

The Seven Churches

Introduction:

The Audience:

The Blessing:

Revelation 1:3 NKJV Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

The bulk of this blessing hinges on what is said to the churches in chapters 1-3.

The reason for this is that chapters 4-22 deal primarily with the apocalyptic vision which contains no command to follow.

Chapters 1-3 contain specific instructions and warnings to the churches, so when the blessing is given for those who “keep” what is written in this book it must be referring mainly to chapters 1-3.

The Angels of the Seven Churches:

He is speaking to the pastors or messengers to the churches.

The Seven Churches:

1. Ephesus (2:1-7)
2. Smyrna (2:8-11)
3. Pergamum (2:12-17)
4. Thyatira (2:18-29)
5. Sardis (3:1-6)
6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)
7. Laodicea (3:14-22)

The seven churches were in seven cities that composed a major trade route of that time.

Possible Views of Meaning:

Literal:

This view holds that Jesus was speaking to specific churches that existed in history.

Symbolic:

This view holds that Jesus was speaking symbolically about stages or conditions a church will go through. Support for this is found in the number 7; the number of divine completeness or perfection.

Prophetic:

This view holds that Jesus was describing various ages that the church will go through.

All of the Above:

It is dangerous to put God in a box. Prophecy throughout scripture has dual meanings and purposes. It is foolish to think that this is different.

The Church at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:1-7 NKJV

Background of Ephesus:

They were in an important place.

Ephesus was on the coast and was major trade city.

It was known as the Gateway of Asia.

- People from all over the Mediterranean gathered there.

The population is believed to have been in the hundreds of 1000's.

The chief shrine to the goddess Artemis (also called Diana) was there.

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- It was one of the seven wonders of the world
- It was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide and was surrounded by 120 columns 60 feet tall 36 of which were richly inlaid.
- It seated 20,000 people.
- All shouting, “hail Artemis!” so loud the place shook.
- In this arena many Christians lost their life.

Christ’s Revelation to Ephesus:

He is the Owner:

✠ He owns the pastor. (2:1)

The “stars” are the “angels” or literally messengers to the churches

“The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches...” (1:20)

They are in His hand.

This was demonstrated by the different fates of Timothy and John.

- Timothy was beaten.
- John was spared.

I am His and work for Him

I answer to Him

✠ He owns the church.

The “lampstand” is the church.

“...and the seven lampstands are the seven churches...” (1:20)

Matthew 5:15-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

We are lights - the church is the lamp stand.

The source of our light is Christ.

It is interesting that one Ancient Roman writer called Ephesus, “The Light of Asia.

He has the power to do what He wishes with the church.

“...If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place.”(2:5)

The City of Asia was known as a “Free City.” This was a city that, due to its service to Rome, was declared free from Roman rule and therefore at liberty to be self governed.

It could be that the church there had developed such an independent mentality as well.

He is the sustainer:

✠ *“These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lamp stands:...” (2:1)*

He is our common ground.

Our loyalty is not to the church, but to God.

He is our source.

Everything we do must be God – driven.

He is our strength.

Every need will be God – Supplied.

He is our foundation.

Every ministry must be God – built.

✠ **The church rises and falls according to His blessing and presence.**

If we begin to fail or struggle, before we look at what we are doing, we need to look at who we are seeking.

The fact is: churches grow because God blesses – churches die because He withdraws His hand.

I know of thriving churches that have grown in the face of unspeakable odds.

I also know of churches that once thrived and no longer exist because God dissolved them.

The Commendation of Ephesus:

They had developed an impressive profile.

✠ They had ministries.

“I know your deeds, your hard work...”(2:2)

They were the center and model of the early church.

Paul stayed longer at Ephesus than any other place. They had great love for Paul.(Acts 20:17, 36-38)

Legend tells that John brought Mary, Jesus’ mother, to Ephesus and that she was buried there.

✠ They were persistent.

“...you have persevered...”(2:3)

Twice Jesus commends their perseverance.

Church sign, “God did not call us to succeed, but to be faithful.”

- People pride themselves in being faithful.
- The real question is, “What impact have you made on the kingdom?”

✠ They had contended for the faith.

KJV translates the word “perseverance” as “patience.”

- “patience” – literally means, “a man not swerved.”

They had consistently withstood those who opposed the faith

- Ephesus was on the major road to Rome. All kinds of itinerate speakers passed through the city proclaiming all kinds of heresy.

✠ They had integrity.

They would not tolerate sin - *“I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men...”(2:2)*

- Ephesus was known for its immorality. The Temple of Artemis as a place of Asylum where any criminal would be safe and find refuge if he reached it, no matter what the crime.
- The “Nicolaitans” were professing Christians who taught a “new and improved Christianity.” They taught that a Christian could live anyway he wanted to because he was not under the law but under grace. (More on the Nicolaitans when we study the Church at Pergamos.)

They would not tolerate hypocrisy – *“...those who claim to be apostles but are not...” (2:2)*

✠ They had scriptural knowledge.

“...you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and found them false.” (2:2)

You can’t expose what is false unless you know what is true.

✠ They had endured persecution.

“You have persevered and endured hardships...” (2:3)

The church at Ephesus was active during the Persecution caused by the Emperor Domitian.

Any natural disaster or occurrence, (such as famine, earthquakes, disease...), was blamed on the Christians.

Any Christian brought before the Roman magistrate, (no matter what the charge,) had to renounce their faith or face death.

Timothy became the Bishop at Ephesus.

- He openly opposed a pagan festival
- As a result he was beaten to death by clubs.

John was imprisoned and tortured here.

- They had tried to boil him in oil – miraculously he wouldn’t boil.
- They shipped him off to Patmos.

✠ All in the name of Christ.

“You have persevered and endured hardships, for my name.”(2:3)

We must remember that what we do in the name of Christ is irrelevant or even damaging if we don’t do it in the Spirit of Christ.

The Condemnation of Ephesus:

They had *“left their first love.”*

The Meaning of “left.”

Greek word “aff-ee-ay-mee”

- Disregarded, Neglect, Abandoned, Divorced
- Notice how one builds on the other.
- Very drastic charge.

The meaning of “love.”

Greek word “Agape.”

- Divine love for God and others.

Love for ministry had taken the place of love for God.

The Command to Ephesus:

Remember

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen...” (2:5)

Repent

Repent from where you are now. Turn away from your present state. No longer be content to remain where you are spiritually.

Redo

“...do the first works...” Do what you did when your love for God was new. Rekindle the passion.

