

# Christ Speaks to Seven Churches in Asia Minor

## “The Things Which Are” Revelation 2-3

[Bible Truth Web Site - by Cooper Abrams](#)

Revelation Chapters 2-3 begin the section that deals with situation in the day that John wrote the book. It addresses "*the which are*" of Revelation 1:19. The seven churches mentioned here are literally seven churches that existed at the time of the writing of the book and were located in Asia. In these two chapters the Lord gives seven messages to the churches. Although these messages were challenges to these specific churches, by application they are directed toward churches throughout history. The strengths that Christ commended are strengths churches should embrace, and their failures should be a strong warning to diligence in faith and practice. As with the Epistles Christ's message surely given to all churches and was applicable to all the hundreds of churches in Asia. Their dedication to the Lord and also the problems in these churches are common to all churches.

The characteristics of these seven churches appear to be prophetic. An examination of church history shows the distinctiveness of each of these seven church parallels the trends in the churches in the following centuries.

The seven churches and their corresponding ages:<sup>1</sup>

<b>Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)</b>	<b>(30-100 AD) The First Century Apostolic church.</b>
<b>Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11)</b>	<b>(100-313 AD) The Age of Roman Persecution</b>
<b>Pergamos(Rev. 2:12-17)</b>	<b>(313-600) The Age of Constantine</b>
<b>Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29)</b>	<b>(600-1517 AD) The Dark Ages</b>
<b>Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)</b>	<b>(1517-1648 AD) The Protestant Reformation</b>
<b>Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13)</b>	<b>(1648-1900sAD) The Missionary Movement</b>
<b>Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)</b>	<b>(1960 to Present) The Age of Apostasy prior to the</b>

**Rapture**

Surely, throughout each century there have been churches with the characteristics of these seven churches. However, the general trend is apparent that the general types of churches in Chapters 2-3 correspond to each of these churches.

### **EPHESUS: BUSY BUT BACKSLIDDEN AND WITHOUT LOVE.**

**Revelation 2:1-7**

#### **THE HISTORICAL SITUATION AT EPHESUS:**

("Ephesus" means "desirable")

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of Messiah*, rev ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 48-49.

Ephesus was an apostolic<sup>2</sup> church of the First Century and was a prosperous Roman trade city located on the Aegean Sea. Its business centered on worldwide sea trade due to its sheltered inland harbor. Today the city is but a ruin. Heavy timbering and over grazing of land eroded its top soil which was carried into the Cayster River and deposited in the bay the city was built by. They tried by dredging to clear the waterways, but failed. In time the river filled up the bay and it became a reed marsh. Today the ruins of the city are 12 miles inland. The city that occupies the area today is the Turkish town called Ayasaluk.

Ephesus was in the beginning a spiritually strong church and Acts 20:31, records that Paul spent three years there teaching and preaching. Timothy was pastor of Ephesus during Paul's imprisonment and martyrdom in Rome. Historians record that Timothy suffered at Ephesus the same martyrdom as Paul at Rome. Later, the Apostle John ministered at Ephesus and was exiled from there to the Island of Patmos. Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, was a faithful leader in this church. He too gave his life for Christ in that city. It was an evangelistic church sending missionaries to other areas and was a very busy and outwardly prosperous. Others who faithfully served the Lord and worked at Ephesus were Aquila, Priscilla and Tychicus. (Acts 18:2, 18, 20:4, 26; Rom. 16:3; Eph. 6:21, 24; Col. 4:7, 18; 2 Tim. 2:12; Titus 3:12)

The church at Ephesus was constantly plagued by Satan's attacks and by the problem of the saved but immature Gentiles who continued to walk after the world. (Eph. 5:2-17) Their unfaithfulness was robbing the church of God's blessings. Ephesians 5:6 indicates there were false teachers in the assembly who were also teaching that sinning was all right with God. Timothy was battling a host of problems including false doctrine. John later opposed the false doctrines of Nestorius and Gnosticism who also plagued this church. This church is an example of the diligence of Satan in assaulting a church which is seeking to serve the Lord.

The city was located in the middle of pagan land where false religion dominated the culture. The idol goddess Diana's (Artemis) temple was there which was called one of Seven Wonders of the World. This temple and others made it a tourist city and part of its great industry was selling souvenirs and small idols. The pagan religion of the city was very rich and influential. When Paul first preached in Ephesus many people believed in Christ and sale of idols and pagan religious items dropped off. Those who made the idols, upset by the loss of business, caused the riot mentioned in Acts. 19:25-27.

### **CHRIST HOLDS THE PASTOR AND CHURCH RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADERSHIP. Rev. 2:1**

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2 The word "apostolic" relates to the Apostles. It refers to the first churches established by the Apostles and the time period in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century when the apostles were living.

**Letter is addressed to the church through its pastor.** The word "angel" means "messenger." The word doesn't mean an angel as heavenly being, but it simply identifies one as the "messenger. It is important to note that the pastors derive their message from Christ. A church is ruled by Christ who is its Head and He brought it with His own blood. (Eph. 5:23, 25) The church that follows Christ will have no problem honoring and following God's messengers who faithfully preach the Word of God and follow the Lord.

Addressing the message to the pastor is putting him in the proper perspective as the overseer of the church. God reveals the ministry of a pastor in 1 Peter 5:1-3. *"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock."* (1 Peter 5:2-3) A pastor does not rule a church, but follows God's word in leading the congregation in worshipping and serving the Lord. The elder, bishop, pastor are various names the New Testament gives to the overseer that God sends to a local church to set the example and lead it. The New Testament is clear in that God instituted congregation rule as the biblical polity in a church.

Many preachers amass great power and glory unto themselves and the people allow it. But it is wrong for a church to esteem its messenger to the point he over shadows Christ and the Word of God. It is also just as wrong to show little esteem and respect for a pastor or recognize him as God's messenger. (See 1 Tim. 5:17)

The pastor is to be the leader or overseer of the church as New Testament clearly states. He is not to be a lackey of the congregation, nor should he lord over the flock. (1 Tim. 1:18-19; 4:16,12; 5:20:22; 6:3-5,17; 2 Tim. 1:8, 13; 2:2-3, 14; 3:5; 4:1-5; 1 Peter 5:7) Many churches and pastors allow a group of elders, deacons, trustees or committees to rule over a church. Many churches and denominations are ruled by an outside hierarchy of rules who exercise authority over a church. Nowhere in scripture is this found and in fact God expressly denounces this as He did in Ephesus commending the Nicolaitans. The point can be made here that God did not speak to any individual or group in the churches, but spoke directly to the pastor whom he had appointed as their leader. Ideally the congregation is made up of born again believers who are in fellowship with the Lord and are spiritually mature. Being spiritually sensitive to the Holy Spirit they properly cooperate with the overseers of the church and jointly they do God's will. The precedent is firmly established that God spoke to the church through their pastor that He through the Holy Spirit had set over the congregation.(Acts 20:28) A church that ignores this principle of Scripture is outside of God's will.

God is not pleased nor will bless those who do not listen and follow His messengers. Throughout the history of Israel their rebellion against God was directed toward God's messenger. (See Acts 7:52, Heb. 11:35-40) Often those whom God had not called tried to elevate themselves into that position. Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses' leadership falsely concluded that they were better qualified to lead Israel. However in spite of Moses' shortcoming God's choice was Moses. (Numbers 12:1-16) God struck them down for their arrogance and disobedience.

Korah also rebelled against Moses saying, *"Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?"* (Num. 16:3) He argued that all the congregation of Israel did not need Moses and without God's approval he proceeded to take the leadership of Israel upon himself. God severely punished Korah for his error and destroyed him, his family and those that followed him and 14,700 people died. (Num. 16:1-50)

Leadership over the local church is set by God in the man that He calls. The pastor is to lead, guide and set the example. (1 Tim 4:12) God's pastor should be warned not to abuse or to take his responsibility lightly. A church, as well should, not allow itself to usurp the pastors' role as God's under shepherd, nor should the pastor allow his God appointed position to be degraded by the church. (Heb. 12:17)

### **FIRST: THE GOOD NEWS - CHRIST COMMENDS THE EPHESIANS. Rev. 2:2-3**

***"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: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."***(Rev. 2:2-3)

Jesus says to this assembly that He knew of their deeds and hard labor for the Lord showing which shows His personal attention to the affairs of His congregation. Christ commends them for their "work." This refers to the service done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The term "hard labor" means to "toil, or strenuous exhausting effort." Thus this church was a well-organized, busy and a hardworking assembly.

Their patience denotes they were enduring and not losing momentum. They refused to be defeated even though wickedness and opposition was all around them. This church just fought harder when presented with difficulty.

They did not tolerate evil men. Unbelief is evil and sin whether it be in a preacher, a church, a denomination, or an organization or people in general. This church abhorred evil and false teachers. Today often peace is placed ahead of truth in churches and pastors and churches have compromised God's Word lest they offend the wicked. They preclude that, "I know it is wrong, but for the sake of peace we will tolerate it." Some proclaim, "Peace at any price," yet the Lord says *"have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* (Eph. 5:11) If the price of peace is to allow sin and false teaching to go unrebuked in the church or in one's life, the price is too high and God's will is not being done. There can be no true peace where false doctrine and sin are found.

The Lord is commending them for their uncompromising stand for the truth against false apostles who this church showed to be liars. Pastors and churches today should take heed of the Christ's commending approval of this church for

contending for the faith. (Jude 3) The modern trend is to accept anything and anyone who says he is speaking for Christ without testing them by closely examining their teachings and actions by the Bible. Many churches striving for outward success and numbers and have allowed worldly philosophies and methods into their midst. The modern heretical emerging church movement is a perfect example. Using faulty human wisdom they have abandoned God word, merged worldliness into their services. Pragmatism has replaced sound doctrine in many churches. To these church is not a matter of "What does the Bible teach" but what works. The radio and TV is flooded by false preachers and churches of every persuasion and rarely if ever do you hear them exposed and denounced from the pulpits of most churches.

