

Jesus is Lord!!!

To The Seven Churches I Write



Jake Steele
April 14, 2016

For the Glory of God and the Edification of His Church...

Introduction

The letters are broken up into several levels. The first is that they were actual churches of their time, and archaeological findings have confirmed this. Since there were many much bigger churches during this time such as the church at Jerusalem, Corinth, and Rome, I would have to speculate that these seven Churches were a cross-cut representation of major issues that all churches may encounter. The second level are the warnings that Christ gives to the seven churches. Each of the letters has this very important phrase “Hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. Notice it is not singular “church” but plural “churches”, which tells us these messages were for every church in existence during John’s time. Also, once we understand these messages we can see seven very distinct profiles of Christianity. The next level is that these messages are for every Christian and church that has ever existed. Notice he says “He that hath an ear let him hear...” This tells us that anyone with an “ear” to “hear” should heed his admonishments to the seven churches. To put this in perspective, has anyone ever heard a message on a Sunday morning and say “Golly gee Ma, I wish so-and-so would have been here because she could have really needs that message”. I know I have, and this is where many of us get in trouble because they think the messages to the seven churches are for everyone else, and not ourselves. So as we go through these messages, I pray God will open our hearts so HE can speak to us. The next level is the prophetic level because if you study church history you will see that the church went through all the stages listed in Revelation 2-3. This kind of accuracy cannot be manmade, but can only be inspired by God. The final level are the promises, however the promises are not just handed out. Each time a promise is mentioned there is the condition of “He who overcometh...” Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 24:13 when he said “But he that endure unto THE END, the same shall be saved”. For us to obtain the end time promises then we must be faithful and overcome everything that comes our way, even if it means our very lives.

The next thing about the messages to the seven churches are the key elements of each message. The first thing we see is the name of the particular church, and the meaning of the name (along with the message) is very important because it will set the tone of the letter. The second element is how Jesus “titles” himself, because each title is chosen specifically for that church (and will give us more insight to that church). Next, we see how Jesus commends each church for what they are doing right. This is important, because we can learn a lot from this alone as parents, employers, and as Christians. The next time you decide rip someone apart, it would be a good to tell them what they have done right first. The fourth element are the “admonishments” that he gives each church. Note that not all churches received rebuke, so understanding why the ones who didn’t is just as important as understanding why certain churches did. Next, after rebuking (or in some cases not) we will see that Christ exhorts a good condition of the church. This helps to rebuild their confidence in what they are doing correctly. The sixth element in the messages is the promises to those who overcome (and this could be an eBook all in itself). Not only does Christ rebuild us after we are admonished, he gives us gifts if we do what he says!! What a GREAT GOD we serve. The final element is always “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches”. The hear is not just to hear it, but to give heed and go what it says. If I said I would give you a million dollars, but you never acted on it and came and got it, would you have a million dollars? Not a chance, and this is how we are to receive the messages to the seven churches.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:9 “who hath ears to hear, let him hear”, which tells me that hearing is crucial if we want to follow Christ, but hearing his words is not enough. “Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:47-49). In these perilous times we need a strong foundation, and nothing is stronger than hearing and doing the Words of Christ.

John and the Last Days

John wrote the book of Revelations around 95 AD, which was approximately 60 years after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Both Peter (by crucifixion) and Paul (who was beheaded) had been killed 30 years prior to the writing of this book, and John was the only original member of the twelve disciples still alive. John starts out in Revelation 1:3 by telling that “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand”. So according to John, the time of Revelation is at hand but this was 2000 years ago. There are three basic premises as to when the last days started, so we will examine each and see how they may or may not fit with the word.

The first position states that the last days started when Jesus started his ministry. However, this would mean that the last days have been going on for 2000 years which is possible because 2 Peter 3:8 says that “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”. However, if this is the case then why would Jesus say to the church at Smyrna “These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive”. Apparently, Jesus is speaking of his death and resurrection so we can easily reason that the last days could not have started till after he was resurrected and not when he started his ministry (since he still had the choice whether or not to go the cross). The second premise states that the last days started when Israel became a nation (Matthew 24:32-34). Jesus did say that the generation that sees Israel become a nation WILL be the generation that will see his return so this position has lots of merit. In addition, Jesus went on to say that “this generation (the one that sees Israel become a nation) shall not pass, till ALL these things be fulfilled”. So what things is Jesus talking about? He is referring to Matthew 24:1-31, which is the tribulation that we as Saints will go through. Due to these factors, we can say that this position about the last days is very plausible. Finally, many think the last days will start sometime after the year 2000 which is the beginning of the 7th millennium. The number seven means divine perfection, completeness, or something that is finished so the seventh millennium could easily be the last days. So which one is right? The following are my views, and you can agree or disagree with them but this is how I see the last days. I believe that the last days started when Jesus ascended into heaven. In addition, I feel that we are THE generation that will see his return because of Israel becoming a nation again in 1948. Finally, I believe we are in the very last days because we have entered into the seventh millennium (the year 2000). So if we are the last generation then we need to figure out how long a generation is.

In biblical times a generation was all over the board from over 900 years (pre-flood) all the way down to 38 years, but we need to know what a generation is in today’s numbers (since we do not

live in biblical times). Today the average life expectancy on average is 68.5 for males and 73.5 for females, which gives us an average age of 71 years (this is according to the UN World Population Prospects 2012 revision). So if a generation today is 71 years old, then the approximate (I am in nowise claiming Jesus is coming back on any date or year) return year is around 2019 (1948 + 71years). However, I said the average was 71 which means some people of this generation will live to be much older so the actual year is speculative. However, as we have seen over the last 6 ½ years, and even more so in the last 7 months the world has gone up in flames. Things in America that we thought would never happen (gay marriage and the pursuit to destroy Christianity) has hit this country like a freight train from hell. All this being said, we can almost certainly say we are in the final days before our Saviors return so we must be wise virgins and be ready...

Prologue

In Revelation 1:9-11 John makes it clear where his prophetic vision comes from when he writes “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea”. The entire vision was to be sent to each of the seven churches, so that each church would know how Jesus felt about not just them but the other churches as well (there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed). In addition, every church would know about the other churches issues which would help them so they would not fall into the same traps. Finally, each of the churches would see the rewards that would be given to those who overcome and endure until the end. This is something we need to know today because God does not want us in the dark about what is coming, and he wants all his children to have access to the same information. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus describes himself the “First” and the “Last”? The Greek word for “first” is “protos”, which is where get our modern day word “prototype”. Anyone working in engineering or design will know that a prototype is the original build or idea, and sets the bar for everything that comes after it to make sure they conform to the original. In other words Jesus was OUR prototype of how we are to live, and yes someday maybe die. Romans 8:29 tells us that “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). The word “last” comes from the word “eschatos”, which means the end of the line. This can be viewed as “Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”, or as Jesus being the highest level than can be achieved. This being said, we must always pattern ourselves after Christ, and not each other for an incorrect ruler leads to incorrect measurements and inaccurate results.

John said “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Rev. 1:17-20). In this verse the Lord divides Revelations into three sections, which are the things John has seen (chapter 1), what is now (chapters 2 and 3), and those that will take place later (chapters 4-22).

The fact that the Lord is seen standing in the midst of the seven lampstands shows us that Christ has direct involvement with the 7 churches, and it is Christ himself who holds the seven stars in his right hand which speaks of the intimate relationship He has with its leaders. Whether you see them as the pastors or as angelic messengers, the fact remains that He has them in the palm of His hand.

The seven churches in Revelation 2-3 are a great insight into how God views the Church and Christians today because they were not just written to the churches of the day, but for anyone that "hath an ear let him hear". The reason these messages are so vital for us today is that we can use them to measure where we are in Christ, and they act as a warning system in case we are committing the same transgressions that these churches were. As we all know, we are in the beginnings of the final tribulations on earth, and soon the wrath of God will fall on this planet like never before. In the case of the 7 churches it does not matter if you believe in a Pre, Mid, or Post-Tribulation rapture because in Revelation 1:3 it says "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand". This book is for everyone who is born of God because "all scripture is given by inspiration of God... that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). So we as professing Christians need to "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). As we look at these seven churches we need to keep our eyes wide open to see what God is telling us, because he goes into great detail about the issues of each church. In addition, these "issues" are very much alive in today's churches so we need to heed the warnings and see where we are and if there is something that we need to repent from. The only real and true way that we can examine ourselves is by using the Word of God, because it is the ruler that we will be judged by.

As we read all the letters to the Churches it is imperative that we remember that in Revelations 1:4 John wrote that "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne", or in other words these letters are for everyone that hears them, not just the seven churches.

I found this to be interesting math ...

Paul signed 13 epistles

Three of these had "duplicate" addressees: Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Timothy
So $13 - 3 = 10$ addressees.

Of the remaining 10, three were addressed to individuals: Titus, Timothy, and Philemon.
So $10 - 3 = 7$.

Paul wrote to seven churches.

To the Church at Ephesus

History

The name Ephesus means “desirable” or “the desired one”. Ephesus was a bustling town, and with its artificial harbor made it the most accessible city in Asia. In the New Testament times Ephesus had a population of about 250,000, and it was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire coming in behind only Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. It was connected to the sea by a huge harbor, and connected to the inner parts of Asia by a network of roads. With its great access, it was a natural magnet that drew political and religious groups from all over the known world. Also, when Christians were brought from Asia to Rome to be killed in the Coliseum by lions they had to go through Ephesus, and this is why Ignatius called the road from Ephesus to Rome the “Highway of the Martyrs”. Paul went to Ephesus many times to preach to the Jews and about things of the Kingdom of God. However, Ephesus was known for his huge amount of wizards, sorcerers, witches, astrologers, diviners, and palm readers. After hearing Paul preach many burned their books “so the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:19-20), but many Ephesians still worshipped their main idol which was Diana.

