

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

Revelation – Chapter 2

The Church at Pagamos & Thyatira – The Introduction of Paganism Into the Church
(In this particular class, there was a visitor, “Brother Strickland” who had apparently been involved with speaking to or teaching the Toccoa students in some fashion.)

Editorial Note: This is a lecture by Sidney Cox that was part of a series of lectures on the Book of the Revelation that he taught while on the theological teaching faculty at the Toccoa Falls Bible Institute during the early part of 1962. He was 75 years of age at the time.

During the latter part of his life, Sidney Cox had developed a close relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). CMA operates as a vast network of churches, similar to a “denomination.” Toccoa Falls Bible Institute was closely affiliated with the CMA, provided support to the Institute and the Institute sent many of its graduates into ministry within CMA churches. CMA and The Salvation Army, in which Sidney Cox served as an officer for 30 years previously in his life, share a similar theology and emphasis in Christian outreach.

From 1956 – 1960, Sidney and Violet Cox lived in Miami, Florida where Sidney was on the theological teaching faculty of the Miami Bible Institute, another CMA supported institution. They moved to Toccoa Falls, Georgia in 1960, where he served on the staff at the Toccoa Falls Bible Institute from 1960 – 1962.

As a lecture, he was obviously assuming that his students had prepared for class by reading and studying the pertinent scripture and other class material. Thus, his comments were not like a sermon, but lectures to enhance the students’ theological understanding. He emphasized a detailed study of the scripture and incorporated analysis that he gained from his study of Bible commentaries and books on the related subject matter. These lectures are remarkably free of any personal opinions, personal illustrations or “sermonizing” of any kind. While at other times in his career he was very much the preacher and evangelist, in these late-in-life roles of Bible Professor, he was very much the educator.

Lastly, it might be helpful to at least comment on the historical context in which these lectures were delivered. Many biblical scholars of that day associated some of what is found in the Book of Revelation with the Catholic Church – symbols of paganism, the movement of Satan/antichrist to establish one world church, etc. Many people viewed the Catholic Church with much skepticism and fear. Further, John F. Kennedy had just been elected the first Catholic president of the United States in 1960. His election was quite controversial and many non-Catholics were concerned about Kennedy’s catholic background. Elements of these concerns and mindset are found in these lectures. In 2008, many of these fears have been discredited and some would find them to be offensive and intolerant, but they were quite prevalent and not at all unusual in 1962.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

...to that letter or message to the Church at Pergamos. Now, you will remember that this is the next step along the line. We've been watching this second section of the Book of Revelation. By the way, could we have this to...thank you very much, John. Isn't it nice to have a student who can do work like that? It surely is. We're so proud of it. We surely are, we don't do a lot of fussing about it, but we do like it and like it very much indeed.

Now, the second section of this book has to do with these messages to the churches, the seven churches, who were actual churches, and the picture of our Lord in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks is not all together a fanciful thing. It does have that phase about it, of course. But here He is in the midst of them holding them in His hand, and the message is to the angel of the church at this and that and the other, is the second section.

The first section of the Book of Revelation, "The things thou hast seen," - and we get that in Chapter 1.¹ The second one, "The things that are," - and the things that are, have to do, not merely with a message to particular churches, but it does give us a picture of the development of the church age. Each one seems to have some reference to a particular period in the history of the church. Now, I don't think we need to fall over backwards about that and make a major issue of it. But we would be very foolish indeed if we did not observe it. It is there, and great men have seen it all the way through. And it is a remarkable thing to find how each of these letters to the churches seems to describe a particular period of church history.

Ephesus, with the rise and then the fall, and the fading away of first love, and the intrusion of false doctrine, Nicolaitans coming in, and Balaamism coming in, and so on. You'll find this kind of thing coming in. Then you find the next one that describes the period of great suffering, where the Church at Smyrna is a suffering church and in spite of its poverty and persecution and that sort of thing, the Lord refers to it as a church, rich and gives us that rather strange three fold recipe for spirituality. It's a strange thing. Will somebody tell me what that three fold recipe was?

Students answer: Works, tribulation and poverty.

