

The fact that Jesus stands amongst the candlesticks, which we see from v 20 are the churches, indicates He is ready to move out in judgement on the churches first.

1 Peter 4:17 -

‘17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?’

Here Peter asks a rhetorical question, if judgement begins at the house of the Lord what on earth is going to happen to unbelievers? As we study this book we shall see the answer to this. However, for believers this is **not** judgement in terms of eternal fire and loss of salvation, but judgement of their **works** which judgement will take place immediately after the catching away of the church.

Jesus’ address to the churches is because He wants to bring them into alignment with His eternal plan for them in order that **they may receive a reward**.

They are not going to receive any reward for things done in the flesh only that which is at the bidding of the Spirit and they therefore they need to hear **what the Spirit is saying to the churches**.

Verse 19 and John receives his instructions, write three things:

- *what you’ve seen,*
- *the things which are,*
- *and those to come.*

He’s **seen** the Glorified Man, Jesus, identifying Himself, Jesus shows Himself as the Eternal One, the First and the Last, ‘*I was dead, and behold,....I am alive*, John has **seen** 7 lampstands, and the 7 stars, which are explained to him as the 7 churches, and the 7 angels which are messengers to the churches and this completes the things which John **saw** and we move on to the things which **are** – the 7 churches. So the first division of the book is completed with verse 20 of chapter 1. Chapters 2 and 3 comprise the second major division of the book.

This division is the **things which are**, it is a description of the **church age** contained in 7 short letters. And now Jesus begins to tell John the state of the churches, and what He wants John to write to them and them to hear - **the things which are**.

This is the **VISIBLE** church, the local body or local church and it can contain both believers and unbelievers, whereas the *invisible* church is only believers who have gone to be with the Lord already. The visible church includes all professing believers, whether they really believe or not.

The theory that the 7 churches of Revelation 2 – 3 are prophetic, that they represent seven consecutive periods in church history seems to have been suggested around AD 303.

This belief is held today but, at the same, time the 7 churches are also historical and representative of the church as a whole.

Thus we see 7 congregations -

1) historically **existent** at the time John wrote -

2) as **representing** the entire church through the 7 types of local churches which shall exist throughout the dispensation and -

3) as **prefiguring** or representing 7 aspects of the professing church which would rise into prominence before Christ's Second Coming. The 7 periods are generally divided as follows:

1. Ephesus – Apostolic (evangelical) church (AD 30 – 100)
2. Smyrna - Persecuted (Iron curtain) church (AD100 – 313)
3. Pergamum – (Inner City) State church (AD 313 – 600)
4. Thyatira – Papal (suburban) church (AD600 – 1517)
5. Sardis – Reformed (Liberal) church (AD 1517 – 1648)
6. Philadelphia – Missionary church (AD1648 – 1900)
7. Laodicea – Apostate church (AD1900 – present day)

Although most of these phases of church history are now concluded their influence still carries over from stage to stage, and some trends are still in existence even in our own day.

Revelation 2:1 – 7

*¹To the angel of the church of Ephesus write "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. ²I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars; ³and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent. ⁶But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the *Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*

*One view has it that it was a strong ecclesiastical hierarchy ruling over the laity – but there are several views.

Ephesus

Ephesus means desired one – begun by Paul (Acts 18:19 – 20) and located in the wicked city given over to the worship of the goddess Artemis. Paul's effective ministry began seriously to hurt the traffic in magic and images, leading to an uproar in the huge Ephesian amphitheatre.

Religion was a prominent feature of life in Ephesus, the temple of Artemis (or Diana, her Roman name) ranked as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. As the daughter of Zeus, Artemis was variously known as the moon goddess, the goddess of hunting and the patroness of young girls. The Ephesians took pride in their beautiful temple, which was supported by scores of stone columns.

Wikipedia says of present day Ephesus -

“The site is large; Ephesus contains the largest collection of Roman ruins East of the Mediterranean. Only an estimated 15% has been excavated. The ruins that are visible give some idea of the city’s original splendour, and the names associated with the ruins are evocative of its former life”

This is the only church where reference is made to apostles. Hence it is called the ‘apostolic’ or early church and it covered the time from Pentecost AD 30 – AD100.