The Temple of Artemis (Diana was her Roman given name) at Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the Ancient world. According to lore, she was the twin sister of Apollo, and the daughter of Zeus. She was also known as the goddess of hunting, the moon goddess, and the patroness of young girls. Her image was housed at the temple on Ephesus, and was said to have come directly from Zeus (Acts 19:35). The temple that held her image was actually four times larger than the Parthenon, and during the Roman period they even had coins that had the inscription “Diana of Ephesus” imprinted into them. She was to some the embodiment of female principles from fertility to the one day eternal return of life to the earth. With all this idol worship it is no wonder that Ephesus would be a magnet for so many false teachers and apostles. However, The Temple of Diana was also the center for prostitution and an asylum for criminals. The priestesses of Diana were also prostitutes, and were known as the Prostitutes of Babylon. Paul gave the Christians at Ephesus a dire warning so that they would be ready when false teachers would try and draw them away from the faith. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you over-seers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

To the Church at Smyrna Write:

- 1) Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;
- 2) I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:
- 3) And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.
- 4) Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.
- 5) 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.
- 6) But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Chapter 2 Verse 1

The seven golden candlesticks represent the seven churches that John was told to write to. This verse also shows us that it is Jesus himself who holds the seven stars (the messengers to the churches) in his right hand, and it is Jesus who walks among them which shows Christ's intimacy with these Churches. In addition, Jesus establishes that he is dictating every word that John wrote. Once we realize that it is Christ himself delivering the messages to the Churches we can then understand that he doesn't just want us to read them, but he wants us to understand and heed these warnings as well. This speaks to the power and love of Christ that he would not only give us warnings (and a chance to repent), but also that would give so many amazing promises to those who endure till the end. As lampstands he also reminding us that we are the light of the world, and if our light is snuffed out then what good are we? This is why trusting in the Lord is so important, and understanding the spiritual nature of these letters is equally important. We live in perilous times, and understanding Satan's traps is more now than ever before.

Chapter 2 Verse 2-3

In these two verses Jesus shows what the Church of Ephesus was doing correctly. He says that he knows their work, labor, patience, and that they have not grown weary in their good works. In other words, they were a very evangelical church. He commends them for not listening to false apostles and finding them to be liars, which means they did not allow false teachers to come into their congregation. So far, Ephesus sounds like a great Church, and in many ways it was but why? First, the Word tells us that works are very important to the Kingdom of God and a sign of a changed person. In Matthew 5:16 it says to let our light shine so that the world can see our good "works" and give glory to the Father. Also, in James 2:26 it says "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead". We must remember that we are saved by grace and not by works, but an outward sign of an inward change are the works of Christ in our lives. If we are going to name His name, then our actions must line up with the Word of God. However, we must also understand that they will not all change overnight but that is still no excuse to commit sin. Did you ever hear the phrase "We are a work in progress? That is absolutely correct, but we cannot use that as an excuse to sin (Romans 6:15). Secondly, they did not allow false teachers to come and teach in their Church or in their homes. 2 John 1:10 (NIV) says "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them". What teaching? "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 1:9). So God is telling us that anyone who does not abide in the doctrine of Christ should not be allowed in our home or even welcomed. This may seem harsh, but once you let them in your home then you have allowed the spirits who control them into your home as well. There are many warnings about false prophets and teachers, and here are just a few ...

Romans 16:17-18 (ESV) – "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve"

Matthew 7:15-16 (ESV) – “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves... You will recognize them by their fruits”

2 Timothy 4:3-4: (ESV) – “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching”

So if the Church of Ephesus has good works and didn't tolerate false teachers then what was their issue? Jesus states it clearly in verse four “Thou hast left thy first love.”

Chapter 2 Verse 4

I can hear them now; “Lord I have taught Sunday school for 40 years”... And “Lord I have lead the choir for 50 years”... And “Lord I have been the Pastor here for 80 years”. However, the Lord told us in 7:21-23 that “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” While many will clap and shout AMEN at this point, personally this is one of the scariest verses in the New Testament to me. Imagine thinking your whole life that you were serving God and hitting the bullseye of God's will only to find out that you had left your first love. To know the Word is one thing, but to know the Author of the Word is another. So how do you know what your first love is? What occupies your thoughts? Many people have grown up in church, and had dads who were Pastors or moms who were Sunday school teachers so they naturally think they are born again too. Unfortunately, no one is ever grandfathered into heaven because of a relative or group association. In addition, Jesus is pointing out here that works in and of themselves are not good enough for anyone to obtain eternal life, and makes it clear when he says “You have left their first love”. Many people of Ephesus were no longer serving God with their heart, but only in their actions. In the same way that faith without works is dead (James 2:26), so too is are works dead without a “love” relationship with Christ. The story of Mary and Martha really brings home this fact. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha was running around doing her “works”, however Jesus told Martha when she complained that Mary wasn't helping said “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her”. From this exchange it is crystal clear that Jesus valued Mary's “wanting to be” with Jesus over Martha's “wanting to work” for Jesus.

Another aspect of Ephesus was that the temple of Diana was the center of prostitution in the region, and many could have left their “first love” for the love of the prostitutes, other sexual activities, or just sinning in general. If we think about the world today, there are many things that Christians have left their First Love for. In this busy run everywhere, I have to get it done now world we easily can forget to spend time with the person who is supposed to be the most important person to us – Jesus. Many people may not even know they have left their first love for sin or activities such as their job, family, TV, a hobby, online gaming, or even sporting events but regardless of the why Jesus clearly stated that where your “treasure is; therein lies your heart (Luke 12:24). However, for whatever reason a person leaves their first love does not matter, what does matter is that they left it. Have we left our first love? Is there ANYTHING in our lives more important than our relationship with Jesus? If so, then we need to fix it but how? Christ is always displeased when we put anything before him and even though we can make up a thousand excuses for why we did it... It is still SIN at the end of the day...

Chapter 2 Verse 5

“Remember from where they have fallen from, and repent and do the first works or he will remove their candlestick from its place, except they repent”. So what are the first works? The first works include repentance and making Jesus lord of your life!! Something very interesting is that Jesus brought up repentance not once, but twice in this verse. So what is repentance? In the Greek this word repent is “metanoēō”, which means to change one’s mind. This is not what most people think when they hear the word repentance because many of us have been told that is groveling or weeping and gnashing, but that is not repentance. I heard a man of God once say that there is nothing more powerful than a changed mind, and that is a 100% fact. When you change your mind about Jesus, you turn and do a 180 (true repentance), and this is what the Church at Ephesus is being told to do. TURN AROUND and MAKE ME LORD again. When I was in my desert time (as I call it) I remember clearly how I came back to Christ. I was sitting on my picnic table and said “God, I have messed up my life so bad but if you will take me back I am yours and will do whatever you want me to”. As I said, there is NOTHING more powerful than a truly changed mind because from that day forward I was NEVER the same again. There was no “sinner’s prayer” or 7 steps to repentance, and I didn’t have to grovel or do forty “Hail Mary’s”. However, I meant business and God met me right there on that picnic table; and Praise God he changed my entire destiny. If you are tired of what you have done with your life, then all you need to do is change your mind and make Jesus Lord again. So what would have happened if Ephesus hadn’t repented? He clearly states that he would “remove” their candlestick from its place, so does this mean that once you are saved, you may not be always saved? That is food for thought, but I would say this “why take the chance!” We know that God wants to have a loving relationship with us more than anything else. However, no matter how many times we attend church, teach Sunday school, sing worship songs, lift our hands, shout hallelujah, or feed the poor will make up for a life void of fellowship with the Father. In other words, become Mary and quit being Martha. The Christian life is not a onetime prayer experience, but a lifetime of spiritual warfare against Satan, sin, the world, and the flesh. While we will never win every fight, we must never just yield ourselves to our spiritual enemies. We need to remember that the more we overcome our enemies, the more we will overcome them the next time they come at us. If we have left our “first love” then our relationship at that point is broken and only repentance will reestablish the connection with our Heavenly Father! Are we ready to repent?

Chapter 2 Verse 6

Once again Christ commends the Church at Ephesus. He tells them that they have hated the deeds of a cult known as the Nicolaitans, which Jesus states he also hates. The exact origin of the Nicolaitans is unclear, but there are two major theories about who they were. The first one says that they were followers of the teachings of Nicolas who could have been a deacon in the early Church (Acts 6:5). According to this theory, he became part of a group who followed the doctrine of Balaam; who instructed by Balac to make Israel sin by putting a stumblingblock before them which included having them eat foods offered to idols, and by having them commit acts of sexual immorality. The Nicolaitans were an apostate group that believed for someone to be free from lust then they must submit to their sensual desires to overcome it, and they used these religious teachings as an excuse to pursue whatever sexual pleasures they desired. Their teaching also changed and perverted grace into legalism. The other theory says that the name came from the Greek word “Nicolah”, which meant “let us eat”, and they encouraged each other to eat food offered to idols. Either way, their actions were an abomination to God, and the

Church of Ephesus was extolled for hating their deeds. Even though many may condemn you for not having the “drippy love” they think you should have towards a person’s sin, remember Jesus commended Ephesus for “hating” the deeds of the cult. If you doing what Christ tells you then who cares what other people say, because Christ is the one who will judge us all. We will discuss this cult more when we get into the Church or Pergamos.

Chapter 2 Verse 7

The first thing in verse seven is “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”. Can you hear what the Spirit is saying to you? This is crucial because if you cannot hear him, how will you return to him? Jesus said my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27). Now is the time when we as Believers need to learn to hear his voice, for perilous times are just ahead. The second thing is a promise “to him that overcometh”, but what does overcometh mean? It the Greek overcometh here means to be victorious, or to hold the faith unto death against the power of foes, temptations, and persecutions. Going back to what we talking about before, we are not in a physical battle against flesh and blood, but against powers and darkness of this world. To defeat them we need to have the Armor of God, we must know God’s Word, we must have God’s Wisdom about how to use His Word, and we need to move when our Commander-In-Chief Jesus Christ tells us to move. Even though our faith may lead to our death we are still overcomers, and that’s a promise you can take to the bank. This is his promise to us who repent and overcome that we will get to “eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”. Where is this amazing tree? It is located IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PARADISE OF GOD!!! It is not on the outskirts or some vague place, but it is the center of Heaven. This is where we all want to be, but it is reserved for those who overcome. Have you left your first love? If so then it is time to repent and do the first works. God is not waiting to strike you dead, he is waiting to restore you as though you never left so why not change your mind today...