In the church at Ephesus false teachers were identified and rebuked as liars and this pleased the Savior. An example church ignoring God's truth is the growing acceptance of the false doctrines of the Pentecost and Charismatic movements. Once biblically sound churches are now rushing to copy the worldly practices of these groups by having what is called non-traditional services, changing their names to identify themselves as being non-denominational, and participating in the gross errors of movements such as the Promise Keepers and teaching the human philosophy such a Rick Warrens "Purpose Driven Church." The music in many of these churches is patterned after the world using rock music with supposed Christian words. Biblical doctrine rebukes sin and error and therefore has been set aside in the pursuit of greater bigger churches and more money. Christ cannot nor will He bless error and those that ignore His word. A stern warning should be seen in Christ's praising these believers for upholding biblical teachings and for their discernment. Romans 12:2 proclaims *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

The Ephesians hated false teachers. They tested their teachers and compared them and what they taught to the Word of God. They were as orthodox and fundamental in doctrine as any church. Yet, in spite of all their outward appearance of being a spiritual church they were backslidden. The word of God is to be believed and upheld, yes, but unless it is lived it produces no honor to the Lord. One commentator said, "They were straight theologically as a gun barrel and just as empty." How sad that they championed God's word, looked so good outwardly, yet were inwardly dead.

### **THE BAD NEWS: I HAVE SOMETHING AGAINST THEE. Rev 2:4**

Christ Himself admonished His church and literally says, *"I hold this against thee."* If only today we would see the words of Christ are as valid now as when he spoke them to John. They are as applicable to our churches as to the church at Ephesus. It is a serious matter when Christ who gave Himself for the church says I have something against you. (See Eph. 5:25)

Christ's admonishment was that they had left their first love." In contrast, Paul in Ephesians 1:15, written in 64 AD commended them for their love unto all the saints. He encouraged too them to continue to walk in love. (Eph. 5:2) They ignored

God's instruction and in a period of approximately thirty years had grown to the point of substituting the pride of good works for love of Christ.

Jesus says in strong language to this busy, laboring, discerning, persevering church, that hated evil, *"you have forgotten your first love."* They had forsaken and abandoned a personal relationship with Christ. The word used here for love is "agape" is the deepest, personal and totally unselfish kind of love. Jesus says to the church, *"Look at yourself as I see you! You are too occupied with church pride, numbers, programs and routines. You should serve me out of love, not loyalty to an organization."*

It has been my experience that often churches which appear so successful outwardly, when examined more closely are found wanting. One church in a town where I ministered had a seemingly very prosperous church. They had large numbers and many reports of people being saved. I knew the church's denomination was in doctrinal error in several areas but how could one criticize such success? In time it became clear the Gospel the church preached was unsound and flawed. When questioned about their clear compromise of Scripture the church pointed to its outward success as proof of God's blessing on their ministry and refused to even consider that anything was wrong. They looked good outwardly, but were in fact dishonoring Christ with their false practices all the while thinking themselves to be spiritually sound. It is the word of God, not outward success which determines a church's spiritual relationship with the Lord. A church in doctrinal error is in sin and by their disobedience has separated themselves from the Lord and He cannot nor will bless them or be a part of their work. Churches must examine themselves in the reality of the teachings of the Bible to determine reality and see themselves as Christ sees them.

Clearly the Bible teaches God will not under any circumstances bless error. Ephesus' failure was refusing to follow Paul's instruction to *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."* (2 Cor. 13:5) The attitude Paul is teaching in this instruction is one of constant self-evaluation. *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."* (1 Cor. 11:31) They were so busy and taken with their work they had left their love of Christ.

Outwardly, they may have prided themselves in their love. But it was an emotional love, not "agape" which manifests itself in total unselfish dependence on and devotion to Christ. The word used for "hast left" implies an intentional and not accidental act. They knew they were in error, but it did not matter to them. You see they were running this church in human power and did not see the need of the Lord. It is the same error of one trying to work or earn their salvation. They were operating in their own righteousness and not God's. This church was proud of its organizational achievements and self-sufficiency and their human accomplishments robbed them of blessings and presence of the Lord. God is saying that even doing good for improper reasons is wrong. This should certainly be a rebuke against many churches today who take such pride in their numbers, programs, buildings, etc. Paul rebuked the Galatians who were so legalistic in applying the letter of the law. *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by*

love"(Galatians 5:6). In verse 13, Paul continues and says, ". . . *by love serve one another.*" Paul gave thanks for the ". . . *work of faith and labor of love*" of the Thessalonians. (1 Thess. 1:3)

God's love is the essence of His character and the reason for all He does. The believer, too, must reflect that love to those around him; that is why this was so important the Lord. How could a church or believer be used by God to reflect His marvelous love, if they have abandoned it?

### **REPENT! RETURN TO A SERVICE OF LOVE OR I WILL REMOVE YOUR CANDLESTICK. Rev. 2:5**

Colossians 1:18 says, ". . . *that in all things he might have the preeminence.*"

The Ephesians had gotten so involved in "church work" they had forgotten why Christ instituted the church and the reason for its commission. Christ is saying, "It is important why you do what you do." The fatal error of the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees was that they were religious zealots outwardly making a show of keeping the letter of the law. Yet, inside in their hearts, Jesus said they were dead and described them as white washed tombs, beautiful on the outside but full of dead men's bones. (Matt. 23:27) If our service is not out of a heartfelt love for Christ, it is worthless. Only that which is done by faith pleases God and will be rewarded. History proves many churches have received the scriptural truth yet failed to obey the truth in love.

It is easy for a church to slip into using a program to build its membership rather than winning souls to Christ. Programs, if done biblically, certainly can be used by a church to reach the lost, but often the program begins to take over and but the motivation of the love of souls is lost.

This message was a serious warning and rebuke from the Head of the Church Jesus Christ. The warning is plain; Christ will remove His power and blessing from a church that refuses to serve in truth and love. Jesus warned them He would remove their "candlestick" means their God called pastor. Playing church out of habit or tradition is not pleasing to the Lord. Christ warns He would leave their assembly and thereby would cease to recognize them as His church and provide not leadership for them. Sadly, many churches have suffered what Jesus warned would happen. Many once sound churches and most Protestant denominations of today certainly fall into this category. They have the name and all the pomp and ceremony, but have abandoned sound doctrine and compromised with the world. Their pride in their denomination shows their motivation is keeping tradition rather than serving the Lord in love. Removing the pastor the Lord sent them meant His direction and blessings would also be removed. Many churches today operate in the flesh and God is not a part of what they are doing.

The Apostle Paul was very much concerned and feared the possibility that he

would lose his love for Christ making his labor in vain and in turn be disqualified at the Bema Judgment. (See 1 Cor. 9:27, 2 Cor. 5:10) If Paul was concerned, should not we be even more so concerned about serving Christ for the right motives. What is a wrong motive? It would be ANY motive which is not out of love and deep commitment and devotion to Christ.

Christ warns He would abandon this church if it did not repent of this gross sin of leaving their love of Christ. Some such as Charles C. Ryrie water down the warning by falsely concluding that Christ would only "remove the usefulness of that local church."<sup>3</sup> What Christ is saying I will remove you as a church not be your Head any longer. No group that does not have Christ as its Head is a true church. This assembly had deposed Christ by not loving Him. When Christ left this group, they were no longer a true church, but now were a false one. Yes, they went on meeting and doing religious works and they had the name, but God was not in it and all they did was of the flesh and of no value. (See Matt. 7:21-29)

The whole point of Christ addressing the church was to wake them up to their terrible failure. Many times, when it is very obvious a group has left its love of Christ and gone off on its own, we graciously try to avoid offending them, or rebuking or even pointing out their errors. We grasp at straws and look for some redeeming outward quality in them, when in fact Christ has left them, because they left Christ. Is there really any value in saying something is alive when in fact it is dead? Does condoning sin bring them back to life, help them, or bring comfort? Clearly the answer is no and it only makes the matter worse.

It is very possible to be busy as a bee working supposedly for the Lord, and actually be not pleasing to Him. Why? Our works are done in the flesh and glorify ourselves, however, our labor of love and obedience to the Lord glorifies Christ! That is the difference.

### **THEY RIGHTLY OPPOSED THOSE TRYING TO SET UP A HIERARCHY IN THEIR CHURCH. Rev. 2:6**

The Nicolaitans were a heretical sect of people in this congregation. The word means, "*Niko*" to conquer and "*Laos*" the people. It means simply this: The Nicolaitan's philosophy was that there was a difference between the "laity" who were the people in the pew, and the clergy who were the church's religious leaders.

It was an attempt to reestablish of Old Testament priesthood in the churches which led to a group of leaders which were above the common people. This hateful practice eventually led to the establishment of popes and prophets ruling in a hierarchal church governments over the local congregation. It is the idea that spiritual leadership can only come from an elite or special class of upper class

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible, footnote on Revelation 2:5, Chicago: Moody Press, 1978, p1791.

officers in the church. They purport that only through these special persons does God speak to and give the authority to control and dictate to the congregation. Only this elite little group has access to God and the people must come through them to reach the Lord. The Nicolaitans thus sought to control access to God. Historically the congregation at Ephesus did not purge itself of this unbiblical idea. Today it is still around in various forms in such apostate churches as the Roman Catholic and in Protestant denominations. It is also prevalent in the Christian cults.

Every member of the body of Christ is a minister responsible to his Savior for his own spiritual relationship to Christ. No one can intercede between a believer and His Lord. Every Christian is a believer-priest and needs no one to intercede on his behalf save Christ Himself. (See Hebrews 10:19-22) The institution of the local church was given by the Lord to edify, build up believers in the word of God, and to evangelize the world. Each congregation is responsible to follow the Bible, God's word which alone is ". . . *given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Christ says he hated their deeds. If Christ said he hated the deeds of these people who sought to enslave the congregation and rule over them, how can any denomination, church or believer condone being ruled by a hierarchy of men?

