Sardis and Laodicea are still present with us they could only have dead overcomers,” as the dissenting sister categorically and assertively taught, is to stretch beyond what the Scriptures mean and say. Nowhere in the Scriptures or in the teaching of brothers Nee and Lee or renowned Bible scholars do we find anything close to the *eisegesis* taught by the sister in her website.

The Three Different Teachings in Revelation 2 and 3

To teach different teachings among the churches, such as what the sister is doing, is a very serious matter in the Bible. In writing to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord warned not only of the three “isms” which He hates, but also of the three kinds of teachings: the teaching of Balaam (Rev. 2:14), the teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:15), and the teaching of Jezebel (2:20). The teaching of Balaam disregards Christ the Head by distracting believers from the person of Christ to idolatry and from the enjoyment of Christ to spiritual fornication. The teaching of the Nicolaitans destroys the Body by destroying the function of believers as members of the Body of Christ, thus annulling the Lord's Body as His expression. The teaching of Jezebel refers to the speaking of a self-appointed prophetess, one who presumes to be authorized by God to speak for God, but brought in mixture instead. All these are teachings that deviated from the apostles' teaching and are not according to God's New Testament economy. Any teaching that is different from the apostles' teaching should not be allowed in the church, as Paul exhorted Timothy to charge certain ones in Ephesus not to teach different teachings (1 Tim. 1:3).

The Sister's Different Teachings

All along, the sister has assumed herself to be the Lord's worker and a teacher of the truth with her head not covered despite the biblical injunction against women teaching with authority by defining and deciding on scriptural interpretation (1 Tim. 2:11-12). It is interesting that the sister has and continues to insist that her works and teachings are answerable to the Lord and accountable only at the judgment seat when He returns. By saying this, she has persisted in teaching differently by twisting facts, distorting the ministry, and interpreting the Bible according to what she subjectively perceives to be

right, especially how the Word might be expounded to tailor-fit the promotion of her eccentric ways and practices which she has been trying to thrust upon the churches.

Her different teachings over the past years have been corrected in many of our previous articles in www.healthyteaching.org, and 20 of these were listed in the letter to her from the elders of the church in Malabon on May 2, 2010, which has also been posted on the same website. Lamentably, not only did the sister not repent and correct her unscriptural and erroneous teachings, she even issued an acerbic letter of reply in an atrocious display of her affront to the elders, even audaciously sending it to a great number of saints. In that letter, she sidestepped all the substantiated concerns and issues with blanket denials and enraged challenges in order to divert attention from her different teachings and pass them on as truth. For one who writes pompously about overcomers, her misdeeds are simply too glaring to go unnoticed.

The Lord's Word and Name in Philadelphia

The sister has insidiously tried to buttress her different teachings with repeated emphases on her perceived successes in work and her credentials, promoting herself as an indefatigable pioneer of the church, rather than giving the glory and honor to the Lord. She exults her own name instead of the Lord's, and her work is paraded with no regard for the Word, which reminds us of the familiar opening word of the Lord to the degraded church in Laodicea, a word on her work meant in the negative sense: "I know your work" (3:15). In contrast to that is the Lord's praise earlier to the overcomers of the church in Philadelphia who have "a little power" (3:8) and hardly any prominent work, but have kept His word and have not denied His name (3:8, 10, 12). Brother Nee said:

"I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown' (3:11). The Lord says, 'I come quickly'; therefore, this church is to continue until the Lord comes back. Thyatira is not gone, Sardis is not gone, and Philadelphia is not gone. 'Hold fast what you have,' which is 'My word' and 'My name.' We should not forget the word of the Lord, and we should not put the Lord's name to shame." (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 10, Section 6, LSM*)

In stark contrast to the case of our sister, such is the case of the overcomers in Philadelphia: apparently weak (3:8) but rich and faithful in His word and so eventually rewarded with being the strong pillar in the temple of our God (3:12). They did not exalt their own name by not denying His name (3:8), and they will in turn be rewarded with the Lord's name written upon them.

