

1. Laying the Foundation

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” 2 Cor. 13.5

For many years I looked for someone to come into my church fellowship and candidly address our spiritual lack, to speak as a voice of the Lord into my life and that of the church. I thought how terrible it would be to go through our Christian walk being blinded and not able to discern present “sin.” I am using the term sin in its most fundamental definition, that is, *to miss the mark*. This definition goes well beyond obvious moral sin, but includes such things as personal character flaws, errant doctrine, inordinate fleshly or worldly desires and distractions—all things that may affect one’s spiritual walk and ministry.

We can *miss the mark* as a church as well and fall short of His high calling and purpose. You know, not all the tribes of Israel crossed the Jordon to enter and possess the “land of promise.” Two and one-half tribes remained in the land east of the Jordon River, a land “better suited for their lifestyles.” They stayed connected governmentally with Israel, but for obvious reasons could never be an integral part of the Kingdom. Being isolated unto themselves, and coming short of the promises of God, they eventually fell victim to the land, the peoples of the land, and to their gods (religions). *“So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away into exile, namely the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara and to the river of Gozan, to this day.” 1 Chron. 5.26* Scattered abroad, they continued to be the children of Abraham, but fell from God’s kingdom relationship. They... *missed the mark!*

So, I would always ask myself, “Are we **doing** what the Lord has called us to do? Are we **being** what the Lord wants us to be? Are we **functioning** as He would have us function as members of His Body? Is our **focus** correct? Are we **doctrinally** sound or in error or misunderstanding? Is the nature of our **worship** truly acceptable...*in Spirit and truth?*” With these and other such questions, there was the prayer, “Lord, expose us to Your light. Give us understanding. Give us an opportunity to repent from failings, these sins of *missing the mark*, so we may move on into Your present purposes, into Your land of promise, Your Kingdom.”

How absolutely dreadful it would be to ignorantly become *a reprobate*—to be set aside, as an inferior vessel. Though we may remain His child, being born of His Spirit, we may yet miss the reality of His service and Kingdom walk. O’ we may continue to function in a church, and in a ministry, but be without His anointing and the *present moving of His Holy Spirit*. And, the church itself, or its ministry, may simply begin to dry up spiritually for lack of “life.” Something will always be missing.

Several times over the years, I have had the opportunity to witness similar situations. Someone would speak in a “prophetic” voice to administer correction and admonition. A few times this came as a prophetic word spoken from one present in the service. Other times the correction came from spiritual fathers in the faith. Being present during those times, I must say that in each situation there was a very strong witness to the correction. Regrettably, in most every instance, the admonition was not heeded or taken as a correction from the Lord. Personal feelings of the individuals involved seemed to be of that of embarrassment, of being insulted or misunderstood, or of self-justification. Perhaps it was thought, “That voice surely has missed the sincerity of my heart.” In all these cases, godly repentance was not sought after nor did brokenness enter the soul. The individual or the church involved continued on in life with the same ministry, though *missing the*

mark. Growth is not necessarily an indication of true spiritual maturity. One may grow in knowledge, in the mastery of Scriptures, and in expanse of ministry, yet be flawed in substance, character, and truth. A church may grow in numbers, facilities, function, and ministry, yet remain immature as a child, as in an adult's body, being tossed about by every circumstance and wind of doctrine, failing to walk in His present purposes. People seem to become adjusted and comfortable in their lifestyles.

Of course, a prophetic voice, or the wisdom of a mature spiritual father in the faith, is always appropriate and timely and is very much needed when discernment is lacking. Oftentimes, however, the word of exhortation and/or correction may come by way of the Spirit directly from the Bible. However, when John wrote, "*But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light...*" (1 Jn. 1.7) was he referring to becoming enlightened by revelation of "the word" (scriptures)? Partly. I am convinced his main intent is by "The **Word**," where he is referring to Christ Himself, who breathes life into that scripture. Scripture may be read inside of, or outside of Christ. There is a significant and important difference between these two revelations—one being of an outward understanding and religion, the second being of an inward quickening and life. This will be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

This series on *The Seven Churches* takes a close look at the seven messages given to the seven churches of Asia as revealed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation. The intent will be to stand in the Light of "The Word," as before a mirror, to closely "*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.*" John said that he heard a "**loud voice**" behind him instructing him to write the following exhortations and needful corrections to each of the seven churches. It was like the voice of a trumpet—a wake-up call! This is most serious! The loud voice heard was that of the "*Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last,*"—Christ Himself. The word written was the sending forth of the mind of the Lord, **The Word** (The Logos). No scripture is independent of Christ, Old or New Testament.