The Reward For Overcoming:

The term to “overcome” speaks of a soldier who is victorious over his enemy.

“...to eat from the Tree of Life... in the midst of the Paradise of God.” (2:7)

- This was the fruit that Adam was denied after he sinned.
- The reason he was cast out of Eden was so that he would not eat of this tree and live forever in a sinful condition.
- Ephesian coins from this period often contained images of a sacred tree which was used in the worship of nature and various Pagan gods.
- It may be that God is reminding them what the source of their life is.

!!!Bottom Line: God doesn't care about our ministry, ability or service for Him if it does not flow from a heart of love for Him!!!

The Church at Smyrna:

Revelation 2:8-11 NKJV

Background of Smyrna:

- 35 miles north of Ephesus
- The birthplace of Homer
- Known today as the City of Izmir with a population of 3 million.
- It is the 3rd largest city in Turkey and the 2nd largest seaport.
- In John's day it was known as one of the most beautiful cities in Asia.
- Historians referred to it as the Ornament of Asia.
- Its many temples were built on the hill of Pagos behind and above the city thus resembling a crown. As a result it was sometimes called ‘The Crown of Asia.’
- Aristides, a historian of that day, called it “a flower of beauty such as earth and sin had never showed to mankind.”
- It was one of the chief ports of Asia.
- The population could have been more than 100,000 in John's time.
- There was a temple built to Zeus in Smyrna. Leading from this temple was the Street of Gold, which circled around the hill of Pagos like a necklace and ended at the Temple of Cybele on the other side.
- It had also become a center for Emperor worship with several temples built in honor of various emperors. It was a capital offense in Smyrna to refuse to offer a yearly sacrifice to the Emperor. This made it a very hostile place to be a Christian.

Christ's Revelation to Smyrna:

The First and the Last:

- Because of its beauty, and political ambitions Smyrna was known as a “paradise of municipal vanity.” It was noted for local pride and political rivalry.
- Ancient coins described Smyrna as “first of Asia in beauty and size.”
- There was series of temples built to honor Rome, the present and past emperors as well as several gods.
- These very well could be two of the reasons Jesus took the title of “First and Last”.

The One “who was dead and came to life...”:

- Smyrna was one of the oldest cities of that region, dating back to 1200 years B.C. It had been destroyed around 600 B.C. by the Lydians then was rebuilt 300 years later in 290 B.C. by the Greeks.
- It could be that one of the reasons Jesus is taking this title is because of the history of the city.
- Historians also tell us that there was a strong west wind that blew almost constantly through the streets of Smyrna which made it a very comfortable temperature. The problem was that the sewage drained into the gulf on which the city was built. The west wind tended to blow the smell back into the city rather than out to sea. That being the case, though the city was beautiful, the inhabitants of Smyrna would have had to endure a constant smell of death and decay in the air.
- It was in this city that Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and one of the early church fathers, was burned at the stake in 155 A.D. for not renouncing Christ and pledging allegiance to Caesar.
- Upon coming to the stake he was given the chance to renounce the Lord, to which he is reported to have responded, *“Eighty and six years have I served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me? You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.”*

The Commendation of Smyrna:

Their works:

- Their labors and service for the Lord

Their tribulation:

- “Thlipsis” originally meant a “crushing weight”
- Imagine living in a world that focuses on achievement, worldly success, and status yet choosing poverty, humility and persecution.
- The name of the city “Smyrna” literally means “myrrh” which was used to embalm.
- A sweet smelling white liquid called stacte is produced from hardened Myrrh when it has been bruised or broken. Myrrh is associated with suffering. The myrrh tree has long thorns which could have been what composed the crown of thorns placed on Jesus.
- Be so full of God that when you are squeezed, He is the only thing that comes out.

Their poverty:

- “ptocheia” literally “beggarly”. To lack the necessities of life.
- Many times in such places, the reason Christians were poor is because heathen mobs would attack and plunder their homes and the law would do nothing.

Their riches:

- Yet in the midst of this God calls them rich.
- Man's view of success differs from God's view of success. God sees what truly has value and worth.

The Condemnation of Smyrna:

There is no condemnation of this church.

- This is one of two churches that receive no rebukes from the Lord.

The Blasphemy of the Jewish Imposters:

- There is a note of consolation and coming justice in the Lord's tone when He addresses the *“blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”*
- The Jews were important contributors to the city of Smyrna. Many of them were wealthy and had compromised by worshipping other god's along with Jehovah.
- Many of them were instrumental in persecuting and executing the Christians.
- The Lord's statement supports Paul's statement in Romans: *“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and*

circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” (Romans 2:28-29 NKJV)

“The Synagogue of Satan”:

- The Jews in Smyrna were the greatest enemies of the church; constantly stirring up hostility against the church.
- The Jews were fond of calling their gatherings the “Synagogue of the Lord”. In fact, “synagogue” simply means, “assembly.”
- Jesus is flatly denying their worship and validity as His children.

Note: *While this church is not condemned, it is not necessarily healthy; however, unhealthy does not mean unholy. It is a wounded church that has been faithful. It has endured great persecution and not lost integrity or purity. But this does not mean that it is a healthy church.*

The Coming Persecution of Smyrna:

1. Imprisonment

- In that day, imprisonment most of the time was simply a prelude to execution.

The common accusations against Christians:

- They were accused of being cannibals because of their talk of partaking of the body and blood of Christ in communion.
- They were accused of being immoral because of their “love feasts”. This was what they called their common meals because of their Agape for each other.
- They were accused of being anti-family because often the decision to follow Christ split and separated families.
- They were accused of being arrogant elitists because of their refusal to worship other gods.
- They were accused of being atheists because the God they worshipped had no image.
- They were accused of being political dissenters because they would not worship Caesar.
- They were accused of being extremist and alarmists because they taught of a coming judgment when the world would be destroyed in fire.

2. Testing

- “peirazo” – tested to determine quality or behavior. Used also to describe the process of purifying metal.
- This is the root word used for “trials” in **James 1:2-4 NKJV** *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

3. Tribulation

- “Thlipsis” same word used in verse 9 meaning a “crushing weight”

4. “Ten Days”

- Ten days could refer to a short of time.
- Some say it was a symbolic period of time.
- Some say it refers to the persecution under Diocletian which lasted exactly 10 years.
- Some say it referred to a literal prison sentence lasting ten days which ended in execution

The Comfort for Smyrna:

Do not fear:

- “phobeo” – from where we get the word “phobia.” Literally it means to be alarmed or frightened away.
- This is a father comforting his frightened child.

