

New Lessons from Old Churches

*A Study of the Seven Churches of
Revelations*

by W. Max Alderman

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EPHESUS – A DRIFTING CHURCH

TEXT: Revelation 2:1-7; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 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. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Revelation 2:1-7

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

INTRODUCTION: When studying the panorama of church history, one should begin with the seven churches of Asia Minor. These seven churches listed in Revelation chapter 2 and 3 were actual churches that existed when John the apostle wrote the Revelation Epistle from the Isle of Patmos. Even in our day, God uses these churches to teach and warn us of problems that we can be confronted with and that can also destroy us. He also shows us the traits that we should emulate in several of these churches.

These seven churches were definite churches that God selected out of all of the existing churches to convey prophetically the entire scope of church history. Just as we do with the rest of the Bible, we should study this Scripture with the purpose of finding the proper interpretation, its practical application, and its prophetic revelation. In this study, we will attempt to do just that.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor, and was a leading seaport. The Isle of Patmos, from which the letter was written, was located almost directly west of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. Paul was used of the Lord to evangelize Ephesus, and he worked out of the church for about three years. (Acts 18:18-21; 19; I Cor. 16:8). May we notice some of the characteristics that marked this church .

I. THE PRAISING OF EPHEBUS (Vv. 1-3).

The One speaking to the Church at Ephesus is the Lord Jesus Christ. He describes Himself as the one who is walking “in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks”. The seven golden candlesticks are the seven churches. When He refers to the “seven stars”, He is possibly referring to the pastors of the churches. The word *star* as used here refers to angels, who are normally supernatural, created beings but may not be such in this instance.

The word *angel* means messenger. The messenger that

is referred to in our text is likely the pastor. The pastor or messenger is therefore responsible for delivering the “message”.

A. He Praised The Activities Of The Work. (Vv. 1-2a).

The Church at Ephesus had remained faithful to the work for over 40 years. Paul first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey, but only was there for a brief period of time. He came back on his third missionary journey and faced opposition from Demetrius, because Demetrius was concerned about his business. He made silver shrines and images that were used by those who were worshippers of false gods. The new converts were destroying their false gods and worshiping the true and living God. With this taking place Demetrius’ business began to fail.

Christianity in Paul’s day made inroads into the city that was known as the “temple keeper of the great Artemis”. A similar situation took place when Billy Sunday came to town. It is said that the bars would close down when he preached against the liquor crowd. Perhaps we should question what effect our churches are now having on the towns and the cities in which we live.

B. He Praised Their Action Against The Wicked (V. 2b).

The Church at Ephesus continued to discipline those who attempted to do evil against the church. They were very orthodox and vigilant in keeping the faith. You might even say, borrowing from our vernacular that they were “straight lace” and separated from evil. This is certainly commendable for a church, but as commendable as it might have been, we will discover in our text that it was not enough, for they were guilty of leaving their first love.

The Church at Ephesus not only recognized the evil workers but they also rejected the evil workers. Our churches, as a result of sound Bible preaching should be able to both recognize evil and reject that which is evil.

C. He Praised Their Attitude Towards The Work. (V. 3).

The Church at Ephesus had many sterling qualities, and on the surface would have been perceived as a wonderful church. As I do this study, the Lord seems to be showing me that this is where many of us may be in our fundamental churches.

The Church at Ephesus was described in this manner: “hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.” Certainly this is commendable, but we shall find in our next consideration that something was still lacking, for they had left their first love.

II. THE PROBLEM OF EPHEBUS. (Vv. 4-5a).

The Ephesians had gotten to the place that they were serving God out of orthodoxy and out of tradition rather than out of true love to the Lord. The Lord said that *they had left their first love*.

“The church that loses its love will soon lose its light, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be” (Wiersbe).

If churches continue to be doctrinally sound and yet lose their love for the Lord, they will get to the place that they are intolerant of those who do not measure up. This does not mean that they should compromise, but it does mean that they should not be mean spirited in preaching against sin. The love of God is not at all *wimpy*, and it is not at all wimpy to patiently love and teach those who do not at first measure up.

Do you realize that there will be people who visit our church, who come from a background of teaching that is entirely different from what we teach, who if they are shown that we love them will be more likely to accept our teachings and values than if we simply snub them and fail to love and teach them?

A. The Church At Ephesus Did Not Realize That It Had Drifted From Its First Love. (V. 4).

I use the word *drift* here because that seems to be what happened to the Church at Ephesus. It was something that happened to them over a period of forty years. Churches do not usually get where there are overnight. It may be described as the gradual encroachments that occur with the passing of time. When this drifting occurs, it is not usually detected as would be a more blatant departure from the Lord. For this reason a church can feel comfortable in having good orthodoxy and even good standards, yet be far from the Lord because of having left its first love. I dreadfully feel that that is where many of our churches are now and they do not even realize it.

The Word of God speaks of having “strength and beauty” along with having “grace and truth”. Our churches should be described in this manner. We should be very strong to the Truth, but have grace to love in Truth.

B. The Church At Ephesus Needed To Remember How It Had Drifted From Its First Love. (5a).

The Lord said remember and repent or He would remove... Many times one may get to the place that he forgets where he went wrong. It may be that one chooses to forget. This seems to be the case with the Church at

Ephesus. The Lord is telling this church to recall where they went wrong. This calls for each of us to do some soul searching, and find what it was that began to steal our love. There are so many attachments and distractions in the world to amuse us and cool our affection for the Lord.

The word *amuse* by definition tells us that it does not take much thought to be entertained by the world. The word *amuse* comes from two words, *muse* which means “to think”, and *a* which means “not”. When the two words are put together, the word *amuse* means *not to think*.

Yet the Lord is calling upon the Church at Ephesus to think and remember, “From whence thou art fallen”. May we do the same, if we find that our love for the Lord is not what it must be.

III. THE PUNISHMENT OF EPHEBUS. (V. 5b, c).

The Lord has identified the problem with Ephesus and is going to give a space of time for them to repent. He is warning of the severity of correcting the problem *quickly* or face having the candlestick removed. Each church must be lit by His presence, for He is the Light. If our church is to be a lighthouse in this community, He must be that light.

A. The Lord Will Move Quickly In Time Of Judgment. (V. 5b).

The Lord is patient but very sure in requiring us to do what He says. He told the Church at Ephesus that He would come unto them quickly and remove the candlestick if they did not repent. Our churches need to do all that they can to return to where God would have them to be. There have been many changes in the church in the last several decades that involves change that is unacceptable to the Lord. There are those, like this Church of Ephesus, who maintain their orthodoxy, but who no longer have the love of Christ as

their motive for ministry. Then there are those who have yoked up with the world, bringing worldliness into the church, which are also void of His love, as well. These people are motivated by those things that appeal to the flesh, instead of being led by the Spirit.

If our church will be sensitive to the will of Christ according to His Word, we will see the mighty power of God continue to work in our midst. I am saddened to see churches that have had their candlestick removed because they refused to take heed to the warnings of Christ as a result of His Word being preached.

B. The Lord Will Remove Quickly In The Time Of Judgment. (V. 5c.)

Again the word *quickly* gives indication of the urgency of the church doing right. God never wants the church to delay in getting to where it needs to be spiritually. We need to remind ourselves that as we speak of the church that we are the church. We individually must take heed to the Word of God.

You have heard it said, “Delayed obedience is the same as disobedience”. It certainly is true when the Lord instructs us, for He may suddenly bring swift and sure judgment upon the church if we fail to obey Him.

IV. THE PROMISE OF EPHEBUS. (Vv. 6-7).

The Lord tells the Church of Ephesus that He hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans, even as the congregation of Ephesus does.

We know little of the Nicolaitans who were obviously followers of a person named Nicolas (cf. Acts 6:5). Irenaeus, who lived in the latter part of the second century, wrote that they were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh and practiced fornication and the eating of

foods sacrificed to idols. The word “Nicolaitans” is a transliteration of two Greek words that mean, “to conquer” and “people”. For that reason Nicolaitanism describes any system that seeks to dominate rather than serve people.

“The teaching of the Nicolaitans was an exaggeration of Christian liberty which attempted an ethical compromise with heathenism” (Tenny).

There seems to be a trend today even among fundamentalists to give liberty to any kind of vice. We must strongly reject this evil temptation. We must continue to label sin as sin while still loving the sinner. Now may we look at the promise given to those who overcome.

A. The Promise Was Backed By A Great Person (Vv. 6,7a).

Such a wonderful and loving Savior as Christ is, He promises great benefits to those who obey. Yes, there are many rewards for the believer when he obeys, and the promise can be believed because of Who made it.