Works, tribulation and poverty - that's a rather strange recipe for spirituality. But that's the way we see it in the Church at Smyrna, or the Church at Smyrna, we find this.²

Now, when you go beyond that, you find you're turning a corner when you get to the message of the Church of Pergamos. You're turning a corner there, for persecution as we have seen it now begins to disappear. And instead of reproach there is the approval of everybody. Instead of being thrown out, they are now received. And here is a time of equal danger to the church, even though it may not be the outward problem that persecution is.

Don't forget that Satan always attacks in two ways: then and now; collectively and individually. First, by persecution. I wonder sometimes why he ever does that. I think it's one of the evidences that Satan is not as clever as we think he is, even though we may have exalted ideas about that, and rightly so.

¹ See Revelation 1:2.

² See Revelation 2:8.

But he has never learned that persecution does not accomplish his purpose; that always when persecution comes, growth takes place. It was always so. In the midst of the persecutions of the Church at Ephesus, the Word of God grew and multiplied greatly. And it's always so.

But when persecution fails, as it always does, then he approaches with the next point of attack, which is the sowing of seeds of doubt and false doctrine within, and always coupled with that is the connection between the church and the world. You will notice that in the Church at Ephesus the two things that marked it were: the name that was in the center, and always the mark of separation from the world. Now that was the mark of the Church at Ephesus.

If Satan can introduce some thought that casts a shadow over the glory of the name, and if he can bring about a connection between the church and the world, then how great is his victory, and that's always the path of his attack. It's always so, to connect an individual life with the world. If only he can get us connected with the world. The Lord Jesus Christ died to separate us from it. If only he can get these connections made again between our lives and the world; if only he can do it, how great a victory he has won. Now, he does it in a very subtle and clever way, and it almost brought catastrophe to the church.

In fact, it did for a period of almost 1500 years - the real light of the church was almost extinguished because of this thing. And the story of it begins in the letter to the Church at Pergamos, and it continues in the letter to the Church at Thyatira.³ By the time you get beyond that Thyatira period, you are then approaching what we speak of as the Reformation. We've got a period of five or six hundred years when the church and the world are married; and when the church and the world become one. And when the world comes in and takes charge of the church, and the church becomes the servant of the world, even though it thinks it may control the world, but it doesn't. And we find this. And it went on for years and years and years. And finally went into that dreadful period that is spoken of historically as the 'Dark Ages.'⁴ And you can find them pictured, these periods, you can find them pictured here in the letter to the Church at Pergamos, and also to the Church at Thyatira.

Don't forget, this period begins with the coming into power in Rome of the Emperor Constantine.⁵ Now, this is not merely an old fundamentalist conception of what happened in those days. This is born out by such great historians, for instance, as given in his history of the Roman Empire and all the rest of it. This is all born out there in the historical facts that you find all the way around. Constantine comes to the throne, and persecution ends. And whether he actually received within his own heart that which Christianity stands for or not, he certainly received it on the outside, and received it so emphatically that two things happened immediately. One, persecution ceased; and, the edict was given out that Christianity should then become the state religion of Rome. Now, that was almost the beginning of the

³ See Revelation 2:12 and 2:18.

⁴ "Dark Ages" is a term referring to the perceived period from 450 AD to 1000 AD of both cultural and economic deterioration as well as disruption that took place in Western Europe following the decline of the Roman Empire. The label employs traditional light-versus-darkness imagery to contrast the "darkness" of the period with earlier and later periods of "light".

⁵ Constantine was Roman Emperor from 306 to 337. Best known for being the first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine reversed the persecutions of his predecessor, Diocletian, and issued the Edict of Milan in 313, which proclaimed religious tolerance of Christians throughout the empire

end for the Christian church.

Can you imagine, without getting beyond the bounds where we ought to be, but can you imagine what happened to the Christian church? Here was this church that had been living underground for so long that every time they met together they were in danger of their lives? That this was the way in which it grew? And all the way through, they were surrounded by the cries of martyrs and the flowing of martyr blood. This is what the church knew. This was it, all the way through. And then suddenly, it all ends. And instead of them being persecuted, here they are praised. Persecution gives way to praise. They become now, recognized. Instead of being rebuked, they are now recognized. Can you imagine what happened to the Christian church itself when that happened?