The Absence of the Lord's Authority in Thyatira

While announcing the impossibility that living overcomers could be raised from the church in Thyatira, the sister has neglected the fact that the Lord stresses the matter of authority rather than work which she emphasizes while continuing to denigrate the elders who are God's delegated authorities in the church and the brothers who take the lead in the work. Even in Thyatira, Brother Lee stressed the importance of giving heed to the matter of authority:

“In the epistle to Thyatira the matter of authority is emphasized. The Roman Catholic Church has an earthly position, but it has lost its authority before God.” (W. Lee, *Three Aspects of the Church: The Course of the Church*, Book 2, Chapter 7, Section 4, LSM) [Emphasis Added]

As taken up in our three previous articles, “*Who is God’s Delegated Authorities in the Body*,” “*Remember, Obey, and Greet the Ones Leading You*,” and “*Who are the Shining Stars and the Wandering Stars?*” it is clear that the dissenting sister, in utter disrespect of God’s delegated authorities in the church, has repeatedly and obstinately disparaged and ridiculed, both openly in her spoken messages and printed articles on the Internet, the elders in Metro Manila and even leading brothers who were invited to speak in the Fellowship Among the Churches. She minced no words when she called the elders “liar,” “unprincipled,” “slanderer,” “crooked,” and “traitor.” Even after she has been quarantined by the elders of the church in Malabon, her latest article entitled “*Logos Turned Rhema*” spitefully addressed the elders as the “*highly ecclesiastical positioned people*.” This characterizes the kind of spirit and attitude she has toward the elders.

Moreover, while appearing to be obedient and submissive to Brother Liu Chi Cheng, behind his back she has publicly declared that she cannot and will not submit herself to the Brother Liu’s arrangement for another brother to take the lead in the work in Northern Philippines. Not only so, until this day she continues to publicly take exception to the qualification of many of the elders appointed by Brother Liu over the past 30 years in various churches. Her undermining words and works against these brothers whom Brother Liu ordained under the leading of the Holy Spirit exposes that in reality she does not submit to Brother Liu. Her insubordination to the authority of God exactly reflects the situation in Thyatira.

The situation of the church in Thyatira is also not one that is short of “fruits.” Thyatira may be copious in the number of fruits but lacking in God’s authority. The dissenting sister may brag of her assumed and presumed successes and fruits, but she can never have more fruits than the Catholic Church which Thyatira typifies. Yet despite the enormous number added to the church in Thyatira, the overcomers of Thyatira are not to be rewarded because of their fruits but because of overcoming the degraded conditions of the church, primarily in the matter of authority and headship in the church, an area where the sister is clearly wanting. This should serve as a grave warning to us that when we work for the Lord, our working must be under the proper authority as arranged by the Lord for the Body [For more details, please refer to “*Who are God’s Delegated Authorities in the Body?*”]

The Problem of Death in Sardis

As insubordination to authority is the shortcoming of Thyatira, death is the problem of Sardis. While the sister rejects God’s authority like Thyatira, she has come to embrace deadness like Sardis.

Deadness is by no means a small matter in the church, more so if it involves serving ones. Brother Lee said:

“The first enemy is the deadness of Sardis (Rev. 3:1-2).” (W. Lee, *The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups, Chapter 3, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“The fifth epistle, to the church in Sardis (3:1-6)... Death is the most defiling thing before God. In the Old Testament a person could offer a sacrifice to atone for the commission of a sin. However, a person who touched a corpse or anything dead was defiled and had to be separated for seven days before he could be cleansed (Num. 19:11-19). Strictly speaking, sin is not necessarily a defilement, because it is a matter of breaking God’s law; death is the real defilement. To God, death is the dirtiest thing.” (W. Lee, *Three Aspects of the Church: The Course of the Church, Book 2, Chapter 7, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“The third thing that must be dealt with is the uncleanness through contact with the dead—the spiritual deadness. The Israelites were not to contact anything that was dead, whether an animal, an insect, or a person (Lev. 11:24-47; Num. 19:11). If they touched these things, they would be defiled. Death is more dirty than sin. If we contact those who are spiritually dead, we will be defiled by spiritual deadness.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Numbers, Message 6, Section 1, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Dealing with Leprosy, Rebellion, and Death in the Old Testament

In Numbers chapter five, there are three things that require corporate dealing among God’s people: leprosy, discharges, and deadness. Leprosy is a dreadful disease that ultimately issues in death. According to the Old Testament teaching, leprosy comes mainly from rebellion against God’s authority. The first illustration of this was the case of Miriam and Aaron, who rebelled against Moses, who was God’s deputy authority (Num. 12:1-10). By rebelling against God’s deputy authority, Miriam became leprous.