To the Church at Smyrna

History

The name Smyrna means “myrrh or death”. Myrrh is a resin, which was extracted from trees in Africa, India, and Arabia and used as an incense like frankincense, and in ancient times myrrh was so valuable that it was worth as much as gold. Myrrh was also used in the purification of women (Esther 2:12), as a perfume (Psalm 45:8), as a gift for Jesus when he was born (Matthew 2:11), and they mixed it with wine that they offered to Jesus on the Cross (Mark 15:23). Myrrh was also commonly used in burial because it could dry up moisture thus preventing the growth of worms. As an embalming spice, myrrh released its odor when crushed so the crushing of the Saints at Smyrna in the name of Jesus was a pleasant aroma to the Lord.

The city of Smyrna was approximately 35 miles NE of Ephesus, and it was a port city as well as a commercial center with a population of around 100,000. It was called the most beautiful of the seven cities, and it is still around today except it is now called Izmir Turkey. Smyrna dates back to 3,000 BC and it became known as the “Glory of Asia” because of its beautiful temples, harbor, and planned development. The temple of Tiberius was built in 26 AD, and it became the center of worship for the Evil Kings of Rome. The word “Catholic” was first used by Ignatius in a letter he wrote to the Church at Smyrna, however the most famous pastor of Smyrna was Polycarp (69-155AD) who when he refused to abandon his faith was burned at the stake. Christians were extremely persecuted in Smyrna, and many lost everything they owned because there was a group known as the 10%’ers who got 10% of the property seized from Christians that they turned over to the Romans. These people were non-Christians and often Jews who profited off the death of Christians so hunting Christians was commonly practiced. In 178 AD the city was destroyed by an earthquake, but it was rebuilt by Marcus Aurelius who ruled from 161-180 AD. It is said that from 100-313 A.D that 5,000,000 Christians were martyred, which was the greatest persecution of the Church ever known. During this time, Satan did everything he could to wipe the Church at Smyrna off the planet. Also, the Christians at Smyrna were persecuted by ten different Roman Emperors and the last ten years being a living nightmare for the Smyrna Church. However, the gospel spread faster during this period than any other period in history, and the more Satan persecuted this Church the more God’s Word spread!

To the Church at Smyrna Write:

- 8) And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;
- 9) I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.
- 10) Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.
- 11) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Chapter 2 Verse 8

In this verse, Jesus is described as the “first and the last”, and that “which was dead and is alive”. The Greek word for first and last here are “protos” and “eschatos”. The word “protos” is where we get our modern word “prototype” from, and the definition of prototype means “a first, typical

or preliminary model of something, especially a machine, from which other forms are developed or copied". In other words, a prototype is what all products of the same line are patterned after, so Jesus is the prototype for all Christians which why we should never pattern ourselves after each other. (Philippians 2:3-8, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 4:32, and 1 John 2:6). If we try and pattern ourselves even after the most righteous person we know (pastor or youth minister), we will always fail. After working in manufacturing for so many years I have seen this happen many times. When you begin to make a pattern of the prototype, and then begin to make patterns of that pattern you will eventually be so far off from the original prototype that the part you are trying to manufacture will not fit or work. So to avoid this, Christ made sure that we understand that He is the only should be who we pattern ourselves after for he will make us into who he wants us to be. Another danger here is spiritual "inbreeding". This happens when a Church is primarily dominated by a few families, and those families are the main people who show up. This is dangerous because this can turn into nepotism, which can lead to an uneven and large amount of power in a few Believers hands. For a Church to grow there needs to be a balance in the power structure of that particular Body. Next, the word "eschatos" carries the meaning of a finished product. So Jesus is not only our prototype, but he is what we will look like as his finished product. This is a great revelation because once you truly understand this, then Hebrews 12:2 "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." has much more MEANING and POWER!!! Many times we start out with Jesus as our "Lord" only to take the reins back and do our own thing. Even though we may not be in what Christians would call outright sin (drinking, cussing, or fornication), we must remember that Jesus must always be first because without him in that position we will not make it to the end. Simply put, the key to Smyrna's success was they kept Jesus first and foremost in everything they did and they never left their first love.

The word dead in this verse comes from the Greek word "nekros", which literally means someone who has breathed his last breath, and the word alive (zaō) means to be among the living, someone having true life, or having endless life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is telling us that he died, (not ceremoniously) but literally DIED so that he could pay the price for us so we would never have to see the second death or eternal hell. Not only did he die, but when he went to hell He took the keys of death and hell so his children need never fear death or hell again. In addition, if this wasn't enough Jesus also ROSE AGAIN!!! Because of this, Jesus has eternal life in the Kingdom of God, and where does Jesus reside? IN US!!! This is so amazing once we realized that we are "... (His) children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:17) then we know that HE has it all under control and we never EVER need to worry. In short, when Christ died and rose he gave us eternal life in the Kingdom NOW once we accept him, so does it matter what happens to us here? It shouldn't!! Since Christ was raised from the dead unto eternal life then so shall we also be raised from the dead, and we will FOREVER be with our Lord!!! "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). What is our soul worth? It was worth God sending his Son to die for us, which tells me that we are worth more than we will ever imagine to God!

Chapter 2 Verse 9-10

Smyrna as we showed was notorious for killing Christians, and not only were the Romans hunting them, but the Jews were turning them in for money. Once we understand this then verse nine and ten become crystal clear. What I find interesting is that Jesus knew this, and did not

intervene on their behalf, but why? Paul in Philippians 3:10-11 stated that “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead”. It was Jesus that said “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). Many people, especially those in America think they are “safe” from the coming storm of persecution, however a time is coming when Christians worldwide and in America will face it. During this period many will lose their lives for naming His name so God is giving us all time to prepare. Remember the 10 virgins? Are we preparing? (Psa. 20:7-8)

If we look closer at verse nine and ten Jesus says he knows their works, tribulation, poverty, the blasphemy of those that say they are Jews but are of the synagogue of Satan. This is a reference to the Hellenistic Jews who opposed the fact of Jesus Christ being the “Savior”. However, these Jews were deceived and as Paul stated in Romans 2:28-29 “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God”, so the real Jews now are ones who are Jews inwardly. In this verse Jesus is giving the Church at Smyrna “high praise” for what they are doing, and in verse ten he tells them to “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer because the devil SHALL cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried and have tribulation ten days, and that they should be faithful unto death.” People today are seeing the death of Christians over in Islamic countries and act surprised, and I have to ask myself why? Jesus clearly told us that this will happen and in Matthew 24:9-13 Jesus says “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another...And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”. Remember his warning to the church at Ephesus about leaving their “first love”? In Matthew 24:12 it is saying the same thing, and in verse thirteen he goes on to say that “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”. The word saved here is from the Greek verb “sō'zō”, which has many meanings such as keep safe and sound, rescue from danger or destruction, heal someone from disease, to save from the evils which obstruct the reception of the Messianic deliverance, and to deliver one from the penalties of the Messianic judgment. As we can see Jesus wants to deliver us from eternal damnation, heal our bodies, and keep us safe from death and destruction. However, we must remember that we may still be called to give our lives for the Lord but our spirits are forever HIS and Satan cannot have us!! As we can see from Matthew to Revelations Christ promises that we will live eternally with him IF we endure and are faithful to the end, and we know that God Never Lies! (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, Numbers 23:19) So be of good courage, for Jesus overcame all and He lives in each of us that belong to Him!

Chapter 2 Verse 11

If we remember the beginning of this section where Jesus says he is the first and the last, we can see that his promise in verse eleven is so incredible! Jesus promised the church at Smyrna that “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” We need to remember that the messages to the seven churches are also a message to us. So if we endure and overcome by continuing in Christian works, overcome tribulations, endure poverty, endure imprisonment, and endure to the end even if it means our life, then we WILL receive the crown of life and we will

not be hurt by the second death. Abraham had to endure with patience, and THEN he received the promise that God gave him (Hebrews 6:15). However, to endure as his body we need to encourage one another daily. Ecclesiastes 4:12 tells us that “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” and Acts 14:22 says that “...exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”. In these end times we will need each other like ever before. If we marginalize people because they aren't in our cliché or like “us” then we are committing outright sin against God because we are ALL His body, so let me ask you this... Will you cut off your nose to spite your face? Another lesson we can learn from the Church at Smyrna and is that Jesus already knows what we will ever go through, and He will always be there with us. So it doesn't matter if it is doing hard work, going through poverty and tribulation, or even dying for him; He is with us, ALWAYS even unto the end of the world! (Matthew 28:20)

To the Church at Pergamos

History

Continuing on our trek the next church was Pergamos, which was located 40 miles NE of Smyrna. The first part of the name Pergamos or “*per*” means improper, and “*gamos*” means marriage so “Pergamos” literally means “Improper Marriage”. Pergamos was located in the Roman province of Asia called Mysia in Caicus valley. The city was located three miles from the river, and one of the tributaries known as the Selinus flowed through the city and the other tributary called the Kteios ran along the walls of Pergamos. The early city was build on a cone shaped acropolis that was a thousand feet tall with steep perpendicular sides, which made the city an easily defensible fortress. After Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, Lysimachus left Philetaerus in charge and left him with 9,000 talents of God but Philetaerus decided to keep the money and make himself the ruler of Pergamum. Many evil kings ruled over the next few years in Pergamos, and they were worshipped as gods. However, Eumenes II was the most memorable king and during his reign the city reached its greatest height. During this time art and literature were encouraged, and the city library had 200,000 volumes which Antony would eventually give to Cleopatra. One of the biggest and most renown buildings in the town was the alter of Zeus, which was also one of the wonders of the ancient world. In 133 BC when Attalus III who would be the last Greek ruler died, he gave his entire kingdom over to the Roman government. His son Aristonicus try to retake it, but in 129 BC he was defeated and the Roman province known as Asia was formed and Pergamos was made its capital city. However, the term they used “Asia” was not the continent of Asia nor was it part of Asia Minor but it was simply the part of Asia Minor that the Romans controlled.

