

The Lord's Letters to the Seven Churches

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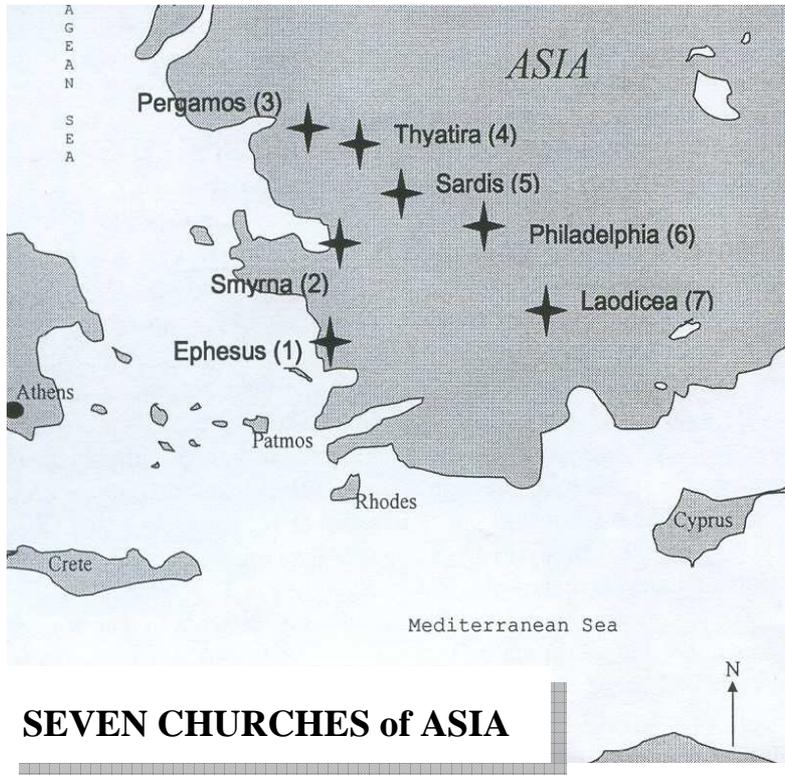
John was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:9). The Lord gave him a commission. “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter” (Rev 1:19). This threefold divine enterprise given to the beloved disciple required a record of the opening vision – “the things thou hast seen,” followed by a record of the Lord’s messages to the seven churches – the “things that are,” and then an account of the “things that shall be hereafter,” – that which is entailed from chapter 4 to close of the Revelation.

The seven letters compose a divine judgment on the spiritual estate of the professing Church historically and, as we shall see, prophetically. As such they compose a unique revelation, one which is in essence a commentary on the churches, but not in the order of other “church epistles” found in Scripture; one that is prophetic, but not of the typical order of prophecy. The first uniqueness, we suggest, is because they are not apostolic but given directly and personally by the “Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.” The second element of uniqueness, as others have noted serves to preserve the imminence of the Lord’s return for the Church, which would have been dispelled if the letters followed the typical line of prophecy which tell of the “things that shall be.”

The uniqueness that pervades these letters, their penetrating judgments, priceless commendations and their precious portraits of Christ, enjoin our prayerful meditation and commitment in the light of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Four Biblical Perspectives

These seven churches were located in the Gentile region outside Jerusalem and Israel. The seven church epistles written to them have a fourfold perspective: **historical, spiritual, prophetic** and **Christological**. These perspectives



SEVEN CHURCHES of ASIA

compose an instructive insight into the life and times of the churches they address, namely - the character of contemporary Christian life and testimony, a foreshadowing of the broad course of Christian profession to the end of the Age (the Rapture) and a revelation of the glory of Christ. These perspectives and the Book in which they appear are associated with a solemn theme – *God's glory in judgment*. A righteous God has “prepared his throne for

judgment” (Ps 9:7). There are times when, like John we lean on the Lord's loving breast; but there are times when in the light of His judicial glory, we too like John must fall at His feet as if dead (v 17).

The historical perspective

These seven letters were written to seven churches that existed among many during the latter apostolic period. The apostles had traversed the land laying the foundation truths of the gospel and of NT gathering in obedience to the Lord's command to go “into all the world” (Matt 28). The date of these letters (c. 90 AD) and the location of these seven churches, reflect the fervent commitment of the early believers to the gospel, and mark its penetration into Gentile regions beyond Jerusalem and Antioch. The historical aspect also reminds us of the unity and empathy we have with all in the Body of Christ who have “gone before.” Though we are many we “are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:5). This doctrinal truth endears these letters to us and enhances their practical value.