*"Now unto the church of:
Ephesus
Smyrna
Pergamos
Thyatira
Sardis
Philadelphia
Laodicea
write, I know your works..."*

An elder in my church fellowship recently stated, "If this word to the seven churches was the very last instruction given by Christ to the church—His last exhortation recorded—should it not be of overwhelming importance to heed until the time of His return? Shouldn't we prayerfully examine these letters more closely to see how they may apply directly to us, and to the church of this day?" Upon this statement, this word began to come alive in a new way. Thus came the birth of this series: Lessons from the Seven Churches.

Foundational Principles

Before embarking on our examination of these lessons, it is of utmost importance to first lay some **foundational principles**. A building, or a teaching, must be established upon a firm foundation, without which a structure, or a message, cannot stand. A proper foundation gives stability and "under-standing" to what is to be built upon it. The largest such stone in building the temple was recorded to be approximately 44' long x 15' wide x 10' high, weighing 570 tons. Setting such a stone in place took many years of labor and thousands of workers. So too, these spiritual foundation stones are not simple Biblical principles to be set in place. They are extremely weighty! The importance of the massiveness of these foundation stones cannot be overstated. We will briefly look at four key foundation stones upon which these lessons are to be built.

Christ, the Chief Cornerstone

*"Or ¹know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is **in** you, which you have from God? And you are not your own;" 1 Cor. 6.19*

*“Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. ²Know you are not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is **in** you, except you be reprobates?”* 2 Cor. 13.5

The fact may be readily gleaned from these scriptures that one must (1) *examine* and (2) *prove* whether *Christ is* (truly) **in** *him*, lest he become a *reprobate* (disqualified). This is quite a challenge and deserving of elaboration. How often we know **of** Christ, **of** His life and ultimate sacrifice, **of** His present seating in heaven at the right hand of the Father, **of** His intercession for believers, and **of** His promise to one day return for His Church. And, we know **of** His promise to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in the believer. In light of all of that, just how well do we actually “*know that Jesus Christ is **in** us?*”—Not **on** us, or **about** us, or **among** us, but **in** us. Do we really know its spiritual reality? To further understand this question, we must return to the two scriptures above and understand the distinction between the two words for “**know**” as used in these verses.

1 Cor. 6.19: ¹**know** (Gk. *eido*) – To see physically, or to perceive with the mind.

2 Cor. 13.5: ²**Know** (Gk. *epiginosko*) – To experientially know through direct relationship.

It is very important to understand the distinction between the two words translated as the English word for “**know**.” In the first verse, ¹Greek *eido* is used as perceiving or understanding, in the sense as, “Do you see what I am saying? Capisce?” Mental gymnastics may answer “Yes, I see what you are saying.” This type of knowing leads directly into the realm of religious thought and to the practice of *religion* itself. It is extraneous to the heart of the inward man. It is simply imposed from without, and therefore becomes a way of life and part of our Christian culture. One’s memory is thus committed to hold the truth, his conscience becomes a compelling force to follow that truth, and his will power and self-control become the enablement to “try” to obey that truth. One becomes trained in his faith and practices the routines and rituals of that faith. This is religion. Reacting to a newspaper article referring to “the three great religions of the world: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity,” a church leader once responded, “I didn’t think Christianity was a religion but a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.” He was right, you know. The difference is as night and day, slavery and liberty, and death and life.

