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Our Standard and Our Hope.

C. H. Mackintosh.

There are two very important principles presented in Revelation 3: 3, 11, which are profoundly interesting, but clear, simple, easily grasped, and full of power, when understood — two distinct things which characterise the overcomer. The first is the truth that has been communicated; and the second, the hope that is set before us.

We find these two things illustrated in Israel's history, and in the history of the Church of God — what He has given us, and what is held out before us. These two things are to form your character and mine. We are not to be influenced by the character of things around, or the present condition of the people of God; but we are to be influenced by what God *has* given, and what He *will* give. We are apt to be discouraged and disheartened by the state of things around, and to surrender everything because of the ruin, and thus get paralysed; but if you get hold of these two things, or rather if they get hold of you, they will enable you to stem the tide and to be an overcomer. You are to remember what you have received and heard, and cherish the hope of glory.

We have Protestantism before us in Sardis. You must always distinguish between a work of the Spirit of God and the state of things resulting from it through man's interference, human management, earthly machinery, stereotyping the form when the power was gone. The Reformation was a distinct work of the Spirit of God, a wave of spiritual power. Protestantism is the powerless form which, through human weakness and Satan's craft, has followed that glorious season of divine visitation.

Fifty years ago there was a very distinct movement of the Spirit of God, which drew many out of the enclosures of Christendom. But what use has been made of it? When the energy, freshness, and bloom of the Spirit had departed, what followed, in many cases? Why, people slipped into what may be called dead brethrenism, and there is nothing worse than that, because the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption. What is our moral safeguard? Simply to hold fast what we have received, and to live in the blessed hope of Christ's coming, to realize in our own souls the power of what God has given and what He will give.

We find illustrations of this in Old Testament times. All the great reformatory movements in Israel were characterised by this very thing. It was so in Jehoshaphat's time, and in Hezekiah's time. The Lord calls back His people to the original standard, to what they had received at the first. Hezekiah goes back to Moses, as his authority to maintain the divine standard in the celebration of the Passover. Many might have said, Oh, it is all hopeless; your national unity is gone. Even Solomon had left abominations behind him. The devil suggests to lower the standard because of the ruin; but Hezekiah did not listen to that. He was an overcomer. A tide of blessing rolled in, such as had not been known since the days of Solomon (2 Chr. 30).

So, again, in the days of Josiah: a child was on the throne; a woman filling the prophetic office; Nebuchadnezzar almost at the gates. What did Josiah do? The book of the law was read. Instead of lowering the standard on account of the state of things, he acted on the Word of God; that was his standard of action, and he kept the Passover in the first month. The result was, there had not been such a Passover since the days of Samuel.

Thus was it with Hezekiah and Josiah; and we have a still more beautiful example of it in Ezra and Nehemiah. In those days a feast was kept which had not been observed since the days of Joshua the

son of Nun. It was reserved for that poor, little remnant to keep that feast. They were overcomers; they went back to God, and to what He had given at the beginning.

Again, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego gained a magnificent victory when they refused to eat the king's meat. They would not yield one hair's breadth. Were not they overcomers? They might have said, God in His governmental dealings has sent us into captivity; why should we refuse to eat the king's meat? But no! they were enabled to hold up the standard of God in the midst of the ruin around.

It was the same with Daniel. He stood in unshaken faithfulness, and gained a splendid victory. It was not to make a show that he opened his windows, and prayed towards Jerusalem, but to maintain the truth of God; he prayed towards God's centre, and he was called the servant of the living God. If these had surrendered, they would have lost their victories, and God would have been dishonoured.

All this bears upon us in a very distinct way, in the midst of Protestantism. It makes the Word of God of unspeakable value to us. It is not a question of setting up our own opinion or authority, but we are called on to maintain the truth of God, and nothing else; and if you do not get hold of that, you do not know where you are. It might have been said to Josiah, when he broke down the high places built by Solomon (2 Kings 23: 13), Who are you, to set yourself up against Solomon, and the institutions set up by a great man like him? But it was not a question of Josiah *versus* Solomon, but of God *versus* error.

And now, as to our second great principle, namely, that our character is also to be formed by what is before us — the coming of the Lord. But mark here, the church of Sardis, instead of being cheered by the Church's proper hope, the bright and Morning Star, is warned, "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." This is how He will come upon the world — as a thief. We belong to the region of light; our proper hope is the Morning Star, which is only seen by those who are watching during the night. The reason why Sardis is warned, instead of cheered by the hope of His coming, is, that it has sunk down to the world's level: low, lifeless, sapless Christianity; and it will overtake them as a thief.

This is what Protestantism is threatened with, and what you are threatened with, if you let yourself go down with the stream, like a dead fish. The Lord is awakening the hearts of His people to a deeper sense of this. He is giving them to see that nothing will do, save downright reality. If we have not this, we have nothing. It is one thing to have doctrines in the mind, and another thing altogether to *have* Christ in the heart and Christ in the life.

He is coming for *me*, and I have to watch for the bright and Morning Star. Now let my heart rise up, and overcome the condition of things around. If I find saints in that condition, I seek to rouse them out of it. If you want to instruct saints, you must bring them back to the truth you have received, what God gave at the beginning. Build on what God has given you, and on the hope that is set before you. I find it a great thing to say to any one, Are you prepared to abandon everything that will not bear the test of the Word of God — to take your stand on that?

Hold fast the standard of the truth of God, and do not accept anything less; even though you may be alone. If a regiment were cut to pieces, and only one man left, if he hold the colours, the dignity of the regiment is maintained. It is not a question of results, but of being true to Christ, to be really alive in a scene which is characterised by having "a name to live, while dead." We want something more than mere profession. Even the breaking of bread may become an empty formality. We want more power and freshness, more living devotedness to the Person of Christ. We are called to overcome. The hearing ear is found only with the overcomer increasingly. May our hearts be stirred up to desire it.