The Charge for Smyrna:

Be faithful:

- “pisto” – The Amplified Bible translates this: to trust, rely on and adhere to.
- It also means “trustworthy.” God was committing to them the honor of being persecuted because He knew they could be trusted with it.

Unto death:

- How long must I be faithful? Till death. This speaks of utter and total commitment. It also reminds us of the big picture and that death is not the end.

Crown of Life:

- Could also be a rebuke against the attitude of the city of Smyrna
- A crown was a symbol of status, power and ability all of which the people of Smyrna prized.
- A crown of life that is eternal is starkly contrasted against an earthly crown that will be destroyed.

The Reward For Overcoming:

They will NOT be hurt by the second death

- Everything about this church spoke to the persecution and death they were going to endure.
- This is a reminder that though they may die physically, there is a worse death that is eternal.
- The Greek word for “not” here is “ou me” which is actually two different words for not and creates the strongest form of negative in the Greek language.
- **Matthew 10:28 NKJV**, “*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”

!!!Bottom Line: The Church at Smyrna love Christ with all their heart. Because of that, when trials came they were faithful. Because they were faithful they were hated by the world. Because the world hated them, they were persecuted. The persecution drive them closer to the God they loved!!!

The Church at Pergamum:

Revelation 2:12-17 NKJV "

Background of Pergamum:

(“Pergamos” = masculine. “Pergamum” = feminine.)

- Today it is the modern day Turkish city of Bergama.
- One of the most famous cities of Asia, though not on any main road.
- At the time of John’s writing Pergamum had been the capitol of Asia for about 250 years.
- A highly cultured city. Known for its royalty and stature.
- Roman historian Pliny referred to it as “by far the most distinguished city in Asia.”
- The name “Pergamum” means “elevation” or “height.”
- It was in fact situated on one of the highest hills in the region, 1000 feet above the plain. From Pergamum one could easily see the Mediterranean Sea which was more than 15 miles away.

Christ’s Revelation to Pergamum:

The Living Word:

- Known for parchment manufacturing In fact the word, “parchment” is derived from “Pergamum”. The ancient word for “parchment” was “*he pergamene charta*” or “the Pergamum sheet”.
- Known also for a tremendous library containing more than 200,000 parchment scrolls. This was second in size and reputation only to the library at Alexandria.

Christ’s identification in this manner is a direct reference to Hebrews 4:12-13:

Hebrews 4:12-13 NKJV For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (13) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Many scholars believe Hebrews was written in the late 60’s. By this time, this verse was well known to the church.

The word for “word” in this passage is “logos” which many times refers to the written word as opposed to the spoken word. It is a word that appeals to man’s reason and logic.

The Eternal Judge:

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- Pergamum was the administrative center of Asia.
- It was the center of Caesar worship.

The Right of the Sword:

The Roman governors were divided into two groups:

1. Those who had the “right of the sword” or “ius gladii”.
 - a. This meant that they alone made the call of whether or not someone lived or died.
 - b. Criminals (and Christians) were brought before such a governor and either released or killed on the spot at his command.
2. Those who did not have the “right of the sword”.

The Proconsul of Pergamum had the “right of the sword.”

Jesus identifies himself as “*He who has the sharp two-edged sword*”; a direct reference to both the Living Word and the Judging word found in Hebrews 4:12. It is Christ who pierces even to the dividing of:

- * soul and spirit
- * joints and marrow
- It is Christ who is the discerner of the thought and intents of the heart.
- It is Christ who see all; from whom nothing or no one is hidden.
- It is Christ to whom all flesh shall give and account.

The Commendation of Pergamum:

Their works:

Their labors and service for the Lord

Where they dwell:

The word here for “dwell” denotes permanency. This was their living place.

QUOTE: “*The more difficult it is to be a Christian in any set of circumstances, the greater the obligation to remain within these circumstances. If in the early days Christians had run away every time they were confronted with a difficult engagement, there would have been no chance of a world for Christ.*” – William Barclay

Satan’s Throne:

There are three probable causes for this reference:

1. The Temple of Athena sat 800 feet atop Pergamum’s conical hill. In front of this was the altar to Zeus where smoke from the sacrifices to him could be seen at all times.
 - a. The combination of these two structures gave the appearance of a large throne overlooking the city.
 - b. The inhabitants of Pergamum were known as the “chief temple keepers.”
2. The main god of the city was Asclepius. Asclepius was a god of healing. Pergamum was known for the healing temples of Asclepius which were the ancient versions of hospitals.
 - a. Asclepius was called, “Asclepius the Savior.”
 - b. The symbol of Asclepius was a serpent. This symbol is found on many of the Pergamum coins from that era.
 - c. History tells us that here some early Christian stonecutters had been executed for refusing to carve the image of Asclepius.
3. Pergamum was the administrative center of Asia and a major hot bed for emperor worship. The first temple in honor of an Emperor (Augustus) was built here.
4. Unlike the hazard of the yearly sacrifice to Caesar faced by the Smyrnans, the Pergamum church faced it almost daily. Therefore, it was a major place where Christians were required to call Caesar lord and denounce the name of Jesus or be executed immediately.

Held fast (“krateo” = seize, retain) to Jesus’ name:

- This is in reference to the choice many had made to not denounce the name of Jesus. Many had lost their lives for this decision.

Did not deny (“arneomai” = disavow, reject) their Faith in Jesus:

The word Greek word “*martus*”, here translated “martyr”, is synonymous with the word “witness”. This indicates the depth of commitment to Christ for an early Christian.

Jesus refers here to Antipas and calls him “his faithful martyr.” Nothing much is known of this man except a legend which says that he was roasted in a bronze bull.

What is beautiful is that Jesus calls him “his faithful martyr”; “*pistos martus*” which is the same title given to Christ Himself in Revelation 1:5.

The conclusion here is that Antipas did not renounce the name of Christ. In return Christ bestowed upon Antipas His own name.

The Condemnation of Pergamum:

The Doctrine of Balaam: (Numbers 31:16, 25:1-5)

- In the Jewish teaching, Balaam stood for a evil man who had seduced and deceived the Israelites to sin by marrying Moab women and worshipping a false god.
- Balaam would *not* curse the Israelites at the command of the king. Instead he showed the king how to cause the Israelites to bring a curse on themselves.
- 2 Peter 2:15-16, Peter condemns some for this very thing.