### **CHRIST SPEAKS TO HIS CHURCH. Rev. 2:7**

*"He that hath an ear, let him hear that the Holy Spirit says to the churches."* Ephesus did not hear and in time fell and became a part of the organized Papal type church. Because the love of Christ was not their motive for service their organization began to promulgate itself. It ceased to be Christ's church and became an apostate group without Christ. This phrase makes the Lord's message applicable to the whole of the church, but also personal and particular to the individual members. No church can serve the Lord as a whole until its individual members are faithful and obedient to the Lord.

### **CHRIST HAD NO CRITICISM FOR SMYRNA The Poor Rich Church Rev. 2:8-11**

#### **THE ANCIENT CITY OF SMYRNA.**

The name Smyrna means "myrrh" which is a bitter herb. The city was located in Asia Minor about thirty five miles north of Ephesus. Ancient ruins reveal the city existed in ancient times 1500 years before Christ. Today the modern city is called Izmir and is the second largest city in Turkey with a population of 1.5 million people. The city has a large sea port harbor on the Aegean Sea and had a population of around 10,000 in Paul's day and was considered the finest city in Asia being called "was called "the lovely-the crown of Ionia-the ornament of Asia." The city is one of

several who claim to be the birth place of Homer. It was a prosperous and important Roman city and favored by Rome. There is no record of how the Gospel came to the city, but it was probably reached by the church at Ephesus on a few miles away. The city had a large Jewish population who were extremely hostile towards Christians and the chief cause of their persecution. Christ's message to Smyrna was not for them to repent, but to remain faithful in their present and future persecutions. History shows the persecution of Christians continued for many years after this letter was written.

### **THE HISTORICAL SITUATION AT SMYRNA.**

Polycarp, a martyr was at one time the pastor of the Smyrna church. From history we have the record of Polycarp who was burned at the stake in 155 A.D. The account of his martyrdom gives us a picture of probably what occurred early in John's day. Polycarp was brought before the Roman governor and charged with atheism, which meant he was charged with not worshiping the Roman Emperor as God. The same evil principle is presently today attacking the believers and congregations. The world accuses Christians of atheism, that is not worshiping the God of Secular Humanism, evolution, or manmade humanistic "Christianity," or any of the many religions and cults man has invented.

The Roman custom in the First Century was to ask the prisoner to recant his belief in Christ three times and if he refused the sentence he was put to death. It was the practice of the Romans to offer the accused a chance to recant save his life.<sup>4</sup> When asked by the local magistrate to recant Polycarp's reply was, "For 86 years I have been His servant and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The Romans governor's angry response was a warning: "I'll have you destroyed by fire!" Polycarp replied to him, "The fire you threaten me with burns for a time and is soon extinguished. There is a fire you know nothing about - the fire to come and of eternal punishment; the fire reserved for the ungodly. But why do you hesitate...do what you will with me." The governor was amazed, but sent a crier into the arena to cry "Polycarp has confessed to being a Christian!" The mob angrily cried that he be burnt at the stake and Polycarp, thanking God for the privilege, walked to the stake and was burned alive! A true faith will produce a true love of God and a true love will produce sacrifice even to the point of death.

Such was the character and love of Christ of the pastor and members of the church at Smyrna. They loved Christ who He had died for them and they in turn gave their lives for their Savior.

### **CHRIST SPEAKS TO THOSE WHO ARE DYING FOR HIM. Rev. 2:8-11**

This period in church history corresponds to the time of Emperor Nero to Emperor Constantine. (AD 64-316) During these years persecution was allowed by God and should silence the false teachers who say God has only good times for a Christian. As far as safety was concerned these were not good times to be a Christian. To profess Christ was to become an outlaw" wanted dead or alive."

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church (New York:Oxford Press,1973) p3.

Jesus assured them saying, "*I know thy works and tribulation*" (Rev. 2:9). The word "works" refers to their "afflictions." They were in constant fear of death. A father, mother or children could be taken at any time and imprisoned or executed. The Christians had great enemies and some of them were the false Jews, natural born, but not spiritually born who were turning in Christians to the civil authorities.

At this time there was no active investigation to locate Christians and the only way the state would arrest them was that if someone reported them and swore out a warrant. It was the Jews who turned in Christians and took out warrants against them. The Jews felt that the Gentiles had overtaken Judaism and that to be an ethnic Jew was to be no Jew at all. Thus these zealous Jews also turned their fellow Jews over to the government which meant a certain and cruel death. It is a clear indication that Gentile believers of the First Century did not keep the Old Testament laws. Paul's Epistles clearly denounced the Judaizers who sought to impose the Old Testament law on Gentiles. Because of their hatred of Christians many were imprisoned and murdered. Although Christians appalled the persecution and murder of Jews by Hitler and Stalin one cannot but remember the proverb that says, "Be sure your sins will find you out."

There were ten major persecutions in the period of 64-316 AD. Tens of thousands of Christians died horrible deaths, because they loved Christ more than life itself. These dear saints of God thought there were principles and truths worth living and dying for. Rather than compromise God's truth or deny the Lord Jesus Christ, they willingly suffered martyrdom for the cause of Christ.

### **POOR IN THE WORLD'S EYE, YET RICH IN CHRIST. Rev. 2:9**

Luke 12:15 says, "*A man's life consisteth not in abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" Matthew 6:19-20 tells us that the man who lays up riches in heaven is rich indeed. In Hebrews 10:34 God commended the Hebrew Christians because in a time of persecution they "*took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*" They had little of the world's goods and they were hungry and oppressed unto death, and Christ commended them for their faithfulness.

The church at Smyrna was poor in the world's status and goods, but Jesus states they are rich. What is seen outwardly as poverty is not necessarily what it seems! The ones who were in real poverty, never let you know it! Few in our churches today are as poor as were the Smyraeans. In spite of their poverty they were a vibrant church on fire for the Lord. They were poor in worldly goods, but rich in the Lord. In contrast today many churches are rich in worldly goods yet starved spiritually and that is why so much of the potential ministry goes lacking.

Their attitude towards material possession was that all they had including their very lives belonged to the Lord. They were like the Macedonians who Paul commended for giving out of their great poverty. (2 Cor. 8:1) These saints of God gave sacrificially more than they really could and literally took the food from their

tables and coats off their backs in order to support the work of God. First and foremost they gave of themselves, totally! The spirituality of a church can be judged in direct proportion to its giving. It's like a spiritual thermometer.

Many excuses are given as to why people do not support God's work through their local church. Many claim they cannot give because they are too poor. The example of the believers in Smyrna and Macedonia remove this as being a legitimate excuse. The Bible instructs the believer to give his offerings to the Lord, yet the unspiritual refuse and can't see how they can trust God to do as He says or believe His promises.<sup>5</sup> When they have needs or sickness comes and they cry for God's help, yet many will not trust God with few dollars a week. Those that first give themselves wholly to the Lord have no trouble with giving and that is the people God uses to carry on His work. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Rom. 12:1-2).

No one should be comfortable or secure in a faith that says it believes God to forgive their sins and save them, yet cannot trust God in sacrificial giving. (See 2 Sam. 24:24)

### **THE REWARD PROMISED TO THESE FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS IS "A CROWN OF LIFE" Revelation 2:10**

James 1:12 explains, *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."*

These believers were ordinary people such as we are and they had the same promises of God we have. What would we do under the threat of death! Would we RECENT! Some might complain that this is an unfair question. History records that some in other churches during this persecution did recant and deny their faith in Christ. When the threat was over they wanted to return to the fellowship of the local churches, and in justifying their actions said that it was only what was in a man's heart really counted. Yet the Scriptures teach if it's in the heart it will come out and be in the life and on the lips. Romans 10:10 says *"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation..."* Confession of the mouth is inseparable with salvation. There should never be any silent Christians. One's silence speaks very loud and reveals their lack of faith! *"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."* (1 John 4:4).

Jesus praised them for dying instead of uttering even one sentence of denial of Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18 says Christ to the Christian is preeminent in all things meaning first and all. The message is clear that a life which publicly rejects

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<sup>5</sup> See 1 Corinthians 9:6-15. Paul explains what giving should be in the New Testament.

Christ is worthless. One man's life is of such a value to our Lord that He thought it was worth dying for. One person's lack of true witness for Christ can seriously affect many lives and hurt his church.

## **THE PROMISE OF GOD: THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD HAVE NO FEAR OF THE SECOND DEATH. Revelation 2:11**

***"Fear not those who are able to kill the flesh, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in Hell" (Matthew 10:28).***

Death for the true believer is only a door they pass through which ushers them into the very presence of the Lord. Christ conquered death and the God's word gives us the assurance that. ". . . *Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*" (1 Cor. 15:54-55) Jesus when speaking Martha said ". . . *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*" (John 11:25-26)

The Christian's promise from the Lord is *"To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."* (2 Cor. 5:8-9) 1 Thess. 4:13-18 explains the coming Rapture of all believers both dead and alive and ends telling the Christians to comfort yourselves with this truth.

2 Cor. 13:5 explains we are to, *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"*

## **PERGAMOS: A CHURCH IN SIN CITY. Rev. 2:12-17**

### **THE HISTORICAL SITUATION IN PERGAMOS.**

It is popular today to blame the spiritual deadness in our churches on the evil day in which we live. The unfaithful offer many supposed reasons for their lack of faith; the world is evil, everyone is doing it; times are financially tight; hard times are here; and you don't know my situation. Yet Scripture never allows for circumstances to hinder or dampen one's commitment and faith in God. The world says; we cannot be honest in a crooked world, sex is too persistent to keep ourselves pure and everyone does it, the trend of our times is divorce, remarriage, and living together outside marriage, and further drugs, abortion, homosexuality are normal ways of life. Sadly many churches in unbelief have surrendered to the world's sinful attitudes.