B. The Promise Involved A Great Place. (V. 7b).

The place of the one who overcomes is heaven. The one who overcomes shall have the joy and the privilege of eating of the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God. The fact that the believer is going to have so many eternal blessings and benefits should serve to motivate him to serve the Lord faithfully.

CONCLUSION: This first letter also pictures the beginning of the church age, or the age of the apostles. It is no accident that there are seven churches. Seven is God’s number of completion or perfection. Students of the Scriptures have long recognized these seven churches picturing in succession the panorama of church history. We

will study these churches for the practical and the prophetical lessons that might be learned from such a study. We will learn new lessons from old churches...

SMYRNA, A DELIGHTFUL CHURCH

TEXT: Revelation 2:8-11

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

Revelation 2:8-11

INTRODUCTION: As we look at this second church, we will soon notice that the Lord had no rebuke for this church. I wish to refer to this church as being a delightful church. It was a church that faced persecution for doing well. Even though it had many pressures and difficulties during its existence, it continued to do well. Even its name says something about the persecution that it went through. Notice this about Smyrna:

Smyrna – The name “Smyrna” signifies “myrrh”

Myrrh was made from the gummy sap of the *Commiphora myrrha* tree. The sap would be collected by slashing a branch or the trunk of the small tree, and then the gum hardened into a solid resin. The resin would then be pounded and ground up, then mixed with oil, forming a perfume. It has been said about Myrrh, that the more this resin was crushed, the more fragrance that was emitted. There was something about the make-up of this substance that made this phenomenon so.

Smyrna, as a church had been slashed, cut, and bruised; yet because of what it was made of, it emitted a sweet smelling fragrance, thus the name Smyrna. May we

consider our own attitude towards suffering as we make this study? May we apply the truths learned from this study to our own hearts? May we realize that as we are going through difficult times that the Lord may be teaching us to have a more precious fragrance coming forth from our lives? Each cut, slash, or bruise may be God's way of revealing what is really inside of you.

Another interesting thought concerning the word Smyrna is that it means *myrrh* or *bitterness*. The sappy substance would naturally be bitter, but as the oil was mixed with it and it was crushed, the sweet fragrance would come forth. Throughout the Scriptures, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. When we are going through our bitter trials, the oil of God's Holy Spirit will also bring out the sweet smelling fragrance that is in us.

I. NOTICE SMYRNA'S PRAISE FOR DOING WELL (8-9c.)

As the Lord speaks to each church, He introduces Himself in a manner that is both particular and different to each church. The way that He introduces himself would be worthy of a study in and of itself. Notice how each of these introductions has its subject matter relating to its own situation.

Ephesus: "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks:"

Smyrna: "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"

Pergamos: "These saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges"

Thyatira: "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine

brass;”

Sardis: “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;”

Philadelphia: “These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth: and shutteth, and no man openeth;”

Laodicea: “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;”

The significance of these introductions will be considered in each of these studies that pertain to the seven churches. While considering Ephesus, the Lord was establishing both His authority, and His presence as seen in the way that He introduced Himself. The right hand speaks of His *protective authority*, and His walking in the midst of the churches, shows *His presence assured*.

With Ephesus being the first church mentioned, his introduction shows that He is establishing Himself as the sole authority of the church, and showing that He is present in the church for their protection. When looking at the church at Smyrna, the introduction gives us a clue as to the suffering that Smyrna was going to face.

The Lord revealed to Smyrna that He suffered, died, and was raised from the dead. Certainly this was an inspiration to Smyrna as she went through her time of suffering, and should be to any Christian that is being called on to suffer.

A. The Lord Praised Smyrna In Her Performance (Vv. 8,9a).

When the Lord began this letter, He said, “I know”. By saying such, He implied a most intimate acquaintance to the church at Smyrna. How very encouraging it is to know

that He knows. He knows all about us. We can never escape His attention. It is more than just His foreknowledge that He has; He has all knowledge.

He told Smyrna, “I know thy works: If the Lord were to personalize such a letter to our church, He would also say, “I know thy works”, for He certainly does. Smyrna may have had the famed Polycarp as its pastor for the purpose for which this letter was addressed.

Polycarp was burned alive at Smyrna in the year of our Lord, 166 AD. We have an ancient account of his martyrdom, which has been translated by Cave, which states that the Jews were particularly active in his martyrdom and even brought the wood by which he was consumed.

The Lord knew such even before it took place. He also knew the fidelity and the faithfulness of this church while it was under Satan’s attack. For this reason, He praised Smyrna’s works.

B. The Lord Praised Smyrna In Her Persecution (V. 9b.).

It is said by the historian Josephus that when Polycarp was brought before the judge, and commanded to adjure and blaspheme Christ, he firmly answered, “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong, how then can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me? He was then set ablaze and suffered cheerfully for Christ his Lord and Master.

The church at Smyrna must have had many who had the same spirit as Polycarp during their time of suffering. Historically, this church pictures the “age of persecution”, a time when Christendom in general was going through severe persecution.

Knowing that these letters were written for our

example, then how willingly should we suffer for the cause of Christ and His Church. Those who live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution as God's Word tells us.

C. The Lord Praised Smyrna In Her Poverty (V. 9c).

The very nature of Smyrna's persecution entailed suffering and poverty. The Lord called attention to this poverty, which they experienced, as being a part of their persecution, and contrasted it with the true riches that they possessed. Even though their persecutors would see only their extreme poverty, the Lord saw them as spiritually rich because He owned them.

Smyrna was a "poor-rich church", whereas Laodicea was a "rich-poor church". The world's model of what it considers to be the example of riches and success does not meet the standard that God deems as true riches and success. Remember, that poverty is no hindrance to having the favor of God.

II. NOTICE SMYRNA'S PROBLEM FOR DOING WELL. (9d-10a).

The religious Pharisee Jews, in their rejection of Christ, became enemies to the Christian faith. Just as Christ faced much opposition from this Jewish element, so did several of these churches here mentioned. They were against Christ, and will continue to be so until the blindness is removed, and then they see "whom they pierced".

A. Smyrna Faced The Problem Of Imposters. (V. 9d).

Our text shows how subtle the enemy can be when it infiltrates the church. Notice the warning that Christ gives

when referring to these counterfeit Jews, “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan”

There is not much known about what Christ was referring to in this passage, but I am sure that it was very obvious to those who were members of the church of Smyrna. The Lord did not even honor these counterfeit Jews as being members of His Church, but Satan’s, instead.

We could draw a similar parallel to this by saying, “You call yourself a Christian, but you really belong to Satan”. There are people in all of our churches who make up the chaff instead of the wheat.

B. Smyrna Faced The Problem Of Imprisonment. (V. 10a).

A person could, just as did the members of the church of Smyrna, face imprisonment for doing right. Brother Lester Roloff spent time in jail for his courageous stand involving the separation of church and state. He would not take a license from the government for his girl’s home.

We should in our modern day churches not only take stands for right, but be prepared to face imprisonment if necessary. I am hoping that our churches will start taking stronger stands against Satan and all of the churches’ enemies, even if it means persecution.

III. NOTICE SMYRNA’S PROMISE FOR DOING WELL. (Vv. 10b-11).

The Lord both knows what we must face, and also encourages the believer not to fear the things he will be called upon to suffer. His encouragement comes with the promise of rewards for being faithful unto death. The churches historically went into a difficult time of persecution under the Roman Catholic system. The church

at Rome persecuted and put to death many Christians by accusing them of being heretics. The Roman government, beginning with Nero did the same. There were ten Roman leaders in succession that persecuted the church. We may look at them later on in this study.

Some of our early Baptist forefathers were called Anabaptists for their insistence upon baptizing their new converts who may have been baptized as infants or in another faith. They were given the name Anabaptist in derision for taking a strong stand on baptism following conversion. The prefix *Ana* meant “re” as in re-baptize. This is an example of how the early Baptists were persecuted and put to death for maintaining and practicing their beliefs.

A. Smyrna Was Promised A Courage For Being Faithful. (V. 10b.)

For one to have courage, he must have confidence or faith that either there is nothing to fear, or there is no good reason to fear. The Lord told them that they could have the promise of being delivered past and beyond the persecution. He did not promise that the Church of Smyrna would not face persecution, nor be delivered from the persecution, but that they would be given a crown of life.

Christ introduced Himself as having been the One that was dead, and is now alive, and promised the same to those who made up the membership of this church. This is what made the early church courageous.

B. Smyrna Was Promised A Crown For Being Faithful. (V. 10c, 11)

The crown of life was promised to these faithful martyrs in allusion to the Gentiles who would crown their dead. The difference here is that the Lord would crown living men

who were once dead as opposed to the Gentiles who were crowned as dead men.