The Nicolaitans:

- The Nicolaitans were people within the church who had introduced a “new and improved” version of Christianity which allowed complete freedom to live immorally.
- These were people who had no restraint in their sin yet still called themselves believers. Clement of Alexandria described them people who “abandon themselves to pleasure like goats...leading a life of self indulgence.”
- He also stated that this was a perversion of Nicolaus’ teaching that the “flesh must be abused” meaning “kept under” and “repressed”. The Nicolaitans twisted it to mean that we can live anyway we want.
- Referred to in **Jude 3,4,11-13: 2 Peter 2:12-17**
- Their sin was not just in that they indulged but that they enticed others to do so as well.

These two groups could be the same people:

- “Nicolaus” who is believed to be the founder of the Nicolaitans (Acts 6:5) is a compound Greek word: “nikan” = “to conquer, and “laos” = “the people”.
- “Balaam” is a compound Hebrew word: “bela” = “to conquer”, and “ha’am” = “the people”.
- Both are used to describe an evil, deceptive teacher or leader who has poisoned the people with heresy.

Early Church regulations for a Believer: (Acts 15:28,29)

1. Refrain from eating meat sacrificed to an idol.
2. Abstain from immorality.

The most common word for “Christian” in the NT is “hagios” which simply means “different.” And so we must be from the world. We do not think or function as natural people but as God’s people and therefore we are “different”.

- The charge against the Pergamum Church is one of compromise.
- MacArthur defines worldliness as “any preoccupation with or interest in the temporal system of life that places anything perishable before that which is eternal.”
- The Pergamum church was most definitely flirting with worldliness and compromise.

The Command to Pergamum:

Repent: Turn away from what they know is wrong.

If they do not, God will fight against them with the sword of His mouth.

- They will be judged according to His word. God is not vague in His commands and those who openly disobey are without excuse or justification.

The Reward For Overcoming:

Hidden Manna:

This may be a reference to the meat sacrificed to idols that the Christians were not to eat.

- This was often the choicest of meals.

White Stone:

- In the games of that day a white stone was awarded to the victor. It was a symbol of honor and respect.
- In Rome a legendary Gladiator who had gained the admiration of the people was often given a white stone with the initials “SP” on it and allowed to retire. “SP stood for “spectatus” which meant “this man has proven his valor beyond all doubt.”

New Name:

- A very common custom of that day was for people to carry an amulet or stone with the name of their god engraved on it.
- This was considered sacred to them and was believed to be a bond between the holder and the god which would protect them from evil and all enemies.
- This amulet was especially powerful if only the owner knew the name.

Intimacy

- What God is indicating here is that whoever overcomes will enjoy special intimacy with their God that is unique. He is speaking of the individual intimate relationship between Him and a person who has given everything for Him.

!!!Bottom Line: Though they were surrounded by persecution and trials, the Pergamum Church was tolerating sin. There is no scenario in which God is okay with our continued sin. Intimacy with God will keep us from sin or sin will keep us from intimacy with God!!!

The Church at Thyatira:

Revelation 2:18-29 NKJV

Background of Thyatira:

- Thyatira means "odor of affliction."
- Thyatira was positioned on the road connecting Pergamum with Sardis, then Philadelphia and Laodicea.
- It was the road the Imperial post traveled and was highly traveled with commerce, thus the city was heavy with commerce.
- It was considered a gateway to Pergamum (the capitol of the province.)
- There was an armed garrison there whose job was to protect Pergamum from invaders.
- The problem was there was no geographical advantage for protection. It was situated in an open valley and therefore could do nothing more than delay any battle coming.
- About the only religious interest in the town was the Oracle Sambathe; a female fortune teller who may have been Jewish.
- Acts 16:14 tells us that Lydia came from here and was a seller of purple.
- There were many trade guilds in this town. To be a business person and not belong to a trade guild was financial suicide. The problem was that at most if not all of the guild meetings and dinners, they would begin and end with a sacrifice to a god and eat meat sacrificed to that god. Many times there was also drunken revelry and immorality.

Christ's Revelation to Thyatira:

The letter to Thyatira is the longest and begins with a grave view of Christ

He is the Son of God

- His authority

He has eyes of fire

- His discernment and knowledge
- There is nothing He does not see

He has feet like fine brass

- His strength and purity
- John MacArthur explains that this is an alloy of copper and metallic zinc. It is both pure and strong.
- He is strong enough to conquer His enemies and pure enough to judge them.

The Commendation of Thyatira:

Works

Love

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Service
Faith
Patience

The point here is that Thyatira was doing everything that Ephesus was doing, plus they had love.

One thing they lacked: Purity.

The Condemnation of Thyatira:

Jezebel:

We are not certain what specific person he is talking about.

She could be a leader's wife.

She could be a woman known to the church at that time.

We do know what she was like and what she was doing.

Jezebel's Character: "Jezebel" literally means "without co-habitation"

Self Righteousness - "who calls herself a prophetess," (literally, "an inspired woman.")

- ⊆ Pride in her spirituality and spiritual maturity
- ⊆ Presents herself as the mouthpiece of God
- ⊆ Self appointed "spiritual authority"

Superiority - "to teach"

- ⊆ This is indicative of her desire to be the one who imparts knowledge to those who are "not as spiritually mature" as she is.
- ⊆ This reflects a warped "motherly nature"

Manipulative - "to seduce" (literally, to lead astray or deceive)

- ⊆ Jezebel has her own agenda. It is all about her. She will not submit to anyone. If it appears that she is submitting to God it is only because she is promoting her own "righteous" agenda and appearance.
- ⊆ When she appears to serve, she is doing so for manipulative and self promoting reasons.
- ⊆ Everything she does, including the act of praising God, is motivated by self exaltation. She will do whatever makes her look good.

Idolatrous - "to commit sexual immorality" (see also 1 Kings 21:25-26)

- ⊆ The Greek word here means fornication. This is speaking sexually but has spiritual implications as well. To fornicate is to fulfill a human desire in a way other than what God approves of.
- ⊆ This word is also translated, "idolatry." God was no longer first. They began to treat things other than God as divine.
- ⊆ Keep in mind, the sin of this church began, not when they agreed with her, but when they did nothing to oppose her. Sinful non-actions can be just as damning as sinful actions.

Deceptive - "and eat things sacrificed to idols."

