

THE CHURCH INVINCIBLE

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Rev. 2:5, 3:19)

The above are the words of our Lord to the first and the last of the Seven Churches in Asia. They incorporate the sum and substance of His dealing with the New Covenant church when she errs from the way He has given her. It contrasts drastically with God's dealings with His elect people, Israel, under the Old Covenant. To them He gives first the legal grounds of blessings and cursings in Deuteronomy 28. Then, if Israel sins, and falls under divine judgment and cursings, He promises in II Chronicles 7:14 "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*" This Old Covenant promise is popularly held out as the hope of "revival" for the New Covenant church. Such a hope is quite consistent with Covenant Theology of Reformed churches, which continue to impute the sacralism of the Old Covenant to the Christian church. This confounding of the Old Covenant with the altogether different Christian church is another unwholesome legacy of the Reformation. Christians commonly and unwittingly pick it up, having never thought these things through or examined them in the light of scripture. Here are some of the contrasts between the Old and New Covenants that bear upon this matter.

1. In the Old Covenant, the church and the state were one and the same. The sins of the state were the sins of the church. The righteousness of the church was the righteousness of the state, and God dealt with them as one whole, both in cursings and blessings. Therefore, a spiritual awakening could be expected to "heal the land," to bring about political peace, moral uprightness, and material prosperity in the whole of society.

On the other hand, the New Covenant church is utterly distinct from state society. The prosperity or decline of one has absolutely nothing to do with that of the other. The church has never been more vital and effective than it was in its early years, yet the society in which it thrived has never been more corrupt. And while the church was growing and expanding, the Roman Empire was crumbling and dying. If anything, peace and prosperity in a nation is more commonly attended by a decline in the vitality of the churches. Interest in and pursuit of carnal riches and comforts which are easily within reach dim the spiritual vision of the saints and hearts grow cold. Likewise, when rejection, persecution, and privation seem to deny access to worldly things, hearts are turned to God, spiritual life prospers, and the church expands.

2. In the Old Covenant, blessings and cursings were all realized in outward things, the carnal or material. Political peace, material prosperity, and physical health, which were only types and figures of **spiritual realities** to be realized in the New Covenant, were the only things counted as evidence of God's approval. In the New Covenant, we are admonished and conditioned to seek for those inward spiritual realities, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The possession or lack of outward things is completely irrelevant to the health and strength of the church.

God judicially dealt with His outward people under the Old Covenant corporately, not individually. He would judge a whole family according to the behaviour of one person. The sins of the fathers were visited upon the children, those of the priest upon the church, and those of the king upon the whole nation. With the advent of the New Covenant, all this was changed: "*In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity*" (Jer. 31:29-30 . . . see also Ez. 18) Jesus affirmed this contrast between Old Covenant corporation and New Covenant individualism in Luke 16:16: "*The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it*" (emphasis mine). This personal and individual treatment even applies **within** a particular local church: *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I . . . Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white . . . Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him . . .* "Reformed churches ignore this radical departure, and bind people with a Covenant Theology nonexistent in the early church, but which was revived in Roman Catholicism. Covenant Theology also accounts for the evangelistic expansion mentality of Reformed churches. It employs the "top down" tactic. "Convert the king, the nation will become Christian, and the people will all fall in line." "If the father becomes Christian, his children are included in the Covenant." Accordingly, Reformed people are conditioned to concentrate on the powerful, the wealthy, the intellectual, the gifted, the leaders, "movers and shakers," the shapers of society. When these impressive leaders become Christian, they exert their carnal powers to "Christianize" the whole of society and bring the lower class masses along with them. Nothing could be more contrary to the spirit of the New Testament. Here, God has chosen "*the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love Him*" (James 2:5) "*Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; . . . That*

no flesh should glory in his presence . . . and . . . That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (I Cor. 1:26 – 2.5).