It was the most desirable of all the churches and was characterised by fervent evangelism. There were a large percentage of Jews in the congregation. The letter to the Ephesians can be divided into three sections; it begins with a commendation moves into condemnation and closes with a command.

Commendation: ‘I know your deeds...’ He commends them for their hard work literally in the Greek *‘toiling to the point of exhaustion’*; the Ephesian Christians were hard working in their service, determined in their commitment and orthodox in their doctrine. They had resisted the false teaching which was causing corruption in other churches, and they hated the work of the Nicolaitans. Yet in spite of these fine qualities, something was missing – they had forsaken their first love.

Condemnation: *‘You have forsaken your first love’* – they had allowed their love for Jesus to cool in the midst of all their activity. They had fallen away, and despite the efficiency of their service, Jesus is not pleased – in His eyes, they were backslidden.

Ephesus had heart trouble. It had forsaken its first love, walked away, left it. *‘I just don’t love Him any more’*. Honeymoon love had eroded into routine married life. The thrilling flush of our new-found conversion experience must be guarded by submission to the Holy Spirit at all times.

Many Christians’ lives consist of a first love experience, which then develops into a routine walk of having forsaken their first love. The Ephesians love had chilled in this way and this describes so many people in churches today, who are caught up in their activity for Jesus and have lost that inner glow of love for Him and have become caught up in works. So He counsels them -

Counsel: ‘Remember the height from which you have fallen...repent’ – change your minds, come back to Me. Return to intimacy with Me, your Coming Bridegroom or I will remove your lampstand – I will put your light out. I will remove your witness from this place.

Do not think that ‘Ichabod’ ‘ the glory has departed’ cannot be written over present day churches, because it can. Selwyn Hughes in his book on the letters to the churches says this:

“I will never forget standing with a group of Christians on the site of what once was the city of Ephesus. Even though it is now in ruins it is still a breathtaking spectacle, yet there is no sign of a Christian church anywhere in the vicinity. Did Christ’s warning take effect there? I believe it did. The Ephesus church failed to obey His command and in consequence its light was extinguished. A church has no light without love. It can maintain a building and support a minister, but if there is no love there, there can be no light. The lampstand has been removed.”

Chilling words.

So their challenge -

Challenge: 'To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God'.

The next church to get Jesus' attention is the church at Smyrna –

Revelation 2:8-11

⁸And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹I know your works, tribulation and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.¹⁰Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death''.

Smyrna

This is the persecuted church A D 100 – 313.

Commendation: 'I know your afflictions and your poverty....'

Condemnation: None

Counsel: '**Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer**'

Challenge: 'He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.'

Jesus starts each church's message by saying 'I know' and in the case of Smyrna, He says, 'I know your affliction and your poverty (but you are rich)'.

This church period is probably the greatest time of persecution the church of Christ has ever known. The more persecuted they were, the more they overcame the one condemning characteristic of the apostolic church before them – that of having lost their first love. Dates AD100-312. If love is the first characteristic that Jesus seeks in His church, suffering is the second.

Smyrna means myrrh. This was the persecuted and afflicted church. It wasn't easy to be Christian in Smyrna. The city had acquired a reputation for being loyal to the Roman Empire, and as a result a temple had been erected to the Emperor Tiberius. Citizens were required to sprinkle incense on the fire that burned before his bust and acknowledge him, Caesar, to be Lord. Christians who would not conform were outlawed and persecuted. The pastor was Polycarp, a student of John. Polycarp was hounded and finally burnt at the stake in AD156 for not denying Jesus. He said "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Apparently the wind became contrary and the flames blew away from him and would not burn him, so a soldier's sword finally ended his life.

Geographically the city lay about 60 miles north of Ephesus. At the time this letter was given, Smyrna was the pride of Asia, and was one of the principal cities vying with Ephesus and Pergamum for first place. It is the only city of all the seven churches which is still thriving and is now called Izmir.