These faithful martyrs were also told that they would not “be hurt of the second death”. They would be able to enjoy the full benefits of eternal life even though their life upon earth was cut short. This should encourage every believer to place his complete trust in the Lord.

Conclusion: Even though this church met much persecution in its faithfulness to the Lord, it was a very delightful church. Jesus said nothing against this church. This should inspire us all to be more Christ like when we face our own trials. It should encourage us to be more patient, loving, and understanding with those whom we come in contact. We should even love our enemies with a Christian love without compromising to do wrong. May these studies help us all...

Third Church: PERGAMOS – A Divided Church

TEXT: Rev. 2:12-17

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Revelation 2:12-17

INTRODUCTION: Pergamos was the capital of Mysia, which was a Roman province that was located in the northwestern portion of Asia Minor. When Paul heeded the Macedonian call, he passed through this province, embarking at the port of Troas (Acts 16:7-8). This very religious city of Pergamos was located about twenty miles from the sea. Though this city was not a city of commerce, it was a very religious and a very wealthy city.

This city had heathen temples that were erected in honor of its gods, such as Zeus, Aphrodite, and Asclepius with the latter being the god of medicine who was worshiped under the form of a serpent. (Strauss). With Satan knowing how religious the people of Pergamos were, in worshiping their false gods, he must have felt very comfortable setting up his throne there.

We need to keep in mind that Satan does not do his

most effective work in houses of ill repute which are located next door to the taverns, bar rooms, and the clubs, but right in the middle of our religious institutions. Satan does not care how religious you are, as long as you do not believe in the Biblical Christ.

I. NOTICE PERGAMOS' PRAISE. (Vv. 12-13).

The Lord is careful to observe the believer who is being faithful when it is very difficult to do so. The location of Satan's seat is obviously not an easy place to worship. One can only imagine the tribulation and the pressure that these early Christians had to face being right where Satan's seat (throne) was located. This is not to say that Satan was not anywhere else, but it indicates that Satan was certainly intensifying his efforts in this location. It is also true today that Satan intensifies his efforts against those who take a stand for God and against him. Satan will not bother a church that does nothing, says nothing, and fails to take a stand for Truth. It is only when people and churches sell out to the Lord that they began to face intense opposition from Satan. Pergamos was such a church.

A. For her fidelity during great temptation. (Vv. 12, 13a).

This twelfth verse introduces Christ as the one who "hath the sharp sword with two edges". This reference is in regards to the way that Christ will speak and perform according to His Word. With Him giving His Word sword like qualities, He is describing the attitude that He has towards Satan and those who are worshiping him. The Lord is in a perpetual war against Satan and those who are Satanic. He will not tolerate anyone worshiping any other gods, without there being an ultimate confrontation with Him, based upon the Truth of God's word.

Hebrews 4:12 shows that the Word is likened unto a

sword as it deals with man in respect to his humanistic mindset. The minds of so many have been humanized to only think apart from God with no respect as to what God's Word has to say. Such is the reason that there are those who are making every effort to tear down the Ten Commandments, to remove the manger scenes, and then take God out of the schools. Such thinking will one day be cut into and exposed by the cutting sword of Truth. Then, it will be absolutely recognized by all that it was not such a bad idea to worship God, rather than Satan. Listen to this verse:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12).

B. For her faithfulness during great trial. (V. 13b).

You can learn much about a people group when you see the way that they respond to persecution. The Christians of Pergamos would not deny the name of Christ even though one of their own had been martyred. Those who embraced the Name of Christ during the time period of this church did it knowing that there would be a price to be paid, but did so any way. We should do the same, and not be intimidated by this world that is controlled by Satan. For the believer, as the song says, "There is just something about that Name".

II. NOTICE PERGAMO'S PROBLEM. (Vv. 14-15).

To get a complete understanding of what this church was guilty of would involve a thorough study of Numbers 22-25. Briefly stated, Balak, the king of Moab offered Balaam the prophet a considerable sum to curse Israel.

Upon the first offer he refused, but then when the amount was increased he agreed to curse Israel; but God kept this from happening three times.

Balaam was a very gifted person but could be bought for a price. Such was the case at Pergamos. Pergamos had some very gifted preachers and speakers, but they would compromise with the world. They saw no reason not to invite the world into the church. This kind of worldliness was weakening the church and dividing the church. Balaam, when he found that he could not *curse* the church, he began to *corrupt* the church by suggesting that the Israelites yoke up with the heathen tribes. This is what began to happen to the Church at Pergamos as it yoked up with the world. The church became just like the world.

This is where so many of our churches are today. You cannot tell them apart from the world. It has shown up in their lack of standards, the wrong kind of music, worship services that feeds the flesh and a departure from the Old King James Bible.

A. They had those who had a covetous spirit in their ministry (held to the doctrine of Balaam). (V.14).

Just as Balaam could be bought for a price, there were those in the church at Pergamos who would rather have the applause of the world, and the praise of men, than the favor of the Lord. With this being so, they would tolerate worldliness. We must be warned knowing that the same thing is happening to many of our churches today. We must constantly be on guard against this subtle attack of Satan. If Satan cannot curse you, he certainly will attempt to corrupt you. Churches with its membership, who take a stand against worldliness, will never be that popular with the world.

Pergamos historically pictures the time when

Constantine contended with Maxentius over the throne that had been occupied by Diocletian up until his death. Old tradition has it that the night before the battle at Milvian Bridge, Constantine saw a vision in the shape of a cross in the sky with this Latin inscription, *in hoc signo vinces*, (by this sign conquer). It was that night that Constantine bargained with Satan and would join the church if he were victorious. It was after this battle that he marched his soldiers into the church, and the church and the state were wedded together. After this, it was then popular for a person to say that he was a Christian even though there was no real evidence to show that he was truly a follower of Christ. This was the way that the Roman Catholic Church developed and this Roman system is still hated by Christ for its departure from Truth. In the spirit of ecumenicalism many churches today have yoked up together and they are compromising Truth to do so.

B. They had those who had a conquering spirit in their ministry (held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.) (V. 15).

Louis T. Talbot wrote: “The two words *nikao*, meaning ‘to conquer,’ and *laos*, meaning ‘the people’ or ‘laity,’ form the root of the name ‘Nicolaitanes.’ The term was applied to those who originated the system, which divided the Church of Jesus Christ into two divisions—the clergy and the laity. When we come to the study involving especially the churches of Pergamos and Thyratira, we will discover that this system is in full bloom with bishops, archbishops, and other religious dominating taking place.

This kind of religious system does not properly recognize the priesthood of the believer. It causes men to believe that they cannot personally come to the Lord.

III. NOTICE PERGAMOS' PUNISHMENT. (V. 16)

The Lord desires the church to maintain its fidelity by not allowing unbelievers to find safe haven in our churches. If a person does not give evidence of real, genuine conversion, then that person should not be allowed to come into the membership. God's definition of the New Testament church involves baptized believers.

The church also should exercise church discipline to avoid the church from having a tolerant attitude towards sin. The discipline should be done in such a way that provides for firmness and fairness, in a way that also demonstrates Christian love. We like Christ should hate the sin, but love the sinner.

A. Unless they repented there would be sudden judgment. (V.16a)

The Lord does not lightly regard sin nor does He lightly deal with sin. He told the church at Pergamos that they were to repent or face His sudden judgment. Each of us should recognize the seriousness of sin, and neither tolerates it in our personal lives nor in our churches.

B. Unless they repented there would be sure judgment. (V.16b)

He warned the Church at Pergamos that He would execute judgment with the sword of His mouth. Can you imagine the Creator God who spoke into existence everything that is, speaking judgment against your sin? Again, we should not have a light regard for sin. We should see it as He does.

IV. NOTICE PERGAMOS' PROMISE. (V.17)

Christ does not want an individual, or a church comprised; of individuals to remain defeated by either sin or any other hindrance to the cause of Christ. He is always encouraging us to do right. To this church, it is the same. To our church, it also is the same. God wants us to go on in grace.

A. Be Fed With A Spiritual Nutrient. (V. 17a)

The Lord told the Church at Pergamos that He would give them the right to eat of the “hidden manna”. The hidden manna is the blessings that come to His own who are walking in the faith. It is hidden to the worldly wise man, and the sinner. Manna as indicated in the Scriptures was a type of God’s blessings and provisions. In the wilderness, the manna was given to sustain the people of Israel. It was given according to God’s design, and according to His timing.

For a church to receive the ongoing blessings of the Lord, it has to be separated from the world, just as the Lord required of the Church at Pergamos.

B. Be Furnished With A Spiritual Name. (V. 17b)

The Lord promised a white stone to the overcomer. No one today knows for sure what the white stone was, but the church at Pergamos knew. What ever it was, it was good because the Lord gave it. It also promised a new name written in the stone. The Lord made something special to offer to the Church at Pergamos for their doing right. This shows how important that it is to the Lord for His people to be a separated, and a peculiar people.