In the second verse above, a different Greek word for “²**know**” is used, *epiginosko*. This word is very different from the *eido* “to know” of the first verse. *Epiginosko* means to know by experiencing through a direct relationship. It involves a knowing in the inward man. It is life itself. We can read about driving an automobile, study a driver’s manual, and understand the function of the automobile and rules for driving. However, until we actually “do” it, it is not life itself, only *eido*, that is, we simply perceive of it. It becomes *epiginosko*, experiential knowledge, when we actually get behind the wheel and **do** it—drive the automobile down the road and experience it with all our emotions and senses. Similarly, I know a man who, in his youth, was fascinated with reading about distant places and of mountain climbing. Later in life, he became a geographer, traveled to those distant places, and would often trek in the Himalayas. How truly great is the gap between knowing by perceiving and knowing by experiencing! One involves emotions generated by perceiving, the other is life by doing. So, we now return to our question, “*Do you **know** that Jesus Christ is **in** you?*” Is it a life principle? Is His life manifesting in our mortal bodies? Or, do we just assume or perceive it to be true and go about life trying our best to live out that life?

Light is necessary for seeing or experiencing. Light reveals the hidden. It dispels the darkness—which may be ignorance. So, the second question here is, what is the source of that light? Does it come from without or from within? In order for the O.T. priests to function, light was needed in Moses’ tabernacle. In the Outer Court, light from the sun was all that was necessary. Upon entering through the veil of the Holy Place, light came by way of oil burning in the candlestick. Thus, light was of a different source and higher order. However, when entering behind the heavy curtain of the Most Holy Place, the high priest could only see by the glory of God’s presence. This was the ultimate source of light and understanding. Seeing in the Spirit (the intangible) is so different than seeing in the natural (the tangible.) We can see or know of Christ in the light of the Holy Scriptures. It gives us understanding. However, He now abides **in** the holy sanctuary of these redeemed

presence. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work **in us.**” Eph. 3.20

Now please understand this is not an academic lesson on the use of certain Greek words. It is important, however, to note the vital distinction by which different words in the Greek are translated to the same English word, as *eido* and *epiginosko* are both translated “**know.**” Presuming upon your patience and understanding, let us proceed to make yet a further distinction between two Greek words both translated to the same English term, “**word.**” The sole purpose of making this distinction here is to reinforce the difference between Christianity as religion and as life as presented above. Consider the O.T. Hebrew text:

“*Thy **word** is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path.*” Ps. 119.105

As long as “*Thy word*” is thought to be “the oral or written scriptures” it all remains in the realm of religion. This would be equivalent to the N.T. Greek *rhema* (word), interpreted as that which is uttered in speech or writing—like the scriptures. Thus, one may see truth in the *rhema*, acknowledge it as truth, memorize, and recite it, and yet **walk** only in the shadow of its reality. This is actually “religion,” the culprit that masquerades as Christianity. People often repeatedly quote scriptures relating to *peace, rest, salvation, joy, prosperity, healing, etc.*, hoping to have “it.” But the truth of the matter is it is not “it” they are really searching for, but “HIM,” who is our *peace, rest, salvation, joy, etc.*

However, if “*Thy Word*” is interpreted as the Greek word *logos* (word), its meaning is altogether different. *Logos* is a “message, or reasoning expressed by words.” It is an intangible concept as opposed to the tangible script or audio words of *rhema*. *Logos* (word) is preeminently used of *Christ* Himself (Jn. 1:1), who expresses the *thoughts* of the Father. The Psalm would then be best interpreted: “*Christ is a lamp unto my feet, and Light unto my path.*” It is no longer in the realm of religion but in the realm of life, Christ **in** you. It is the *Logos* finding His expression in and through the believer. “We must first meet the One who wrote the Book before we can read the words. We must first know Him before we can know His book.” (Watchman Nee)

“*It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me...*” Gal. 2.20

*A careful reading of Colossians 1.24-29 would now be most appropriate.

The Law of Liberty

A second foundation stone to be laid is a renewing of the mind when reading the epistle of James. All too often his exhortation “*to do*” is interpreted to mean, “to pile up good works”—like feeding and clothing the poor, visiting the sick, and other good deeds. And this we must do. However, once again, what is its source—is it of self, of religion, or of an inward life? One does not have to be Christian to do benevolent deeds. These works may be done equally by heathens and atheists, or the vilest of sinners. Thankfully, it seems in every man there comes the “feel good” emotion when having given of oneself, to whatever measure, to help another. But, the highest measure may not involve the emotions at all, when it becomes a life-principle. It becomes simply a matter of life.