The Bible tells us times in Pergamos were as bad as they are today! The Roman Emperor was viewed not only as a ruler but as God. The Emperor and Roman government was looked to for all needs. Their government was socialistic

and the people were dependent on it for their subsistence.

There were three temples dedicated to the worship of Roman emperors located in the city and it was the headquarters of the imperial cult called the Concelia. Today the current situation is much the same. In our modern culture many people look to the American President and Washington DC for their prosperity. Many Christians looked forward to having a Christian President and were elated when George Bush was elected. Yet, even with a professing Christian President nothing was changed. The American people love sin and they proved when they electing Bill Clinton who was unashamedly a reprobate and the most disgraceful president the nation has ever had up to our present time. The United States in 2008 and 2012 elected a President who is openly a Marxist socialist, pro-abortion, who has legalized same sex marriages all the while claiming to be a “born again” Christian. America is a good example of a nation where Satan’s seat is.

The true Bible believing Christian must understand that Washington DC cannot change the morality of this nation and has no desire to do so. Only individual citizens who give themselves to the Lord and take a public stand for the truth can make any difference in the morals of our country. Sadly, the majority of churches in America today are not upholding God’s truth as did Pergamos. Many professing Christians have voted for and helped unashamedly, immoral candidates.

Pergamos was a city of idols. The idol Zeus the male god was worshiped at a great altar in the city and there was a temple to Athena the female idol. When Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, the priest-king, Attalus fled the city and went to Pergamos with his priests and sacred mysteries.<sup>6</sup> Pergamos was located in Asia Minor, Turkey during 241-197 B.C.E. Pergamos was a beautiful area. The city sat in the midst of mountains, between the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea. After the death of Attalus the III (who reigned from 138-133 B.C.E.), the Romans came into power. Under the Romans, Pergamos became the capital and cultural center of the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>7</sup>

There they set up their kingdom outside the Roman empire, and thrived under the care of the devil. Dionysus the Bull god was worshiped and was a powerful force in the everyday life of the people. The health god was Asclepius, a healing snake god, and there was a huge health center dedicated to this idol. Here in the midst of all these false gods there was active persecution of Christians. In many ways it was not unlike today when in America you can worship any god or religion, but is it taboo to even mention the name of God, post the Ten Commandments, pray publicly to God, or speak of Jesus Christ. Pergamos was truly the seat or throne of Satan.

**CHRIST PRESENTS HIMSELF AS HAVING A SHARP TWO EDGED SWORD.  
Rev. 2:12**

At Ephesus Christ is seen holding the seven stars, (churches) in his hand. At

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.biblebelievers.org.au/7ch023.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nicolations.followersofyah.com/>

Smyrna Christ is seen as being the hope of the resurrection and strength. In Pergamos His coming is seen as being a sharp rebuke and judgment.

### **THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH. Revelation 2:13**

There were some commendable factors in this church. (Rev. 2:13) Jesus told them *"I know where you dwell!"* They were in the middle of sin city where Satan had authority and influence. Christ saw the temptations and the pressures they were under yet he did not lessen His instruction to them to be faithful and condemn sin. He is sympathetic yet firm.

The congregation at Pergamos had upheld the name of Christ and had not left the faith. There was no public denial of Christ in their church and Christ commended them for standing faithful when one of their members named Antipas was martyred. Antipas, tradition says was roasted alive inside a hollow brass bull.<sup>8</sup> The point made here by Christ is that no trial, however severe, justifies unfaithfulness to the Lord. The threat to all in this church was real and when Antipas was arrested and slain surely it causes others feared for their lives. Yet, 1 Corinthians 4:2... *"It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."*

### **THE ADMONITION. Rev. 2:14-15**

Balak, the king of Moab sought to destroy Israel and he called Balaam, the son of Beor and a prophet of Pethor in Mesopotamia. (See Num. 22:24 Balak, king of Moab, sent messengers to the soothsayer, requesting him to come and pronounce a curse against Israel, with whom the Moabites were at war, and of whom they could not defeat.

Balaam returned to King Balak and explained how he was unable to curse the Israelites due to God having control of his tongue, but instead explained to the king on how he could get the Israelites to curse themselves, thereby removing the protection God had on them. He counseled King Balak that he could ensnare God's chosen people by offering them prostitutes and unclean food sacrificed to idols. This worked, because Numbers 31:16 states: *"Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD."*

Jesus however, admonished the church in Pergamos by using Balaam's instructions to Balak to infiltrate the nation and pollute their society. Jesus admonished them for allowing the Balaamites to go unreprieved in the church. The problem was they tolerated unbelievers in their assembly. Following Balaam's instruction Balak influenced the Israelites to inter-marry with Canaanites and thus disobey God and defile themselves with the sinful people around them. (See

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<sup>8</sup> "Tradition" This term refers to unverified events not recorded in the Bible, but in extra-biblical literature or oral tradition.

Numbers 22:1-23:25) God had forbidden Israel to marry or have close relations of any kind with the grossly sinful Canaanites. (See Deut. 7:2-6) Israel ignored God's commandments and violated the Lord's strict standard of separation from those who practiced sin by allowing the Jews to inter-marry with the pagan and utterly sinful Canaanites. We can see the same sin in Solomon's life as he married pagan wives and set up temples to their false God's in Israel. The result of Solomon's sin was the divided kingdom and centuries of war between the tribes of Israel.

In like manner some in the Pergamos church were tolerant of false doctrine and teachings and were allowing them in their congregation. Here Jesus is not addressing the Balaamites, but doctrinally sound Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. It was saved church members who were allowing the false teachers to teach and lead in the church. They knew the truth but would not take a stand against them. These wolves were corrupting the church and they were going unopposed by born again believers!

What a paradox that a church with members who were living in an wicked and evil city ruled by pagan religion, who were facing persecution and death would allow worldliness and sin into their midst. The wording of verse 14 indicates that not all were a part of this and there were some faithful that worldliness and false teachers. Satan is the master at knowing our every weakness and his strategy here was to slip in the back door while the church was fighting the battle at the front door. It should be a warning to us all to never let our guard down.

Today much the same thing is occurring in many churches. The current philosophy is "We are all God's children - let's put aside our differences and just worship God together." Biblical separation from unbelievers is not popular today. These worldly churches want everyone to join hands and supposedly praise the Lord together. Their philosophy is that what doctrine is not important. Rather they conclude that what one believes or their church practices has no bearing on their "following Jesus." The doctrines of God's word are not important and these churches cross all doctrinal denominational beliefs. The "emergent" church movement is a prime example of the modern Balaamites. These false churches have polluted biblical Christianity with their blatant worldliness. Such churches, in the name of Christ, have prostituted themselves with the world. Their services are theatrical presentations where biblical teaching is psychology accented by modern CCM rock music that appeals not to God's truth, but to emotional gratification.

The Bible says God does not hear the prayers or praise of unbelievers or worship of unbelievers. The only prayer He hears is the one of repentance and belief. The only true worship is worship "in spirit and truth." (John 4:24) It is the philosophy of the modern "New Evangelicals," and a host of popular evangelists who supposedly preach the gospel and hold to the truth on one hand, while on the other, join and promote the ministers of false religions such as Roman Catholicism and beliefs of the Neo-evangelicals. Such is the state of much of modern evangelism.

Today, it is socially advantageous to be a liberal church member. There is little reproach to being a Christian unless you actually practice New Testament

Christianity and biblical separation. Many who practice biblical separation are condemned as being fanatical and unloving. These compromisers with the world justify their actions by saying, "We must love one another." Preachers are urged to preach love and only positive things. Churches are urged join with the Protestants, Charismatics, and other doctrinally unsound groups whose practices and teaching are clearly unbiblical in order to win the lost to Christ.

What kind of love is it that waters down God's word and disregards His clear instructions? Is true love expressed when one is afraid to hurt someone's feelings instead of telling them the truth? Does love refuse to tell a person that God says they are sinners lost in sin, but that by the shed blood of Jesus Christ they can have their sins forgiven by simple faith? Is it an expression of love to condone a person in their sin and unbelief? Do you define love as withholding the truth of the Word of God to a person deceived in a false religion or cult? Is it love to condone and let false teachers and error in a church to go unrebuked and corrected? Is it love to join with unbelievers, that has the effect of sending a confusing message to the lost. Does God condone false doctrines taught in God's name that says there are no absolutes in the Bible? That definition of love cannot be found in any dictionary and certainly not in the Bible.

It must be understood that as hard as Balaam tried, not even the most famous diviner of his day could curse God's people. It was only when Israel forsook the Lord did Balaam have success. The flood of false churches and cults today do not hinder God's ultimate plan unless God's people turn away from Him. The devil may "bruise the heel," but it is Jesus Christ who will deliver the killing head wound and destroy Satan and all who follow him. (Gen. 3:15)

### **THE WARNING FROM CHRIST. Rev. 2:16**

Christ warns this compromising church to repent or else He would come and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. It does not sound like Christ tolerates unbelievers and false leaders in the church. It even seems as if Christ is harsh and pointed in His approach to the matter. That is the problem today as we are too nice to dismiss and denounce false teachers and too nice to discipline openly sinning church members. Many accept that if a person says they are a Christian, yet does not attend church, give tithes and offerings to the Lord's word, and lives in sin that behavior is okay. Many professing Christians will not stand with their pastor in obeying the Lord, practicing biblical church discipline, or rebuking the unbiblical trends that are always trying to find their way into an assembly. If the pastor is trying to lead his congregation to follow God's word in these areas, often some become offended cause trouble and leave. For a congregation to condone and tolerate sin is to be a party to it.