“In speaking against Moses, Miriam and Aaron were speaking against the deputy authority of God. Although Moses was younger than Miriam and Aaron, God had appointed him to be His deputy authority, His representative authority. God had called Aaron and had raised up Miriam, but there is no hint that God charged them to be His representative. But God told Moses clearly that He had chosen Him to be His representative authority on earth (Exo. 3:10-17; 7:1). Because of Moses’ timidity, God gave Aaron to Moses as his helper (Exo. 4:10-16; 6:30—7:1). However, this does not mean that He appointed Aaron to be His authority. According to God’s governmental administration, Miriam and Aaron should have submitted themselves to Moses. But they rebelled.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Numbers, Message 19, Section 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“There were, I believe, two reasons why God punished Miriam but not Aaron. First, it is likely that Miriam took the lead in this rebellion. She was the instigator, the initiator, who stirred up Aaron. Miriam, not Aaron, was the main source. Second, it is not at all seemly for a female to rebel. Concerning rebellion, some allowance may be given to a male, but none should be given to a female. God punished Miriam to warn and alarm all the females among the

children of Israel so that they would not follow Miriam.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Numbers, Message 19, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

In the case of our sister, to this date she continues to refuse to take the proper position of a sister in submitting to the decisions and fellowship in the work and in the church. Instead, she labels it as *machismo*. Even after she has been quarantined, she stubbornly persists in spreading germs of division and rebellion, bringing deadness to the saints, while at the same time throwing the blame for the decrease in number of meeting saints in her locality on the elders.

In the Bible, we see that God does not compromise in dealing with the spreading of germs and death among His people. Moses recorded in Leviticus 13:45-46: “And as for the leper in whom the infection is, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be let loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, Unclean, unclean! He shall be unclean all the days during which the infection is in him; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.” In the Old Testament, a leprous person was to be separated from the healthy people, dwelling outside the camp. The same is true in dealing with death:

“Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel, the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, ‘Come near; carry your brothers [Nadab and Abihu] away from the front of the holy place outside the camp. So they came near and carried them in their tunics outside the camp, as Moses had spoken’ (vv. 4-5). This signifies that the deadness of unholiness should be kept away from the sphere of God’s holiness and also from the community, the fellowship, of God’s people.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Leviticus, Message 33, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“There is no excuse for being defiled by death....Once you have been contaminated by death, you need to deal with that contamination and have a new start. Otherwise, you will be killed, and eventually the entire church, seemingly without explanation, will be brought into a deadened situation.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Numbers, p. 71, LSM*)

Dealing with Division in the New Testament

Second Thessalonians 3:6 says, “Now we charge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the things which were handed down *to you and* which you received from us.”

“To walk disorderly not only is according to the flesh (Rom. 8:4) but also is against the building up of the church life (1 Thes. 5:11; Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 10:23).” (*Recovery Version of the Holy Bible, 2 Thess. 3:6, fn 1, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

According to 1 Thessalonians 5:14 footnotes 1, the disorderly walk referred to in 2 Thessalonians 3:5 includes rebellion.

Then in Titus 3:10, Paul said, “A factious man, after a first and second admonition, refuse.”

“In order to maintain good order in the church, a factious, divisive person should be refused, rejected, after a first and second admonition. This is done to stop intercourse with a contagiously divisive person for the church's profit.” (*Recovery Version of the Holy Bible, Titus 3:10, fn 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

And in Romans 16:17, “Now I exhort you, brothers, to mark those who make divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them.”