Now, don't forget, and here is a question that I ask you more or less incidentally, and it was just as our class was finishing, what happened and what kind of a religion was that in the Roman Empire before this thing happened? What was the religion of the Roman Empire before Constantine proclaimed Christianity the state religion of Rome? What kind of a religion did they have? Well, it was paganism, yes, that's true. That's the covering word. It was the worship of idols.

But let's imagine what happened here. Here was a people of vast, almost unnumbered people, who had been pagans all the way through it. When we think of the Roman Empire we usually think of it's (inaudible) and its legions and its military power and all the rest of it. But back of it all, what about the religion of Rome? What about it? Scattered here and there in various places for don't forget that Rome is not merely this little boot shaped piece of land that sticks out into the Adriatic that we call Italy. That's only a very small part of the Roman Empire. They've got it here and there and everywhere. And here, religion has been everywhere.

Now, suddenly, with an edict from Rome, all of this must be banished. What's going to happen to the old heathen temples, for example? What's going to happen to them? Why these things have been the glory, religiously, of the world up to that time. Some of them have been among the seven wonders of the world, these great temples that are there. For instance, what's going to happen to the temples there in the City of Smyrna, where this great city is there and you find the temples at either end of their main street, and so on. What's going to happen to these heathen temples? Well, along with the edict came the word that the heathen temples were to be destroyed, and they were. And for a long period of time, one of the first marks of a religious change was the destruction of these heathen, pagan temples. Now, let's stop a minute and ask this.

And remember, these people had never seen anything else but pagan temples. They had been brought up for generations, and it has always been this; never any thought of anything else; no knowledge of anything else other than that which was symbolized by, and went on in these pagan temples. What did go on in these pagan temples? Well, we don't need to go into detail about that, but all you need to do is to stop a minute and visualize it. Here was this great congregation of priests. Here were these images and idols, and in the center of every one of them, while they manifested themselves in various ways, in the center of every last one of them was a woman with a supernatural child in her arms. Now, no matter where you look in paganism, that's what you see. You see a woman with a supernaturally conceived child in her arms, and you can go back as far as you please and find that that is so.

Now, what's going to happen to these priests? What's going to happen to this religion? What's going to happen to all of the pomp and ceremony and glory and that kind of thing that gathers around a priesthood, and gathers around the worship of idols in this particular fashion? What's going to happen? These people had never seen anything else, and suddenly, it must go. They don't know anything else. Here they are being brought in as Christians. Now, baptized in whole...in droves; whole cities coming in, because the edict had been given from the throne of Rome. And here they are brought in.

Constantine having a tighter grip on the army than anything else; issued the order that all of the Roman soldiers must now be baptized Christians, and whole regiments were baptized, all at the same time. And they are brought in. At that time, he was making awards and rewards to those who came and confessed Christianity and were baptized into the new state church of Rome. A white robe and twenty pieces of silver were given to them as a reward for becoming a Christian. And it happened with tens of thousands, and probably millions of people.

Now you see what a problem that raised. What's the Christian church going to do with this? What would any pastor do if suddenly there was an influx of pagans that came into his church and swamped the thing. Supposing this pastor here had five hundred of them that came in and wanted to join his church all one Sunday morning. Why, the thing is impossible. And yet, here it is, right before.... What are you going to do with them? How are you going to fit Christianity into a situation like that? These people didn't know anything else but priesthood. And now, the inevitable thing happens.

When Christianity is proclaimed as the state religion of Rome, into it is introduced these things that were seen in paganism on the outside. These pagans, now professing Christians, must have a priesthood. And the consequence was that priest-craft within the church grew and grew and grew, and whenever you find priest-craft growing within the church, you find the church in the grip of it; and not only the church in the grip of it, but the community in the grip of it too. And this vast group of priests that arose there to minister the things of Christianity, if you please.

What are they going to do with this old idea of theirs that had been there for generations, that in the center of any religion, there ought to be a woman with a child in her arms? What are you going to do about that? Are you going to ignore it? Well, you can't ignore it. They won't let you ignore it. They're not going to let you ignore it. What are you going to do about the incense and the pomp and ceremony and all the rest of it? These pagans, now brought in, bribed in, ordered in, these pagans of this kind, what are they going to do without pomp and ceremony and great robes and all the rest of it, and incense and the rest of the stuff that goes with it? What are they going to do without it? They couldn't breathe without it.

