

## KEEPING OUR GARMENTS WHITE

**"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life; but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels." – Rev. 3:5.**

ALTHOUGH there were persecutions of individuals, such as recorded in Acts, the early Church as a whole was not subjected to the severest of trials at first. But when the Truth began to spread and had the enmity, not only of the Jews, but also of the Greeks, emperors and governors found favor with the masses by persecuting the followers of Jesus. And for aught we know so it will be in the not far distant future. For a long time the pure Truth has been hidden from men, and worldliness, with a form of godliness, has had the upper hand in influential circles; but doubtless, as the troublous times which the Scriptures predict for the end of this Age draw closer, those who will stand firm for the Word of the Lord's Testimony may expect to be made the scapegoats, under various pretexts.

We shall not be surprised if a considerable amount of persecution develop within the next few years against all the "children of light" who will walk up to that light. John, the beloved disciple, in some measure or degree illustrated or represented the last, living members of the "little flock." Doubtless this was the meaning of our Lord's statement, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:22,23.) John did not tarry, but a class whom he in some respects illustrated has tarried – a class who see *with the eyes of their understanding* the visions and revelations which John saw *in symbols, in a trance*.

There are many reasons for concluding that, while the various messages in the second and third chapters of Revelation were given to the seven churches specified and were applicable to them, they should properly have a wider application to the whole Church of Christ, the

number *seven* representing completeness, and the *order* representing different epochs in the history of the Church. Thus the Church at Ephesus would represent the condition of the Church in the Apostle's day, at the time of the writing of the messages, while the Laodicean Church would represent the Church in our day, in the end of this Gospel Age. The other churches would correspondingly represent different epochs intermediate, between the beginning and now.

To think otherwise would be to attach more importance to those seven comparatively small churches of Asia Minor than would seem to have been appropriate, and would imply an ignoring of other churches larger and more influential than they, as, for instance, the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Colosse, Philippi, Thessalonica, etc. Furthermore, the details of the message given to these seven churches apply to and fit historically the experiences of the one Church of the Living God, over every member and branch of which the Lord has a care. This thought that the number *seven* signified completeness, we find emphasized in the other symbolic representations – in the seven golden candlesticks, and seven stars, etc.

The first three chapters of Revelation contain particular specifications and general admonitions, not only for the local churches therein mentioned, but for all "overcomers." They apply not only to the different epochs in the history of the Church as a whole, but to different classes in any one epoch in the history of the Church.

### **IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING OUR GARMENTS UNDEFILED**

The words in our text, addressed to the Church at Sardis, or to that epoch of the general Church symbolized by Sardis, are explained by the context. In this Church there was a wrong condition of things, a defilement. Trespasses committed had not been repented of and forgiveness sought from the Lord.

In the context it is stated that the majority of the Sardis Church had not kept their garments undefiled. But "thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." By these words our Lord seems to emphasize the thought that no one will gain the prize of the "high calling" if he does not keep his garments undefiled from the flesh. Whoever fails to do so will not be of the overcoming class to whom will be given this choice blessing, is the argument. He that would be an "overcomer" must be clothed in *white raiment*. Any who do not persevere in keeping their garments clean will have their names blotted out. In this connection we remember the words of this same Apostle John, that the blood of Christ washes us, not only from the sins that are past, but also from all stains upon the robe. He says, "The blood of Jesus Christ...cleanseth us from all sin." (I John 1:7.) It cleanses us from all unintentional blemishes, spots upon our garments. Whoever does not thus keep himself cleansed will not be an "overcomer." It is only such as observe this cleansing whose names will not be blotted out.

As to our ability to discern whether or not we are keeping our garments clean, only the individual himself can know to what extent he has watched his conduct and kept up his communication with the Lord and daily scrutinized life's affairs, the incidents of the day, and asked forgiveness for shortcomings and trespasses. Others might surmise, but they could not know. We all have sense enough to know what things are right and what are wrong. If the wrong thing seems *not very wrong*, it would indicate that we are growing careless in regard to our robe. As a result we would have less interest in the Truth, less interest in keeping our robes [R4870 : page 342] clean, less interest in prayer meetings, etc. Between such and the Lord there would be a cloud, and a condition of leanness would be sure to follow.