- ⊆ This was a problem, not because of the food, but because of the environment the food was usually served in.
- ⊆ It was served in pagan festivals that included all manner of immoral acts taking place.
- ⊆ Thus many believers were enticed to levels of sin they would not have believed themselves capable of because they had given the enemy a foothold.

Intimidating -

1 Kings 19:1-2 *"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."*

- ♣ She uses fear and threats to maintain her control
- ♣ A person controlled by jezebel is someone that causes people to walk on eggs around them.
- ♣ People will go out of their way not to offend such a person - even to the degree of tolerating things that are not Godly.

What does that look like today?

The Jezebel influence on a man:

Authoritative Dictator

- ☞ Such a man cannot stand to have his authority questioned.
- ☞ In a marriage, he is a drill sergeant. He keeps his family under his thumb.
- ☞ If he is a leader in a church, he will abuse God given spiritual authority to promote himself and his agenda.
- ☞ As long as things are going his way he is fine.

The Jezebel influence on a woman:

Domineering and Controlling

- ☞ In a marriage, this woman will either rule her house or be constantly bucking her husband.
- ☞ If she does rule her house, she will keep her husband in line through ridicule, nagging, and attacks at his self esteem.
- ☞ In the church, she loves to appear super spiritual and will attempt to control the pastor and leaders through manipulation and intimidation.

The Confrontation Jezebel and Thyatira:

Aimed at four targets:

1. Church Leaders

- They had tolerated, or literally "forgiven" her.
- She either had not been confronted or she had been confronted, feigned repentance and showed no change.

2. Jezebel

3. Her partners

- To allow Jezebel is to participate with her.

4. Her children

Christ had given her time to repent.

She knew what she was doing, had opportunity to repent and refused.

Her Fate:

Sickness:

- ☞ Jesus states that such a person will eventually suffer debilitating sickness if they do not turn away from the influence of Jezebel and her way of thinking.
- ☞ It is easy to see how much stress such a control obsessed person would be under. It is no wonder that sickness would plague this person.

Death:

- ☞ God will not tolerate this opposition long. He will do what He desires to do.
- ☞ In the end, as in 1 Kings, God will usually allow Jezebel to be destroyed by her own devices.

2 Kings 9:30-37 NKJV Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window. (31) Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" (32) And he looked up at the window, and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" So two or three eunuchs looked out at him. (33) Then he said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot. (34) And when he had gone in, he ate and drank. Then he said, "Go now, see to this accursed woman, and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." (35) So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. (36) Therefore they came back and told him. And he said, "This is the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; (37) and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse on the surface of the field, in the plot at Jezreel, so that they shall not say, "Here lies Jezebel." ' ' "

The Fate of those who allow her to continue:

Great tribulation:

- To tolerate Jezebel is to commit the acts with her.
- Those who are bound by her are in misery.

- They want to be free but they don't want to "rouse her anger."

The death of their children:

- **Rev. 2:23 "I will kill her children with death"**
- Jezebel will not simply destroy a person, but will continue to control, manipulate and ultimately destroy that person's descendants.
- God's judgment will fall on her children, because she has trained her children to be like her.

The Challenge to Thyatira

Hold fast what you have.

Everything they had and worked for was being seduced away and they were losing it.

Overcoming Jezebel in yourself

Let God search your mind and heart.

Revelation 2:23

- Jesus refers to Himself this way because it is in the searching of God that Jezebel is revealed.
- ♣ God must be the one who searches because many times Jezebel's deception comes in the form of "godly" or "pure" motives.

The Mind: He starts with the mind because the foundation on which Jezebel rests is a faulty mental stronghold of dominion and superiority.

- ♣ It exists because somewhere the person has believed a lie that makes them feel entitled to be superior.
- ♣ You cannot tolerate any Jezebelian thinking!!!

The Heart: He continues to the heart because once the lie has been revealed the motives of the heart have been exposed as well.

- **SEE: Philippians 2:3-8 NKJV**

Repent

Revelation 2:21 "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent."

- God is patient if the person is seeking Him.
- As God reveals Jezebel, the person must turn away and reject her utterly.
- God will help you do this if you will ask Him and let Him.

QUOTE: "Victory begins with the name of Jesus on our lips. But it is not consummated until the nature of Jesus is in our heart." - Francis Frangipane

Men: Overcome Jezebel by seeking to love as Christ loves - sacrificially.

- ✠ Do not seek to rule; seek to relate.
- ✠ **Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her"**

Women: Overcome Jezebel by seeking the meekness of Christ.

- ✠ **1 Peter 3:1, "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives."**
- ✠ Seek God's wisdom in the divine order of things.

Both: Humility and Peace in serving others is a sign that Jezebel is being destroyed.

The opposite of not co-habiting is co-habitation.

Overcoming Jezebel in Others:

Fear God more than man

- Your fear of God must be greater than your fear of man.
- Fear of man is Jezebel's tool of trade.

Know the Word

- Jezebel will manipulate the word of God for her own purposes.

- It is vital to have discernment and solid biblical foundations.

Speak the Word

- Jezebel will intimidate.
- It is vital to have Godly boldness and not give in to intimidation.

Put on Humility

- This completely contradicts Jezebel's motives and thinking.
- She cannot conceive that someone would take no thought of themselves.

Pray

- This is our weapon.
- QUOTE: "Jezebel hates prayer. Intercessory prayer pries her fingers off the hearts and souls of men. It sets people free in the spirit. When you pray, it binds her. When you pray against immorality, it cripples her. When you pray for a submissive heart, it is like the trampling of Jehu's horse upon her body." Francis Frangipane

The Reward For Overcoming:

Promised in Psalm 2:8-9

The nations:

- To rule: Iron would signify strength, solidness, and authority
- To break: there would be no opposition.

Ironically this is the very thing Jezebel seeks.

The Morning Star

- This is Christ Himself (Revelation 22:16)

It could be that this is a reference to being the Bride of Christ.

- Jezebel is referred to as "that woman." The word "woman" in the Greek is "gune" which is also translated "wife."
- The one who overcomes has rejected the companionship of the domineering harlot and is joined eternally with the Living God.

!!!Bottom Line: The mark of a Godly person is humility not control. A church that tolerates divisive and controlling people is as guilty as the person they tolerate. Control of the church belongs to God and God alone!!!