And the result is, that introduced into Christianity as the result of this, were the hallmarks of paganism, and you could see it everywhere as this state church grew. There was its priesthood. There was its ceremonies. There was its flowing robes. There were the priests with their fish-shaped hats, just like they used be out there in paganism. And here it is. Every single mark of it comes from pagan source. Are they going to observe sacred things of Christianity or are they going to take the sacred things of Christianity and mix them up with the pagan ceremonies that they had been used to? And the result is that great Christian moments became paganized, such things as Easter and Christmas, and the rest of them. And they all became paganized, all of them.

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Now, let's have a look at another problem. What are they going to do to accommodate these people? Here, they haven't had any churches before. There had been no church buildings before. But all these pagans had been used to worshipping in a church building, a great cathedral. This was the place. They didn't know anything else. What were they going to do now? Do you think that these pagans were going to be content to belong to a group and worship as the Christian church used to worship?

Go and look at the church at Colossae, for instance. Go and look at the church meeting in the home of Philemon. Take a look at it and see. What would they do? What was the church like in the home of Philemon or anywhere else? What did it look like? It was simply a group of believers sitting in a little quiet circle with the Holy Spirit in charge; and somebody giving a word here, a word of testimony here, or a tongue here, or an exposition somewhere else; and the Holy Spirit graciously and kindly in charge of it all; and the harmony of united hearts.

What did these pagans know about that? Do you think they were going to be satisfied with that sort of thing? Oh, no. They were going to demand that attached to this state religion should be all the hallmarks of the thing they had been used to. Of course they would, of course they would. What would they do? What would they do? Could they get on without a priesthood? The answer is no. Could they get on without all these things? The answer is no. They had no intention of getting on with them. But what are you going to do with them? The old pagan temples are now being broken down. What are you going to do with them? What?

Well, you don't have to stop very long to answer the question. There was something else in every community besides pagan temples. In every community there was a meeting place, a forum where great debates and discussions and public events were all taking place. The basilica of the old, ancient cities was there. The temple had gone - the pagan temple, broken down. Where are they going to meet? They're going to meet in the basilica, and so these public buildings were made centers of so-called Christian worship.

Now what did they look like? Well, these basilicas were buildings, oblong in shape, with one end of it a raised platform, and in the center the one who would be controlling whatever was going on; the chairman of the meeting or the person who was handling the debate, would be right in the center of it on a raised platform there. And if you cared to look, you can see the shape of the average church. It's just like that. It wasn't like it in the first place. The average church didn't meet in a church at all.

How did this transformation come, this change from a little group sitting around in the home of Philemon or somebody else? - a little group of believers. What caused the change? Why is it that we have to have a building with this and that and the other? Why? It's because, out of this change, this pattern appeared all the way through. And you can find it there - somebody controlling it. Here are the people who are listening. And when you would visualize the priest in charge of it all and the people listening; and you can see what was happening there; and that was the way in which, for the time being, the crowd that now became enforced, ordered, bribed Christians were taken care of.

Now, what's going to happen with a thing like that? Here's the world in the church. It isn't any different now? The world is the church, and the church is the world. There isn't any difference. And

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Satan's master stroke that almost destroyed the Christian church, was to marry the Christian church to the world, and the world to the Christian church; and the progeny of that horrible union has been plaguing and cursing the world ever since. That's what happened.

And that's what happened in this church in this place and in this time that we call the Church at Pergamos - where Satan's seat is; where Satan's program is being carried out; where Satan's throne is, from which, perhaps in the shadows, he's controlling this thing. And as you look at it, you can almost hear the Satanic chuckle that must have come from that center, wherever it is and whatever it is, where Satan speaks. What a laugh that was. And it almost ruined the Christian church.

Now, of course, a pagan church like this, now become nominally Christian, meeting in pagan buildings with pagan performances going on, and with the priesthood in control, for that's the thing that happened right away. What's going to happen there? Do you think they're going to be controlled by the Bible? - because everything in the Bible condemned that. There wasn't one sign in the Bible of a church like this. You can't have a Bible in a church like that. What are you going to do with it? What? You can't be controlled by the Bible. And so, you've got to take the Bible and you've got to put it outside somewhere or other. And if it appears at all, it's going to appear controlled by the church.