The Spiritual perspective

The local church. Before we can know our role in the Lord's house we must know the divine role of His house. There is therefore a primary appeal in each letter to the conscience of the *local* church in its testimony to the glory of the Lord. His house is the house of His glory (Isa 60:7). Here the local church is not figured as "body of Christ" but a "golden lampstand," because it is to be a bearer of "divine light" amidst a world of spiritual darkness ("Asia" means *mire*).¹ An assembly is not the source of light, but a bearer of the light - the divine *glory* of Christ, hence its *golden* character. Its solemn responsibility in this is seen in the Lord's warning to Ephesus. "I will remove thy lampstand (light bearing)." The spiritual lessons in these letters concerning assembly testimony are as relevant today as they were at the time of their writing. Each lampstand with its own base represents an *individual* and a *separated* testimony and responsibility before the Lord (1:12-13). *He* judges the spiritual condition and confession of each assembly. May we grasp two vital practical truths. First, what is of interest to the Lord must also be of interest to His people. The Church and the churches - not Israel, is the present object of the Lord's eye; it is the Church not Israel today that is to bear testimony to His glory on earth (Eph 3:10). The Lord's teaching concerning His Church was given upon His rejection by Israel and the world. The Church therefore stands apart from both. Satan would have it otherwise. Second, the local assembly is *His* house, and we ought to measure what we do in it according to what pleases and glorifies *Him* - not ourselves (1Tim 3:15). So we have in these letters as elsewhere in Scripture, the autonomy and responsibility of the local assembly before the Lord. He does not direct His messages to a federation of assemblies, nor to some hierarchy within them.² That each message is to "a church" also marks the *collective* responsibility of every believer within a local church in regard to its testimony.

The local churches: The "book" containing these seven letters was to be sent unto *all* seven churches, revealing their spiritual interdependence yet

¹ It is not "candlestick" as in the AV, but "lampstand" (*luchina*).

² The seven angels would appear to be human messengers, even those having the gift of prophecy - forth telling (Eph 4). They are the seven stars, the seven messengers who are here appointed by the ascended Lord to convey a message from Him to the churches (as the OT prophets were similarly appointed and gave censuring messages to Israel). The "angel" of each church cannot be an "office bearer"; their singularity would preclude them being elders. Responsibility for church testimony rests with the local *church* - it is what the Spirit says to the *churches*.

governmental autonomy before the Lord (Rev 1:11). In this they are representative of all churches throughout the Age.

The individual believer. There is an appeal to the conscience of the professing believer seen in the promises to the “overcomer” and in the exhortation, “he that hath an ear, let him hear.” The testimony of the local church is dependant upon the spiritual condition of each individual within it.

The prophetic perspective

The spiritual conditions in these seven churches represent the *featured* spiritual character of *successive* periods of the Church age (Table B). This does not deny that these conditions have existed throughout history, i.e., some churches today experience the persecutions of Smyrna. To deny this is to rob these letters of their practical value. Neither does the prophetic view conflict with the imminent return of Christ. It is said that if these letters represent seven successive periods of church history (taking us into the present day and even beyond), then the early Christians and subsequent Christians who believed this could not have expected the Lord’s imminent return. However, *all* the spiritual conditions represented in these seven letters existed at the time of writing. Therefore the Christians of that early age (or subsequent age) would have believed that all conditions had entered into their course. What they did not know was the length of that course – it could have ended at anytime with Christ’s return. This would have enhanced their belief in the imminent return of Christ.

We note too that certain promises associated with this imminence were as are still future today. Take for instance the promise to the church at Philadelphia. “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation [trial], which shall [is about to] come upon all the world” (Rev 3:10). This does not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. The *global* hour of trial has not yet come, and that particular church no longer exists. Therefore the Philadelphian *condition* continues until the end of the Church Age. The last four spiritual conditions, though featured in their day continue until the Lord’s return. The early Christians genuinely expected the Lord’s return any day; but He did not come and we know why – for the day of grace is yet open. Our calling has ever been to “wait for his Son from heaven,” however long it takes for the Lord to return (1 Thess 1:10). Nothing has to be fulfilled before the Rapture – nothing that is, revealed to *man*. God has His appointed day known only to Him. The following points support the prophetic perspective of these letters.