James writes, “*But be ye **doers** of the word (Logos), and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoso looks into the **perfect law of liberty**, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a **doer** of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*” James 1.22-25

O’ how a further distinction must be made between the **Law of Moses** and the **Perfect Law of Liberty**. The former is outward, a religious application of codes of behavior, methods of worship, rituals, sacrifices, and holy days. This is much like a “practice” of any denomination of today may be religious in nature. Even

under the Law of Moses there were social laws—for example, see Deut. 15:7-11 regarding feeding the poor. This **Law** is one of bondage—of slavery—for it demands obedience to itself but does nothing to guide or help one perform its demands. One relies only on the self-nature: conscience, determination, resolve, and a feeling of satisfaction—a job well done.

However, the **Law of Liberty** in Christ Jesus has set us free from this Law of bondage. It begins with a new life (of the spirit) with the new birth and strengthened by the indwelling Holy Spirit. “**Doing**” becomes spontaneous and free. It is experiential. It is selective, being obedient, responding to the prompting of a new nature. Jesus went about “*doing good*” (Acts 10:38), not indiscriminately, but under the leading and anointing of the Holy Spirit—always in obedience to the Father. He healed many, not all; taught many, not all; delivered many, not all; became intimately close with many, not all. “*Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’*” Jn. 5:19

No longer are deeds of an outward nature and of the conscience, and self-determination. There must be a concession to the new life of Christ **within**. Paul wrote to the Colossians (Col. 1:25) that he desperately wanted to “*fulfill the Word of God*” in them—to bring to maturity what was lacking of this marvelous mystery of “*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” Col. 1:27 This is freedom from obligation and the liberty of living a new life.

Walk in The Light

*“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is **Light**, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not **practice** the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*” 1 Jn. 1:5-7

We have been encouraged to “*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*” 2 Cor. 13:5 And, we have previously mentioned that **light** is essential for such a self-examination because light exposes darkness and uncovers truth. It is important to understand that light does not just uncover universal truths, such as there is one true God and one true Savior, Jesus Christ. Light also uncovers truths pertaining to ourselves, personal things of the heart. We walk by what we see to be true. One that is blind cannot see, and certainly a dead person cannot see. Darkness surrounds him. Lack of spiritual discernment is a type of blindness. Scripture is clear, Jesus said to Nicodemus, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot **see** the kingdom of God.*” Natural man may theorize, reason, and philosophize about unseen things and heavenly truths, but in the end it is all futile. Man cannot begin to perceive things of the kingdom. For to him, they are a *mystery*, concealed in darkness. One may *see* with his eyes, and *see* (perceive) with his understanding, and yet be dead or in total darkness to the spiritual nature of God and His kingdom. Paul gives miraculous hope to this hopeless state of man, “*even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*” Eph. 2:5 The new believer becomes, in the spirit, that blind man who was healed by Christ. This man, blind from birth, said, “*One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!*” Jn. 9:25

This spiritual light of which John speaks comes from intimate **fellowship** with Christ. O’ such fellowship! John wrote, “*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*” 1 Jn. 1:3 Fellowship is that living experiential oneness with God and other believers **in** Christ. Please pardon the following simplicity: If we had a pizza party, our fellowship would be in the pizza. It would not be true fellowship unless we both ate of that pizza. If you ate of the pizza, and I could only perceive of its goodness, in its appearance and aroma, we would be together, but not in fellowship. Likewise, unless we fellowship **in** Christ in the same measure of the “*We*” (the **apostles!**) in our quoted text, we are not in true fellowship. One part is in spiritual intimacy with Christ while the other part can only perceive in an outward way of His goodness. John and the other apostles

knew (*epiginosko*: to know by experience) Christ. In the natural, they saw Him, felt Him, and heard Him. In the spirit, they knew Him no longer *according to the flesh* (2 Cor. 5:16-17), but in oneness of spirit. Christ was alive to them as an inward reality. We are to have this fellowship as with the apostles in Christ.

Fellowship is experiential in the inward man, and clearly manifested in the outward man. Note in the following verse John's use of the words *walk* and *practice*: "*If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet **walk** in the darkness, we lie and do not **practice** the truth.*" 1 Jn. 1:6 And, like James, his selective use of the word *practice* means "**to do, doing.**" This is the work, the good deeds: walking in the light (of Christ in me.)