The faithful "overcomers" watch and keep their garments clean. "They have not defiled their garments," they have kept them "unspotted from the world." They have not been willing to have sin contaminate them and to separate them from the Lord, but have

quickly applied for and obtained the precious blood to remove every stain. They are so heartily opposed to sin and so earnest about keeping their garments unspotted that the Adversary gets no hold upon them – "that Wicked One toucheth them not." All this indicates a full submission of their wills to the will of Christ. They are "dead with Him" and hence could not willingly practise sin.

### **THE PRECIOUS BLOOD ALONE CAN CLEANSE**

Evidently, the majority of the people of Sardis were of the Great Company class and needed to "be zealous and repent"; for they were not in a condition to receive the greatest blessing possible for them. The principle is applicable, evidently, not only to the Church in Sardis, but to the Church in general. The things to be overcome are the difficulties in the "narrow way." These difficulties make the way narrow – all the opposition of our flesh to the things of God, the oppositions of the world in general, and the snares which the Adversary may place for us. The love of self, of popularity, of worldly prosperity, must be overcome, as well as love for man-made creeds and theories.

How gracious is the provision of our God in thus presenting us with the Robe which covers all the repented-of blemishes of the past as well as the unintentional and unwitting imperfections of the present! Under this arrangement it is possible for the Lord's people to walk so carefully, so circumspectly (*looking all around* at every step), as to keep their garments unspotted from the world. But, alas, how few, if any, there be who have always lived up, in all the past of their Christian lives, to this high standard which alone will insure the keeping of their garments white!

Seeing that any deflection from absolute purity of heart would constitute a stain, a spot upon the robe, we might inquire with great concern, Is there any possibility of having such spots or stains removed and of getting my robe white again? Thank God, yes; there is a way by which the spots and wrinkles may be removed from our

robes and leave them once more as white and clean as at first. The stain-remover is the *precious blood*. As the Apostle says, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness."

### LET US JUDGE OURSELVES

While all our efforts could not remove a single stain, which the "precious blood" alone can remove, yet it is well for us that while realizing our Lord's forgiveness and the cleansing of our robe, we should promptly seek to discipline ourselves in repentance, otherwise we may expect that while our Lord cleanses our robes in answer to our earnest prayers, He will, nevertheless, put upon us certain *chastisements* for our correction in righteousness and for the strengthening of our characters along the points of weakness. The Apostle teaches this when he says, "If we would judge [correct, chastise] ourselves, then we should not be judged [corrected, chastised] of the Lord; but when we are judged of the Lord we are chastened that we might not be condemned with the world." – I Cor. 11:31,32.

God's grace cannot admit to heavenly perfection those who have not robes of spotless righteousness; hence, we are shown that those who have not cared for their garments and kept them white must be put through severe experiences before they can in any sense of the word be sharers of heavenly favors. These severe experiences are shown in the symbol as *washing their robes* in a *great tribulation*. But to show that not penance nor sufferings would cleanse the robes, it is particularly stated that the efficacy for the cleansing is the "blood of the Lamb." Many will be thus purified, purged; and their garments, [R4871 : page 342] now soiled by contact with the world, will be cleansed of every guilty stain when they, realizing the folly of their course, shall repentantly appeal to the Lord and *use His help*.

We rejoice that these will ultimately sing praises to the Lord and be glad in His wondrous grace. But we note that even after their robes

shall have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb, during the time of trouble, they will wear no crowns; but, having finally overcome, they will be granted "palms" as emblems of their victory through Christ; and although they can never be of the living Temple of which Christ is the Head, we are told that they shall be *servants* in that temple; and although they shall never sit in the Throne, they will be highly privileged to serve "*before* the Throne. Grand and glorious privileges will be theirs; but they will lose the great "prize," having sold it for the mess of pottage of present seeming advantage, which proves unsatisfying and brings bitter results. What exhortation to holiness, to complete consecration to His will could be stronger!