CONCLUSION: Each of these churches that we are studying has special lessons for us to learn. Sometimes these lessons are hard lessons to be learned, because our flesh does not enjoy being corrected. Such could be the case as we study this church because it is so difficult to stay separated from the pull of the world without having the strength that comes from the Lord. May we have His strength...

THYATIRA, A DEPRAVED CHURCH.

TEXT: Revelation 2:18-29

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 2:18-29

INTRODUCTION: As we learn about these churches that were located in Asia Minor, it is important that we keep in perspective what God is teaching us. As we have already learned, we study this great last book of the Bible with three things in mind. We want to first learn what the primary interpretation of the passage is. Then, what is the practical application to be learned? Finally, what is the prophetic implication?

Thyatira could have been founded, with Lydia the seller

of purple, having a beginning influence. Lydia, who was converted at Philippi, was from Thyatira. (Acts 16:14). Thyatira was not a large city, and was not known for its religious persecution as some of the other churches of the seven, but it did have a strong economic base, which allowed it to be mostly known for its industry.

About the church located here, many good things are said about it. Such words as *charity*, *service*, *faith*, and *patience* are used to describe this church. Yet, the Lord also had a few things against this church. We will analyze and study this church and determine why this church was a depraved church.

I. NOTICE THYATIRA'S PRAISE. (Vv. 18, 19)

May we notice that the Lord is very gracious even when rebuking these churches. If He is able to find something commendable about the church, He will do so. Such is the case with this church under consideration. There were some good things that could be said, but as you study this letter to Thyatira you get the impression that the evil things about the church outweigh the good. Many of our churches are like this today. Most of our churches, something good can be said about them, but sadly there is often so much wrong that the good hardly is noticeable. Churches need great Biblical balance. Churches need strong doctrine, but they also need steady duty. Churches need the love of God, but they must balance it with the law of God.

A. Praised the integrity of the work. (Vv. 18 -19a)

When the Lord is addressing Himself to this church, He is calling attention to having "eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass". This is God's way of saying, "I see what is going on, and I will judge you accordingly". He begins by saying that He is aware of this church by its

works being done.

Churches need to be busy about doing the Lord's work, as the church at Thyatira was. Our churches have a wonderful role in the development and the making of a people. Can you imagine where our own country would be if it were not for the positive influence of our churches. As I am writing this, the ACLU is constantly going to court with the agenda of taking away the core values that made our country great. They have effectively had part in the removal of manger scenes, the taking down of the Ten Commandments, suing the Boy Scouts of America, taking the cross off the California symbol, and changing the name of the Christmas tree to the holiday tree, just to name a few. Church groups and concerned citizens are beginning to fight this group on the basis that it should not support its trial lawyers with American tax dollars. Also, churches across the land were said to have impacted the last presidential election with its concern and influence over rising moral declension.

The church at Thyatira was also commended for its charity. Charity is an unselfish, Christ-like, giving love. This church was known for having this kind of love. This kind of love is sincerely reaching out and ministering to others. Sadly, our text indicates that a church having this kind of love can still be wrong. This should be our warning as we consider this church. A church is stronger when it is built on balance. We get in trouble as churches when we go to the extreme in either direction. The Scriptures use Scriptural couplets to define this balance. Here are a couple of examples: The Bible speaks of having "grace and Truth" or "Strength and beauty". It is no accident that God worded His Truth as He did.

Though God is a God of Love, He also is a HOLY God, and will not compromise His Holiness for His love... This is the reason that we sometimes say that, "Love is tough". In addition to Thyatira being commended for its works and its

charity, it was also commended for its service. The word service in this context carries the idea of ministering to others by receiving the command or instructions of another. This very likely was the way that the Lord commended this church for obeying their pastors. Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

The church at Thyatira was also commended for its faith. When you think about this church, you see that it has a very impressive list of positive qualities. Faith is one of them. Faith must characterize the true church of God. Can you imagine doing God’s work without exercising faith? We could very easily call the church a venture of faith! Every work of the church ought to be an ongoing adventure of faith. The church also should be a patient church as the church at Thyatira was described. The word patient as used here means *the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.*

B. Praised the increasing of the work. (V. 19b)

Another notable quality that describes this church was that its last works were more than those at the first. The church was doing the things that we just mentioned in an increasing capacity. They were not like the church at Ephesus, which drifted from its first love, but instead was loving the things of God even more. Yet, with all of these outstanding qualities mentioned, the church still had problems that were destructive to its very existence.

The warning that I feel as I deliver this sermon, is that even churches like ours can have such good qualities yet still come up so short. Let us be warned and helped as we

look at Thyatira's problems.

II. NOTICE THYATIRA'S PROBLEMS. (V.20)

When the Lord used the phrase, "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou; sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols," He was letting the church know that it had some very serious problems. May I say, most all of our churches have serious problems according to God's standards. If we do not recognize this, we cannot truly experience revival and see God doing what He wants to do in our churches.

We have a wonderful church, but God is very much impressing on my heart that we too have very serious problems. Remember, we must measure according to God's standards. As your Pastor, God is showing me many areas that I need to personally address. Also, God is showing me areas of weakness that is among you that needs to be addressed. Please be both sensitive and pliable to His will as we do these studies.

A. Had a Jezebel that called herself a prophetess. (V. 20a)

In the Old Testament, the name Jezebel is an awful name. I cannot recall one instance of commendation that is given to her. She fornicated the holy things of God, causing her husband Ahab to embrace the heathen gods of the land. She was a murderess, who would cheat and kill to get her way. One commentator in describing her vanity of powdering her face said that she would put on her war paint in the morning, and go on the warpath in the evening.

This Jezebel, mentioned in our text, undoubtedly had the spirit and the characteristics of the Old Testament

Jezebel. This woman had a dominating spirit that prevailed in the church, which resulted in the Lord's servants being seduced by her. This indicates that she had so much Satanic power that she could manipulate the minds of even the servants of the Lord causing them to do those things that they would not normally do.

B. Had a Jezebel that caused her subjects to fornicate. (V. 20b)

Just as seductive women can enter into a healthy marriage and cause harm by seducing the man, so was this woman doing the same to God's servants. Historically this church pictures the time that we now know as the "dark ages", which covered the time period from 600AD to 1500AD. It was when the Roman Catholic Church wanted to dominate as a religious state, the entire world.

This was the time when the church in Rome took the Bible away from the people and said that they only could interpret it. It was the beginning of Mariolatry, when Mary was called "the Mother of God", and "the queen of Heaven". It was the time when all prayers were to go through Mary. Jesus Christ was given a lesser prominence.

The Roman Catholic Church in recent years has been involved in ecumenical movements to bring all of the faiths together. This is warned against in the Book of Revelation in several other places even as it is here. We will in a later study notice how the Church of Rome is referred to as the "MOTHER OF HARLOTS" (Rev. 17:5) and "the whore" (Rev. 17:15). Such a descriptive reference as this shows how the church at Rome is involved in spiritual fornication, and how the Lord describes it.

Many of the Protestant churches that originally pulled out of the Church of Rome are now making inroads back into the system. This may be noted by their similar doctrines, their practice involving the priesthood, and their

liturgical styles that are similar.

III. NOTICE THYATIRA'S PUNISHMENT. (Vv. 21-23)

Our text indicates that the Lord dealt very severely with Jezebel and those who were associated with her at Thyatira. The language of the Lord indicates to us how much that the Lord hated what Jezebel was doing and to whom she was doing it to. Likewise, the Lord now hates for us to tolerate and yoke up with those who have a corrupt system of Theology. The King James Bible is our sole authority for doctrine and practice, which helps to protect us from corrupt theology. Can we not recognize how easy it is for man to depart from the Truth when he lessens his love for and respect for the King James Bible.

A. Tribulation will come because of Jezebel's deeds. (V.21).

The Church of Thyatira faced tribulation for its failure to deal with the prophetess Jezebel. Likewise the religious system that is divorced from God will face very intense tribulation during the great tribulation. Revelation 18 beginning in verse number 4, describes the great punishment that will fall upon the GREAT HARLOT. Notice these verses as an indication of what is going to take place (Revelation 18:4-8).

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.

How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she

saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong [is] the Lord God who judgeth her.

B. Tragedy will come because of Jezebel's deeds. (V. 23a)

The severity of God's judgment is demonstrated in these verses. I am finding more and more people who want to magnify the love of God above the holiness of God. They despise making any judgments against both the sinner and his sin. There is a prevailing spirit in many of our churches today to "not rock the boat" and do not offend anyone. God is convicting me even as I preach, "Yes, we must love", but "No, we must not tolerate sin".