Notice once again the Nicolaitans are condemned by Christ. (Rev. 1:15) Their influence seems to be widespread as were active at Ephesus and Pergamos. These were the Nicolaitans who sought to set up a hierarchy in the church so they might get power and prestige by ruling over the people. (See 3 John 9) Jesus simply says, "*I hate the thing they are doing.*" It is pretty serious business if Christ says He hates

something. Jesus says they must repent or else He would come and fight against them. (Rev. 2:16) Hebrews 10:31 which was written to believers warns that *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

### **HEAR THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST TO HIS CHURCH. Rev. 2:17**

Christ says if you have an ear to hear, listen to what the Spirit saith to the churches! Only the saved have an ear to hear the words of God. 1 Corinthians 2:14 explains, *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* This message was clearly spoken by the Savior to the saved people in this church. Only they could turn the church from its sin.

In every incidence in the Bible where you find God warning of His judgment and condemnation you always also find the message of God's offer of grace and desire to forgive. Jesus said, *"If you repent I give you manna. Hidden manna."* Not all understand what it means to repent and to live for the Lord. Few understand the true joy of the believer's life which is lived in fellowship with the Savior. Exodus 16:14-16 explains that God gave manna to the Children of Israel for their food. They did not grow or make it as it came each morning as the dew on the ground. Exodus 16:17 says some gathered more and some less. It was their choice how much food they gathered for that day. They could eat of it as much as they wanted, but it had to be consumed the day they gathered it.

God offers us hidden manna, or divine food which is the word of God. It is the spiritual life and sustenance which God bestows on those who will receive it. Many miss God's sustenance, yet, it is there, hidden to many, but enjoyed by the faithful few who believe. The blessings of living in harmony with God is available and should be desired by all. It is freely given to all who will believe, repent of their sins, and receive God's blessings. In parallel to the manna in the desert, God does not limit what we can gather. This manna gives the Christian strength to live one's life to the fullest and have the Holy Spirit of God's indwelling presence to comfort and guide one through life. But it is hidden only to the world and to Christians who follow after the world. It is food to those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and live by faith for Him!

There is the peace and security of knowing one's sins are forgiven and that one has an eternal home in heaven. The white stone illustrates God's forgiveness and assurance of salvation.

We must take the statement that we are given a new name which is written on the stone which is a symbol of our forgiveness at face value. Some see the verse meaning that believers are given a special name that refers to our enrollment into heaven. Others take the position that it is the unspoken name of God that the believer gets once he is saved. We do not have a clear meaning for this statement and therefore must take the words simply as stated. It does no good to speculate about an interpretation that is not based on sound biblical evidence.

**THE LETTER TO THYATIRA: THE CHURCH WHICH TOLERATED SIN.  
Rev. 2:18-29**

**THE HISTORICAL SITUATION IN THYATIRA.**

Thyatira was a small city between Sardis and Pergamos. Archaeology found the city to be a wealthy town of organized trade groups of tanners, bronze workers and dyers. The water at Thyatira was suited to dyeing things purple. Lydia was a seller of purple in the city. (See Acts 16:14) However it was a "closed" union shop and outsiders were shunned. The guilds of the city were not only a trade controlling influence, but also a social and religious one as well.

Archaeologists have found that they regularly held huge banquets where food, drink and afterward sexual permissiveness were practiced. The food used at these banquets came from animals sacrificed to idols in the pagan temples. Membership in the guild meant attendance at the banquets and this created several problems for new Christians:

1. Eating meat sacrificed to idols.
2. Drunkenness.
3. Being a part of a sinful organization that lived for pleasure.
4. Exposure to sexual permissiveness.

**THE LORD OF THIS CHURCH DESCRIBES HIMSELF. Revelation 2:18**

Christ clearly identifies Himself saying *"Thus saith the Son of God."* He declares I have the authority to say what I say. Jesus' eyes are described as a flame of fire cutting through and exposing the truth thereby stripping away all pretension and warning of judgment. Remember, God says, *"I am God, what I say is not for speculation, but truth."*

His feet are described as being of fine brass which identifies Christ as the righteous Judge. Hebrews 10:26-31 states that Christ is the judge; however the Bible says He came not to judge, but to bring sinful men to repentance. (John 3:16-19) In Revelation 1:14 there is a similar description given. The word translated "brass" is the word *"bano"* which is the only place it is used in the Bible. It is thought to be a metal made of many metals such as gold, silver and copper which had an unusual brilliance. Brass is used in Scripture as representing judgment. Revelation 19:15 states, *"He treadeth the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."* In Numbers 21:9, the brass serpent was lifted up as a sign of judgment and healing.

Christ did not present himself as a judge just to scare them or to Lord over them, but rather to show His love. His message or remedy is the truth that man is a sinner under the condemnation of sin. Because God loves us, He presents the cure which is repentance for those who are guilty and then the warning to remain clean free of sin's destructive influences!

## **CHRIST PRAISES THE CHURCH. Revelation 2:19**

Jesus tells Thyatira that He knows their "works and charity." The word "works" is the word for "deeds." It refers to the actively involved in the work of the church. Their works and love went together. They loved the Lord and the natural result was a service of love. One must remember that the Ephesians were condemned for having lost their motive of service which must be love.

Christ explains that He knows of their service and faith. The word service is the word "ministry." The whole of the church was active in the total ministry of the church. They also went about their service in faith trusting in God to supply the opportunity, direction and strength. He also commends them for their patience or perseverance. It means "to abide." They stuck to the task at hand were unwavering in service. Christ mentions "works" twice to this congregation. He is actually commending them because their "works" now were more numerous than when they were first saved! This shows that these believers were growing spiritually and had matured. This is a picture of what the Christian's life is supposed to be: a labor of love that matures the believer.

## **CHRIST ADMONISHES THE CHURCH FOR ITS FAILURES. Revelation 2:20-28**

However, Jesus warned Thyatira that they had a problem! He commended them for the truth they obeyed, but warn them of their error! Their problem was not being loving, but for allowing Jezebel to teach. Jezebel is symbolic of a woman attacking God's ministers as 1 Kings 18:4 describes. Jezebel murdered the prophets of God and set herself up as a prophetess. She then set up false prophets who were loyal to her. She taught and seduced believers to point they committed fornication, meaning they followed her and her false religion.

This is what the "Jezebel" at Thyatira did also. This woman's name in the church was probably not "Jezebel," but her deeds were like the Jezebel of the Old Testament. (See 1 Kings 16:31, 18:1-21:29) This woman merged the world and all its idolatry with the church and corrupted it by bringing in paganism. This was a serious rebuke and in Revelation 2:24 this heresy is called the "depths of Satan." The Lord used strong language in condemnation of their sin. Clearly, it is displeasing to Christ when His bride corrupts itself with Satan.

Christ's love and longsuffering is shown here. (Rev. 2:21) He gave the church time to deal with this matter that was destroying it, but they refused to take action. Do you believe a born again Christian can believe error? Christ does and here says they did. Satan's lies are not always ugly, and false doctrine is often dressed up in truth! (See 2 Cor. 11:14-15) It is often easy to deceive and mislead a church that is not spiritually strong. This church was busy doing a lot of works, but the church lacked spiritually which comes from knowing and living by the word of God.

Do you believe Christians will allow error to be taught and sin to enter their

churches? The answer is, yes they will! Often well-meaning and even sincere believers will turn they heads and ignore open blatant error and allow it to go unchallenged in their church. Often the false teacher is an outwardly nice person that people are attracted to. The appealing character of such persons makes it difficult to challenge, because people are blinded by their personality and outgoing spirit. Paul addressed this problem to the Corinthian church saying, *“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”* (2 Corinthians 11:14-15)

For an example in 1921, William Lewis Poteat, the teacher of Natural Science and later President of the North Carolina Baptist Seminary at Wake Forest was openly teaching evolution in this school founded to teach young Southern Baptist preachers. Many North Carolina Baptists were outraged that this was happening. On Dec. 13, 1922, Salem Baptist Church, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina was hosting the State Baptist Convention. In the meeting Poteat was publicly denounced and there was strong support in the convention to vote to stop him. Several churches were threatening to withhold their monies from the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program. However, Poteat was polished speaker and was given the opportunity to speak. He then gave a glowing testimony of how he stood for truth, giving his personal testimony of love for Christ. However, he still affirmed his belief in evolution and stated he would continue to teach it.

Impressed with his moving testimony the convention gave him a standing ovation and he continued to teach evolution, liberalism, German Higher Criticism, which were the seed plot of the present day liberalism in SBC universities and schools. Christian people ignored the truth and compromised the word of God letting emotion rule their actions rather than the truth. Dr. Charles Stevens, the pastor of Salem Baptist Church, soon resigned and withdrew his church from the Southern Baptist Convention and founded Piedmont Bible College an Independent Baptist school to biblically train preachers.

Large numbers is rarely a sign of the Lord's approval. The Roman Catholic heresy is over 1600 years old and the largest "Christian" church in the world. The vibrant modern apostate emergent churches are the largest churches in America. Yet, they are devoid of truth and have merged with the world's entertainment. We should be warned that broad mindedness leads to compromise and a loss of truth! When truth is lost then the presence and blessing of the Lord is also lost. Any church which allows error and false teaching to go unchecked is defiled. Even those who do not accept the false teachings are affected by them. It divides a church and renders its testimony useless. Worse, they separate themselves from the Lord and no longer have His presence and blessings.

### **THE WAYWARD ARE WARNED. Rev. 2:22-23**

Jezebel was attempting to replace the word of God with word of man and Christ gives them a strict warning. He warns Jezebel and her followers to repent and that the Lord would bring on them great tribulation. Jesus warns that her children would be killed in such a way that all the churches would know that it was a judgment of God. He tells her and her followers that they will reap what they have sown. Jesus is saying "Church, if you want Jezebel then I'll let you recline in her bed. And in her bed you will experience all the sorrow, pain, hurt and suffering that is there. All that commit adultery with her, following other gods, idols, false prophets, sin, and immorality will be cast into this bed of tribulation and death."