In Pergamos they worshipped four gods, which included Zeus, Dionysus, Athena and Asklepios. During this period the priests and physicians of Asklepios had a scam going on to make money. Invalids from all over Asia would come there and sleep in the court, and the “gods” would reveal to the priests and physicians in dreams the remedies needed to heal their diseases which gave many opportunities for the priests to deceive them. The priests used skills to make the people believe that people were getting healed, and this is how they made money. Pergamos was also called "Thrice Neokoros" meaning that in the city there were three temples built for three Roman emperors, and as we stated earlier they worshipped as gods. Pergamos was the main religious center of the region, but gradually as it grew it also became the political center. Eventually even the Jews that lived there assimilated into the Greek culture and even began using Greek names. Christianity came to Pergamos in the early days of the Church, and Antipas was the first Christian killed by the Romans and it was in Pergamos where he died. According to Revelation Pergamos is also known to be “where Satan’s throne is”, which could refer to the temples of the Roman emperors whom people worshipped in Pergamos.

During this period Satan was not winning his battle by persecuting and killing Christians, so he changed his tactics and decided to corrupt them from within (which was the same tactic used against Israel by Balaam). Constantine the Great, who ruled from 306 to 337 A.D. was the first Roman ruler to convert to Christianity. In the year 313 A.D. he issued a degree that gave religious tolerance to Christians. Even though Christianity soon became the state religion (which some believers liked), it also allowed for Roman pagan rituals and doctrines to influence Church doctrine (the way of Balaam) (2 Corinthians 6:14). The Church was never meant to have political

power on this earth but spiritual power, and to mixing the Church with politics was a dangerous game...

To the Church at Pergamos Write:

12) And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

13) I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

14) But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15) So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

16) Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Chapter 2 Verse 12

Jesus is described in verse 12 as “he which hath the sharp sword with two edges”. Revelation 11:15 also says that “...out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations...” From these two verses in Revelation we can see that Jesus uses a two-edge sword, and that the sword he is using is the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). We must also remember that Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14), and even when Satan came to tempt Jesus he had to use the Word to defeat him (Matthew 4:1-11). If Christ needed the Word of God to overcome Satan, then how can Christians not see that we also need to know the Word to overcome the enemy (Revelation 12:11, Ephesians 6:17). People like to say we need to “know” the Word of God, so in reality if Jesus is the “Word of God” then we need to know Jesus more to know God’s Word and know God’s Word more to know Jesus!! (Nice circular pattern indeed)

Chapter 2 Verse 13

In verse 13, Jesus states that he knows of their works and they dwell where Satan’s seat is. In addition, he says that they have held fast the name of Christ and have not denied His faith. Sounds pretty good, so what is the issue? Apparently the Church at Pergamos let things creep into their lives that shouldn’t be there, and in a sense they married themselves to those things.

Chapter 2 Verse 14-15

In the next two verses Jesus spells out exactly what the Christians at Pergamos allowed into their church and how it corrupted them. Apparently they became soft on doctrine because they allowed people who followed the doctrine of Balaam and doctrine of the Nicolaitans into their Church. Some people may not realize it, but God is very serious about who we allow into our Churches and he will not tolerate false teachings. 2 John 1:10 says “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.” Jesus wants his bride pure, so even allowing false doctrine (or a little leaven) will not be tolerated by him. If we remember the Church at Ephesus

then we remember that they were admonished for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. However, when we get to the Church at Pergamos we see that they decided to embrace both doctrines that God hated, but why did God hate these two doctrines so much? These doctrines were based on greed, selling the Word of God for money, idolatry, and sexual immorality so it is easy to see why our Heavenly Father did not want these doctrines in his Church.

Balaam was a false prophet who did his work for God for one thing, which was money. Sadly, in today's churches we can see this same type of behavior. First we see televangelists everywhere fleecing the sheep by selling their "Word from the Lord" for \$19.99, and by begging the sheep for cash to stay on the air. Next, we can also see "so-called" music ministers charging admission prices to come and receive what you need from God. And finally, we see many people selling their talents (such as musicians) to whichever church pays them the most to show up on Sunday to play. All three of these are in no way of God, and it is time for the Church of the Living Most High God to call a spade a spade. If we are truly called to do a ministry for the Lord then he will supply our needs and we should never EVER have to charge for it or beg for money. In addition, if we are doing what we are called to do in the Lord then it should be done out of the love for our Him and from a humble heart. A good rule of thumb to follow is that if a ministry is doing what we described above then the ministry in question is more than likely not of God. The sad part is that this new modern commercialized Church is far worse than simply being religious because it has turned the Church of Jesus Christ into a den of thieves (Matthew 21:12-13). Another sad point is that the Church has been deceived for years about this, and doesn't even know it. A really good example of this new age demonic doctrine is the "Prosperity Message". The Bible clearly states that we as Christians are to be blessed, however NO WHERE does it say Christians are to be rich or have huge bank accounts full of cash. The blessing of Abraham wasn't so Abraham could have tons of money, but that he could bless others and this is what we as Christ's followers should be doing as well. So much I could say on this devilish lying doctrine, but simply put God is NOT an ATM and if you are calculating your blessing based on what you give then you are not giving as onto the Lord. People who do this are trying to put Almighty God into their little blessing box. Have you heard a preach say "Send us XXX amount and God will do this or that"? If so then you are hearing the doctrine of Balaam for these "preachers" are using their ministry to make money. We as Ministers should never EVER do our service to God for reward, but out of a humble and thankful heart for all HE has done for us. Paul told us that people in the last days will "have a form of godliness, but will deny the power thereof" and we see that in full force today in many America's churches and in MANY American ministries.

Another even more deceptive aspect of Balaam was that Balak instructed him to make Israel sin by having them eat foods offered to idols, and by having them commit acts of sexual immorality. When it comes to idolatry, most Christians that I know do not have a "shrine of Buddha" in their home however they may have "shrines" in their life which is still idolatry in the eyes of God. No you say, then let me ask you three pointed questions ... What occupies your time? In your life do you strive for more money, a bigger house, that new fishing boat, or even a fancier car? Do you spend the majority of your time watching TV, going to sporting events, or playing video games instead of spending time with God or doing the work of the Lord? Idolatry is not just getting on our "knees" and bowing before a physical idol, but an idol is "anything" that we put before God! Jesus clearly said "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). God warned us that "Thou shalt have no other gods before me (or beside me). Thou shalt not make

unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:3-4). So we all need to look into the deepest reaches of our hearts often to see if we have any “grave images” there, and these “graven images” can be anything we idolize including musicians, actors/actresses, sports teams, or even ministers of the Word of God. Simply put, anything that takes time away from God or anything we put before God is an idol. I can hear it now (because I said it), isn’t that getting a little extreme? If we want to serve Jesus the way he told us to then we will seem extreme, but it isn’t extreme at all in the eyes of God. How about marching around a wall, blowing horns, and shouting so a wall will fall down, was that extreme? How about preparing a HUGE BOAT for a flood when there had never been any rain, was that extreme? How about leaving heaven to die for everyone ever born so they could be saved, was that extreme? God IS AN EXTREME GOD and that’s why we who follow him will seem extreme to unbelievers and to carnal Christians. Once again, a simple rule to follow is that anything that comes before God is our lives is an idol and to not cast it down is rebellion.

The next area that he spoke about was that the church at Pergamos ate food offered to idols, but what is food offered to idols? When we think of food we think of things we eat that keep our bodies going and gives us sustenance. However, in the Old Testament many foods were offered to pagan and false gods so that the gods would show them favor, and this is how Balaam tried to get the Israelites to sin. Jewish law forbid the Israelites from eating certain types of food (shellfish and pork for example) so by eating these foods the Jews committed sin against God. So thinking spiritually then, what is food (sustenance) offered to idols? First, let us look at some modern day idols that many people “worship”. If I were to ask you, who or what is worshipped today what would be your response? For me it was simple because all I had to do was look around the Internet or TV to find them? People today worship movie/TV stars, politicians, musicians, sports figures, Christian bands, and even preachers. So if meat is “sustenance” then what sustains these idols? Simple, money! Money is their sustenance so giving them God’s money is the same as feeding them and buying their products is just like spiritually eating food offered to gods. I know, back to the word EXTREME and yes we as Christians are to be a PERCULIAR PEOPLE. If we look a little deeper we can see that when we go to a movie or sporting event we are offering God’s money to these idols so that they can live their lives full of sin. When we spend time with our friends praising these people, we are in affect worshipping them as “gods and goddesses”. So sly is the devil, yet once our eyes open to the light of God’s Word we can never say that we didn’t know. Once again, Exodus 20:3-5 makes it crystal clear for God says “Thou shalt have no other gods before me (or beside me). Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me”. Once again, people will say this is extreme but I will counter that with “where your treasure is” ...

Finally, the Church of Pergamos were allowing people who followed the Nicolaitan doctrine into their church. The word “Nicolaitan” in the Greek means “destruction of people”, and this devilish doctrine was just that. First, many people believe that the Nicolaitan doctrine was a type of clergy-laity system, which means that the Church was ruled by the Clergy of the day. This meant that the Body of Christ was totally controlled by whatever their leaders said which is not

how God intended his Church to be. We see this in many modern day cults such as the Mormons, Heaven's Gate, and what happened down in Guyana under the infamous Jim Jones. First off, the Mormons people are in general a really nice people, but there is a devilish underbelly to this cult. What most people do not realize is that the Mormon people can only do what they are told by their leadership and frowned upon if they think of thinking on their own. One example that really sticks out to me is that for many years the Mormon's were told they could not purchase a certain type of drink. However, the Church later bought stock in this company so the "Leader" said he had a "Word from God" that is NOW okay to buy that product. Also, in the Heaven's Gate and Jim Jones cult's people committed suicide because they were "told" to by their leaders. In all three cases, the cult leaders are and did "cause the destruction" of the people they were supposed to be helping.