Having a tolerant attitude towards sin can be just as devastating as having a too demanding attitude towards the sinner. Once again, it is the Word of God that balances it all out.

C. Trials will come because of Jezebel's deeds. (V. 23b).

When the Lord says, "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works," this is the Lord's way of saying, "I will put you on trial, and try your motives". The Lord knows the true motive of each church, and each person.

IV. NOTICE THYATIRA'S PROMISE. (V. 24-29)

There were promises given to this church for those who did not embrace the teachings of Jezebel, and did not learn the ways of Satan. There also seems to be strong teachings relating to and going beyond the tribulation right on to the

kingdom age. When reference is given to them having, “power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father,” there seems to be a solid connection to the Millennium

A. To the pure He will give protection. (Vv. 24-25)

There is an ongoing principle that is found throughout the Word of God. This principle has been called the “If-But” principle. This principle simply stated says, that IF you do that which is right, you will have the blessings of God, BUT if not you will have the curse of God upon you.

The Lord is promising His blessings to the one who “overcometh”.

B. To the pure He will give power. Vv. 26-27)

He will also give power to the person who obeys and does His Word. Today, in doing the work of the Lord, we desperately need God’s protective power. It can be had as a reward for faithfully doing what His Word says.

C. To the pure He will give permanence. (Vv. 28-29)

The morning star is a star of antiquity. It also is a symbol of permanency. For a person or a church to enjoy the glory and the permanency of the morning star, it needs God’s favor and His blessings. I certainly want this church to have just that...

CONCLUSION: This is another great study or lesson from an old Church that we should give heed to. May we be the kind of church that will please God.

SARDIS, A DEAD CHURCH

TEXT: Revelation 3:1-6

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.
Revelation 3:1-6

INTRODUCTION: Sardis was east of Smyrna, and south of Thyatira, but a neighbor to both. Not much is known about the start up of this church, but the church through a messenger had visited John while he was on the isle of Patmos. It was by this messenger that the letter was delivered to the church at Sardis. Sardis was a very rich city, and also the ancient capital of Lydia.

In studying the meaning of the word Sardis, some says that it means “escaping ones” or “remnant”. Prophetically this church pictures the time known as the reformation. It was on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his famous Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. It was during this time that Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, and others attacked the very citadel of Rome causing the very foundations of papal Rome to be shaken.

There were two major emphases during the reformation. One was the return doctrinally to the truth

Justification by Faith, and the other was the emphasis on the Scriptures as being the sole authority. The battle cry of the reformation was *Sola Scriptura* or *the Scriptures alone*.

In addition to the reformation taking place, Protestantism was born. Sadly, the break that the Protestants made was not nearly enough. We will consider this more in-depth as we continue this study.

I. NOTICE SARDIS' PROBLEM. (Vv. 1-2).

The Letter begins with a complaint by the Lord, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." In creation, in our solar system, it takes 33 years for the light to travel from the Polar Star to the earth. If it exploded 30 years ago, it would still be seen on earth for 3 more years. In a similar statement, one could then say about the Polar Star, "You have the appearance of being alive, but you are dead." Tragically, there are many churches today that are just like this.

William R. Newell, the old commentator said this about Protestantism, "**Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.** Nothing could describe *Protestantism* more accurately! As over against Romish night and ignorance, she has enlightenment and outward activity: the great 'state churches', or 'denominations', with creeds and histories, costly churches and cathedrals, universities and seminaries, 'boards', bureaus of publication and propaganda, executors of organized activities, including home and foreign missions, even 'lobby' men to 'influence legislation' at court! You and I dare compare the Church with no other model than the Holy Spirit gave at Pentecost and in Paul's day!"

A. The Church Had Inconsistencies Before God. (V. 1).

With all of our activities, and churchy events, it comes down to this one consideration, “What does God think about it?” To know God’s thoughts is to know God’s Word. Wonder what God thinks when we start shutting our doors on Sunday nights, and quit frequenting our mid week prayer services, and I hear that some churches are shutting down for the summer. Faithfulness to the church ought to be as natural as breathing. There should not be the need for carnal attractions to keep people in church. There should be a love for the Word, and a desire to worship and praise Him based upon real life.

When God saw this church, He saw that it was engrossed in activities, and that it was doing religious things but was really dead... God saw their inconsistencies, and He also sees ours, as well.

B. The Church Had Imperfections Before God. (V. 2).

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” (V. 2).

The Lord saw very little vitality in this church at Sardis; He even noticed that the Church was in a near terminal state, and it was for this reason that He gave this very serious and solemn warning to the church. The command to be watchful is another reference to the second coming of the Lord. Two references are given to the seven churches in regards to the second coming of the Lord. The Lord was telling Sardis to be looking for the Lord.

When a Christian and a church have its eyes on the coming of the Lord, they will be more likely to be ready for the coming of the Lord. Also, the church at Sardis was told

to strengthen the things that remain. A worthy endeavor on the part of Pastors and Preachers is to preach messages that cause its membership to be mindful of the coming of the Lord, and to also be preaching messages that strengthens the church. Obviously our flesh does not like such preaching, and for this reason our churches are dying.

The truth of this verse is supported in Colossians 1:23, where it says, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;” Being “Grounded and settled” speaks of strength. It says something about the foundation. If the foundation settles, the building crumbles. Church, if the foundation of Truth is removed, then the church begins to crumble.

II. NOTICE SARDIS’ PUNISHMENT. (V.3).

“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” This verse speaks of swift, full, and complete judgment. We falsely develop the opinion that we can change the requirements and the rules of God to suit our own lifestyle, and to live as we please. We live as though we forgot that God is still in control.

Just as God told the Church of Sardis to remember how they had received and heard, they were also told to hold fast and repent. If they did not, God was promising sure and swift judgment upon them.

A. The Lord Will Come As A Thief. (V. 3a).

This certainly does not mean that the Lord is a thief. It

just means that He will come as a thief in a manner that is not expected. He is telling the Church at Sardis that He will come suddenly and will bring judgment upon them. There will be no clue as to when it will happen. Would it not be an awful tragedy to disregard the warnings of God, only to have Him swiftly come and remove His presence, while at the same time bringing His judgment with Him?

B. The Lord Will Come Unannounced As To Time. (V. 3b).

It is with significance that the Lord uses the expression “Be watchful” here, as it pertains to judgment upon the church at Sardis, and also when describing His second coming. Each church and its people should be looking for the eminent return of Christ. Usually when the Scriptures speak concerning the coming of the Lord, it also speaks of judgment that will befall the people who are left behind.

III. NOTICE SARDIS’ PRAISE. (V. 4).

The Lord is careful to give praise when and where it is deserved. Such is the case concerning those who are remaining faithful in the Church at Sardis.

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” (V.4).

Certainly, we who are the King’s children should walk as such. Just as a few in the Church at Sardis were commended for not defiling their garments, we should not either. I have always been impressed with the soldier who took great pride in the way that he wore his uniform. Looking back, I can see why the drill sergeant would require us to spend so much time preparing our shoes and our uniform. The uniform identified the soldier with both his unit and his country.

We are royal ambassadors representing a heavenly country. With such being so, we should never do anything to defile the uniform that marks us as being Christians. Sin certainly defiles. The word garment is used in our text to show recognition to those who were not defiled. The color white pictures both purity and worthiness. The Lord Jesus Christ made us worthy by clothing us in robes of righteousness.

A. There Were A Few Not Dead. (V. 4a).

When the Lord spoke of the church at Sardis having a name that it was alive but was dead could mean two things. It certainly meant that there were those who had lost all of their effectiveness to the cause of Christ. They were void of any recognizable traits that identified them as being converted. Then, also, there could be a greater reference to the church being slowly taken over by lost men. When the Word of God is constantly being watered down and there is a lesser and lesser regard for the Word of God, one can be assured that it is only a matter of time before that church is nothing more than a part of history.

Lost people who are members of the church will have no real living passion for the things of God. There will be a “form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof” that marks such a congregation. Though a few may still be converted, most will be lost just going through the motions.

B. There Will Be A Few Not Defiled. (V. 4b).

Just as there were a few who had not defiled their garments at Sardis, historically there were also the Baptist groups during the Protestant Reformation who were neither Catholic nor Protestant. This remnant stayed true, and continued even as they had started. The Protestants during this time were not friendly to the early Baptists. I can still

hear in my mind Dr. Harold B. Sichtler saying, “Martin Luther was never a friend of the Baptist”. Some of the greatest persecution came upon the Baptists from the Protestants after the Protestant Reformation.