Why is Christ presenting such a strong judgment against Jezebel and even those who follow her? Christ makes it sharply clear; He will not tolerate sin in His congregation. He will strongly chasten it to bring it to repentance and purity. Ephesians 5:27, says, that He wills to present His local church as, "**not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.** . . . "**Only** a pure church can have a pure and viable testimony and win souls to Christ. God cannot bless error and the congregation that ignores God's word separates itself from the Lord. "*In Him is light, and there is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5).

### **THERE WERE FAITHFUL MEMBERS AT THYATIRA. Revelation 2:24**

Jesus speaks words of comfort to those that had not defiled themselves with Jezebel's false teaching. He says to them that they will have no greater burden to bear than what they had already experienced. Thank God there were some in this church who had not been a party to their error. Some of this church had remained faithful to the Lord even in the midst of this great apostasy. It is clear they were in the

minority and their voices of protest against false teaching and practices had fallen on sin deafen ears. Jesus implores them to hold fast to truth they had. (See 2 Tim. 4: 1-5) We cannot be neutral in this battle if we are saved. There can be no fence straddlers, because we either serve Christ or we serve Satan.

### **JESUS GIVES A PROMISE TO THE FAITHFUL. Revelation 2:26-27.**

The believer who overcomes and is victorious is the one who faithfully follows the Word of God. Christ promises to give him power over nations. (Rev. 2:26-27) The body of Christ will reign with Savior in the Millennium for a thousand years. The word "rule" means to rule in judgment and also in mercy. This will be the task of Christians in the coming Kingdom of God (the Millennium). Christians, who are the Bride of Christ, will reign with Christ and administer the promised Kingdom to Israel. This Kingdom period is called the Millennium which follows Christ's Second Coming. The Kingdom is promised to Israel, but includes Gentiles saved during the seven year Tribulation as well.

### **CHRIST THE MORNING STAR. Revelation 2:28**

The believer is also promised he will receive the Morning Star. Revelation 22:16, tells us that the Morning Star is Christ Himself. It is Christ we will receive. *"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."* (Revelation 22:16) The phrase the "bright and morning" star refers to the coming of a new day. Christ is promising and end to the present age of persecution and godliness and the coming age in which He will rule.

### **BELIEVER, LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT. Revelation 2:29**

*"If you have an ear, hear what the Spirit says!"* It is vital to the work and ministry of the churches that every believer listens and examines all they do in light of Scripture. In other words, if you are a born again Christian, washed in the blood of the Lamb, listen and hear what God is saying to you. The Lord is giving a warning to turn from sin and encouragement to the faithful that there is coming a better day when the Lord will rule.

### **SARDIS: THE DEAD CHURCH Revelation 3:1-6**

#### **THE HISTORICAL SITUATION IN SARDIS.**

The city of Sardis was a great and wealthy city built on a plateau with high natural walls making the city difficult to attack. There was only one narrow passage that led into the city and it gave the city great protection. They trusted in their defenses thinking themselves to be unconquerable. This led the people to be lax in their defense which made their strength their weakness. Their enemies took the city by surprise coming through a crumbling wall and found its defenders asleep and destroyed the city. It is a monument to carelessness and underestimating of one's

enemies. Once in within the city walls it was almost impossible to dislodge the enemy. In the city gold and silver coins were minted and the people were wealthy comfortable, self-indulgent.

The situation in the church at Sardis parallels the period of Church History from the Reformation and in some places in the world today. This was the church that was persecuted for believing and following Christ. The Protestant Reformation which began in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was a time of persecution for those who upheld the Word of God. The Roman Catholic Church, claiming to be the only true church on earth, had for centuries persecuted those Christians who would not submit to their authority and false practices. In 1517 Martin Luther after reading and studying the New Testament discovered the truth doctrine of salvation which is clearly by grace through faith as Romans 1:17 teaches. *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith.”*

In Dark Ages the Roman Church had invented Purgatory, the place of the dead who had unforgiven sin. This false doctrine led to selling of indulgences, which was paying money to escape the penalties of sin. A unfaithful Catholic could purchase a paper called an “indulgence” prior to committing some sin and thereby receive forgiveness for a sin not yet committed. (It is still doing the same thing today.)

Luther, a priest and monk saw the error of many false teaching, practices, and corruption of the Roman Church and nailed his 95 theses to door of Edinburg Church, in Germany. He denounced the unbiblical practices of the Roman Church. He preached God’s grace instead of a works salvation and many believed and were saved and left the Roman Church. Luther became a wanted man with warrants issued for his arrest. In spite of denouncing the Roman Church for his heresies and being persecuted by it Martin Luther remained a Catholic until his death. Luther set the example that Protestantism followed and though they denounced the Roman Catholic Church, they took with them many of its doctrinal errors.

Those who left the Roman Church were called Protestants, because they protested the false doctrines and practices of the Church.<sup>9</sup> Problems arose in Protestantism over mode of baptism, church power, polity, the Lord's Supper. Instead of letting the Scripture be their guide they compromised and built manmade systems of worship and church polity.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:43-45 speaking of those who had demons cast out of them, but who did not come in faith to God, *“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked*

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<sup>9</sup> Though some would refer to Baptists as Protestants but they were never a part of Roman Catholicism and therefore not historically Protestants.

*generation.*" The Protestants made an effort at sweeping the house clean, but did not keep it clean by filling it with God's word, and in a short time condition their condition was worse than before.

The unbiblical state churches of Europe were born during the Reformation and church membership became a matter of nationality and birth rather than spiritual regeneration through belief in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. These churches were and are today filled with unbelievers. Soon they replaced the Roman Catholic Church as the persecutors of biblical Christians and went into apostasy. The basis of Protestant Reformation was that true that salvation was by grace through faith. Today most Protestants have abandoned God's word and has degenerated into a "grace plus works" system. These churches began in truth, but deteriorated into many different dead religious systems. The ecumenical movement today seeks a union of these churches putting differences doctrine aside for the sake of unity. Unity is to them more important that biblical truth. Today Protestantism has a great name and following, yet it is spiritually dead.

**RESPECTABLE AND WELL KNOWN CHURCH, LISTEN TO YOUR LORD!  
Revelation 3:1-2**

**Christ gives them no commendation. Revelation 3:1-2**

In the other churches there is some praise from Christ, but there is none here because their church was spiritually dead. They claimed they worshipped Jesus Christ and emphasized that they were "Christian" churches, but they had no corresponding walk in the Spirit and without the necessary applying of the truths and guidelines of the Word they were in fact, dead!

Christ is blunt and sets a serious tone for His message to this congregation. They had organization, programs, and buildings, yes even people in great numbers, but these do not make a spiritual church. Only a spiritual church pleases Christ. In verse 2 Jesus says their "works were not perfect." It literally means, to be "finished or completed." Tradition ruled in this church, not Christ, nor the word of God. It must be stated this was not a church that looked dead. In fact it had all the appearance of being alive and well. It looked good, very good with all its outward ritual and service. In reading about this church, it brings to mind all the many churches both large and small who have great activity and are nationally known, yet are clearly in doctrinal error. They look good, but God is not in their midst because God will not be a party to unbiblical practices and doctrinal error.

**BE WATCHFUL AND STRENGTHEN THAT WHICH REMAINS. Revelation 3:2**

Today Protestant churches have a degree of truth. They have the Bible, God's word, to follow, but they ignore its clear teachings substituting the traditions of men. Christ says strengthen that which is truth, for it is about to die! Protestantism ignored this warning and today is mostly dead. Yet in some few cases there still remains some life and some truth therefore the Lord is instructing them to repent and

truth from their error until His truth.

### **WELL KNOWN CHURCH: BE AS YOU LOOK. Revelation 3:3**

Jesus cautions this assembly to remember the truth you received and heard. The message to the church at Sardis parallels the Protestant Reformation. At the beginning of Reformation the truth of salvation by grace was heart of movement. Many believed and were saved, but after a short while they began to forget this truth. The popular respectable religion was Catholicism with all its works, sacraments and ceremonies. The Protestant churches that had earlier left the paganism and false teachings of the Roman Church, now began to pattern themselves after the deadness they left. It was hypocritical for them to claim to believe the Bible and that is was God's grace alone that saved, yet in practice they added to grace works such as church membership, infant baptism, and good works to salvation. They set up a hierarchical system of church government ignoring the clear teachings of the New Testament. They did not follow God's word which clearly states the institution of the "ekklesia" was a local autonomous assembly of believers with no outside authority save the New Testament and Lord Jesus Christ Himself as it Head.

Jesus warned them that He would come upon them as a thief and they would not know the hour He would come. That the Lord would come as a thief in the night is mentioned several times in scripture. Jesus made reference to the situation in that the Flood took the antediluvians by surprise even though they had been warned by Noah for one hundred and twenty years. The reference in Matthew 24:39-42 is to the unsaved who will be taken or purged off the earth at the Lord's Second Coming. Paul also referred to this in 1 Thessalonians 5 saying, "*For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-5) The promised rapture will come as a thief to these dead, but religious churches.

The Sardis church was a mixed congregation of weak Christians and unsaved church members. Jesus warned both these groups to repent. Christians were not pure or living for the Lord; therefore they were also not interested in His coming. 1 John 3:2-3, explains, "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*" To the unsaved who were dead, Jesus warned also to repent. Christ's return will catch this type of church by surprise. For them it will be an unexpected and be a rude and serious awaking.

### **WELL KNOWN CHURCH: YOU HAVE ONLY A FEW WHO ARE SAVED! Revelation 3:4**

There were a few in this congregation who still walked with Christ. The word "few" means only small, slight or little number. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said that the

broad way leads to destruction and many chose that road. Only a few were worthy because they were trusting in Christ as their Savior alone for their salvation and were rejecting the "grace plus works" teachings of this fat but fallen church. The spiritual condition of these few appears too weak, because they seem to have been comfortable to remain in a dead church where God's word was not followed.

