

ST58 The Seven churches Revelations chs 2 and 3

When you read the comments of Jesus to the seven churches you need to remember the following:

There was no New Testament

The Didache may not have been written then and if it was they may not have known about it

They would have been taught by word of mouth and the teacher may have not been an apostle but someone they taught. In Acts 16:14 we are told of Lydia from Thyatira that had been taught by the apostles but no one from the other cities, except Ephesus, are recorded as being taught by the apostles.

It appears Ephesus was the only city recorded in Acts that had a visit from an apostle.

Except for Ephesians and Philippians there is no letter existing that had been written to them

However God would not have condemned anyone for doing something they did not know was wrong so that the churches were deliberately doing the wrong thing or were some of the members to do these things.

God did not judge the whole church but only those doing the wrong thing. But the minister would have been judged for not correcting the error.

But Jesus addresses the church as a whole and not individuals in the churches when writing to them in the book of revelation?

He is looking at the impact of the church on the society around them because of what it preaches and how it demonstrates Jesus. The church and their representation of The Kingdom reflects the leadership and in a way these letters are comments on the leadership in these churches.

If a church is not doing the work of Jesus, it may not be part of the Body. It could be in the category of one of those churches that God says will be removed and people in it may lose their salvation. They lose being a member of the Body of Christ and its members may be in danger of going to hell.

So, there is a double warning here:

Are you as a church part of the body doing the work of Jesus or is it just certain members in it?

Are you not demonstrating The Kingdom to society as Jesus desires you to by life and mouth and in danger of hell fire?

The condemnation is also of the church's leadership that guide the members so that they do what they are taught by the leadership.

The question arises as to why these particular churches were chosen. They were all in Asia Minor that had had many years of Christianity in it so should have been relatively mature

churches. They may have been chosen because of the length of Christianity in Asia Minor that allowed time for these things to develop.

The comments on Ephesians are interesting because Paul had taught there for three years.

Note: The condemnation is also of the church's leadership that guide the members so that they do what they are taught or are allowed to do by the leadership.

Also, every church is told by Jesus that He knows what they are doing and cannot hide it from Him. This means, that while Jesus is not acknowledged much He or His agents are always watching what they do.

Every church is warned to listen to what He says and correct the problems in their church (if they have any) and all are encouraged to be strong in their faith.

General Background

Chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation deals with letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. Why were they all in Asia Minor?

We are told in the Letter to Pergamos that Satan had his throne (seat) there so he ruled from there.

The chief spirit over Asia Minor was not a lower territorial spirit but Satan himself? So the churches were prime targets for his attacks. So these Letters are to seven churches to illustrate the effects Satan attacks on churches.

It is interesting that after these letters to the seven churches the focus changes from these churches in the area Satan controls to God's throne in heaven as if to remind us that Satan is controlled by God so that these churches are only in danger if they do not follow Jesus as Lord!

Also, in some of the churches the description He gives of Himself points Revelation Ch 1 where He identifies Himself as God over the seven churches. It appears that Jesus is over the churches as they are part of His dominion.

***Jesus:** , I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending,
11, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last:*

***John:**12, And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;*

.13, And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

.14, His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

.15, And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

.16, And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

***Jesus:** Fear not; I am the first and the last:*

18, *I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*

19, *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;*

20, *The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*

The Following comments are from the excellent Commentary by The Garner-Howes Baptist Commentary which was for more comprehensive than anything I could come up with.

Verse 8

1) *"I am Alpha and Omega," (ego eimi to Alfa kai to Oo) "I am the Alpha (beginning) and the Omega, (end)," the A to Z, the originator and terminator, the beginning and the end, by whom all things exist and are sustained, Lam 3:22-23, Acts 17:28; James 4:15.*

2) *"The beginning and the end, saith the Lord," (legei Kurios ho theos) "Says, or affirms the Lord God"; in the Revelation of himself, of his nature and existent being, without end or cessation of being. He is alive forevermore, Rev 1:18; Heb 7:25.*

3) *"Which is," (ho hon) "The one (Lord God) who exists," or the one God which really is or exists, Exod 20:1; Psa 115:4-9; 1Cor 8:6. Only here and in Rev 21:5 is God Almighty identified as the direct speaker in this book.*

4) *"And which was," (kai ho hen) "And the one Lord God who self-existed, who was, has always been," John 1:1-3.*

5) *"And which is to come," (kai ho erchomenos) "And the one Lord God who is to come, of his own will, accord, or pledge," 1Thes 4:13-18; 2Thes 1:6-12. He comes to be glorified in his saints and to execute everlasting punishment upon the unsaved.*