Even today when so many religious groups are taking the interdenominational and the no denominational road, there are still a few Baptists who will not compromise their doctrine or their duty. They continue to remain true to the King James Bible, and all that it involves, knowing that it is becoming less and less popular to do so.

IV. NOTICE SARDIS’ PROMISE. (Vv. 4b-6).

This next section has a very interesting expression. “I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”.

The expression *blot out his name* has been either much discussed or not discussed at all. We will look at what seems to be the truth of this expression as we look at these passages, with some comments being made as we do.

Using the *Law of First Mention*, we will note the first appearing of this expression. “Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin -; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.” (Exodus 32:32). Moses has such a love for his people that he was willing to have his name removed from the book of living, which will eventually become the book of life. God has a register that He keeps of all who would ever live. This was a way that the Lord is able to show that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance. When the sinner refused his last opportunity to be saved, then his name was blotted out, thus it would never be in the book of life. Moses was referencing to such a registry in this passage.

Now, look at this passage in Psalm 69:28, which gives additional insight to this expression. “Let them be blotted

out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”

Praise God, all who are believers will have their names written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. All of those whose names have not been blotted out will be included. Will your name still be there?

A. There Was A Promise Regarding Their Walk. (V. 4b).

What is absolutely thrilling about this promise is that the Scriptures say, “they shall walk with me in white”. How thrilling to walk with Him. How thrilling to know that He now walks with us who are believers. Can you but imagine how wonderful that it will be to forever be with the Lord, and to be able to go on a long walk with Him and not even use up one second of eternity?

B. There Was A Promise Regarding Their Wardrobe. (V. 5a).

To be clothed in white raiment, speaks of the requirements and the righteousness of God. It speaks of the approval and the acceptance of God. It speaks of the favor and the faithfulness of God. It speaks of the glory and the grandeur of God. He awards the wardrobe which says it all.

C. There Was A Promise Regarding Their Well-being. (Vv. 5b, 6).

Nothing means more than to have Christ to confess the believer’s name before the Father and the angels. It often is exciting to have your name spoken publicly in a good way, but not nearly as exciting as having your name spoken by Him in this way.

CONCLUSION: Studying these seven churches certainly offers some new lessons from old churches. Really, these lessons may seem new, but they have been around for a long time. These studies are God's way to teach us to pattern our churches in a way that will be pleasing to Him. I trust that this is happening.

PHILADELPHIA, ANOTHER DELIGHTFUL CHURCH

TEXT: REVELATION 3:7-13

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:7-13

INTRODUCTION: This would be the church! Out of the seven churches listed in our study, this is the one that I would most rather be a member of, and would most enjoy being the pastor. Now back to the real world... Sadly, there are not many churches like this. If the ratio of such churches would be the same as it is here, it would be one out of seven. Yet, I am afraid that it even would be much less than that. Churches that meet the Biblical standard of God are few and far between. These studies of the seven churches are showing me that this statement would be so.

Philadelphia was an interesting place that was built by Attalus Philadelphia. This city which was located nine

hundred feet above sea level suffered much from earthquakes and volcanic activity. This contributed to the land being rich and fertile making it well suited for the cultivation of fine grapes.

The church at Philadelphia was located about thirty miles southeast of Sardis leading to Laodicea. This city was nick-named “Little Athens” because of its beautiful buildings, and unique culture. The following historical statement shows why this is so:

"The original purpose behind this key city was to make it a center for spreading Greek language, culture and manners throughout the Asian provinces." (Hocking)

Even though this city had the strong Greek cultural influences, it still did not negatively affect the Church of Philadelphia that was located there. May we discover what made this such a delightful church.

I. NOTICE PHILADELPHIA’S PRAISE. (Vv. 7-8)

There is absolutely no better praise than the praise that comes from the Lord. The highest ambition of any church or Christian ought to be to serve in such a way as to have the praise of the Lord. The Scriptures have much to say concerning the way that the Lord rewards faithfulness. This particular letter gives us much insight as to the character of Christ. We will note from whom the praise was given.

A. Note From Whom The Praise Was Given. (V. 7).

A wonderful description is given in our text concerning Christ as the very One who praised the church at Philadelphia. We will very carefully consider the way the Lord is described as we explore the text. We also will look at some related passages that give information about Him. This will help us better understand how wonderful it is *to be*

praised by Him. Consider this enlightening passage that is found in Hebrews 1:3, 4.

“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

This passage tells us something about His Majesty on high, and how He came to us as the Savior and takes consideration of us, while being the Sovereign One. Christ Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power. No one but He has this ability and power. Colossians 1:18, 19 further demonstrates this same truth. *“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell,”* The Word of God clearly proves that Christ pleases the Father as being *“the head of the body, the church”*

As the Head, Christ has the right to govern the church. The church is His government; He is its absolute governing Head. As the governing Head of the church, he can make observations and praise the church if He finds it to be worthy. He is absolutely qualified to do so, as these Scriptures remind us. Our text that we are considering also voices this right by showing or listing how He is qualified. May we now consider these qualifications.

1. Praise Came From The Sanctified One - “is holy”. (V. 7a)

Christ is indeed the sanctified One or the Holy One. The word holy comes from a word that means awful one, not awful like one who is deplorable or wicked, but as one who is full of awe. The Holy One is the reverend One. The more Holy we become, the more like Christ we become. A

churches capacity to reverence God will be proportioned to the way it regards His holiness. The word holy is a separating word in that the word *holy* means to make a difference. Christ Jesus is absolutely different from all others. There is no heathen god that can be compared to Him in any manner. He far outshines them all. He is separated from all in His splendor, His majesty, and His power.

2. Praise Came From The Sure One- “is true” (V. 7a)

The word *true* as used in our text, according to *Strongs*, means “opposite to what is fictitious, counterfeit, imaginary, simulated or pretended”. Christ Jesus is true because *He is the Truth*. There is nothing counterfeit, or imaginary about Him. As He spoke to each of these Churches, He spoke the Truth. There could have been those even in the Church at Philadelphia who needed to have Truth confirmed. We, in our churches today can have the Truth confirmed by virtue of having the King James Bible as our sole authority. There must be a proper Truth reference point. Jesus Christ was that reference point as He spoke to the church at Philadelphia. He told them everything upon the absolute basis of Him being true. Today, a church is strong only when it operates absolutely according to the truth of God’s Word.

3. Praise Came From the Sovereign One- “key of David”. (V. 7c)

When the expression, “he that hath the key of David” is used, it describes the ruling authority that the Lord Jesus has. David’s authority was passed on to Eliakim, Isaiah 22:22 and in a Spiritual sense it was then passed on to the Lord Jesus Christ. God’s sovereign power is exercised in heaven and upon the earth. Everything pertaining to His

power originates in the throne room. Romans 13:1 says, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”.

When thinking about the key of David, one can see how God blended the human with the Divine. It was according to God’s sovereign purpose that David was selected in preference to a “head and shoulder” man such as Saul. God, within His sovereign purpose selected David and then allowed His own self to be placed in the human lineage of David by being born of a human mother that was of David’s descent. It will be Christ Jesus who will take both the seat of David, and the key of David according to His own sovereign purpose. It is in this manner that He introduces who He is to the Church at Philadelphia.

As the sovereign *key holder*, Christ declared that He was the one who opens and closes doors. Just as this was true when He addressed the Church at Philadelphia, it is also true as He addresses our churches today. It is equally true in respect to personal ministry. Even as I stand before you, as your preacher, it is only because the Lord opened a door of opportunity and service nearly twenty-three years ago. I continue to serve here because God has not chosen to close that door. When He does, my ministry here will be completed. It is with that confidence and knowledge that I now serve you. It is He that has the keys.

Many years ago, I would have older and wiser preachers counsel me on how I could know the will of God. They would say, “God opens doors that no man can close, and closes doors that no man can open”. It has been my desire to be sensitive to when God is either opening or closing a door. This is what contributed to my waiting so long to actually begin our building program. I had to absolutely know that it was in God’s perfect timing. As a church, we patiently waited for God to give us the go-ahead, and I am glad now that we did. It is so much better to trust God with

the *key*.

The Church at Philadelphia pictures historically the missionary church or the church of the open door. This period began around 1750 AD and continued until around 1950 AD. During these years, there were many revivals in different parts of the world. England, and the United States experienced a *great awakening* as did those who were associated with the famed Welsh Revival. God raised up men like William Carey, John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Adoniram Judson, Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, “Billy” Sunday, John R. Rice, Oliver B. Green and many more. My own parents were saved as a result of this Great Awakening. Over 50 years later our church is still enjoying the benefits of the Philadelphian Church Age, having been born under the influence of the Great Awakening.

Sadly, we are now living in the Laodicean Church Age. Because of this, our churches as a whole are in desperate need of a heaven sent revival.