- a. Why were *these* seven churches chosen out of the many that existed at that time? It was because they represent the course of the Christian profession until the time of the fullness of the Gentiles – the Day of Christ - the Rapture of the Church.
- b. “Seven” is of special significance in biblical prophecy, speaking of the divine program and completeness, i.e., Daniel’s prophetic week is seven years.
- c. Why are these seven letters presented in their particular *order*? Why do the spiritual conditions given in this order correspond effortlessly to the broad downward course of Christianity over time? The seven-fold panorama portentously begins where Acts 20 concludes - with Paul’s warning to the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:28-31). This warning is as timely and compelling today as when it was first written.
- d. The prophetic lesson of these seven letters is endorsed at the beginning of the Book in which they are contained – “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy” (Rev 1:3).

The 3-4 grouping of the seven letters: The last four letters are distinguished from the first three. Unlike the latter, as others have noted, the exhortation “he that hath an ear” *follows* the promise to the overcomer. The appeal here is to the *individual* believer rather than to the “professing church,” as is the case in the first three letters. This suggests that the testimony of the “professing church” ceased with the coming of the Thyatiran apostasy. Then and thereafter, there is only a remnant testimony (the featured testimony in the prophetic period represented by Philadelphia). Thyatira tolerated the woman Jezebel. During the days of Jezebel Elijah lamented there were none true to God save himself. God rebuked His prophet, declaring He had a remnant of 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). The beginning of the remnant testimony in Thyatira coincides with the first mention of the Lord’s return for the Church in these letters. They are exhorted to “hold fast till I come”(Rev 2:25). This is consistent with the exhortation “he that hath an ear” being directed to the individual. This remnant, and those of Sardis and Philadelphia all partake of the promise to be saved from the hour of trial. All false profession is dealt with through divine rejection. “I will spew thee out of my mouth” (at the Rapture). This apostate element goes into the Tribulation where it evolves into the Great Harlot, mystery Babylon (Rev 17).

The Christological perspective (that which concerns the Person of Christ)
 The principal revelation within these letters is the *glory of the Lord*. His glory is the spiritual salve to be extracted from these passages and applied to eyes blinded to His judicial majesty and to local assembly responsibility. Scripture begins with an emphatic declaration of the glory of a Triune God as Sovereign *Creator*. His realm is the world and the creation of all things in it. It concludes with an emphatic declaration of His Son as the Sovereign *Adjudicator*. His

realm is the world and the judgment of all things in it. God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31). In the seven letters it is *God’s house* and the judgment of all things *testified* by it. We take up aspects of Christ’s glory presented in these letters later. For the moment, let us note four broad observations concerning the Lord’s glory in His *relationship* to the seven churches individually and collectively, found in chapter 1:10-17. His:

1. **Judicial position** – He is in the “midst” of the seven churches. The Lord always takes up His rightful place “in the midst” (Matt 18:20, Jn 20). His divine glory is the centre of all things pertaining to His people. It was so in the OT in regard to Jehovah and Israel.
2. **Judicial preoccupation** – He judges the testimony of each church. Note the change of expression in the passage. We have the seven “churches” in verse 11, but in verse 12 they become seven “lampstands” - light bearers in testimony to His glory in a world darkened by its rejection of Him.
3. **Judicial preeminence** - He alone is the Judge of the churches, for “He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18). A further seven aspects of His glory are brought out here (vv 14-16). His:
 - a. **Judicial purity** - His head and hair white as wool and as snow.
 - b. **Judicial scrutiny** - His eyes as fire. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29).
 - c. **Judicial integrity** - His feet as burnished brass refined in a fire.
 - d. **Judicial ministry** - His voice is “as the voice of many waters” (He censures, commends, consoles etc).
 - e. **Judicial authority** - He holds the seven stars (messengers) in His right hand.
 - f. **Judicial sovereignty** – in legislation, a two-edged sword proceeds from His mouth.
 - g. **Judicial deity** – His majestic glory, a countenance as strong as the sun.
4. **Judicial perception** – He is all seeing and all knowing. Nothing escapes His all-consuming, penetrating judicial eye. His title “Son of Man” is a divine (judicial) title, acknowledging that He possesses the divine attributes of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. He knows the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10).

The Spirit of God fully intends the heart and mind of the reader to be absorbed with the judicial and administrative grandeur of the Lord in this letters. A low appreciation of such glory will mean a poor appreciation of what the Lord and His Spirit has to say to these churches and to us through them.