6) *"The Almighty," (ho pantokrator) "The one Lord God, almighty or all powerful," omnipotent; Isa 9:6, the God of might, dynamic power. In this manner John and Jesus are identified as testator and recorder of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.*

V12

2) *"One like unto the Son of Man," (homoion huion anthropou) "A Son of Man likeness-one," or one that appeared to me to be "The Son of Man," Rev 14:14. Jesus is the "Son of Man", or "heir-redeemer of Mankind," John 5:27. The Redeemer of Mankind from the Law of sin and death, that all might come forth from the graves", Gal 4:4-5; John 5:28-29.*

3) *"Clothed with a garment down to the foot," (enededumenon podere) "Having been clothed (covered or well dressed) down to the feet;" The long robe was a mark of dignity, indicating high official rank or office, such as that of a kingly ruler or the Jewish High Priest, who wore a purple robe down to his feet, Psa 133:2; Lev 8:7-12; Luke 16:19; Dan 5:29.*

4) *"And girt about the paps," (Kai periezomenon pros tois mastois) "And having been girdled around at the breasts"; High girding with a belt, a wide belt that reached up to the breast, was also a mark of lofty position, usually reserved for Jewish priests who presided over spiritual services, Lev 8:7; 2Kin 1:8; Job 12:18; Isa 11:5.*

5) *"With a golden girdle," (zonen chrusan) "(With) a golden girdle," - - gold the ornament of kings and royalty, the most enduring of precious metals, a symbol of divine excellence. The girdle was a belt used to tie up the long robe for rapid walking, work, or battle - of soft cloth, linen, leather, or gold indicating use or rank - - Exod 28:4; 28:8; 28:27-29; Rev 15:6; Eph 6:14.*

V14

1) *"His head and his hairs," (he kephale autou kai hai triches) "What is more his head and the hairs (of his head)," his forehead and his hair, described as a wise, venerable person, Prov 20:26-28; Gen 42:38; 44:29; 44:31; Deut 32:25.*

2) *"Were white like wool," (leukai hos erion) "(Appeared to be) as white as wool," a symbol of celestial or heavenly beings, in white apparel, as well as a representative of an holy cause, 2Chr 5:12; Ezra 8:15; Eccl 9:8.*

3) *"As white as snow," (leukon hos chion) "Even as white as snow," a symbol of purity, innocence, cleanliness, or holiness, Isa 1:18; Matt 28:3; Acts 1:10; Rev 3:4-5; 19:8; 19:14.*

4) *"And his eyes were as a flame of fire," (kai hoi ophthalmoi autou hos phloks puros) "And his eyes (flashed) as a flame of fire," Rev 20:11; In holiness and fierce judgment he comes to reign, 2Thes 1:6-9. This appears to be the person of "Ancient of Days" one, whom Daniel foresaw, Dan 7:13-14; Rev 1:7.*

V15

1) *"And his feet like unto fine brass," (kai ho podes sutou homoioi chalkolibano) "And his feet appeared to be like burnished or polished brass," burnished in heat for polishing, to trample under his feet or crush his opposition, the antichrist, Dan 10:5-21.*

2) *"As if they burned in a furnace," (hos en kamino pepuromenes) "As having been fired in a furnace," as white heat-metal, brass (copper) or bronze, in a burning furnace, as in or similar to Ezek 1:26-28.*

3) *"And behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen," (kai idou eimi eis tous aionas ton aionon) "And behold it, perceive it, I am living (alive) now and hereafter, forevermore," to die no more. This is a victory annunciation over death, an assurance of his power to raise all his own from the grave, 1Thes 4:13-18; John 5:28.*

4) *"And have the keys of hell and of death," (kai echotas kleis tou tharatos kai tou hadou) "And I have, hold, or possess the keys (control or jurisdiction) of death and of hell," of the hadean, spiritual realm, of the abode of the impenitent and unregenerate, the unsaved whose souls have departed their bodies. Keys denote authority of control, jurisdiction, or administration to the places of their entrance - - our Lord, with all authority committed to him by the Father, holds the keys to both heaven and hell, John 3:35; 5:22; Acts 17:30-31.*

V16

1) *"And he had in his right hand seven stars," (kai echon en te deksia cheiri autou asteras hepta) "And he was holding in his right hand seven stars"; after his majesty and authority were identified, there followed his position in and among the churches,*

to observe, aid, assist, and protect them and their pastors in labors. The seven stars were the messengers, pastors, or mouth pieces of the seven churches of Asia.