### **WELL KNOWN CHURCH: THE PROMISE REMAINS! Revelation 3:5**

Jesus both warned the unsaved in the church at Sardis to be mindful of their unbelief and lost condition. He with the warning offered them salvation if they would repent. He stated he that "*He that overcometh*" shall be clothed in white raiment, meaning they would be saved having overcome sin. Some try to use this verse to teach that salvation is by works. It is worth noting that all the cults interpret this verse this way. In other words they teach that a person in his own strength "overcomes" will be saved. Ephesians 2:8-10 emphatically refutes this false idea. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*" We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and once saved God has appointed us to live godly lives. Nowhere in His word does God say that a man is saved by his own righteous or good works. Jesus says that he that "overcometh" is he who is victorious.

The overcomer is the one who by faith has believed and been forgiven of their sins. 1 John 5:4-5 explains who the ones who overcome are explaining, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*" Even in the midst of such deadness as existed in this congregation the power of the Gospel remains and will redeem all who trust Christ by faith. The one who seeks Christ; the heart who loves truth; the one who bows himself to Christ; the one who believes and trusts Christ will overcome.

Jesus promised that those that overcame would not have their names not blotted out of the book of life. This verse is teaching assurance of salvation. The Lord promises that those who are truly saved have their names written in the "book of life" or the "Lamb's book of life" and would never have their name removed or blotted out. The "book of life" here plainly is a list of the names of all believers. Paul writing to the Philippians referred to his fellow labors whose names were written in the book of life. (See Phil. 4:3) Revelation 21:27 refers to the Lamb's book of life which contains the names of all who are in the New Heaven and Earth.

In contrast, Revelation 3:8, 17:8, and 20:12, 15 refers to the unsaved whose names are not written in the book of life. These are unbelievers who died in their sins and as Revelation 20:15 states "*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*"

### **WELL KNOWN CHURCH, LISTEN TO WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES. Revelation 3:6**

Again to Sardis, as to each of the other churches, Christ ends His address to the church with an exclamation to hear what He is saying to His church. This makes the hearing and action to correct problems an urgent matter.

## **PHILADELPHIA: A CHURCH WITH A MISSION Revelation 3:7-13**

### **THE HISTORICAL SITUATION AT THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA.**

The word "Philadelphia" is two words "*philos*" meaning "love," and "*adelphos*" that means "brother" thus brotherly love. This was a church located at the junction of three ancient countries and its geographical location gave it a great opportunity to spread the Gospel. The city was strategically founded originally to spread Hellenism (Greek influence) and pagan Greek philosophy into the East. It was located on a geological fault and had frequent earthquakes which were often a source of panic. In 17 A.D. Philadelphia was almost totally destroyed by a terrible earthquake.

### **CHRIST IDENTIFIES HIMSELF TO HIS CHURCH. Revelation 3:7**

Jesus presents Himself to this congregation as Holy meaning separated from sin, pure, righteous. He states He is true which means genuine having the redeeming truth. He names Himself as the Sovereign One who holds the key of David, which signifies His authority. In the Old Testament, Eliakim in Isaiah 22:22 carried the keys to the palace. All who entered come through Him. By using the term here it means He has sovereign control and is the only way to salvation.

### **THE OPPORTUNITY THE CHURCH POSSESSED. Revelation 3:8**

Philadelphia was a church that had a great potential and opportunity set before it because of its location. It wasn't a "super church" and may not have been well organized yet but it was a church seeking to spread the Gospel and the Lord says He was aware of their works. Jesus states they had a "little strength." The word "strength" is the word "dynamic" meaning church was only a little bit dynamic. This would seem to indicate that this church was young and the deadest and error of other churches that existed in their time had not had time to take hold here.

This was a church governed by the Word of God and they loved the Bible and built their church on it. They were obedient in their lives for Christ and were well known for being faithful to Christ's name. They had before them an open door for the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. Geography they were in a good location being bordered Lystra, Mysia, and Phrygia which amounted to about half of Turkey.

## CHRIST PROMISES PROTECTION AND BLESSING. Revelation 3:9

The Lord makes no condemnation of this persecuted church as He had done with the church at Smyrna. These faithful believers had enemies, but God promised their enemies will be humiliated. Further they would “. . . *come and worship at thy feet and know that I have loved thee*” (Rev. 3:9). The Pulpit Commentary says, “. . . This would be fulfilled when the destruction of Jerusalem drove large numbers of Jews into Asia Minor. Every city which had previously had a Jewish colony would then receive a great influx of refugees. This augmented Jewish settlement at Philadelphia was to furnish some converts to the Christian Church; but as we learn from the epistles of Ignatius, these converts tainted the church with a stubborn form of Judaistic error.”<sup>10</sup> The Jews were the chief source of persecution of this church. Christ calls their synagogue the synagogue of Satan. These devout Jews were bent on destroying the followers of Christ. Paul stated in Romans 9:6 “. . . **For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.** These were tares the Devil sowed which Jesus mentioned in Matthew 13:25. They had not only rejected their Messiah, but were seeking to destroy those that believed. John 16:2 says, *“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”* Paul further states in Romans 2:28-29, *“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in 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.”*

This is what Jesus was telling Nicodemus in John 3:3 when he told him he must be “born again” in order to see the Kingdom of God. (The Kingdom of God refers to the Millennial Kingdom promised Israel). Nicodemus was a devout Jew and thought that his being born a Jew (born of water) assured him he would be a part of God’s promised Kingdom. Jesus went straight to the heart of the matter and explained to him that his ethnic birth would not save him, but he needed the new birth that comes by belief and receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Messiah. (See John 3:1-19)

## THE CHURCH WILL NOT GO THROUGH THE GREAT TRIBULATION. Revelation 3:10

I will keep you from the “hour of temptation” which shall come on the whole world. (Rev. 3:10). The word temptation means “trial or testing.” Jesus is telling this church they will be spared from the coming seven year Tribulation (Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Week - Dan. 9:27). Today there are false teachers who are teaching what they call a Mid-Tribulational or the Pre-Wrath Rapture. This false idea teaches that the believers on earth will go through the first period of the Tribulation which will “purge” the churches of the lost and believers of their sins. There is no scriptural support for such an idea. The seven year Tribulation will purge Israel and the earth, not Christians who have been raptured and are in heaven with the Lord. They falsely purport that the Rapture recorded in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 will occur sometime during the

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<sup>10</sup> The *Pulpit Commentary*, edited by H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, 1890. (SwordSearcher ver. 6.2.1.2, Rev. 3:10)

middle of the Tribulation.

The view is false because first, Christ has already purged believers "once for all" as Hebrews 10:10 states and all true believers stand righteous before God (Rom. 3:22-23). The purging that God does in the Tribulation is of the Nation of Israel and the world, not the Christians or churches. Second, note that the scope of this trial is worldwide which clearly shows this does not just apply to the Philadelphian church. Most believe that the Philadelphia type churches will be the faithful churches who are preaching the Gospel just before the Tribulation begins. It is the Philadelphians who will be raptured at Christ's coming for His bride. At the same time the Laodicean churches will exist which typifies churches which have gone into apostasy. (Rev. 3:14-22)

Further evidence that the church will not go through the Tribulation is found in 1 Thess. 5:1-11. In verse 2, the passage speaks of the "day of the Lord." This is a reference to the seven year Tribulation which in other places in the Bible referred to as the "day of the Lord." In verse 3, it should be noted that the pronoun "they" is used to identify the ones who would go through the Tribulation. In other words the believers to whom Paul is addressing this Epistle are not the ones to go through the day of the Lord, but someone else. In verse 4, the pronoun is "you" is used. The question is this, what was Paul telling these Christians to be ready for, the Tribulation or the Rapture? Verse 9 states that "you," meaning believers are not appointed unto wrath. Believers will not experience the wrath of God as it is poured out in the Great Tribulation. Why? Because we will not be on earth having been "caught in the air" to meet the Lord at the Rapture.

Verse 11, encourages Christians to comfort themselves and edify (build up) one another with this good news. It would have been little comfort for Christian to know they will have to go through the horrors of the Tribulation. But Paul says take heart, and comfort one another with the truth that believers will not go through the Great Tribulation.

Jesus tells this faithful church I will make you strong and secure. (Revelation 3:12) You will become a pillar of the temple of God! Revelation 3:12 gives promises to believers in the time frame of Millennium and eternity. Believers will be honored in the New Jerusalem as the Bride of Christ. The custom in John's day was to honor a magistrate by placing a pillar with his name inscribed on it in one of the temples of Philadelphia. Christians in Heaven will have a pillar in the New Jerusalem with their name on it, thus memorializing them as belonging to Christ for eternity.

Christ will write His own new name on Christians. See Revelation 19:12. This new name of Christ will say, "This one is mine, of all eternity." Believers will bear the name of Christ forever. It is like the wife taking the name of her husband. Christians as the bride of Christ will also take His name.

### **Historical Information.**

Church at Philadelphia was given an open door to carry the Gospel into all

Turkey and outward to the world. Today we in America have an equal opportunity to preach the Gospel in our town, community, county, state, around the world! (See Acts 1:8) Some churches may have the truth, but may not be actively preaching the gospel and seeking the lost. Like Sardis and Laodicea many are dead or lukewarm. At this time most nations are open to missionaries and the preaching of the Gospel. This lesson from these six churches is clear that merely holding the truth is not the same as living by it and it is Christ's stated desire that we be active about doing His will.