You in Me and I in You

Compare the following two scriptures:

*"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory."* Col. 1:27 (See also Gal. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 6:19)

and

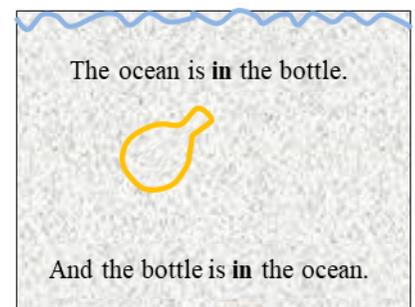
*"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect **in Christ Jesus.**"* Col. 1:28 (See also Eph. 1:4ff, 1 Cor. 12:13)

Note the first verse speaks of Christ being **in** the believer, while the second verse speaks of believers being **in** Christ. There is an important difference. Jesus emphasized this in speaking of His relationship of the believer to Himself:

*"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides **in Me**, and **I in him**, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."* Jn. 15:5

I in him The indwelling Christ is very **personal**. "*...to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*" Eph. 3:16-17 This cannot be made any clearer. The believer becomes the tabernacle of Christ. What glory! How humbling! What a work of grace! God is present and at work **in us to do and to will of His good pleasure**. This is His life **in** the individual—the *whosoever* of John 3:16.

he in Me However, to be "*Baptized into Christ*" (Rm. 6:3) is yet another dimension. It is something both mystical and universal. It is being corporately joined together with **all** believers in Christ, and into all the grace gained through His eternal sacrifice as the Lamb of God. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.*" Eph. 1:3 This is the corporate nature of the Church, the Body of Christ. As A. B. Simpson once wrote, "It is as a bottle in the ocean, the ocean is in the bottle yet the bottle is in the ocean." Christ is in me, yet I am in Him in a much larger and universal realm. The Kingdom of God requires both, Christ in you and you in Christ. Even as the body of the individual is His temple or dwelling place, the church, the many membered body of Christ, corporately dwells in Christ.



In Revelation 1:13, John reveals, "*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks (churches) one like unto the Son of man (Christ).*" These churches were quite a physical distance apart, yet Christ was in the midst of all because all were spiritually "**in Christ.**" "*Christ is all, and in all.*" Col. 3:11 "*Is all*" relates to His mystical universal or corporate nature: all being **in** Christ. "*In all*" relates to His working from within or inside the Church or

the individual. A mystery, yes, but a mystery revealed is no longer a mystery but a revelation to be received and properly appropriated into our lives.

To say, “I have Christ in me, and His life, and that is all I need,” is to misunderstand this foundational principle and fall short of His ultimate intention. It is like a stone, cut, shaped, and designated for the temple, saying, “I have been chosen, I am the work of His hands, I have a personal relationship with God, I need not be part of this building.” Until this stone is actually set into the temple, it cannot be a part of the larger purposes of God—**A Temple in the Lord:**

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Eph. 2.19-22

Now, Let’s Build Upon this Foundation

When reading the letters of Christ to the seven churches of Asia, we must be as before a mirror, standing in the brightness of His light. We must always be aware of a “word” ready to be revealed to us as individuals, and of a word ready to be revealed to the corporate church, of which every believer must be an integral part. An example of this is when Christ said to the Church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, verse 4, *“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”* Even though this word was directed to the corporate church at Ephesus, we, as individuals, must stand in that same light and evaluate ourselves as well.

O’ the unfathomable riches of **knowing** Christ: Christ **in** us, and we **in** Christ. Thus, a foundation is laid here for our study on the Lessons from the Seven Churches of Revelation. The task before us is to humbly look into these letters as His continuing word to us, not as some historical fact, but as a present day revelation. May they speak to us as a **loud** voice, as the sound of a trumpet. Here, we are to examine ourselves in their light, in all Godly understanding, proving to what measure Christ is **in** us...and we are **in** Christ.

Next message:

Lessons from the Seven Churches:

2. The Letter to the Church of Ephesus. Rev. 2.1-7