2) *"And out of his mouth," (kai ek tou stomatos autou) "And out of his mouth," originating from his mouth, coming or going out, of its own accord or will, from his mouth; his testimony that went forth from his mouth, Isa 55:11-12.*

3) *"Went a sharp two-edged sword," (hromphaia distomos okseia ekporeuomene) "Was proceeding a sharp two-mouthed (edged) sword," an instrument of pending judgment, based on His word, Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12-13.*

4) *"And his countenance," (kai he ophis autou) "And the face appearance (countenance) or likeness of him," like lightning in instant brilliance, Matt 28:3; Dan 10:6.*

5) *"Was as the sun shineth in his strength," (hos ho helios painei en te dunamei autou) "Was like the sun shines in his dynamic power," his blinding rays, blinding brilliance, to give light, vision, and revelation to all, as in Rev 10:1; Luke 9:29.16*

V17

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V18

1) *"I am he that liveth," (kai ho zon) "I exist as the living one," or "I am the one living," to whom the beasts (living creatures) later gave glory, honor, and thanks, Rev 4:9; as well as the twenty and four elders in worship 5:14.*

2) *"And was dead," (kai egenomen nekros) "And I (once) became dead (was dead)," Rom 6:9. Christ both died and rose again. This is the central issue of gospel redemption, 8:34; 14:9; 1Cor 15:3.*

Before reading the comments on each church is it worthwhile looking at the description that Jesus and John give of Jesus that are relative to how Jesus introduces Himself to the church.

Of interest also is that Jesus writes to the angel of the church and not to the church itself. He is writing to His representative and telling Him about the church situation.

It is not like He did not have a prophet to warn them because we have the letters in Revelation.

So why did He write to the angels?

The Holy Spirit is the one to convict them of sin and Prophets warn them.

So why did He address the angels because all they could do is to watch the church. So what roles does an angel over a church have?

Church Addressed: Ephesus

Background to the letter: Paul spent three years at Ephesus it was such an important strategic city. All Asia Minor went there to worship the goddess Artemis who had the same attributes as Jesus. It is quite possible that the other six churches in Revelation were started by people Paul trained while he was there.

There was little difference between Artemis and Jesus when their attributes were described so that there was no real incentive to follow Jesus.

However, Jesus was able to heal people raise people from the dead and other miracles while Artemis could not and it was the expression of the delegated authority Jesus gave to Paul that showed Jesus was greater than Artemis so that people follow Jesus instead of Artemis.

How Jesus identifies Himself: *These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*

The right hand is the symbol of ultimate power and Jesus is saying He has control over the seven churches including the one at Ephesus and that Artemis had no power over them.

Commendations: *2, I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:*

.3, And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Condemnations: *.4, Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

They were no longer serving out of Love for Jesus but were like the followers of Artemis, serving so as not to disobey Jesus and be punished.

.5, Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

6, But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Possible punishment: *5, Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*

Jesus reminds them that they are facing possible punishment in hell instead of avoiding it.

Reward

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

If they go back to serving Him out of Love for Him they will go to heaven.

Final Comments:

This was the church whose practices had been influenced by those of the religions around them so that their focus was no longer on a love for Jesus but the desire to avoid punishment by pleasing Him. It was legalism and not Love.

Church Addressed: Smyrna

Background to the letter: Smyrna was a city of 200,000 people of which one third were Jews. These persecuted the Christians and put to death Polycarp. The Jewish hatred of the Jews was so great they even broke the Sabbath rest to martyr Polycarp.

It was also a very wealthy city with that many Romans were there, all with different beliefs in the gods of Rome. The Romans did not appear to persecute the Christians but did not stand in the way when the Jews martyred Polycarp.

The Romans believed a person called Dionysus died and rose from the dead like Jesus did.

How Jesus identifies Himself: 8, ¶ *And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;*

Jesus proclaims He is greater than Dionysus and is the one who has power of life and death unlike Dionysus. He also declares He is the creator and final judge of all so is able to protect them.

Advice: 9, *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*

10, *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

Jesus addresses their persecution and encourages them to be steadfast in their faith

Reward: 11, *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*

They might die, but that was only physical death and they would not die the second death in hell. The implication being that if they did not hold fast to their faith they would die the second death.

Church Addressed: Pergamos

Background to the letter: Pergamos was the birthplace of Galen, a famous physician, and contained a famous temple of Aesculapius the god of medicine, who was worshipped under the form of a living serpent

How Jesus identifies Himself:

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

.A two edged sword is a weapon of war and from v16 it appears it is the words of Jesus that will punish the Christians teaching error.

Jesus was obviously angry at those that opposed the Christians and would soon order things to punish these people.

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

They were persecuted by the Jews who killed the Christians, if possible,

(The serpent was also important to the emperor and had an alter to it there. The serpent was the image of Satan.)