A vital question answered

“What marks the proper *character* of an assembly?” Local assemblies at times become concerned over their spiritual direction, often prompted by falling numbers and few “conversions.” Such occasions can reveal diversity of opinion as to what should characterize the spiritual life of a local church. These seven letters clearly and comprehensively mark what the *Lord* desires and values in a local church. We may be surprised to learn that some things that we commonly regard as vital and a priority are not seen as such by the Lord. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of Ephesus, the first church that claims the Lord’s attention. Note too, that the Lord’s judicial review of these churches is made *after* the whole counsel of God has been declared, in that foundation was once for all laid by the apostles and prophets (Acts 20:27; Eph 2:20). Correspondingly we have no new doctrine in these epistles written by Christ in regard to church order. May we then mark the solemn standard – that we are to be governed by His word and we will be judged according to it. Let us then study these letters bearing in mind that the Lord is telling us what *He* expects from a local church and those within it. They reveal what *He* expects in a local assembly and this is the *only* thing that matters. The local church is His church. It is responsible solely to Him. All must be done for *His* eye and nothing for the eyes of men. We have no higher authority. Are we prepared to defer to Scripture and bow to Him?

EPHESUS – Abandoned Affection

Rev 2:1-7

Historical

The City: Ephesus (meaning desirable) was the vital Roman port in Asia, the terminus of the Asiatic caravan-route. It was an opulent city, a centre for thriving commerce, diverse culture and learning. The Roman goddess Dianna (Artemis) was worshipped. Temples were also built in homage to the emperor cult.

The Church: The church at Ephesus had a simple beginning in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Paul’s first missionary journey, Acts 18). The first generation was a thriving missionary centre with gospel outreach into Asia to Jews and Greeks. Here the Spirit of God wrought special miracles through Paul and Apollos and the Ephesian disciples were brought into a more perfect way (Acts 19). Paul spent over two years ministering at Ephesus in the school of Tyrannus. He warned the elders of the church of “grievous wolves.” He also

wrote to the church (Ephesian Epistle), its spiritual maturity enabling him to speak of the great truths of the Church as the Body of Christ. This early church earned scorn among the merchants for its damage to the prolific trade in figurines and cult objects (Acts 19). When Paul departed Timothy was left at Ephesus. He assisted in the fight against false teaching (Acts 20; 1 Tim 1:3). Decades on, the church at Ephesus lapsed and became the seat of a long line of eastern bishops.

Spiritual

The Divine Commendation: *Deeds* – they were notable for their works; *Diligence* – they were steadfast in labor (effort); *Disposition* – they possessed patience; *Decisiveness* – they rejected evil men; *Discernment* – they correctly judged false apostles and the Nicholaitans; *Dedication* – they worked in the name of Christ; *Dependability* – they had not fainted in their labor and patience.

The Divine Censure: There was only one mentioned. *Departure* - they *abandoned* (not lost) their *first* love (*agape*, v 4).

The Church's Condition: To all eyes except to the holy eye of the Lord, Ephesus appears as an “ideal” church. It had zeal, fervor, doctrinal diligence and a steadfast faith. It had a manner of love – dedication to Christ. It was its *first* love that was abandoned, which also meant it failed to do the *first* works. What is this first love and its first works? First love is espousal love - that love which is preoccupied with the *glory* of its object – Christ, His Person and work. Such preeminent love is the root of an assembly, hence the threat of its removal if it is abandoned and not recovered. The *works* of first love are works pertaining to the stewardship of Christ's glory.

The Divine Counsel: The church had to do *all* of three things. First, it had to *remember* from where it had fallen. Remembering here is “bringing to mind” - by looking up. Second, it was to *repent*, to alter its course from the abandonment of first love to absorption with it. Third, to *respond* – to do the first works (v 5).

Prophetical - Apostolic period

The church at Ephesus represents the second generation of Christianity, the end of the apostolic period (perhaps only John was left). It had the correct form, fidelity and an evangelical fervor to take the gospel into foreign parts; it resisted error - the germ of clerisy evident in the deeds of the Nicholaitans. However, the church had left the budding, espousal love that has the *glory* of the *person* as its absorbing object – the Person of Christ. We have in this

failing the root of the decline in assembly testimony and this second generation at Ephesus stands representative of it.

Practical portions

1. The greatest threat to the testimony of an assembly comes from within rather than from without, and springs from its poor condition of heart towards the glory of Christ.
2. Busyness and zeal are not necessarily marks of devotion to Christ and spirituality. Note the expression “thy lampstand” (v 5), revealing that the local *church* is to take ownership and responsibility for the testimony to Christ in its appointed location. Self-judgment is called for.
3. An assembly is called upon to exercise spiritual discernment in regard to error – to identify it and “hate” it. “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way” (Ps 119:128).