The Church at Sardis:

Revelation 3:1-6 NKJV

Background of Sardis:

- Sardis was a city of great reputation.
- 700 years prior to this letter, Sardis was the capitol city of Lydia.
- The ancient city of Sardis stood 1500 feet high on a plateau on top of a ridge of Mt. Tmolus overlooking the Hermus River plain.
- There was one narrow entrance to the city that was steep and treacherous.
- This ancient part of Sardis was said to have looked like a watchman on a citadel.
- Over time the narrow entrance grew too hazardous and the city expanded to the plains surrounding the ridge.
- The name "sardis" is plural, representing these two cities.
- In 17 A.D. The city was destroyed by an earthquake and restored by Tiberius Caesar.
- By the time Christ addresses the church it has become once again a highly prosperous city full of culture and art.

Christ's Revelation to Sardis:

He who has the Seven Spirits:

Also in Revelation 1:4.

Seven is the number of Divine perfection and Completion.

- This could be referring to the Holy Spirit who does everything God requires and desires.

- Christ could be also making a reference to Zechariah 4 which describes the vision of the 7 lampstands. In verse 6 the Lord tells Zerubbabel that it is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts."
- If this is the case, Christ may be presenting Himself to the church as the one who brings life and divine fruit.
- It is a scathing rebuke of man-driven ministry.

He who has the Seven Stars:

This is a direct reference to God's ownership of Church Leadership and part of the same description of Himself presented to Ephesus in chapter 1.

The Commendation of Sardis:

None

The Condemnation of Sardis:

Your name of being alive but you are dead:

Two Cities: The irony is that the name "Sardis" is plural.

- The City that appears to be.
 - ς The reputation of being alive.
 - ς The Church at Sardis was viewed in a favorable light by the world and other churches.
- The City that really is.
 - ς The reality of being dead.
 - ς The church was so dead that it had no direct opposition
 - ς There was no persecution
 - ς There was no heresy
 - ς There wasn't even any immorality.

Your works are not perfect before God:

- ♣ Here again is a rebuke against man-driven ministry.
- ♣ The word Greek word "plero-o" translated "perfect" means perfect in the sense of being adequate or satisfying.
 - ς The works of this church are hollow and empty.
 - ς They fit the description of *2 Timothy 3:5 NKJV* *having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

The Command to Sardis:

Be Watchful:

- ς Sardis had at one time been known for legendary wealth.
- ς In 549 B.C. the King Croesus believed the City was impenetrable and nothing would ever diminish its' glory.
- ς He lead an attack against Cyrus of Persia and left the city relatively undefended.
- ς Cyrus meanwhile laid a 14 day siege against Sardis.
- ς One of his men observed a soldier of Sardis accidentally drop his helmet over the edge of the ridge then climb down using cracks in the foundation to retrieve it.
- ς Cyrus sent a small group of soldiers who easily overtook the city.
- ς Cyrus made it illegal for the Sardinians to carry weapons of any sort and turned the City into a cultural and artistic center. Beautiful but impotent.
- ς In 218 B.C. the city was plundered again in the same way shortly after the Death of Alexander the Great under the rule of Antiochus because the city was not watching.
- ς The inhabitants had once been a great people but had become lazy, comfortable, weak and careless.

This charge to the church at Sardis should have been easily understood. They knew what it was to be destroyed because of overconfidence and not watching.

Strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die:

4. This requires the church to take inventory of what is left that is Godly.
4. Then they are to strengthen it. Literally the word means establish or to fix resolutely.

Remember how you have received and heard:

- "How" refers to the manner in which the received and heard.
- "Received" means to take hold of or seize.
- "Hear" can also mean understand.

Christ is telling them to remember how they first came to Him; how they first grew in the faith and go back to those methods. Seek the Lord again the way they used to.

In doing this, He will reveal what they need to strengthen and what He needs to resurrect.

Hold Fast

"Tereo" in the Greek literally means,

- Guard
- Keep an eye on
- Protect
- Implies a encasing in a fortress

He is saying, get your priorities straight

Repent

Turn and do an about face.

Alter the course they are on.

The Warning to Sardis

If they do not watch:

They have been told what to do. The choice is theirs.

Christ will come as a thief:

This is a direct reference to the coming of Christ and the warning He gave for not watching.

This day will not be pleasant for those who do not listen.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 NKJV For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

Matthew 24:42-44 NKJV Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (43) But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. (44) Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The Reward For Overcoming:

The Undeiled Few

- ς Apparently there were some who were not dead.
- ς These were probably people who were concerned by the lack of depth and life.
- ς These were the faithful saints who were at the mercy of the church.
- ς They had nowhere else to go, but were grieved because they knew things were not right but may not have known why.

White Garments

In the Pagan world, no one could enter the temple of a god with soiled garments.

In the ancient world white garments represented 3 things:

- ς Festivity
- ς Victory
- ς Purity

Name not Blotted Out

Conversely the opposite is implied.

In the ancient world, the king kept a register of all the citizens.

- When a citizen was charged with a heinous crime, their name was removed from the register as punishment.

Confessed before The Father and the Angels

Matthew 10:32-33 NKJV "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. (33) But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

!!! Bottom line: the life of a church comes from the Holy Spirit. Churches that operate on the power of man risk dying spiritually and not realizing it. It is possible to have all the marks of spiritual life, but actually be spiritually dead!!!

The Church at Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:7-13 NKJV "

Background of Philadelphia:

- The youngest of the two cities
- Founded by colonists from Pergamum
- Philadelphos was the nick name of Attalus II who ruled Pergamum. It means "One who loves his brother" he was so named for his love for his brother Eumenes. Thus the city was named Philadelphia.
- It was positioned on the edge of a volcanic plain with incredibly fertile soil which they used to grow vineyards and produce wine.
- This is the only church still alive and active today.

Christ's Revelation to Philadelphia:

He who is holy:

- It could be that Jesus identifies Himself in this way because these people were lovers of holiness and desirous to be what God wanted them to be.
- There is no condemnation whatsoever of this church so we do not see any warning in his identification.

He who is true:

- The Greek word here for "true" is "alethinos" which literally means that which is real or genuine.
- This again could reflect the character of this church. They were the real deal.
- It could also be an assurance to these people who lived in a physically uncertain place due to the continuous earthquakes.