It isn't the Bible that controls the church. The Bible would have destroyed a church like that. The only way in which Bible and church can live in the same world, a church like that, is for the church to control the Bible; and to say you mustn't read your Bible except as the church tells you to read it; and you are to read into it and out of it what the church tells you to read into it and read out of it. How could it be otherwise? How could it be otherwise? And so the Bible is pushed into a secondary position and the church assumes control of it.

Now, what's going to happen now in another way? Don't forget that the procedures of a church like that, the methods, the decisions, the things they decide to do, could not be found in the Bible. You can't find a controlling priesthood in connection with the New Testament church. You can't find a group of decorated pagans with fish-shaped hats and golden robes and all the rest of it controlling a crowd of believers. You can't find a sign of it in the New Testament. What are they going to do? What? Controlling bishops? Controlling elders? What are they going to do? You can't ignore the Bible. It's there, unfortunately. I think they would have destroyed it if they could, but they didn't.

But what they have to do now is to make the Bible jive with the church. And if there is some things that they are doing, not in the Bible, they will make a dogma that will justify what they are doing and make it as sacred as the Word of God. That's the only thing they could do. For instance, if as years go by, they are going to take one bishop and elevate him higher and higher and higher and higher, until he becomes the Vicar of Christ on earth, and the controlling one, and then if eventually they're going to make him infallible - remember, they only did that seven hundred years ago or less than that. What are they going to do about it? Where are they going to find justification for that? They can't.

And so into this church is introduced something as well as the Bible - the dogmas of the church to justify unscriptural actions all the way through. Now that's the thing you can see happening in the Church at Pergamos. It's a dreadful situation that you find - a terrible business, and it almost ruined the Christian church.

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Notice if you please, something that has happened. In that Church at Ephesus, I was going to say, an incidental remark (you know how I use that word) is made at the end of the letter, "The deeds of the Nicolaitans which I hate."⁶ Now, as far as we can find out, the word translated, 'Nicolaitans,' and there is a mystery about it, but as far as we can find it means 'the control of a priestly group over the congregation or the laity.' - the priest in control and the people controlled. Now, here was a group right in the time of the Church at Ephesus who were wanting to introduce a priestly craft. Now you can't find that in the Bible, but by the time the Church at Pergamos appears, it is not the deeds of the Nicolaitans that you find, it's the doctrine of the Nicolaitans that you find. Now, how a deed become a doctrine? Now, notice the pattern of it.

A deed must have a doctrine to support it. And the result is that all the way through you will find church dogmas to justify a deed that is forbidden in the Holy Scriptures. And you find it over and over again. If you can't find it in the Bible, then we must make a church dogma. And the church dogma must be of equal, if not superior authority to the Word of God. And this is the thing that you find all the way through. This is the thing that is happening. The church must now take the first place and the Word of God the second place. It isn't what the Word says anymore, it is what the church says. Now, you can't find any single thing that is going on from that time on through this dreadful period that can be justified in the Word of God - the gradual elevation into a position of Godhead of this woman with the child in her arms. You can't find one single sign of it.

I sometimes think, Brother Strickland, that the most embarrassed person in heaven, if she's there, is the woman who bore after the flesh the Son of God as her child. I think she's the most embarrassed person in heaven when she looks down upon this idiotic world in which we live and see what insanity has done to her; where they have dared to elevate her until she is equal with God; until now we've got a Godhead with four persons in it. We haven't got a trinity, we've got a quartet now in the Godhead. And it's Father, Son, Holy Ghost and Virgin Mary, all on the same level, all with the same attributes, every last one of them that are there.

Yes?

From the audience: They're trying now to put her above Jesus.