SMYRNA – Endured Affliction

Rev 2:8-11

Historical:

The City: Smyrna means *bitterness* and is associated with *myrrh* and *death*. Smyrna was a commercial port at the end of an eastern trade route, making it a prosperous Roman city. It was a beautiful city noted for its ornate public buildings, especially the hilltop cluster known as the “crown of Smyrna.” Smyrna was also known for its Emperor worship. It was in Smyrna’s stadium that the aged Christian martyr *Polycarp* was burnt to death by the Romans (AD 186). The many Jews living in the metropolis abetted his martyrdom.

The Church: Little is known of the origin of this local church. From Acts 19:10 we gather that the gospel came to Smyrna from Ephesus at an early date within the NT period. It experienced martyrdom under Roman persecution.

Spiritual

The Divine Commendation: *Effort* – they were zealous in works; *Endurance* – they persisted through great trials; *Effacing* – they forsook material wealth; *Enriched* – they sought riches in Christ.

The Divine Censure: No divine censure is evident only divine assurance. Perhaps the trials were deemed a sufficient rebuke for any failing, the Lord allowing the world’s persecution to prove hearts that had earlier left their first love and to correct any error.

The Church's Condition: The assembly was poor materially but rich spiritually. It was proved by persecution from the world. It had a resurgent evil within – Judaism.

The Divine Counsel: They were not to fear but trust in the risen Lord (v 10).

The Divine Concession: The faithful unto death will be given a (victor's) crown of life. The gift here is the wearing of the "crown" – all believers have eternal life (cf Jas 1:12).

Prophetical - Roman Persecution

Satan was at the heart of this persecution, one that God in His permissive will and mercy confined, for they were to have tribulation ten days (v 10). Such a period bears a remarkable correspondence to the heinous rule of ten successive Roman Emperors (AD 54-AD 284) – Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Severus, Maximim, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian and Diocletian. There was also opposition from within the church by the synagogue of Satan, those Jews who were professing Christians and were not (v 9). They sought to mingle Christianity with Judaism. This, too, was Satan's work - Judaizing Christianity; a work he had begun in the days of the apostles.

Practical portions

If an assembly is moving in the light of God's word it will experience rebuke and revulsion by the world. In Smyrna we see the true heart of the world – one that hated Christ without a cause. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (Jn 15:18). Many churches today seek to be "acceptable" to society, even calling themselves "community churches." Many are applauded by the world for their "social conscience," and exist in "peace" because of it. Smyrna was not such a church. Its conscience and conviction was unto the Lord and His glory. An assembly ought to be concerned when the world begins to identify and agree with its testimony.

PERGAMOS – *Worldly Alliance*

Rev 2:12-17

Historical

The City: Pergamos (meaning marriage) was the executive hub of Imperial Rome and its religious centre. Emperor worship had its origins here in the reign of Attalus III., the priest-king of the Chaldeans. The Chaldean priesthood was expelled from Babylon by the Medo-Persians after they conquered Babylon. The priests settled in Pergamos where Attalus III had dominion. When he died (BC 133) he passed his kingdom and his royal and divine priesthood to the

Romans (Julius Caesar was the first Roman Emperor-god - Satan's seat, the throne of the Roman-Babylonian Pontiff. Roman Emperors bore the title Pontifex Maximus and imputed deity to themselves. Pergamos was also a centre for worship of Zeus, Athena, Dionysus and Asclepius.

The Church: Nothing is known outside of Scripture concerning the history of this local church.

Spiritual

The Divine Commendation: *Fervor* – I know thy works; *Fidelity* – Thou hast kept my name; *Faithfulness* – Thou hast not denied my faith.

The Divine Censure: The Lord had a 'few' things against this church: *Whoredom*; *Worldliness*.

The Church's Condition: The church hosted two heinous doctrines. First, the *doctrine of Balaam* - *corrupting* the people. Balaam corrupted Israel. He led the Israelites into spiritual fornication by luring them into marrying Midianite women. Israel lost its place of separation. At Pergamos the church married into the world's community and religion. Second, the *doctrine of the Nicholaitans* – *conquering* the people (clerisy). This doctrine is hated by the Lord. It complemented the doctrine of Balaam. The deeds of the Nicholaitans in Ephesus were now formalized into doctrine. Though possessing good works, fidelity and holding the name of Christ, the church at Pergamos had become entwined with the world its idols and religious castes.