“In chapter 14 Paul was liberal and gracious regarding the receiving of those who differ in doctrine or practice. Here, however, he is unyielding and resolute in saying that we must turn away from those who are dissenting, who make divisions, and who make causes of stumbling. The purpose in both cases is the preserving of the oneness of the Body of Christ that we may have the normal church life.” (*Recovery Version of the Holy Bible, Rom. 16:17, fn 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Based on the above-cited verses, according to the apostle Paul, the way to handle the ones fomenting rebellion and division in the church is to *keep away, refuse, and turn away*. The New Testament way of dealing with rebellion and division complements the Old Testament way of dealing with leprosy, which typifies rebellion against God's deputy authority. Brother Lee said:

“The way to deal with the present rebellion is to reject any kind of division (1 Cor. 1:10), to stand against any wind of teaching and any spreading of spiritual death (Eph. 4:14; 2 Tim. 2:16-17), and to separate ourselves from the contagious ones – exercising to quarantine” (*W. Lee, The Fermentation of the Present Rebellion, p. 74, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

The Presence of Opinion, Self, and Pride in Laodicea

Closely related to the deadness of Sardis and the absence of God's authority in Thyatira is the presence of man's will, opinion, self, and pride in Laodicea:

“The warning to Laodicea is not concerning a position but a spirit. Although many have absolutely nothing to do with Thyatira and Sardis positionally, although they are like Philadelphia in tone and voice, and although they may even be meeting with Philadelphia, they can still be Laodicean believers. Everything that is done according to man's will, whose spirit is not subject to the authority of the Lord's word, is Laodicea.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“Recently we have been having fellowship about opinions and the damage they cause in both the Christian life and the church life... instead of the supply of life, there is death and dryness. Let us stand against all such deadness.” (*W. Lee, Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 44, Section 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

In part 1 of this series of study on Revelation 2 and 3 entitled “*What Makes Philadelphia a Laodicea?*” we have pointed out the many characteristics of Laodicea. Among which are her being opinionated, not submissive to authority, self-centered, proud, and vainglorious, all of which characterize the very condition of the sister sowing discord in our midst today.

The Reward of the Kingdom in the Coming Age

Lastly, if we read the context of Revelation 2 and 3, we will see that every time the Lord gives a promise in these seven epistles, it refers to the coming kingdom in a strict sense. It never refers to eternity, which is our eternal destiny. Rather, it refers to our future in the coming kingdom. From these seven epistles, we can see that whether we receive a reward or suffer a loss is related to the kingdom, and kingdom is related to authority. We cannot expect to receive the kingdom as His reward in the coming age if we do not learn to subject ourselves to His authority in this age. If we have problem with God’s authority today, we will surely have a problem with God’s kingdom on that day. These things are revealed so that we can be sober and watchful to fight, grow, and go on for the manifestation of the kingdom. We are growing today for the manifestation of the kingdom.

We thank the Lord that today we are so blessed to be in the Lord’s recovery to have the better opportunity and greater possibility to become overcomers with the abundance of life supply and by keeping to the central lane of God’s New Testament economy. However, the very same negative conditions of degradation in the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 can possibly be found in us if we are not careful. Being in the proper church life ensures us a proper environment to grow in life and function, and gives us a better chance at overcoming. But this does not prequalify us or disqualify God’s children still trapped in the system of Christianity who nonetheless love and serve the Lord with a pure heart. It was certainly not the burden of brothers Nee and Lee for us to view ourselves in the local churches with pride and look at other Christians with disdain to say that only Philadelphia has living overcomers and that the others could only have dead overcomers, as the sister propounded.

May the Lord grant us the positive spirit of upholding His name by our submission to authority as God had arranged, and to earnestly desire to keep His word in order to be the living overcomers when He comes. May all our living and service today be not for the exalting of our “self,” but for the exalting of Christ, our unique Head; may our work be not for the damaging of the church, but for the building up of the Body of Christ. May this word of exhortation from Brother Lee serve as a solemn and constant warning to us:

“Brothers and sisters, there is a condition to be fulfilled if there is to be a building. The one indispensable condition is submission to the authority of the kingdom. Our Savior has been exalted to be Head of the universe, and all authority has been given Him in heaven and on earth. God has put all things under His feet and has made Him Head over all things to the church. In the first place this implies that the church must come under His headship. What is headship? It is the government of the Head. Do realize that if the church is to be built up, we must submit to the authority of the Head. Where there is no Head there is no authority; and there the question of church building cannot even arise. In Ephesians 4:15-16, which speaks throughout of the building of the

church, it is shown to be of primary importance that we "grow up into Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ." (*Witness Lee, The Kingdom and the Church, Chapter 3, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

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