B. Note To Whom The Praise Was Given. (V. 8)

Philadelphia had suffered many earthquakes and knew what it was to suffer great loss and face tremendous hardship. It would have been very easy for them to live in a constant state of fear and dread, yet such did not seem to be the case. Their adversity seemed to make them more resilient to hardship. The Lord commended them for their faithful fidelity and promised them that He would honor them for their faithfulness.

1. Praise Was Given To A Church That Was Faithful In Her Weakness. (V. 8a)

When the Lord told them that they had a little strength, it could have been in a relative sense. The Lord may have been saying, “Though your number has been greatly diminished, you still, with your small number, have an open door of service that no man can shut. This could be a means of encouraging our churches today that have small numbers, but continue to practice faithfulness to the Lord. A little strength coupled with God’s strength means great strength.

2. Praise Was Given To A Church That Was Faithful To The Word. (V. 8b)

The Lord told the Church at Philadelphia that they had kept His Word. Certainly that was a wonderful commendation for the Church at Philadelphia, and would be for any church so commended. A church will be rewarded according to the way that the Word of God was kept. There will be a day of reckoning as indicated by Hebrews 13:17. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

Preachers should be very careful to deliver the Word of God to the people, and the people should be very careful to keep the Word that has been delivered to them. I recall a preacher who once said that it was his responsibility to *preach God’s Word as it is to men as they are*. When a bridge of trust has been built between the people and the preacher, and they mutually have a desire to please God by keeping the Word that makes a wonderful combination. May we together, strive to be absolutely faithful to the Word of God as was the Church at Philadelphia.

3. Praise Was Given To A Church That Was Faithful In Her Worship. (V. 8c).

Philadelphia in no way denied the name of the Lord. There were those who brought persecution to the church while attempting to get the members of Philadelphia to deny the Name of Christ. There would have been a carnal temptation to deny Christ in hopes of having an easier existence, but they would not deny Christ. It could have been difficult to survive after a major earthquake with the food supply either cut off or under the control of the government. With this being so, those who worshiped Christ may have been told that unless they recant their faith in Christ they would starve to death. The Lord told them that even though they had just a little strength while facing their adversity, that they would still be rewarded by Christ. He would make them pillars of strength in the Temple of God. (V. 12). This would be God's way of perpetually honoring those Philadelphia church members for their faithfulness.

II. NOTICE PHILADELPHIA'S PROMISES. (Vv. 9-13)

In these verses there are at least five promises that the Lord made to the church at Philadelphia.

1. I will make them to come and worship before thy feet.
2. I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.
3. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.
4. I will write upon him the name of my God.
5. I will write upon him my new name.

May we consider these promises in three different groups.

A. The Lord Promised Honor To The Faithful Of Philadelphia. (V. 9)

There seems to be evidence that the counterfeit Jews were persecuting the genuine saints of the Philadelphian Church. The Lord will cause them to come and worship before the church, and will also be shown that the Lord loved those whom these counterfeit Jews did not love. These religious Jews were guilty of religious pretense, and were said to be of the synagogue of Satan. That certainly is a strong indictment against their counterfeit religious activity. That shows us that the Lord is not at all impressed with religious pretense.

In a similar way as here, the Lord will one day reveal Himself to the world as the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords, with every knee bowing before Him. At this time all religious counterfeits will be finally and forever exposed. Also at this time, the faithful in Christ will be honored and rewarded.

B. The Lord Promised A Haven To The Faithful Of Philadelphia. (Vv. 10-11)

This church at Philadelphia had faced so much trial and tribulation, yet remained faithful to the Lord. In a way that only involved the actual church addressed here, the Lord is offering them special protection when they would not have to face the *hour of temptation*. In a prophetic way I believe that the Lord is offering the protection of keeping the true church from the *hour of temptation*. This could very well be a way that the Lord is promising the church that it will not go through the Great Tribulation. The phrase hour of temptation refers to a time that will be of a measured duration. The tribulation will have a limited time of seven years. The church, praise God will not have to go through the Great Tribulation.

C. The Lord Promised A Heaven To The Faithful Of Philadelphia. (Vv. 12-13)

These verses show the wonderful benefits and the wonderful blessings that would come as the faithful church members were taken to heaven. For all of the faithful church members at Philadelphia there were will be identified as to the name of the Lord, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the new name of the Lord. There will be no mistake as to who the genuine children of God are, as opposed to the Jews who are of the synagogue of Satan.

CONCLUSION: The Church at Philadelphia certainly gives us a great pattern to go by. Once again there are great new lessons that can be learned from these old churches. May we be the church of the open door in the 21st century right here in Statesboro, Georgia.

LAODICEA, A DISGRACEFUL CHURCH

Text: Revelation 3:14-22

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Revelation 3:14-22

INTRODUCTION: I have such a different feeling when coming to this church, after leaving the Church at Philadelphia. I was trying to think of words that would best describe this feeling. An event that I will never forget came to my mind as I was thinking. I remember going to Brother Wallace Ward's house on a very dark night. I was in the back yard and decided to go to the front of the yard. I was walking in pitch dark, and I took a step that seemed like it would never end. I had stepped off of a retaining wall into empty space. I finally hit bottom, and thank the Lord, with no broken bones.

In a different sense, that extreme feeling that I felt then, I now feel. We have just spent time learning about the very best church of the seven, and now we are going to learn

about the very worst of the seven churches. It is almost like stepping from the top rung of a ladder to the bottom in just one step.

Yet the Lord would have us to see this miserable contrast of these two churches. It could be as a warning to let us know how we could be when he is operating as the True Governor of the church, or what it is like when he has been forced out of His church. This church was located about forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia, and was a very wealthy city that had independently grown into a very successful commercial and financial center. Unlike the Church at Philadelphia this church, like water to a sponge, had absorbed into its surroundings. Some have called this church, "the rich - poor church". It had so much wealth, but so little of God. "It is frequently noted that Laodicea prided itself on three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world." (Mounce)

I. NOTICE THE PROBLEM OF LAODICEA (3:14-17)

The Lord has no commendation to give to this church. He identifies Himself as being the *Amen*. The word *Amen* means Truth. *The word "amen" is a most remarkable word. It was transliterated directly from the Hebrew into the Greek of the New Testament, then into Latin and into English and many other languages, so that it is practically a universal word. It has been called the best known word in human speech. The word is directly related -- in fact, almost identical -- to the Hebrew word for "believe" (amam), or faithful. Thus, it came to mean "sure" or "truly", an expression of absolute trust and confidence. – HMM*

The Lord very credibly begins to address this church, emphasizing as He does, that He is "the faithful and true witness, the beginning, of the creation of God". There

seems to be indication from our text that this church is so self-sufficient that it thinks that it does not even need God, hence He is seen on the outside of the door knocking for entrance back into the church that He founded. The self-sufficiency of this church is probably the spirit of the Laodicean people. After an earthquake devastated the region in 60 AD, Laodicea refused Imperial help in rebuilding the city, and was able to rebuild the city by using their resources. They could have had the attitude both in the city and in the church that they did not need anyone's help. This could be the reason that Christ referred to Himself as, "the beginning of the creation of God". He wanted to impress to this boastful, self-sufficient people that everything that they had or owned, He created.

A. Their Problem Was Exposed. (Vv. 14-17)

God again uses an expression that only He can use in its totality, "I know". His complete knowledge of everything involving this church is shown in the way that He identified their problem. When He said, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot", He could have been relating to them this way because of His knowledge of an irritation that they constantly experienced. Their water supply was provided by a six-mile aqueduct from the hot-springs of Hierapolis; because the water came from the hot-springs such a great distance, by the time that it arrived, it was lukewarm.