3. It should be immediately evident that this outward oneness of the church and state, a Covenant Theology that Christianizes a whole people under their leaders, guarantees an impure mixture of believers and unbelievers. As the Hebrew theocracy included the unbelieving majority within the believing remnant, so Reformed churches openly admit that their churches include **obviously** unregenerate persons (baptized infants, openly wicked “covenant children), even professed unbelievers. Not only do they admit this, but vigorously contend for an impure communion, and violently war against the “Donatist and Anabaptist heresy” of a regenerate church. That the professing churches include false professors and hypocrites, no one denies. But it is one thing to endure this unavoidable imperfection, and quite another to deliberately assert that people who give no evidence or make no profession of being regenerate are nevertheless bonafide church members. No one can so much as **casually** read the New Testament and conclude anything other than the fact that the New Covenant church is something that Christ purchased in His death, was certain to be regenerated, converted and sanctified by His Spirit, to be perpetually kept by the power of God through faith, and finally glorified. The church is the *ecclesia*, the **called out, the separated, and none other** (Romans 8:29-30).

In the last flyer we remarked briefly on considerable misplaced reverence for, and undue credit given to the Protestant Reformation in church history. In the course of those remarks it was stated that the Reformation was no reformation, that the 18th century “Revivals” were not revival, and that the church that Jesus promised, and brought into being by His redemptive work and endowed with the Holy Spirit, has never needed, nor will ever need either reformation or revival. This has to be true as a matter of fact from the immutable word of God. The New Covenant has secured a people who will never fall away, and Christ has promised a church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail, sent a Comforter Who will never leave her. But a logical and altogether fair question now arises in the minds of saints who are distressed by the seeming apostasy of “the church” all about us, and even the spiritual weakness, error and sin that seems to prevail in many true churches. It is quite easy to say that we need a reformation or revival or both. But although both of these occurred under the Old Covenant, neither is promised the Lord’s New Testament church. Instead, we have the warnings and exhortations to the Seven Churches in Asia. Churches which find themselves in decline are not to pray for revival: they are told to repent, and to do their first works. They are told to judge sin among themselves, to discipline and purge and purify their membership, to recover what they have lost, to rid themselves of false teachings, and to hold fast and continue in the more-than-sufficient power, grace and means which the Lord richly endowed them with. To those who do not, He threatens spiritual extinction. He will “remove their lampstand.” They may continue in existence, but their lights will have been extinguished. How long will the Lord put up with decline before He abolishes such a church? No particular time frame is given, but the language of the scripture certainly gives the impression that such probation is short, “*I will come unto thee quickly.*” God reserves final judgment for the wicked until the last day, but in the New Covenant, He keeps short accounts with His people. For His children, the Father’s chastening rod will prove to be swift, sure and effectual. If it has been some years since a church lost its fervor and spirituality, it is almost certain that its lampstand has long been removed and all that remains is hollow religious form.

Finally, let us note that in the Old Covenant, apostasies and reformations occurred repeatedly over the centuries. Such a thing cannot be in the New Covenant. Hebrews 6:4-8, 10:26-31, tells us that departure from the faith is irremediable. Individuals will be given over to reprobation, and churches will disappear. The New Covenant church as an **institution**, and in its **universal** sense as the body of Christ, is permanent and invincible. Christ’s regenerate, blood-bought children are eternally secure, and shall never fall away or perish. But a **local church** is precariously impermanent, vulnerable to corruption, and may be wiped out at any time. Not one of those Seven Churches of Asia survives today. Every one of those Reformed churches planted by the Puritans in New England apostatized, and either disappeared or survive only as an empty shell in total darkness. That should not be surprising, when unregenerate “covenant children” are admitted into the membership, and pastors and leaders are qualified, not by their piety and spirituality, but by their intellect, “scholarship” and gifts. Hardly more than a couple of generations will suffice to leaven the whole lump. Every Reformed **denomination** as declined and apostatized, not a whit less quickly than other denominations with far weaker theology. Our hope of survival, spiritual vitality, and triumph, will not be found in becoming “Reformed,” or having a revival, but **repenting**, returning to our first love, seeking the face of the Lord, holding fast that which we have. And that must be done quickly.

-C.M.