Another aspect of the Nicolaitan doctrine was the sexual sins that the Church allowed to take place. In verse 14 the word "fornication" comes from the Greek word (porneuo), which is where we get the modern word "pornography". It also carries the meaning of "prostituting" one's body to the lust of another. However unlike Ephesus; the church at Pergamos allowed the doctrine of the Nicolaitans to become part of their church and this doctrine Jesus clearly stated he hates. Like the Gnostics of the day, the Nicolaitans were also an apostate group. They believed that for someone to be free from lust then they must submit to their sensual desires to overcome it. They used religion as the excuse to pursue whatever sexual pleasures they desired. We must remember that so far Jesus has told two different Churches that he "HATES" doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Going back to the meaning of Pergamos which was "Improper Marriage" we can see why God hated their doctrine. Before man created the contract of marriage we know that God made the covenant of marriage. By this I mean that when man and wife committed themselves to each other they became "one flesh" (Matthew 10:8). If we are following the doctrine of the Nicolaitans than we allow ourselves to commit adultery because they had an "anything goes" type of sexual morality. An example of this was a preacher I knew years ago in Texas. Even though he was a "preacher" he also participated in the "Swingers" lifestyle. When I asked him about this he told me it was okay with God because he didn't lust after his "swinging" partners, and he had his wife's okay to do it. Even though this is an extreme example, it does give us an idea of why God hated this doctrine because it so easily polluted the minds and bodies of his Church. Even though we may not openly support this doctrine, our actions may say different. Let me ask you this, do you watch pornography? Most will answer this with a resounding NO. However, what shows do you watch? Do they have a lot of "sexual overtones" or even straight out "nudity"? If your answer is yes, then you are indeed following the doctrine of Nicolaitans. They approved of giving into sexual pleasures (to fix the problem), but it was only an excuse to pursue their perverted sexual desires. So why do you watch shows with sexual overtones or nudity? Back in the day men used to say they read Playboy and Penthouse for the "articles", however we know the truth; it was to feed the lusts of their flesh. However, nowadays no one thinks twice about men (and women) who read these magazines. Remember, Jesus made it very clear when he said that "...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Jesus is calling us to a holy (consecrated and set apart) life, and if we are dabbling in sins such as idol worship or fornication then we are cheating ourselves out of what God has for us. So if this is you then what is the remedy?

Chapter 2 Verse 16

Once again the message of Jesus is the same, REPENT! The word repent means to change your mind, and the Greek word is metanoeww (metanoeo). Meta or “meta” means to change and noeww (noeo) means the mind or thinking. So when we “repent” we are in reality changing our mind from one way of thinking (Satan & sin) to a new way of thinking (God & Righteousness). Feeling sorry and penance has nothing to do with repentance other than realizing that we are in the wrong when it comes to God. True repentance is when we do a 180 turn and change our mind and start walking in God’s ways. Once you do this and mean it then you will be “born again” or restored to where you were when you left (Parable of the Prodigal Son). He also said that if we do not repent “HE” would come quickly, and would fight against us with the sword of his mouth (which is the Word of God) or judgment. But, but, but... God is Love!!! Yes HE is, but he is a JEALOUS GOD!!! It is very important that we understand God is serious, and the time of the end is not coming, it is here. 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 says “And for this cause GOD (not the devil) shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”. If you still have a conscience for your sins, then the time to get right with God is NOW. We are not promised tomorrow, and I have to praise God because he was SO merciful to me when I was away because I should have been dead so many times. The Father is standing up by the house waiting on you to come up the road so he can run to you, hug you, and restore you as his son or daughter so why wait?

Chapter 2 Verse 17

What is SO AMAZING is that once we return to Christ, not only does he forgive us and give us eternal life, but he gives us SO MUCH MORE. In verse 17 Jesus says that for those that overcome he will “give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it”. When you look at “hidden manna” you see that it is symbolic “concealed food that is kept in the heavenly temple for the food of angels and the blessed”. Okay, following it? We get the heavenly food that is reserved for the angels and the Saints. This reminds of the verse “However, as it is written: No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV). God is awesome to us right now in this world, but he has even MORE for those who finish their race and endure till the end (Matthew 24:13). The word here for endure carries the meaning of remaining, not fleeing, persevere under misfortunes and trials of our faith in Christ, and to bear bravely and calmly being ill treated. The key is and always will be “overcoming”. Finally, for those that overcome they will receive a white stone with a new name, and only they will know it. Wow! One of the mainstream interpretations of this has to do with Roman customs. In ancient Rome it was the custom to award the victor of athletic games with a white stone. This stone gave the victors entry into a special awards dinner that was only for the winners. This analogy does line up with Revelations because the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is for Jesus and his followers. In addition those who make Jesus Lord will have an eternal victory celebration in heaven with their Savior. So are you ready to put down your idols, quit feeding the idols, and stop dabbling in fornication? If so, just repent and God will forgive you and he is waiting to restore you as though you never left so why not change your mind today...

To the Church at Thyatira

History

Thyatira means carries the meaning of “continual sacrifice”. Thyatira was a Macedonian colony, founded by Alexander the Great after the Persian Empire was overthrown. The people who lived in Thyatira introduced Apollo, who was honored as the Sun-god, and went by the name of Tyrimnas. Some theologians have speculated that the description of Christ (“the eyes of flame”), was selected in allusion to this worship of the sun-god. Thyatira was a very important city because it was positioned in such a way that it connected Pergamum with the city of Sardis. In addition, the road continued to Philadelphia and Laodicea, which linked them with both Smyrna and Byzantium. Thyatira was a great commercial town as well because it connected all the cities listed above, and it was always heavily traveled by merchants from Asia and the east. Thyatira was also a very strategic town because it lay in a long valley that connected the Hermus and Caicus river valleys. Thyatira was known as the gateway to Pergamos, and it was manned by Macedonian troops. The leaders of Pergamos knew that Thyatira would never hold in the event of an attack (because it was in an open valley) so in case of attack it would be used as a delaying position so that Pergamos could prepare to counterattack. Thyatira today is located in the modern day city of Akhisar Turkey.

Thyatira at the time of the John’s letters to the churches was not a big pagan city. It did have one local “hero-god” known as Tyrimnus who was on the cities coins. From a religious point of view it did have a shrine for fortune-telling that was presided over by a female oracle called Sambathe. Not much more is known about Thyatira, however Lydia (Acts 16:14) who was saved and baptized was from Thyatira. From history we do know that it was a great commercial center and that were many trade guilds there. There were many guilds there that included people who worked in leather, bronze, wool, pottery, linen, bakers, and even slave traders. So what message did Christ have for the Church at Thyatira?

To the Church at Thyatira Write:

Revelation 2:18-29

18) And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

19) I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

20) Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

21) And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

22) Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

23) And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

24) But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

25) But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

26) And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

27) And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

28) And I will give him the morning star.

29) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Chapter 2 Verse 18

In this verse Jesus says that he has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass. If we remember Revelations 1:14-15 we remember it describing Jesus as "... (having) eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace..." In this situation the eyes of Christ are set for judgment because he knows the sins the Church at Thyatira are into and he is not pleased. The second thing we see is that his "feet are like fine brass as if burned in a furnace". From this then we can see that Jesus is being described as someone who has no sin, and because of the Christ's perfection he has the authority to cast judgment on Thyatira.

Chapter 2 Verse 19

Jesus tells the Christians at Thyatira that he knows what they have been doing. In the Amplified Bible verse 19 reads "I know your record *and* what you are doing, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your recent works are more numerous *and* greater than your first ones" so apparently they had been doing many Christian deeds. If we look closer we see that the Church at Thyatira have five major points that they are executing properly: love, faith, service, endurance, and increasing in good works. To me, this sounds like a Church that I would want to attend, however not everything is as it seems. If we think back to Ephesus, it too was a "busy church" however as we saw that is not always a good thing. While researching this I read an interesting example of this, and being a previous CAD programmer it made a lot of sense. If we think of their deeds as "Divine Production" then moving toward higher ground with all axes aligned. "The Lord had seen their love (Y-axis), faith (X-axis), service (Time axis), and endurance (Z-axis). They were making progress and accomplishing more as they advanced toward the high ground and doing "continual sacrifice" in order to gain entrance into the kingdom. However, even though the Christians at Thyatira were moving forward in many areas they had a big problem by the name of Jezebel.

Chapter 2 Verse 20-23

The reprimand comes because Thyatira is "allowing" Jezebel to teach and seduce the Church. This false prophetess is getting the members of the church to commit fornication and leading them to eat food which is used as sacrifices to false gods. To understand this "Revelation" version of Jezebel you need to know who the original Jezebel was. During this period there was a major move going on called the "Christian Montanist" movement in the same area gave leadership roles to two women Priscilla and Maximilla. The Montanism movement had similar views about the basic tenets of Christian doctrine, but this movement was later declared a heresy. So with all this going on, it would appear that they were allowing "that" woman Jezebel to teach and seduce God's servants. So who was Jezebel?

Jezebel was the daughter of the king of the Zidonians. The Zidonian people were worshippers of Baal, and the considered "Jehovah" as nothing more than a "local god". Jezebel had 400 priests lived in the temple that she built for them. This woman knew no end to sin, and it was to this woman that the King of northern Israel married which led to many evil consequences for the

Israel and even her father's name "Ethbaal" meant "Man of Baal". To this woman King Ahab allowed himself to bond, and she seized on his fascination of her to become one with the King of Israel. Ahab became captivated by Jezebel (and a captive) because he "took her to wife, and went and served Baal and worshipped him." Even though Ahab had many "sins" his marriage to Jezebel and subsequently him serving Baal led him and the Israelites into many years of idolatry. These sins meant that they broke the first two commandments of God over and over again. Also, it led to moral and spiritual decay which worked for Jezebel because she wanted to end all worship of Jehovah. Jezebel was also a forceful woman who lived to get her own way, and she used her perverted skills to destroy a king and bring into degradation a nation called Israel. She was a very and radical devotee of Baal, and she worshipped Ashtaroth the famous goddess of the Zidonians with a passion known to no other. However, she was not content just for her to worship these false gods, but she also wanted to convert everyone to Baal. She established two major heathen sanctuaries in Samaria and Jezeel just for this purpose. Her zeal was so strong that she led a campaign to rid Israel of all the Prophets of Jehovah so that only Baal would be worshipped. In the end God raised up Elijah and Jezebel was dealt with by Jehu, but we can see now why God is so angry with the Church at Thyatira.