1. The Lord was aware of their problem. (Vv. 14-15)

Just as their drinking water was not just tasteless, it was also distasteful. This is also a way of describing the way the Lord felt about this church. He wanted to spue this church out of His mouth. Charles Spurgeon had a very graphic way of describing the attitude that the Lord had towards this

church. “The great danger is, first, *to be rejected of Christ*. He puts it, ‘I will spue thee out of my mouth,’—as disgusting him, and causing him nausea. Then the church must first be in his mouth, or else it could not be spued from it. What does this mean? Churches are in Christ’s mouth in several ways, they are used by him as his testimony to the world; he speaks to the world through their lives and ministries. He does as good as say, ‘O sinners, if ye would see what my religion can do, see here a godly people banded together in my fear and love, walking in peace and holiness.’ He speaks powerfully by them, and makes the world see and know that there is a true power in the gospel of the grace of God. But when the church becomes neither cold nor hot he does not speak by her, she is no witness for him. When God is with a church the minister’s words come out of Christ’s mouth. ‘Out of his mouth went a two-edged sword,’ says John in the Revelation, and that ‘two-edged sword’ is the gospel which we preach. When God is with a people they speak with divine power to the world, but if we grow lukewarm Christ says, ‘Their teachers shall not profit, for I have not sent them, neither am I with them. Their word shall be as water spilt on the ground, or as the whistling of the wind.’ This is a dreadful thing. Better far for me to die than to be spued out of Christ’s mouth.” (Spurgeon)

2. The Lord was angry because of their problem. (V. 16)

His anger is a controlled anger that is exercised when His patience has been used up. He has a predetermined time when enough is enough. For this church the Lord got to the place that he had had enough because of their lukewarmness. The lukewarmness of this church shows that all passion has been lost. When telling them that they are neither cold nor hot he is describing how truly disinterested they are to the things of God. They are just as

the generation was that the Lord Jesus described in Matthew 11:16, 17. “But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.” These verses describe the callousness of those who were being entertained. They neither had the capacity to enjoy things that should have brought them cheer, nor were they able to shed tears upon hearing something sad. They simply did not have any feelings. They also were neither cold nor hot.

The Church at Laodicea likely had problems in the pulpit and in the pew. The preacher made no attempt to stir the people up or either they would not be stirred. When and if the preacher preached on sin, the members made no effort to change. They may have even commended the preacher for preaching such a fine message, but they did not let the word germinate in their hearts to cause obedience to the Word that was preached.

Jesus viewed with searching eyes all the works of the church. All that glitters is not gold. Jesus scratched below the surface and looked upon the heart to really see what was there. What He saw made Him sick!

B. Their Problem Was Extreme. (V.17)

He saw a church that had no idea how wretched, poor and miserable they were. There are two phrases in verse seventeen that sums up their true condition, “thou sayest... and knowest not.”

1. Yet they were unaware of their awful position. (V.17a)

They were in a state of misery or distress, and did not even know it. The Lord told them that they were wretched.

The only other time that this word appears in the New Testament was when Paul used it to describe himself, “O wretched man that I am!” In Paul’s case, he knew with conviction that he was in this state because of his indwelling sin. When Paul saw his true state before God, he immediately repented.

This Church at Laodicea was only going through the motions. It had forgotten what it was like to weep over sinners, to witness to the lost, or spend much time in prayer. Once again Spurgeon understands this church, even as he preached to his own church on Sunday morning July 26th 1874. Listen to what he told them. “Alas, this state of lukewarmness is so congenial with human nature that it is hard to fetch men from it. Cold makes us shiver, and great heat causes us pain, but a tepid bath is comfort itself. Such a temperature suits human nature. The world is always at peace with a lukewarm church, and such a church is always pleased with itself. Not too worldly,—no! We have our limits! There are certain amusements which of course a Christian must give up, but we will go quite up to the line, for why are we to be miserable? We are not to be so greedy as to be called miserly, but we will give as little as we can to the cause. We will not be altogether absent from the house of God, but we will go as seldom as we can. We will not altogether forsake the poor people to whom we belong, but we will also go to the world’s church, so as to get admission into better society, and find fashionable friends for our children. How much of this there is abroad! Compromise is the order of the day. Thousands try to hold with the hare and run with the hounds, they are for God and Mammon, Christ and Belial, truth and error, and so are ‘neither hot nor cold.’ Do I speak somewhat strongly? Not so strongly as my Master, for he says, ‘I will spue thee out of my mouth.’” Such, describes the miserable condition of the Church at Laodicea.

2. Yet they were unaware of their awful poverty. (V.17b)

This church had money, but it did not have the things that money cannot buy, such as the blessings and the riches of God upon them. For a church to really be rich it must possess those things that only God can provide. We can have our form, but not have His power. We can have His songs being sung, but not have His saving going on. We can have our prayers being prayed, but not have our prayers being answered. We can have our buildings, our meetings, our choirs, and our programs, and still not have Him. This church had kicked Jesus out; can you hear Him knocking at the door?

3. Yet they were unaware of their awful plight. (V.17c)

When lukewarmness takes over a church, it is usually so slow and so subtle, that it is hardly noticed. In our text the Lord uses one of the commodities that made Laodicea wealthy to challenge them. He told them to anoint their eyes with eye salve so that they might be able to see. This may have been the Lord's pointed way of saying, "You claim to help others to see with your costly eye salve, but are yourselves blind." Our prayer, as theirs should have been, "Lord, open our eyes that we might see." Our twenty-twenty vision can only come from the light of God's Word.

II. Notice The Pleading With Laodicea. (Vv. 18-19)

As lethargic as Laodicea was to the things of God, the Lord still pled with them to change. That is the kind of God that we serve. Though in their present state, they were fit only to be spued out of the mouth of the Lord, He still was pleading with them to repent and to seek after the real

values in life.

**A. Pled with them to seek after real riches.
(vs. 18a)**

Laodicea knew the value of business enterprise. They knew how to make a deal, and how to make money. They knew how to appraise the value of things. The Lord spoke to them in a language that they could understand when He said, “Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.” They considered themselves rich, but He, using figurative language, said that He was the source of real riches. The world has a distorted view of what constitutes real riches, and sadly that view had infiltrated the church. In Isaiah 55:1, the Lord said, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” The buying that the Lord is describing is the kind that only *grace* can buy. The true riches that may be possessed by the Christian is only the kind that can be obtained by grace. A church cannot properly work without grace. It takes grace to be saved, to serve, to sing, and even to shout. What would we even have to shout about if we did not have His grace?

**B. Pled with them to seek after real
righteousness. (vs.18b)**

Not only does the Lord tell this church to “buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich,” but He also tells them to buy “white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.” This language is very similar to the language that God used when covering the nakedness of Adam and Eve. They tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. Such did not please God, because only God could provide a suitable covering for their sins. This covering involved the slaying of

an innocent animal which typifies or pictures the slaying of Jesus upon the Cross.

Laodicea was religiously attempting to satisfy God based upon their terms rather than upon God's. The Lord used the words, "I counsel thee" to express His desire for them to very tenderly, and very seriously consider doing what He told them to do. He wanted them to acknowledge that their religious pretense was not acceptable to Him. The Lord can also see through the rags of our religiosity, or the rags of our own righteousness. He knows what is in your heart.

C. Pled with them to seek after real revelation. (vs. 18c)

The Lord when telling them to anoint their own eyes with eyesalve, was impressing upon them the importance of having true Spiritual discernment without which no man can see the Lord, or cannot see afar off as Peter describes it in 2 Peter 1:9, "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." One reason for blindness is walking afar off; the other is because of being lost. The backslider has no practical capacity for the things of the Lord. The lost, unregenerate person has *no* capacity for the things of the Lord. I Corinthians 2:14 says, "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." I am sure that the Church at Laodicea had both saved and lost members. It very likely had more lost than saved in its membership. Certainly the same could be said about our churches today. Sadly, we are now living in the Laodicean Church age with all the characteristics that marked this ancient church. We, in our Churches, certainly need to anoint our eyes with a Spiritual eyesalve so that we may see clearly.

D. Pled with them to seek after a real repentance. (vs. 19)

The lord gives the reason for His strong rebuke and chastisement. He does it because He loves His own. Hebrews 12:5,6 tell us the same when it says, “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

The Church of Laodicea that has been described as the worst of the seven is still loved by Him. He pleads with them for the purpose of their repenting. As wicked as they were, He still loved them. Church, can you still hear Him pleading?

III. Notice The Passion For Laodicea. (Vv. 20-22)

A. As Seen By The Way The Lord Pled With Them. (V. 20)

This letter to Laodicea ends with Christ Jesus standing outside of the church knocking on the door. He even told them that it was He who was knocking, but there was no indication that they were going to let Him in. The Creator God reserved Himself to the role of a Gentleman, meaning that He was not going to tear the door down to get in. Hear me well; the same is true in regards to you who are lost. In a similar way, He stands outside your hearts door very lovely pleading with you to let Him in. How could you ever refuse the One who loved you so much that He went to the cross and was crucified for you? There was no greater display of the Passion of Christ than that which He exhibited while nailed to the cross. He lovingly draped

Himself on that old rugged cross to bleed and die, so that by His death, burial, and resurrection the poor lost sinner could be set free. Hallelujah!

B. As the Lord promise them. (V. 21,22)

The Lord told those of this church that if they overcame that they would be able to sit with Him in His throne. Again, this is such a gracious and generous offer to the overcomer, an offer from the one who also overcame.

CONCLUSION: This seventh Letter shows how wicked people can be and yet still be offered the long arm of God's grace. A study of these seven churches should stir us all to desire and seek after the favor and blessings of God, as we worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. May we sincerely be challenged from these *new lessons from old churches...*?