Yes, that's right. That's the inevitable thing, of course. They begin with one thing, one thing leads to the next - she must be born immaculately. When they begin to talk about the 'Immaculate Conception' they're not talking about the immaculate conception of Christ, they're talking about the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. She wasn't conceived like other people. She was born supernaturally. And if you have a person that's born supernaturally, they can't die supernaturally. They can't die at all. Our Lord couldn't have died unless He, Himself, had given permission. He stepped into death. Death didn't step into Him. He controlled that situation. It wasn't that He died because He was like others, not at all. Oh no, not at all. Here's this woman. If she is now supernaturally conceived, then she can't die like other people. And so the next dogma that comes along is that she is raised and resurrected and ascended up into glory, without dying as others do. And it follows naturally, of course, it follows

⁶ Revelation 2:6

naturally, and so there are vast numbers of folks who are vastly more interested in the woman than in her child.

I heard a great preacher once say, as we passed a Roman Catholic church, with the inevitable figures outside, a big Mary and a little Jesus. And he shook his head sorrowfully, “A big Mary and a little Jesus.” And you've got to justify that. You can't find that in the scripture. Consequently, it must come from dogma. And all the time you find, this is the thing that's going on. And here, you hear the echo of it, and the sound of it, and find the dimensions of it, and the description of it in the letter to the Church at Pergamos and in the letter to the Church at Thyatira. And this is the thing that you can find all the way through. Lot is now in Sodom and here you find him. Here you find it all the way through.

One other thing is mentioned there, and that is the doctrine or the deeds and the name of Balaam is introduced. What was it that Balaam did? What? - this false prophet. What was it? And this false prophet knew a lot that was very true. Everything he said was not incorrect at all. A great deal of it was quite correct. But what was it that Balaam did? Was it not Balaam who with Balac contrived to get the children of Israel and the people of the pagan nations mingled together in unholy connection? And it all happened while the children of Israel were resting instead of going on their journey. It all happened. And here was paganism and the children of Israel, all united together, mixed up together, in this unholy thing and God hated it. And quietly, God still hates it.

Now here you've got the center of it, and you can let your minds go historically if you please, and you can trace it from the time that Constantine came to that throne until the time a voice began to thunder and you find men like Martin Luther and the rest of them rising up out of the ashes of the Devil's Millennium. A thousand years he has this. And you can find men rising up again out of the ashes, new life begins to come, the dry bones begin to shake. And after you get by this horrible period, you find yourself facing what could have been, and what was for a considerable time, the glory of the Reformation. It wasn't all glory, not by any means, but you find yourself facing this.⁷

Isn't it strange to think that all this was known and that all this can be read and seen and pictured in these letters to the Churches at Pergamos and Thyatira? And after a while you begin to see raindrops descending and the sun begins to shine again, and a flower or two begins to bloom on the dunghill of

7 The Protestant Reformation was the European Christian reform movement that established Protestantism as a constituent branch of contemporary Christianity. It began in 1517 when Martin Luther published The Ninety-Five Theses, and concluded in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia that ended years of European religious wars. The Protestant Reformation began as an attempt to reform the Catholic Church, effected by Western European Catholics who opposed what they perceived as false doctrines and ecclesiastic malpractice — especially the teaching and the sale of indulgences, and simony, the selling and buying of clerical offices — that the reformers saw as evidence of the systemic corruption of the church's hierarchy, which included the Pope. Martin Luther's spiritual predecessors included John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, who likewise had attempted to reform the Catholic Church. The Protestant Reformation began on 31 October 1517, in Wittenberg, Saxony, where Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences to the door of the All Saints' Church. The theses debated and criticised the Church and the Pope, but concentrated upon the selling of indulgences and doctrinal policies about purgatory, particular judgement,

religion, for that's what it had become as time went by.

Now children, you've been very nice to let me go on and just talk to you a little bit, and you haven't asked many questions for which I've been thankful this morning, and we've been looking at certain things. Look at it again. Don't forget it. Don't forget it. It hasn't disappeared. You live in a world where the thing is all the way around you. Don't forget what you're looking at, and don't forget what you're listening to, however plausible it may be. And don't forget that when you find a crowd coming out of New Delhi or somewhere else, and they're looking forward once more to the union of a great church that is now united regardless of who's in it, and the next step is along the line is to unite it with Roman Catholicism, and you can find this old picture all coming back again. The Lord help us to see what kind of a world we live in.

Our Father, we pray for Thy blessing upon us as we bring this class to a close. We give Thee thanks again for the presence of our brother, who has been such a help to us, and whose presence brightens our hearts. We pray for him and for every one of us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(audio ends)