The Jezebel of Revelations

"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." (Revelation 2:20)

The Church Age version of Jezebel was just like her predecessor, and the Believers at Thyatira were reprimanded for tolerating Jezebel the Prostitute and Idolater of Babylon teaching in the church. What the Church failed to realize is that Satan himself was behind Jezebel, and there can be no compromise with the forces of evil. Just as in Israel, Jezebel had weaseled her way in the church at Thyatira, and was corrupting them from within. The word "fornication" comes from the Greek word "porneuo", which means "to prostitute one's body, to commit fornication, or one given to idolatry". If you following back to the root then it has the following meanings "harlot, idolatress, male prostitute, and finally a slave or one entirely under the control of the LOVE of sinning". As we can see from this scripture, Jezebel was more than just leading them down a dark path but she in fact was leading them into slavery from which they may never return. The danger here for Believers is that we need to be extremely cautious who we listen to because just because a speaker, pastor, teacher, or whoever sounds "anointed" does not mean that they are. Jesus said very clearly in Matthew 24:4-5 "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many". He warned us in 1 Timothy 4:1 "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils". The devil is not a red face dude with horns, but the Bible says that he comes as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). One example of this is a preacher I met years ago that said it was okay to be a "swinger". I was like what? He said, well my wife is right there with me and I am not lusting after the other woman. This is a great example of what is starting to creep into our churches among other devilish doctrines such as Chrislam. Even so, the Lord's mercy is still greater than our sin and in verse 21 she was given a chance to repent but didn't. So what was the result?

“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”. Notice that will God will cast judgment on her, and those who committed adultery with her with great tribulation unless they what? REPENT!! Even after all they have done, His mercy is still reaching out. Always know that God’s grace will precede His judgment, and we are seeing that today. Even though His judgment is starting to fall on America, there is still time if America (as a nation) will repent. In Exodus 20:5 God says he would put the iniquity of the father on the children unto the third and fourth generations. If we look at verse 23 again we see he tells the Church that he will “kill her children with death...I will give unto every one of you according to your works”. God’s Word from Genesis to Revelations is seamless, and we know that God’s Word never changes and neither do his commandments. The Bible clearly states the wages of sin is death; however there is a death on this side of the grave which translates into affliction, stress, oppression, and tribulation if we rebel against God. Even Paul gave Believers over to Satan so that their souls might be saved (1 Corinthians 5:5), and what was the sin? FORNICATION! What people fail to realize is that there are two types of fornication. The first is of course sex outside of God’s parameters. However, idolatry is a form of “spiritual fornication” because we are joining ourselves to whatever idol we worship (movie stars, sports figures, cars, boats, or houses), and the list goes on and on. We must remember this warning wasn’t just for Thyatira, but for all Believers. So who we join ourselves with will have a huge impact on our lives. Jesus also tells us that it is HE that searcheth (or examines) our hearts (innermost being), and many may outwardly talk the talk, but inside they may be full of dead men’s bones (Matthew 23:27). We must constantly ask God to search our hearts and lives to see if there is anything that needs to be dealt with because we never want to give any place or authority to the devil in our lives. As King David said in Psalm 139:23 “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts”. Also in Jeremiah 17:10 God says “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.” God is the only one who knows us, and we must rely on him to show us our real true inner selves.

Chapter 2 Verse 24-25

However, God always has a remnant that will not bow down to anyone but him. He tells those that did not follow Jezebel that he will not put them under any other burden, and that they should “hold fast that which you have already till I come”. Even today, there is a remnant that has not bowed to the almighty dollar, the ever increasing idols or the world (bands, actors, or sports teams) because this remnant knows that these idols are evil and giving them God’s money is sin. I know this is hard to swallow (I had to dump a lot of idols), but if we are going to make it in these last days there can be NOTHING before God.

Chapter 2 Verse 26-29

To previous Churches Jesus only says “to he that overcometh”, but to Thyatira he tells them “he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end”. So part of receiving he promise is to not only overcome Jezebel, but also to keep the faith “till the end”. In Matthew 24:13 Jesus told us “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” Many places in the New Testament tell us to endure and stand so no matter what doctrine of Jezebel (or others) comes our way we need to stand against it (in love). So what happens if we overcome and keep his works

till the end? First, it says that they will rule over the nations. The word “nations” here is the Greek word “ethnos” which means a troop, tribe, nation, or an ethnic group. Jesus will appoint his children who have overcome the right to rule various nations during the 1000 year millennium with him. The morning star refers to an honor given to us by Christ who is in fact called the “Bright and Morning Star” in Revelation 22:16. We have such great promises, and it amazes me at times why Believers are still choosing to live however they want...

And so it ends again with:

“He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”.

To the Church at Sardis

History

Sardis was named after a fiery red stone found near the city, and it also represented Israel's firstborn son Reuben. In addition, it was the first stone used in the breastplate of the high priests. The city was 30 miles southeast of Thyatira in a fertile valley that meant "those escaping". It was also on a hill 1,500 feet above the valley below, which meant it could only be attacked from the south and this made the residents of Sardis extremely overconfident. History shows that the city of Sardis was under constant conquest, and it was first taken over by the Cimmerians in the 7th Century, but later captured by the Persians. The Persians were empire builders so under their rule Sardis became the ending point for the Royal Road that led to Persepolis. Eventually it was surrendered to Alexander the Great, and later fell to Antiochus in 218 B.C. When this letter was written to the Church at Sardis it was securely in the hands of the Roman Empire, and it was the major hub between several major cities of its day. Having been built on a plateau high above the Hermus Valley, the city was a natural fortress with only one road leading into the city. However, it grew beyond the area that the plateau provided so a second city was built in the flatlands below it and this is why the name of the town went from "Sard" to "Sardeis" or "Sardis". The city received gold from the Pactolus River and when mixed with silver it made Electrum, which was used to make plating for pagan statues and idols. The town was so wealthy just before the Persian takeover that King Croesus became the person behind the legend of 'King Midas'. However, the king was captured by Cyrus all his wealth was taken by the Persian Empire. During the reign of Tiberius Caesar (17 A.D) a massive earthquake destroyed both cities, however only the lower city was ever rebuilt. When John wrote his letter to the Church at Sardis in 96 A.D the population was roughly 120,000. According to some Biblical scholars Sardis was a representation of the Church from 1517 to 1750. In 1517 Martin Luther published his "Ninety-Five Theses" and put it on the door of the Church of Wittenberg in Germany. His "Theses" outlined his grievances against the Roman Catholic Church, and led to the Protestant Revolution and its breakaway from the Catholic Church.

To the Church at Sardis Write:

- 1) And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.
- 2) Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.
- 3) Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. 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.
- 4) Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.
- 5) 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.
- 6) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Chapter 3 Verse 1

Jesus in this verse tells the Church at Sardis that it is He who holds the seven messengers and the seven Churches. However, he reveals to us that they are not obeying Him because this is the first

Church that wasn't commended for anything. If we look at the verse we see that right after Jesus declares His position he tells them that "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and are dead". The first thing we notice is that Jesus tells them that even though they are physically "alive" they were in fact spiritually "dead". If we look at the earlier Churches Ephesus had left its first love, Pergamum was known for its worldliness, Thyatira tolerated many sins, and finally they reached a new low at Sardis. Another aspect is that even though it isn't written we can surmise that the Church of Sardis didn't know that they were dead in His eyes. Finally, Jesus said by omission that the Church of Sardis had nothing good in their walk with God. Imagine that on the Day of Judgment that they as they plead their case the Lord's reply is "Depart from me you workers of iniquity, I never knew you". To me that is the scariest verse in the Bible because many on that day will say "But Lord we did this, and we did that", and off they will go into eternity lost forever. So I have one question, are there churches like this in America today and if so would we recognize them? Remember the Church at Ephesus? Even though they had "left" their first love (became busy in the work and not in the relationship) they still on the whole doing the work of Jesus. However, Sardis not so much because once again Jesus said "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead".

Over time the Church of Sardis had compromised so much of itself with the pagan society that it didn't even look like a church of Jesus Christ. We must remember that a lot of churches may look good from the outside, but they are actually highly ineffective in the workings of the Kingdom. Some simple signs are when the members would rather sit back than to do the work of the Lord, when they are more concerned about ritual than the Spirit, when they are more worried about social ills than changing lives, and finally when they are more worried about what man thinks than what the Word of God says. A Church like this can be very deceptive because even though they may be going through the motions of looking alive they are in reality "spiritually" dead. Many people may not be able to see this church in the world today, but I can assure you that the "Sardis" church model is very much a part of mainstream churches all over the planet. Deception is sweeping the land, and Believers need to be real careful in these last days what Church they give their allegiance too because a "Falling Away" is not coming; it already started many years ago and the apathy of Sardis was the Churches undoing.

Chapter 3 Verse 2

In this verse Jesus tells them to be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are about to die. In the Greek it reads "Pay strict attention to and make firm the things that remain that are ready to spiritually or eternally die". Even though this Church was totally off track; Jesus still offered His Grace to them. The Church at Sardis apparently was like a sapling on the side of the road about to breathe its last breath of life, and if the story ended here it would be sad indeed. So the question remains, why were they dying? Because their works were not perfect before God. When you break it down it basically says that "there undertakings were not overflowing or filled to the brim". When we are called to serve the Lord he demands ALL of us, not just the parts we want to give him. As my old Pastor used to say "Jesus is Lord of All or He Isn't Lord at All". Now I will warn you here that when you are born again there will be areas of struggle (old habits and sins), but if your heart is in sync with the Spirit you WILL overcome all those struggles. So in the case of this Church we can pretty much tell that they were giving lip service to Jesus, and not serving Him with their whole heart. So what was His answer?

Chapter 3 Verse 3

In the Church of Sardis very few people apparently had stayed true to Christ, and there wasn't enough of them to turn the Church around. However, this is a key verse because it can be applied to many areas of our Christian walk. Remembrance is crucial for everything we will ever do because in remembrance is the knowledge of what our Heavenly Father has done for us in the past, which gives us hope for the future. In Hebrews 10:32 it tells us to "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions", but why? Because in verse 34-35 it tells us that "For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward". Once again the remembrance of things God has done for us in the past will give us strength to endure the things of the present, and the reward that comes with it will be ours. So here in Revelation he is telling the Church at Sardis to "Remember what they have received and heard". This is God's Grace reaching out to try and bring Sardis back home. Two things that will help us is to always keep in remembrance God's goodness to us, and remember that God puts US in His everlasting remembrance (Psalm 112:6). If we are to live a victorious life we need to always remember what Jesus has always brought us through in the past and that he will never leave us or forsake us. The next step is to hold fast and repent.