This church experienced persecution and suffering to a degree that none of the other churches did. The church at Smyrna was pulled apart by pressure, poverty and persecution. The believers in Smyrna were an afflicted church, afflicted by false teachers who had claimed to be Jews but really were not. Any church that preaches a gospel other than the gospel of Jesus Christ is a synagogue of Satan regardless of what it is called. The 'second' death is that state when people who have died in unbelief are resurrected and cast alive into an eternal state of separation from God in the lake of fire. This second death need never cause the child of God to fear, for it will have no power over them. The faithful believers at Smyrna are here promised a crown of life, laid up for those who have suffered and given their lives for the sake of the gospel. Their assurance is this: Jesus knows everything and one day He will meet them personally at the doors of eternity to present them with a crown of life.

Revelation 2:12-17

¹²And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword. ¹³I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵Thus you also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

Pergamum

The indulged church A D 313 – 600.

Commendation: *'I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name.....'*

Condemnation: *'Nevertheless I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.'*

Counsel: *'Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.'*

Challenge: *'To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.'*

This is where Satan had his throne. The city of Pergamum was deeply entrenched in the worship of the god Asclepius – the god of healing.

This was a church which slid into compromise, the toleration of evil. Worldly standards had crept in. So much of the world is in the church and so many of the church are in the world that there is no difference between the two.

The Pergamum period of history evolved into an era when Christianity was introduced by force by Constantine the 'Christian' Emperor. When Diocletian the last persecuting emperor of that period failed to stamp out the church, Constantine came into power. 'Christianity', said Constantine, 'was to be the State religion.' Regiments of soldiers were baptised at spear point! As the self-styled protector of the Christian faith, Constantine issued an edict of toleration for Christianity and showered many favours on the Christian church.

The government provided money for the operation of the church, and many pagan temples were taken over by Christians. To please the emperor, these leaders adopted customs that were parallel to pagan practices. One compromise invariably leads to another, and what seemed at the start to be a great blessing ended up a great curse.

During the succeeding three centuries of this period many anti-Christian practices of pagan origin were adopted, which robbed the church of its fire and its evangelistic fervour. The influence of paganism on the church increased over the years step by step. The church began to shroud itself in 'mystery' and ritualism that had a strong resemblance to Babylonian mysticism.

The Chaldean tau, which was the elevation of a large 'T' on the end of a pole, was changed to the sign of a cross. From AD 312 onwards the church became more Roman and less Christian in its practices. The Roman Catholic Church today is hard put to trace its ancestry beyond AD312.

Until that time the church was an independent collection of local churches, working together whenever possible but not dominated by central authority. The name Pergamum literally means 'marriage' or 'elevation'. As the Church became married to governmental authority and elevated to a place of acceptance, it declined in spiritual blessing and power.

Pergamum was also the church '*where Satan has his throne*'. In the commendation, they are commended for not denying the faith and Antipas, who was martyred in 92 AD, is singled out as being one of their faithful members. His name means '*against all*' and it may be that he stood firm against all satanic worship. This church is said to be situated where Satan has his throne and indeed it was in this city that the serpent-son Asclepius was worshipped.

Wikipedia says this under a photograph of a Greek statue of Asclepius who holds a staff with a large serpent coiled around it –

'The [ancient Greek](#) symbol today associated with medicine worldwide: the [rod of Asclepius](#) with its encoiled serpent. The [World Health Organization](#), the [Royal Society of Medicine](#), the [American Medical and Osteopathic Associations](#), the [British](#) and the [Australian Medical Associations](#) are some of the bodies that incorporate it in their [insignia](#)'.