He who has the key of David:

- This is unquestionably a direct reference to Isaiah 22:22 which says, "*The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.*"
- This scripture is addressed to Hezekiah's faithful servant Eliakim who alone could allow people access to the presence of the king.
- The name "Eliakim" is a compound Hebrew word. "El" meaning "God" and "qum" meaning "stand or rise up". The word literally means "God arises" or "One who lifts up God."
- In Isaiah the Lord says that he will fasten Eliakim like a nail in a secure place. The word secure in the Hebrew can also be translated faith or trust. It could read "I will fasten like a nail in a trustworthy place. Christ could be saying to the Philadelphian church that He is their foundation because they have become a spiritually solid place.
- This could be a reference to what God is going to do to those "who are in the synagogue of Satan." This prophesy in Isaiah states that God will clothe Eliakim with the enemy's robe, strengthen him the enemy's belt and commit the enemy into his hands. God tells the Philadelphian church that He will make these people come and worship at their feet.

The Open Door

- Philadelphia served as a ambassador city of Greek culture and language to the Lydia and Phrygia, its bordering neighbors.
- There was a major thoroughfare going through the city to these regions.

- This was a place ripe for a spiritual harvest and the church was in a healthy condition to receive it. NOTE: Sometimes the reason people are not won to Christ in our churches is because the church is in no spiritual condition to birth or care for new believers.
- Philadelphia is the only church God entrusts the harvest to. He tells them that the unbelievers will turn to the gospel at the feet of the Philadelphian church. (3:9 - *Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie--indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.*)

The Commendation of Philadelphia:

The have a little strength:

Possible interpretations:

1. They have a little strength in the sense that they still had some ability to work.
 - * This could infer that God would take what was little and bless it for his kingdom.
2. They were aware of their weakness and were dependant on God's ability.
 - * In this case God was pleased with their dependence on Him.
 - * **2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV** *And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
 - * **2 Corinthians 13:4 NKJV** *For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.*
3. There is no punctuation in the Greek. The word "for" means "because" so this phrase could refer to either the phrase preceding it or following it. It could read:
 - * *"See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."*

OR

- * *"[Because] you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name, indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie--indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."*

They have kept His word:

They practiced the Great Commission and were completely obedient.

- The Greek word "tereo" translated "kept" denotes a guarding, attending to, protecting and treasuring that which is precious and of great value. The word implies encasing in a fortress.
- God's word was precious to them.

They have not denied His name:

The were not secret Christians.

- They gladly associated themselves with Jesus.

They have kept His command to persevere:

- **Revelation 3:10 AMP** *Because you have guarded and kept My word of patient endurance [have held fast the lesson of My patience with the expectant endurance that I give you] ... "*
- They had treasured his command to endure.
- Could refer to: **Matthew 24:13 NKJV** *"But he who endures to the end shall be saved."*
- The Greek word "hupomone" translated "patience" in 3:10 comes from the word "hupomeno" translated "endures" in Matthew 24:13

Unspoken commendations:

Though these were not necessarily mentioned, they are present because there is no charge of them being missing.

Five Ingredients in a Healthy Church:

- **Agape:** Unlike Ephesus
- **Truth:** Unlike Pergamum
- **Purity:** Unlike Thyatira
- **Life:** Unlike Sardis
- **Effectiveness:** Unlike Laodicea

Five-fold ministry:

Ephesians 4:11-13 NKJV And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (13) till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

- **Apostles** (Establish in Agape) Ephesians 3:17 “...rooted and grounded in love (Agape).”
- **Prophets** (Speak the Word of God which is Truth)
- **Evangelists** (Preach repentance leading to Purity)
- **Pastors** (Care for the Life of the Body)
- **Teachers** (Train people to be Effective)

The Warning / Comfort:

“Behold I am coming quickly”

- This can be a wakeup call to get ready
- OR
- This can be an encouraging promise to those who are ready.

The Command to Philadelphia:

“Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

- The Greek word for “take” is “*lambano*” which actually carries with it the implication of intercepting.
- This could be a gentle warning for them to fulfill God’s purpose. The implication being that they should strengthen what they have so that no one gets the reward that is rightfully theirs.
- Examples where this occurred in Scripture: David and Saul, Jacob and Esau, Matthias and Judas.
- *1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NKJV Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. (25) And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. (26) Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. (27) But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

The Reward:

They will be kept from the hour of trial coming on the earth:

- The word keep is “*tereo*” which has already been discussed
- The word trial is “*perasmos*” which means to proving
- The word “from” is “*ek*” which means from or out of the point of origin
- The implication here is that they will be protected and safeguarded from the proving that is coming. This could be referring to the Great Tribulation.

A Pillar in the Temple of God:

- Philadelphia had been devastated by the same earthquake that destroyed Sardis.
- The difference is that aftershocks were a continual occurrence in Philadelphia due to the volcanic plain it was on.
- This had destroyed much of the city and the remaining building were continually weakening.

He shall go out no more:

- The repeated quakes had so devastated the city that many of the inhabitants were forced to live in tents outside the city. They had created a sense of fear and alienation in many of the people there.
- They would often be seen going daily to their houses in the city to quickly get what they could and go back out to their tents to live.

God shall write on him:

1. **the name of God**
 - This implies ownership
2. **the name of the New Jerusalem**
 - This implies citizenship

3. God's new name

- This speaks of the victory and fellowship to come.
- **Revelation 19:12 NKJV** *His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.*
- Philadelphia had be renamed twice:
 - * Once in 17 AD after the great quake, Tiberius renamed it Neocaesarea meaning “the New City of Caesar”
 - * A second time occurred a few years later when Emperor Vespasian renamed it Flavia after his family name
- This is speaking of reigning with Christ after every enemy has been conquered.

!!!Bottom Line: A Church that has allowed God to make them healthy is a church that God blesses and entrusts with His purposes!!!

The Church at Laodicea:

Revelation 3:14-22 NKJV

Background of Laodicea:

- The word “Laodicea” actually means “Justice of the people” or the “people’s justice”
- The city was infamously wealthy. So much so that when the great earthquake came that destroyed Sardis and Philadelphia, the Laodiceans refused Roman assistance to rebuild.

Christ’s Revelation to Laodicea:

The Amen:

- “Amen” is a solemn Hebrew and Greek word meaning essential the subject is closed for discussion and was used in both Hebrew and Greek culture to guarantee the truth of something. It is the final answer so to speak.
- Christ could be using this title because it is the last of the 7 letters.
- Another possibility is found in **Isaiah 65:16 NKJV** where one of God’s names is revealed as “**Elohim Amen**”, or “God of Truth.”
 - *So that he who blesses himself in the earth Shall bless himself in the **God of truth**; And he who swears in the earth Shall swear by the **God of truth**; Because the former troubles are forgotten, And because they are hidden from My eyes.*

The Faithful and True Witness:

- Christ is identifying Himself here as the trustworthy one who is faithful.
- The fact that He calls Himself the “witness” tells us that He is speaking of which He has seen with His own eyes.