The question is "Are we willing?" In your town people are dying and going to hell. Are you personally willing to take advantage of the open door before us? Are you faithful in your personal commitment to Christ by studying the Bible, praying, living pure lives and letting the Lord direct our lives? Are you willingly giving your tithes and offerings faithfully to the Lord that the needed finances to preach the Gospel are available? Are you prayerfully seeking an opportunity to witness to those around us in our family and acquaintances? In verse 13 Jesus repeats again the statement to listen to Him. Are you listening to what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying to us?

### **LAODICEA: THE CHURCH OF THE LUKE WARM** **Revelation 3:14-22**

#### **THE HISTORICAL SITUATION AT LAODICEA.**

Laodicea was an affluent Roman community and an important banking, trading and manufacturing city. In 17 AD an earthquake destroyed most of city and they appealed to Rome and received aid in rebuilding. Again in AD 60 another earthquake came and leveled the city, yet this time the city was rich and they rebuilt without the aid of Rome. There was an air of self-confidence and self-sufficiency among the Laodiceans and it had affected the churches in this city. Note to the other six churches the Lord addresses them as "unto the angel of the church at [the city where the church was]." However, to the church in Laodicea He address them differently saying "angel of the church of the Laodiceans." Certainly, God had a specific reason in not addressing the church by the city it was located in, but by the people of that city. It would seem that His reason was that the membership of the church at Laodicea had the same worldly characteristic as the unsaved who dwelt there. A true church is not too be proud and self-sufficient; it is to be totally dependent on God operating in the power of God. Its only pride should be in honoring the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning work. The congregation at Laodicea was not depending on the Lord and was operating in their human ability. Paul wrote "*For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.*" (Romans 8:5) Being self-sufficient this worldly church could only be luke warm, not hot or cold spiritually, because they were not spiritual people.

### **JESUS CHRIST THE LORD ADDRESSES A SELF-SUFFICIENT CHURCH.** **Revelation 3:14**

Jesus identifies Himself as the "Amen." The first "AMEN" means "so be it." In other words Christ is saying His following statements are certain! There is no changing or question about the situation.

This strong word may indicate there were these there who wouldn't believe what Jesus said. Today many people call themselves Christians and yet show no evidence of knowing Christ. You cannot see Him in their lives. They live totally within their human abilities and it is apparent that even though they are outwardly very religious, they are complacent, apathetic, have not real zeal for God's word or obedience to Him. Some without conviction live worldly lives and all the while thinking themselves to Christians. They will listen casually to God's truth but without allowing themselves to apply God's message to themselves. If biblical preaching of God's word became too pointed and personal, they will most often balk. They would be very offended if anyone suggested their religion was in vain. Yet, Christ speaks very clear to this church, saying I am God, this is the way you are!

The membership of this church was clearly rejecting God's word while at the same time proudly claiming to be Christians. Jesus speaks sharply to them and says, "Look at me! I am the last word. Don't doubt me. I am God. I would not lie to you. I made you; I know what I am talking about. I made you a light in a dark place. But you are not functioning."

Satan never comes as we might expect because he is a master of disguise. His tactic is never a frontal attack and he and those that follow him are cunning at slipping in unobserved. One of his most effective tools is apathy or luke warmness which is blasphemy of highest order. These attitudes are the worst enemy of a church and of the Christian. Heresy can be fought, but there is little glamour in fighting apathy because it's hard to put your finger on it. In many churches today the problem is simply a lack of interest. Members show up when it is convenient, but if church attendance conflicts with their hobbies or other interests God's house will take a back seat. Pastors preach on how important it is to worship the Lord, hear the preaching and teaching of God's word, and to fellowship and encourage other members, yet year after year the message has little effect. Their occasional attendance shows they are not opposing God's work, but reveals they are not much interested in it either. It is an almost impossible task to reach this type of church member to turn them around to becoming faithful to the Lord.

### **THE PROBLEM AT LAODICEA: THEY WERE NOT HOT OR COLD. Revelation 3:15-17**

These were not backslidden in sense of going into gross sin. They still attended church and had not given up their religion. They were not bitter or opposing the work of the Lord, and probably assumed things were going fine! Yet these church members were in truth only a hollow shell, not hot or cold! (Rev. 3:15) Apathy was their attitude toward the Lord. They went through the motions out of habit not love. They only loved those who loved them! They had no witness or testimony for the Lord! Missions? Well, they gave some to missions, but never prayed and had no real burden for the lost. They just were not interested. Church growth? Sure they

would like to see some growth, but they were not willing to put forth any effort to try and win people. They did a lot of nothing!

Christ says to them "I wish you were hot or cold." Why? Because a person who is in a state of apathy rarely can be used of the Lord. He wished they were hot. A person who is hot can be used and directed. He said He wished they were cold, because it is better to be backslidden than to be without Christ completely. A person who is living in sin and disobedient to the Lord surely knows his spiritual state that his is out of God's will. The lukewarm person does not see their condition as it truly is. They know they are not "on fire" for the Lord, but they do not see themselves as being out of God's will. They are not opposing the Lord, or not in blatant sin so they do not see their apathy as the sin that it is. It appears that many of these church members were apparently not saved. If they had been saved they would be hot or cold. (Revelation 3:16)

Christ says their false religion was nauseating to Him and He would spew them from His mouth. It should be alarming to be nauseating to the Lord. It is tragic to see these church members practicing their religion and thinking that God is approving or is pleased by what they are doing. And in a real sense it is actually turning God's stomach.

Today Protestantism is the epitome churches which are neither hot nor cold. They have all the outward ritual, pomp and ceremony carried on in beautiful buildings with crosses, and stained glass windows, yet they are cold and dead inside. Their preachers are professional clergymen who rarely have any semblance of a true calling from God or biblical faith. They have substituted a "social gospel" for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and openly condone sin and doctrinal error. They are not seeking the lost and have substituted ritual, baptism and church membership for true conversion. The worse offense is they have replaced God's marvelous grace, with a system of human works. Jesus' condemnation of the religious scribes and Pharisees of His day applies as well to these pitiful church members of today. *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."*

### **THEY WERE RICH, BUT THERE WAS NOTHING SPIRITUAL IN THE CHURCH.**

#### **Revelation 3:17-18**

In their eyes they did not need anything! Jesus had nothing good to say about this church which indicates most of its congregation was lost. He says they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. They were blind to their spiritual poverty and need of salvation! This church had the name of Christ, but did not have Christ. They did not know Him. One of the saddest things on earth is a church or individual professing to belong to Christ and yet do not know Him. It is the devil's crowning accomplishment. They have all the ritual, pomp and ceremony but were in reality deep in sin and depravity. When the truth of hypocrisy of such people is revealed they become greatly offended if you even hint that they are not really worshiping or serving God.

Christ counsels this church to seek for truth and lasting riches. Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* Christ says seek the real thing, what you have is worthless.

He tells this dead church to buy gold tried in the fire. He is offering them salvation. The truth of God is pure, without spot or blemish, yet this church had accepted a false doctrine instead of truth. Gold must be heated hot to remove its impurities. He is saying to them that they have been deceived and have purchased impure gold. It would be like a giving a fake diamond to one's girlfriend or wife. They may think it real, but regardless of what they think it is still not the real thing. It is not pleasant having to tell someone they have been deceived, but it is worst to let them go on thinking they have something of value when it is worthless.

The white raiment symbolizes godliness and living holy separated lives for the Lord. Isaiah gives us a good picture of our own righteousness in God's eyes. *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf and our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away"* (Isa. 64:6).

What was the cure? God never condemns without offering the means to repentance and forgiveness. Jesus says, *"... anoint your eyes with eye salve"* and believe the Word of God that opens eyes to the truth. That is the only cure, believe, have faith and trust God's revealed Word to man. (Revelation 3:18)

#### **CHRIST'S WARNING GIVEN OUT OF LOVE. Revelation 3:19**

*"Those I love, I rebuke and chasten."* It seems this statement by the Lord is to the very few in the church that were saved. Yet, in many churches today, a lost person can comfortably attend and never be confronted with their sinfulness, need of repentance and of their need to by faith receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. This also applies to Christians in a church where the preaching is simply lukewarm more oratory than God's word. This happens when there is a lack of rebuke in the preaching the Gospel from the pulpit. Hebrews 12:5-8 warns us that God chastens every one of His children when they fall into sin, but also explains that He doesn't bother the devil's children. The state of apostasy in so many modern churches is evidenced by the lack of chastening of church members who are openly in sin. It is not Christ's desire or will that any should perish but that all would come to repentance and the love of God is seen here in that He is seeking to reach this church that has long since been rejecting Him. (2 Peter 3:9)

Christ says, be zealous or in earnest repent from sin. To repent means to turn from error and walk away from it. It means to change direction and go in the opposite way. Jesus is telling the church to turn from their apathy and complacent to fervently serving the Lord. The word "zealous" also means to be "hot" and Christ is saying to them "get hot."

#### **CHRIST HIMSELF STANDS AT THE DOOR AND KNOCKS. Revelation 3:20**

Jesus Himself says, "*Behold I stand at the door and knock.*" Christ is asking to be allowed back into a church that bears His name. Christ is saying to the sinner, repent, let me coming in and we will have true fellowship together. His promise to come in and "sup" with the repentant sinner expresses Jesus is offering a close and personal relationship with the one who invite Him in.

**THE REWARD OF OPENING THE DOOR TO ONE'S HEART TO CHRIST.  
Revelation 3:21**

Those who accept Christ and who faithfully serve will be rewarded. When sin is defeated there is reward. A witness spoken for Christ and the deed done in love always receives its recompense. Victory is in Christ, because He overcame sin for us, so can we!

**THE LORD'S FINAL STATEMENT TO THE CHURCHES OF ASIA. Revelation  
3:22**

Now to this final church Jesus once again beckons those in sin to listen, "*He that hath an ear let him hear!*" (Revelation 3:22) The message is clear. Jesus is offering forgiveness, eternal life and fellowship to anyone who would listen and repent.