The city lay about 60 miles north of Smyrna and at the time these letters were written it was known to be a strong centre of paganism and idolatry. Two of the main deities honoured there (amongst hundreds of others) were Dionysus and Asclepius the gods of healing. The historian R H Charles describes Pergamum as '*the Lourdes of the province of Asia and the seat of a famous school of*

medicine’. One writer says that *‘In Pergamum it was not so much Christ who was evident – but antichrist.’*

It would appear that whilst many in the church were holding on to the truth of the gospel, others were drifting and entertaining false teachers. Jesus describes it as *‘the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin...’* and *‘the teaching of the Nicolaitans’*. It could be that the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans was one and the same. The story of Balaam is recorded in Numbers 22-24. It tells of how Balaam, a prophet of God, was enticed by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the tribes of Israel who were about to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land. However, every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse Israel, God moved him to speak words of blessing. Totally frustrated by this, Balaam suggests to Balak that he should arrange for the Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel by inviting them to take part in immoral and idolatrous feasts – knowing full well that this would bring God’s anger against them.

What Balaam was to Israel is what the Nicolaitans were to the church in Pergamum *‘We aren’t under law, we are under grace’* – this teaches that sin is no longer a problem, *‘it’s only a problem for the unbeliever, we are free to do what we like because the more we sin the more God can show grace’*. God does not condemn sin in the sinner in order to condone it in the saint! They were teaching a licence instead of liberty and Jesus says *‘Repent!’* The source of their error was not merely human, but demonic.

Revelation 2:18 – 29 –

¹⁸And to the angel in Thyatira write, these things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass. ¹⁹“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience and as for your works, the last are more than the first. ²⁰Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²²Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. ²⁴But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call them, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – ²⁷‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter’s vessels shall be broken to pieces’ – as I have also received from My Father, ²⁸and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Thyatira

Thyatira comes from two words meaning ‘continual’ and ‘sacrifice’. This church AD 600 – 1517 continues where Pergamum left off, and introduces the heresy that Jesus’ work wasn’t finished on the cross - therefore the sacrifice is continual and Jesus is still on the cross.

Jesus comes walking among the candlesticks to this particular church with eyes of flame and feet like fine brass. He always selected a description of Himself that spoke directly to the condition of the church He was addressing. To Thyatira He comes with eyes of blazing fire and feet of brass.

Despite its appearance there was sin in the church at Thyatira. They needed to see Him as the One whose eyes burned with the fire of righteous indignation and whose feet brought judgement. Brass in scripture always denotes judgement; Jesus comes to this church with judgement.

Commendation: *'I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.'*

Condemnation: *'You tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols'*

Counsel: *'Only hold on to what you have until I come'*

Challenge: *'To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre he will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father, I will also give him the morning star'.*

Beneath the healthy surface was a cesspool. Lounging seductively behind the façade of piety was 'that woman Jezebel'. Jezebel was the epitome of immorality and idolatry.

The programme of merging paganism with Christianity begun under the church of Pergamum increased, the light that Jesus entrusted to His church all but flickered out during what was called the Dark Ages and was not rekindled until the days of the reformation.

Kissing the Pope's feet, worshipping images and relics, fasting on Fridays and during Lent, transubstantiation, adoration of the wafer, purgatory, the infallibility of the Pope, Mary declared the mother of the church, were some of the changes and additions made.

Thyatira comes from two words meaning 'sacrifice' and 'continual'; this introduces the central heresy that has produced other false doctrines, that is, ***the Church of Rome denies the finished work of Christ but believes in a continuing sacrifice*** that produces such things as sacraments for the dead and praying for the dead.

All of these were borrowed from mystery Babylon the mother of all pagan customs and idolatry, none of which is taught in the New Testament.

Jesus gave this adulterous woman time to repent, but she refused. Not everyone was involved with her and Jesus gives some marvellous promises to those who hold on to their faith until He returns.

Revelation 3:1 – 6

¹*And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*

²*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. ⁴You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵He who overcomes shall be clothed in white*

garments and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. ⁶He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Sardis:

The reformed liberal church. The dead church. Sardis means ‘those escaping’. Dates AD1517 – 1648. The church in Sardis had gained a reputation throughout the whole of Asia Minor for being a progressive and lively centre of Christian witness. But outward appearances are deceptive and the truth was that the church was nothing more than a spiritual graveyard. It had a name for being alive, but in actual fact it was dead. They had an endless round of spiritual activity but, like the church in Ephesus, in the sight of the Lord they were beggared, bankrupt and broken.

They broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, but they too became state churches and we see the Anglican church in England, the Lutheran church in Germany and the Presbyterian church in Scotland as examples.

What corrupted Pergamum also corrupted Sardis. Jesus describes them as dead. There is no spiritual life because there is no personal faith and relationship with Jesus, so a great part of this type of church is composed of **unbelievers**, they have sound creeds, they honour Him with their lips, but their hearts are indeed far from Him.

Those escaping, however, are the (relatively) few who are born again and have washed their robes and will be clothed in white garments which equal salvation. Mixed bunch these.

Commendation: *‘I know your deeds, you have a reputation of being alive....’*

Condemnation: *‘but you are dead...I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.’*

Counsel: *‘Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, remember, therefore what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent, but if you do not wake up I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you’.*

Challenge: *‘He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels’.*

Sardis means escaping ones, or those who come out. This name together with the Lord’s condemnation of this Church, provides a perfect description of the Reformation churches.

The Protestant Reformation developed as the result of the continued emphasis by the Church of Rome on pagan doctrines rather than adherence to scriptural principles. The basic emphasis of the reformation churches originally was Martin Luther’s watchword – the righteous will live by faith (Romans 1:17). They had recoiled from trying to make salvation the result of works and sparked a resurgence of interest in studying the scriptures.

The tragedy of the reformation churches that earned for them the condemnation by the Lord of being dead was twofold:

- 1) They became state Churches – and had a tendency to please the government rather than God.
- 2) They did not sufficiently change many of the customs and teachings of the Church of Rome.

Infant baptism was continued, in spite of the fact that there is no scriptural verification for it. Sprinkling was also continued.

Ritual and formality characteristic of pagan forms of worship are not conducive to genuine worship for they appeal to sensuous human nature.

If people leave a church with a mysterious feeling of 'worship' but have not been brought face to face with Jesus Christ in a personal way, they have been worshipping in a dead church. This church appeared alive, but was dead.

The Lord is never impressed by the beauty of a well-kept mausoleum, knowing that inside are the bones of a dead man.

Sardis was wealthy but degenerate. Twice the city had been lost because the leadership and citizenry were too lazy to defend themselves from their enemies. Like the city, this church had won a good reputation at one time and the members thought they had arrived; they were content in the beautiful building they had erected on the corner of self-satisfaction and complacency streets.

Cause of death: rested on its laurels. Died from neglect, lax moral standards and a failure to recognise its own spiritual condition – they had a form of godliness but denied the power. 2 Timothy 3:5.

What should we do if we feel we are members of a dead or dying church? Be submissive to the Holy Spirit – if He says stay, stay, if He says go, go. There are lofty promises for those who are called upon to stay where they are. Revelation 3:4,5.

Revelation 3: 7-13

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens': ⁸I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹Indeed, 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. ¹⁰Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Philadelphia:

A.D.1648 – 1900. The church Christ loved.

Commendation: *'I KNOW YOUR WORKS. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name'*

Condemnation: *None.*

Counsel: *'I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.'*

Challenge: *'Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

The name Philadelphia means brotherly love.

Jesus selected that church to describe the kind of church age that was initiated around the year 1650 and will continue to the Tribulation. Just as Sardis came out of Thyatira, so Philadelphia came out of Sardis. Philadelphia was marked by vitality of life.

In this church age God worked in a thrilling way that produced revivals in Europe and the British Isles which in turn produced what is known today as the modern missionary movement. We all want to belong to this one. No condemnation. Right doctrine and right living going hand in hand.

Doctrine without love is legalism where love is present without doctrine it is humanism.

God promised to open doors for this loving church, to give it an opportunity to reach out to a lost world.

It is the Holy Spirit who prepares the hearts of men to receive the good news, not our plans, tracts, crusades or feeble witnessing. Jesus reminds the church at Philadelphia that the doors of opportunity are completely under His control. If He wants them open, no one can shut them. If He wants them shut, no one can open them, He alone has the key.