The Beginning of the Creation of God:

The word used here for “beginning” is “arche” which also means:

- The one who commences
- The one who comes before (in the sense of supremacy)

This could be a direct attack of a heretical teaching circulating in the churches of Colossae and Laodicea that Jesus was created and was therefore not God.

This title is supported and explained more fully in Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

- **Colossians 1:15-20 NKJV** *He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn** over all creation. (16) For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. (17) And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (18) And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the **firstborn** from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (19) For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, (20) and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

- The word “firstborn” here does not mean first as in the first son of many. It is referring to his status. In Hebrew culture, the firstborn son was the one who had the authority and possession of his father’s estate. He was the head of the household so to speak under his Father.
- This title of Christ establishes both His authority and His divinity.
- He is both the Source of all creation and He is the ruler of all creation.

The Commendation of Laodicea:

None

The Condemnation of Laodicea:

They are neither Hot...:

Across the river from Laodicea was Hierapolis; a place made famous for its hot mineral springs.

- People would come from all over to drink of the mineral waters of Hierapolis for medicinal purposes.
- Laodicea had an complex aqueduct system the channeled these waters into the city. However by the time they got here they were tepid and disgusting.

When Christ speaks of them not being hot, He very well could be saying that the church was no longer an agent of change. They had no power to transform a life or to bring redemption or reconciliation.

Nor Cold...:

Situated 12 miles above Laodicea was Colossae. This city was known for its cold refreshing springs.

- Again, any water that would come from those springs would be tepid by the time it reached Laodicea.

When Christ speaks of Laodicea not being cold, He very well could be saying that the church had also lost its ability to inspire, encourage and renew.

In fact, His rebuke to this church was that they literally were good for nothing. They could not heal nor could they refresh and as a result they were appalling to God.

Note: This could also be a testimony against leaning on what is not God for spiritual health. The reason the waters were tepid was because they came from another source.

- *John 4:14 NKJV but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."*
- *John 7:37-38 NKJV On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*
- Both passages speak of God placing a source of water within the believer. This means that I cannot depend on a third party for my spiritual renewal and life. If I am not depending on God and making Him my source, my spiritual life will be tepid at best.

NOTE: The Laodicean church is the product of self sufficiency.

They are deceived:

They think they all is well when they should be deeply concerned. (Wretched)

- The word here can also be translated afflicted. It speaks of a such a poor and damaged condition the person should be concerned or distressed.
- The problem was that there were not concerned in any way.
- There are things that should bother us. If they don’t something is wrong.

They think they are superior when they are really pitiful. (Miserable)

- This word depicts such a poor condition that anyone looking on would be compassionate and feel sorrow and pity for them.
- The problem was that they were arrogant and had no right to be.

They think they are rich but have nothing. (Poor)

- The Laodiceans prided themselves on their self sufficiency.
- The problem was that had nothing in God’s eyes.

- They had no true wealth.

They think they can see but they are blind. (Blind)

- They could not see their own spiritual condition.
- The problem with deceived people is that they don't know they are deceived.

They think they are clothed but they are naked. (Naked)

- Nothing was covering their wretched spiritual condition.
- *Isaiah 64:6 NKJV But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.*
- The phrase “filthy rags” (ed-beghed) literally speaks of menstrual cloths. It describes the unsuccessful attempt to cover and ever growing stain.

The Coming Judgment of Laodicea

They will be vomited out of God's mouth.

The indifference or ineffectiveness of the Laodicean church had a nauseating effect on God. God cannot stand spiritual tepidness.

We see this reflected in John:

- *John 15:1-6 NKJV "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. (2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (3) You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. (5) "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*

The Command to Laodicea:

He declares His love for them:

- He begins this command with His heart of love for them.
- Basically saying if I didn't love you I wouldn't be wasting my time.

Be Zealous:

- The word used here comes from the Greek word “zelos” meaning “heat”. Literally this word means to burn with passion.
- God is wanting them to be passionate about Him as He is for them.

Repent:

- They can no longer continue in the condition they are in.

Buy God's gold:

- Laodicea was a tremendous banking center of the region. They had infamous wealth and had declined assistance from Rome during the great quake. They even had their own mint with which they coined their own currency.

Be clothed with God's garments:

- Laodicea was known for its clothing manufacturing; in particular, its wool. The sheep in this region had a rich black velvety wool that was used to make wealthy and famous clothing.
- In contrast to the ebony cloths of Laodicea God counsels them to be clothed in His white garments.

Be healed with God's salve:

- Laodicea was also known for its medical eye salve known as Phrygia Powder that was used all over to restore sight to the blind.
- God is saying to the church that they are in need of the very things spiritual that they pride themselves in physically and only HE can provide these things.

The Call to Laodicea:

Open to the beckoning Lord:

- This verse is typically used to refer to salvation. In reality however, it is the church that Christ is beckoning to.
- It is reminiscent of *Song of Solomon 5:2 NKJV* "I sleep, but my heart is awake; It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, "Open for me, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one..."

The Promised Fellowship:

- The Greeks had three words for meals: "Akratisma", "Ariston", and "Deipnon".
 - "Akratisma" was breakfast and consisted simply of a crust of bread dipped in wine.
 - "Ariston" was lunch and was nothing more than a picnic snack eaten quickly for nourishment during the day
 - These two meals were simply to tide a person over until dinner.
- The word for "sup" here is "deipneo" which literally speaks of the full meal served in the evening.
- People lingered at this meal and savored every morsel.
- God is speaking of rich, satisfying fellowship with those He loves deeply.

Give Him what you have, receive what He has:

Notice the pattern: He sups with us then we with Him.

- He sits down to our meager crust of bread and lukewarm water that we have to offer.
- Then we sit with Him at His indescribable feast.

Here we see depicted the incredible concept that distinguishes Christianity from every other religion: Not man seeking God, but God seeking man.

A great Jewish scholar Montefiore stated that no Jewish prophet or Rabbi had ever conceived of "*the conception of God actually going out in quest of sinful men, who were not seeking Him, but who were turned away from Him.*"

The Reward For Overcoming:

He will sit with Christ on His Throne in the same manner in which Christ sits with the Father.

- This is the culmination of all the promises for those who overcome. They are all contained in this promise.

!!!Bottom Line: A church that has lost intimacy with God is a church that has lost effectiveness in the world!!!