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

(See end for details of the Nicolaitans)

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

Proposed Punishment:*16, Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth*

Reward.

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

In heaven we will receive a new name only we will know so the results of their faithful endurance was heaven.

Church Addressed: Thyatira

Background to the letter: Tyrimnas, the tutelary god of Thyatira, represented with flaming rays and feet of burnished brass, hence the description Jesus gives to Himself, showing He is God and not Tyrimnas, their God.

How Jesus identifies Himself:

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

Commendations: There was none

Condemnations

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

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

Jesus certainly hates Jezebel type women of which there are many in churches tolerated by the minister. Jezebel seeks to control and does so against the stewardship of the minister.

Proposed Punishment:

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

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

Reward

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

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

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

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

.28, *And I will give him the morning star.*

Jesus is the morning star so He is their reward !

Church Addressed: Sardis

Background to the letter: Sardis was very wealthy., It had a magnificent temple to Cybele (She was like Artemis) and the Christians had little oppression there, was the birthplace of Galen, and contained a famous temple of Aesculapius the god of medicine, who was worshipped under the form of a living serpent

How Jesus identifies Himself: *1, ¶ And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

Commendations: There are none for Sardis – just a warning and promise to those who repent.

Condemnations.*2, Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.*

.3, Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch

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

Proposed Punishment: *, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*

Reward:*.5, He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*

Final Comments: It was a comfortable church so it took its easy and got lulled into a comfortable Christianity so did not need to rely on Jesus for help in any way and was going aside so was in danger of hellfire.

Of interest is the fact that one of the most famous ancient physicians lived in Sardis, a city that worshipped a serpent and a serpent represented Satan.

Look at the symbol for medicine - a serpent twined around a long cross with shortened arms. The serpent is hiding the power of the cross and replacing it with his system. And so he hides the healing power of Jesus replacing it with his system which is why we have pharmaceuticals which the healing power of Jesus does not need.

Church Addressed: Philadelphia

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

How Jesus identifies Himself:

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

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

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

Synagogue of Satan mentioned again but this time there is what Jesus will do unlike the first time. (see Sardis).

Proposed Punishment: Those of the synagogue of Satan will not go to heaven (the city of God)

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

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

Church Addressed: Laodiceans

Background to the letter: It was a rich city with no persecution and everyone was comfortable well off.

How Jesus identifies Himself: .14 *write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;*

Commendations:

Condemnations and Proposed punishment. .15 *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Final Comments:

There appears to be no one in this church for Jesus to commend but it still had hope if it repented.

Closing Comments

The churches that were commended were those that were being persecuted.

The one warned were those that were comfortable. It is worrying that most of the churches in the west are comfortable.

Some of the lessons from these letters

You can lose your salvation (Rev 3:5)

Only in obedience to Jesus and His truths is their salvation

There are rewards for overcoming the attacks of Satan.

Only if you endure to the end will you receive a reward

Lukewarmness (comfortable Christianity) is hated by Jesus.

You must reject the world and all it offers not to be compromised by it.

God is Love and readily accepts the repentant person back into fellowship (Salvation,). It is obvious these people had not blasphemed The Holy spirit or they would not have been able to repent.

Each of these churches would have shown the Kingdom in a different way but only those that obeyed would be showing it correctly. Those that showed a church structure or lifestyle little different to the religions around them would have little impact on the society they lived in but those that had people willing to stand up for Jesus and die for Him would have changed the society they lived in.

Only as you show your life is different to those around you in the world and that you are willing to die for Jesus as well as demonstrate the authority of The Kingdom of God will you impact society in a way that will change it.

Addendum

What were and still are Nicolaitans

The root of the word Nicolaitans comes from Greek *nikao*, to conquer or overcome, and *laos*, which means people and which the word laity comes from. The two words together especially means the destruction of the people and refers to the earliest form of what we call a priestly order or clergy which later on in church history divided people and allowed for

leadership other than those led by the Holy Spirit. A good translation of Nicolaitan would be “those who prevail over the people”

These destroyed the flat structure of the Body of Christ where each person is directly answerable to Jesus and not to another. Spiritual authority over another in the Body of Christ is only for the purposes of helping them in their spiritual life and then it is not a control type authority but a servant type serving the spiritual needs of the person. This true authority last only as long as Jesus wants you to minister to that person to guide them, help them mature, to meet any needs you need to or to teach them what Jesus wants them to be taught.

Ministry is the expression of God’s love in you to another and to express it any other way than helping them because Jesus has asked you to is to take over the role of Jesus and declare you know what is best for a person.

To take authority over the physical side of a person is wrong unless Jesus appoints you as steward over them.