Once they began to move back toward sound doctrine they then had to make a conscience effort to "stand fast" and "repent". The word "hold fast" here means to "attend carefully and to guard". Does this sound familiar? In 1 Peter 5:8 it says "Be vigilant" or "be watchful" for the devil is roaming around looking for someone to devour. It is easy to see that the Church at Sardis was spiritually asleep because the Lord had to tell them that they needed to start being on guard. Proverbs 4:23 tells us to "Guard your heart, for out of it flows the springs of life". Once they were awake to this fact, they like all other Churches were told to repent (change their mind on their current course). If not, the Lord then tells them that "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". The Lord is good to his people, however there comes a time when he will no longer strive with them. I will not get into the "once saved always saved" doctrine here, but let me simply say that we should not take the chance. An interesting point here is that twice Sardis was taken over, once by the Medes and once by the Seleucids because the guards on the "impregnable" cliffs had fallen asleep. If you identify with this Church then you must remember what you have been taught, hold fast to that sound doctrine, and finally turn around and come home. There is no better time than today, and tomorrow is not promised to any of us.

Chapter 3 Verse 4

Even though most of the Church of Sardis was spiritually dead there was still a remnant that was not. No matter how bad a city, nation, or even the world becomes there will always be a remnant that will not bow their knees to the evil forces of God's enemy and like Sodom he is willing to come to the aid of those who have not walked away from Him. In this verse the word defiled means to "pollute, contaminate, or stain" so he is says that the remnant did not allow themselves to be contaminated like the others had done. A note here is that even though we strive for spiritual perfection and we will obtain many levels of it on this earth, we must always remember that the enemy will try and trip us up from time to time. However, if a righteous man falls down seven times he always gets back up!!

Chapter 3 Verse 5

The promise here is as straight forward as you can get... Whoever repents and stands fast will be clothed in white, and Christ will NOT erase his name from the Book of Life. Once again not getting into the “once saved always saved” debate, but it does say he that Jesus would not “erase” his name so does this mean that He will be erasing some names from the Lambs book of life? Also he promises to acknowledge them before his Father and the angels because Jesus himself said that “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33). We must remember that the “Falling Away” has already begun (2 Thessalonians 2:3) so since sinners are already fallen who then is going to fall away? We need to check ourselves daily to make sure we are following the Lord daily, and not just doing it like this Church was because we do not want to think that we are alive when we are actually dead.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

To the Church at Philadelphia

History

The Church in Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven churches, and the name Philadelphia simply means “brotherly love”. Philadelphia was said to have been founded around 150 BC by the Greek king Attalus II who was known as “Philadelphos” because of the love he had for his brother King Eumenes II who was the king of Lydia. The city was used as an outpost to guard the pass between the Hermus and Meander river valleys which protected Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum. It also had very important roads that ran from Philadelphia to Pergamum, Sardis, and Smyrna which allowed it to become the trade hub of the area. The early language of Philadelphia was Lydian, but by the time of the Apostles it had changed to Greek. Philadelphia became a Roman province when the king of Pergamum bequeathed his kingdom over to Rome in 133 BC. Philadelphia did not have the natural defenses that other cities had so it fell constantly in battle throughout its history, and it was also located on a major fault line so earthquakes were a normal activity for the city. In 17 AD a major earthquake devastated the cities of Philadelphia and Sardis, and because of their destruction the Roman ruler Tiberius Caesar had to allocate large amounts of money to rebuild them. However, when Philadelphia was rebuilt it was given the new name of “Neocaesaria” which meant “The New City of Caesar”. Because of all the earthquakes, volcanic activity, and constant warfare the city of Philadelphia had a hard time existing and became a risky place to live. However, a major plus for Philadelphia was that it was located in an area of rich soil and became famous for its wine making. Finally Philadelphia was known for worshipping the Greek god of wine Dionysius, and the only temple in Philadelphia was dedicated to her.

As far as the spiritual side of Philadelphia, it served as a major thoroughfare for evangelists, which gave Christians access to pagan areas in the east, and it provided them with a huge mission field to work. An interesting point here is that five of the seven churches ceased to exist after the time of the Apostles, but Philadelphia was around until the 14th Century. Many have speculated that this was because the Church at Philadelphia was constantly evangelizing the area and they were blessed because of their work. However, with the rise of the Turkish Empire that would eventually encompass the city; Philadelphia was forced to become a standalone Christian city. Finally, the Seljuk Turks besieged Philadelphia and brutally killed every Christian within its walls. Today Philadelphia is known as “Alasehir”, and there is not much left of the original city because of all the calamities that it went through.

To the Church at Philadelphia Write:

7) And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

8) I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

9) Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

10) Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11) Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

12) Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

13) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Chapter 3 Verse 7

Unlike the other five letters to the churches, the letter to the Church of Philadelphia does not use any of the former descriptions that John used to describe Jesus in Chapter One. The description of Jesus here starts with “These things saith he that is holy, he that is true” so immediately we get a new insight into who Jesus is. The word holy means pure from carnality, morally blameless, and physically pure, and because of His holy sacrifice we are allowed to be whom we are in Christ. This is very humbling because none of us can say that there is ever anything good in us, and we are only who we are because of what Jesus did for us. However, when Jesus came to die he did not die so we could do whatever we wanted but that we could be made “Holy even as He is Holy”. Our Lord wants us to be different from the world and it says in 1 Peter 2:9 that “ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”. When we realize that our salvation and our lives are to show forth His praises it makes us accountable for everything we do or in some cases what we don’t do. Next Jesus says that He is the one that is true. Jesus tells us in John 14:6 that “I am the way, the truth, and the life”, and why is this important? Because he said in John 8:32 that “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set thee free”. Many people think knowing the Bible will set you free, and yes it is a component of that but Jesus said you shall know the “truth” and that he was “the truth” so the more we know Jesus, the freer we will become because we become one with Him. Another aspect of Jesus being “he that is true” is that we can always rest assured that what he tells us, he will do. This is such an amazing fact because once we surrender to Him we will never have to worry about our lives because they are in His more than capable hands. Next it says that Jesus has the “Key of David”, but what exactly is the “Key of David”?

The key of David is a reference to an incident involving Shebna in the book of Isaiah. Shebna was in charge of the palace of Hezekiah, however he was caught doing things that were for his own benefit so God removed him from his position and raised up Eliakim in take his place. In Isaiah 22:22 is says “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his (Eliakim) shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open”. In other words, the entire kingdom of Hezekiah would be Eliakim’s responsibility from that day forth which meant that Eliakim would have the power to let people in or to lock them out. Even greater now is that fact that Jesus has the Key of David which means any door he closes cannot not be opened and any door he opens cannot be closed. Wow, to think that we serve a God who is Holy and True, and a God that goes before us to open and close doors for our benefit is POWERFUL stuff!!! This also tells us that Christ will open doors of opportunity for us to go and make disciples so we should always be on alert for doors that God is opening to us to minister!

Chapter 3 Verse 8

This verse starts out with “I know thy works”, and because they were living as they should Jesus did not rebuke them for anything. We should also always remember that Jesus knows everything

about us so we should always be about our Father's business for we all want to hear "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" and not "...I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 25:21 & Matthew 7:23). Next, he tells the Christians of Philadelphia that he has set before them an open door that no man can close and he does this because of their faithfulness. However, an interesting point is that the reason he is opening the door is mentioned afterwards. First it says that they had little power, and I do not believe this was a lack of spiritual power but a lack worldly and geopolitical power. This means they meant nothing to the citizens of Philadelphia nor to the Roman Empire. The Christians in Philadelphia were under constant attack by the Romans and the apostate Jews so they no say in anything, and they were hated by Jew and Roman alike. A great point for the Christians in Philadelphia was that their weakness was actually their biggest strength because in their weakness the strength of Jesus was made perfect. (2 Corinthians 12:9). Since they had to totally rely on Jesus then he could show his power by opening the doors of ministry for them. Sometimes we think closed doors are bad, but if we are following Christ then a closed door is just a prelude to a new door opening.

The next reason that Jesus was opening the doors for them was because they kept his word and held on to the teachings that were given to them by the messengers of Christ. Jesus told us that "... he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven" will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21) and that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). The final reason he opened doors for them was because they did not "deny" His name. Jesus said it clearly when he said that "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven". You cannot get any more cut and dry than that, and there is no grey area that we can wiggle out of. So we can see that because they relied on Christ for strength, held on to the words of Jesus, and did not deny the Lord before men that the Lord kept his Word and made sure they were taken care of. Many people do not experience these open doors because they have not held up their end of the Covenant. God will not bless sin, so if we are not blessed then what are we doing wrong and what do we have to repent from?

Chapter 3 Verse 9

In verse 9 we once again we hear about the synagogue of Satan, which was first referenced in his letter to the Church at Smyrna. To refresh our memory the synagogue of Satan pointed to the Jews of the day that were "Hellenistic" Jews. This group opposed Jesus being the Savior and the Messiah. However, Paul said in Romans 2: 29 that "...he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God". This was a condemnation to all the Jews who considered "gentiles" as undeserving of forgiveness or that Gentiles could not have Jesus as their Messiah. The sacrifice of Christ was for all sin and not just for the Jews (1 John 2:2). The second part of this verse tells us that those of the synagogue of Satanic Jews would come and bow before their feet so that they would know that Jesus loved them. However, this does not mean that the fallen Jews would be worshipping the Christians, but that they would bow out of respect because the Born-Again Believers are now the true members of the family of God.

Chapter 3 Verse 10-12

Verse 10 begins the promise stage to the Church at Philadelphia. As always the promises of God are conditional on what we do, not on what God does. The first thing we see is that since the Church at Philadelphia have kept God's command to endure, God will keep (guard) them from

the hour of temptation that is coming to test the world. Keeping the Word means that they executed proper Bible doctrine, and did not allow themselves to be corrupted by the pagans of the time or by false teachers that Jesus said would come. Next we see that it does not say Jesus will take us “out” of the trouble that is coming, but that He will “guard” us from what the world is going to endure. I do not get into doctrinal wars over certain pieces of “dogma”, but I simply read what God’s Word says so you can take that verse however you would like.