They were commended because they couldn't do it 'they had little strength'! Except for some churches in America the Philadelphia church age is characterized by small congregations which according to human standards are weak. This of course, is real strength. They kept His word. This church not only believed the word of God, but obeyed it.

William Ramsay, in his book, *'The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia'*, claims that when the city was founded in the second century BC, it was designed to be a strategic centre for the spreading of the Greek language throughout the whole of Asia – *'It was'*, he says *'a missionary city from the beginning.'* Whatever the city may have been for Greek culture, it was now to be a springboard for the propagation of the Christian faith.

The reformation churches, past and present, believe the word of God but are not characterized by *obedience* to it. The church of Philadelphia a fitting contrast to this pattern is characterized by obedience to His word.

Promises to the church:

1) **vindication** – He will do it.

2) **preservation** – *'since you have kept my command to endure I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.'*

The world has never known a universal period of tribulation. This passage is an obvious reference to the Tribulation period of 7 years that we will cover later on. This promise however, is to the church of Philadelphia (brotherly love) she will be raptured, caught up, before that Tribulation begins.

Revelation 3:14 – 22 –

¹⁴ And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked – ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Laodicea:

A.D.1900 – present day.

The apostate or unsaved church, the luke-warm church. The name means people ruling, this church is ruled by men, not God. This church is lead by the people not by the Holy Spirit and as such Jesus says, He will spew them out. Jesus description of Himself is the Faithful and True witness, throwing into relief that the church is neither of these. All of the previous churches had a word of commendation, this church has none. What an indictment! There is nothing commendable about it. Probably mostly all are religious unbelievers, the hot are the truly saved, the cold are those who are not believers and do not claim to be believers. The lukewarm are those who claim to be believers, but are not truly regenerated.

This is the apostate church. Apostasy can be defined as the departure from the truth that one professed to have. It does not mean that the person actually possessed the truth.

In fact apostates seldom do possess the truth, rather it is a departure from a truth they *professed* to have because of an *affiliation* with a particular church. For example, a minister of an Anglican, Baptist or Methodist church is *professing*, by virtue of his position, to believe the doctrines of his or her particular denomination. But the apostate denies these doctrines and has departed from the truth that he professed to have.

This is characteristic of the **visible** church which is not made up (totally) of believers, of the 20th and 21st centuries, as predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 –

¹ Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, we ask you ² not to be soon shaken in mind, or troubled, either by spirit or by word, or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come; ³ let no one deceive you by any means for that Day will not come unless the falling away come first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition'.

The term 'falling away' is apostasy.

Commendation: None.

Condemnation: 'So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say 'I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'

Counsel: *'I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see'.*

Challenge: *'To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne'.*

The final church mentioned in Revelation is the lukewarm church of Laodicea, the church which will be in existence when Christ returns for His true Bride. These lukewarm 'believers' will be left behind, unless they have *'bought gold refined in the fire, so that they can become rich'*, in other words, they repent.

The church which received the last letter from the postman at Patmos was outwardly impressive. It had all the trappings of wealth, but something was missing. Well known theologian John Stott wrote *'The Laodicean church was a half-hearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the 21st century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so wide spread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anaemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion.'*

The Laodicean church today would be at the forefront of the gay rights and feminist movements and be leaders in the ordination of women and the feminizing of the deity. God is female lobby.

The message of Jesus is clear - *'Have nothing to do with them'*.

The challenge of Jesus to Laodicea, like his six other challenges, is to *'overcome'* or to become *'born again believers'*. The challenge is simply a promise to share His throne as He shares the Father's throne. *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'*.

The message of Jesus to Laodicea indicates that as this age draws to a close, apostasy, deadness and indifference will increase. Sounds like a case of the Emperor has no clothes! No wonder our Lord asked of this age *'However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'* Luke 18:8.

Although most of these phases of church history are now concluded, nevertheless, their influence still carries over from stage to stage, and some trends are still in existence even in our own day.

May we indeed hear and take to heart what the Spirit is saying to the churches in this day.

Tomorrow we will look at what happens from Chapter 4 onwards.

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