In verse 11 Jesus tells us that he is coming quickly (thief in the night), so we should hold fast to what we have so no one can take away our crown. This verse though short has a HUGE impact on this Church. First, Christ reminds us that when he finally returns there will be NO chance for repentance. If we remember the parable of the wise and unwise virgins we will remember that when the unwise returned to the wedding after the Bride Groom had shut the door he said to them “Verily I say unto you, I know you not” (Matthew 25:1-13). We should always be in the work of our Lord, and always be close to him so that when he does return we are ready at any given time. Next he tells them to hold “fast” to what they have. We have mentioned this many times, but once again “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13). We as believers are going to have to endure “something” until the end, so the question is what is the end? The reason we are to hold fast and endure is so that no one can take our crown, and these “crowns” are rewards for being faithful to Christ, and holding fast to His Words.

Verse 12 gives us the final rewards for being faithful to Jesus. First Jesus will make us a “pillar” in the temple of my God. Pillars can represent stability or permanence depending on how they are used. However, if you remember the history of Philadelphia they were constantly having to leave because of natural disasters and war so Christ could be telling us that this will be our final home which is in His temple because He says “they will go out no more”. Next Jesus says he will write the name of his God upon us, and the name of the holy city of His God, and finally Jesus will write on us HIS new name!!! Now do you understand HOW important you are to Jesus, and how what you do now affects you for all eternity?? This last statement completely reassures us that we will forever be His in the Kingdom he is preparing. While we have His name written on us, the unbelievers will forever have the mark of the beast written on them...

Once again he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to unto the Churches...

To the Church of Laodicea

History

Laodicea was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus, which was the first city that was sent a letter. Laodicea was part of the tri-city area that included Colossae and Hierapolis. The city was founded around 261-253 BC by Antiochus the II who was a Seleucid king who ruled Syria after the death of Alexander the Great, and he named after his wife Laodice. Eventually Laodicea became a part of the kingdom of Pergamum and the Roman Empire, and it was located in the fertile Lycus valley on a flat-topped mountain. Even though at first it was a nothing little town, it later grew and became known as the “gateway to Phrygia”. In addition, because of its location caravans from the east and the west would stop in Laodicea, which helped it to become extremely wealthy because of the cross trading it provided.

The city of Laodicea was known for its commercial life, medical practices, its wealth, and it was also the banking center of Asia which made it the most prosperous of the seven cities and in the ruins of Laodicea there are many beautiful homes that are still visible. There was also a particular breed of black sheep that was raised in the area, and its unique glossy black wool was woven into special clothes. The city of Laodicea was like a bank, department store, and hospital all rolled into one and there was a medical cult of Aesculapius located in Laodicea that was known for their eye and ear salve. Laodicea was so prosperous that when the town suffered a great quake in A.D. 66 it was able to rebuild the city without applying Roman Money to do so. An interesting point is that the symbol of a snake wrapped around a staff that was the symbol of the medical cult in Laodicea is still worn by doctors in the U.S. military today. Paul understood the temptations of the Church of Laodicea, and took a deep interest in it by understanding their enticement due to their intellectual pride and their worldly prosperity. However, John’s letter had a totally different tone.

To the Church at Laodicea Write:

14) And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; these things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15) I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16) So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17) Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18) I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20) Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

21) To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

22) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Chapter 3 Verse 14

In this verse Jesus refers to Himself as the “Amen”. Amen is a Hebrew word that can be used in the context of “firm” or “trustworthy”, which means that Jesus may have been trying to tell the Church of Laodicea (and us) that Jesus is the only firm and trustworthy person that they (we) should be relying on. In addition, the word Amen is also used to end prayer (so be it). Since Jesus is also called the Alpha and Omega then Jesus being called Amen brings to light that he fulfilled all scriptures that was ever written concerning the Messiah. Next we see that Jesus tells them that HE is the faithful and true witness which lets them (us) know that he is always faithful to (even when we are not), and that he is the author of truth (I am the way, the ‘truth’, and the life). We must always remember that Jesus proved himself faithful to the Father in all he said and did so now because of that the Father has put him in charge of all things. Finally he tells them that he is the “beginning of the creation of God”, which means that he was the creator of all things which establishes that by him all things were made, and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:3). All these titles show us that Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and it is to him and him only that we should cling to which apparently the Church of Laodicea did not do.

Chapter 3 Verse 15-16

The Laodicean Church is the first church where Jesus goes straight into a rebuke without any commendation at all. He tells them that he KNOWS that they are neither cold nor hot, and that He wished that they were either cold or hot. The word cold here means “sluggish” or “destitute of warm Christian faith and the desire for holiness”. Or in other words they no longer care about doing and being what Jesus had called them to be (1 Peter 1:15-17). In contradiction the word hot means “boiling hot” or “fervent in spirit and zeal for what is good”. In other words, he would rather us be “on fire for God” or as “cold as an ice cube”. So what about “lukewarm”? Many people think that lukewarm is someone who is in the world one day and in the church the next, but the word lukewarm actually means a “condition of the soul that wretchedly fluctuates in and out of spiritual lethargy and a fervor of love”. This means that one day you want to be Mr. / Mrs. “On Fire Christian” and other days you don’t really care about doing anything for God. I think of it like a “yo-yo”; one day you’re in and the next day you’re out. So why would God rather you be hot or cold than lukewarm? If a person is hot then they are walking daily with Christ, and he leads them where he needs them to be. If a person is cold then God knows they can be reached because they know they are not where they need to be. However, the lukewarm person things they have it altogether and they don’t need anything. In other words, the Laodiceans were completely apathetic about Christianity and only did it when they felt like it. The town was a great example of this. Laodicea did not have water of its own so it had to bring hot water from Hierapolis to the north, and cold water from Colossae to the southeast. However, by the time it got to Laodicea the hot water was no longer hot but lukewarm. So what does God do to the lukewarm believers? He SPUES them out... The word spue means to “vomit or to reject with extreme disgust”. While we know that God HATES sin, we must also realize that God HATES lukewarm Christians because not only do they do nothing for his kingdom; they can in fact be very harmful to it. How many times have we heard “Why do I have to be a Christian, I am as good as so and so”. We need to remember that our lives have a direct impact on everyone around us so God would rather us be a cold and dead “prodigal” son than lukewarm. Another way to look at “lukewarm” is someone that is "carnal", which means they are governed by their flesh

and not the by the Spirit. So how do we know if we are lukewarm? Are there signs? Yes there are very distinct signs of being lukewarm!

Chapter 3 Verse 17

If we think back to the history of Laodicea we remember that it was a banking center and the richest of the seven cities that John wrote to so perhaps this is why Jesus said “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing...” Since they had so much “blessing” they may have thought that they were 100% in the will of God, however he continues and tells them that “and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”. In other words they had allowed themselves to become entangled in money and thought they had it all together because of what they owned. However, they were actually afflicted, pitiful, destitute of Christian virtues, blinded by pride and conceit, and totally naked so that they did not have the covering of Christ’s righteousness in and over their lives. We must always remember that Jesus must be our ONLY source, however many Christians have turned to other things hoping to pad their accounts and live an easy life on this planet. Jesus said it very clearly when he said “Lay NO treasure on this earth”, and I believe he meant what he said and that there was no ambiguity in that statement. The Laodiceans however it seems took the easy way out and decided to a life of luxury. Does this sound familiar?

Chapter 3 Verse 18

The loving thing about Jesus is that even though we fall, he ALWAYS has a way back for us unless we decide to never come back. He tells them to “buy” gold that has been tested from HIM that has been tried so that they be rich (in the kingdom), “white raiment” so they may be clothed and their nakedness will be covered, and finally he says to anoint their eyes with eyesalve so that they can see. When we look a little deeper, the first thing Jesus said was to not just buy gold, but gold that had been TESTED. This meant that they needed to get their lives in line with the Word of God, which means that they would have to be tested for their faith to see if they were really serious about following him. The next thing they were told is to buy white raiment, which symbolizes the Righteousness of God. Apparently the Laodiceans were relying on their works or their own form of righteousness, but they had forgotten that their righteousness was as filthy rags to God. Finally, he say to obtain holy eyesalve so that they could see. There was a school of medicine near Laodicea that produced an eyesalve that was supposed to be a cure for weak eyes, but what Christ was saying was to let the Holy Spirit anoint their eyes so they could spiritually see again. The amazing thing I have learned about our Lord over the years is that he is quick to forgive, slow to anger, and always has a plan to bring his children back and this is what he was trying to do with this church.

Chapter 3 Verses 19-20

If you ever want to know if you are God’s then ask this question, have you ever been chastened? Most people who teach try to make the chastisement of God cruel like broken cars, sickness and disease, or other calamities. However, God has a multitude of ways he can chasten us and the worse for me is when I know that I am not in his favor and he withdraws his presence. Some may say, but he will never leave us nor forsake us and that is true but sometimes the presence of God may not be there. The word chastise here does mean to chastise or to strike like a father spanking his child, but it also means to train a child or to cause one to learn. I believe that the level that someone is “chastened” is based on many factors like how many times they have

committed the sin or in my case how hard headed someone is. However, God is a loving Father and would your Father give you cancer to teach you something? Absolutely not, but if we are not in fellowship with Him as we should be then we open up ourselves to our enemy who is more than willing to strike us down. Next he says to be zealous and repent. The word zealous here means to burn with zeal, to be heated or boil in the pursuit of good, to strive earnestly after GOD. Do you see what I see? The ONLY way to get out of the “lukewarm” state is to BOIL over for God. Why? Because the only other way someone lukewarm can go is totally cold. However, Jesus is a gentlemen and he will not knock the door down to get into our lives. He says “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”. He is always knocking on a lukewarm or cold person’s hearts, however he will never push his way in. Christianity is voluntary life, and only those who voluntarily let Christ in get to be with him forever. Is Jesus been knocking on your door? Isn’t about time you let him in?

Chapter 3 Verse 21

The promise to those who repent is a simple one. First, they will sit next to Jesus, and they will rule with him in the Millennium. What a Promise!!

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Coming soon... The Seven Types of Modern Day Christians...

www.shininginthedark.com