The Divine Counsel: They – the perverted within the church, had to repent, or the Lord will come and fight against "them" (not the church) with the sword of His mouth.

Prophetical - Marriage between the Church and State under Constantine

Persecution had all but ceased. It failed to extinguish the Church so now it was Satan's design to conquer and corrupt it. In this third successive period the Church and the world unite under Emperor Constantine (Satan's seat – his place of earthly power). Constantine saw political gain in furthering Christianity. To placate the influential pagans, he introduced their rituals and holy days into Christian worship (the doctrine of Balaam). Pagans were christened and bribed into the Church. From the ranks of these false professors he appointed bishops and presbyters - the doctrine of the Nicholaitans, adorning them with pagan garments and conferring "priestly" powers upon them. Whoredom and worldliness resulted. All this founded the deepening apostasy of the next period. Despite this unholy marriage, there was some

fidelity and faithfulness in the Church to the faith and to Christ. It defended the doctrines of Christ's deity and the Trinity (Athanasius, the Nicene Creed).

Practical portions

1. An assembly must guard against alliances with the world, its religions and government. These alliances which are no more than carnal expediency will inevitably bring elements of the world into the Church.
2. Satan is the god of this world – the prince of this world and all that is of it. He seeks to bring that which is of his world into the church – marry it with its music, methods and men. Our citizenship is in heaven.
3. If an assembly is to avoid the failure of Pergamos, it must exercise continual vigilance, *identifying* false doctrine and *exposing* those who seek to promote it. The Lord commended Ephesus – the *church*, because it identified, exposed and hated the deeds of the Nicholaitans. At Pergamos, such vigilance and conviction was lacking which earned the Lord's condemnation. May this condemnation censure and convict all who seek to militate efforts to identify false teaching and expose those who purvey it. We are in a spiritual warfare (Eph 6:12).
4. Deeds soon become a “doctrine,” as seen when we compare the early vigilance at Ephesus with its lack at Pergamos. Many in an assembly, particularly the young in the faith follow what they hear and see others do. If a false practice is not corrected it soon becomes entrenched and it can take the status of a “doctrine.”

THYATIRA – Tolerated *Apostasy*

Rev 2:18-20

Historical

The City: Thyatira (perfume) was a small but an important Roman town in the lowlands between the Hermus and Caicus valleys. The city supported a frontier Roman garrison and was known for its industry and trade – particularly purple dyeing. Lydia – the “seller of purple” was a Thyatiran (Acts 16:14). Apollo was the chief deity.

The Church: The church at Thyatira was small and located in a relatively obscure town. It would appear likely that it was through the testimony of Lydia after her conversion that the church arose in that city.

Spiritual

The Divine Commendation: (Here in reference to the faithful remnant within). *Labor (works)*; *Love* (agape, mentioned here for the first time – a clear remnant trait); *Loyalty (faith)*; *Longsuffering (patience)*.

The Divine Censure: *Spiritual fornication* - the “church” tolerated the woman “Jezebel” who brought fornication and idolatry into it.

The Church’s Condition: Although commendable qualities were found among some, a grievous situation existed within the assembly – the toleration of a woman who not only gave herself the title of a prophetess, but led many believers into fornication and idolatry through her teaching and seduction (v 20). The Lord called her “Jezebel,” indicative of the great infamy her presence was bringing to the local testimony. We know the depth of evil associated with king Ahab’s wife Jezebel, who set her murderous heart to destroy God’s servants and to eradicate worship of the true God in favor of Baal through imagery (1 Kings 16-21; 2 Kings 9).

The Divine Counsel: This comes in the form of divine judgment. The gross evil of Ahab’s wife Jezebel moved Elijah to pronounce divine judgment upon her. She would die suddenly and her body cast out of the city where the dogs would devour her remains by the wall of Jezreel. This came to pass. So, too, Jezebel of Thyatira. Though given a time to repent, she had not, and so she would be cast into “great tribulation” and death will come upon her children (Rev 2:21-23).

The Divine Concession: To the godly remnant who had not tolerated the doctrine of Jezebel, the Lord will “put upon them no other burden,” but to “hold fast” until He comes (v 24). This is the first mention of the Lord’s return in these letters.

Prophetical – The Apostate Church during the Middle (Dark) Ages

The spiritual condition of Thyatira foreshadowed the Middle (Dark) Ages, wherein Roman Catholicism subjugated the world. Judaism (the synagogue of Satan) and episcopacy (the doctrine of the Nicolaitans) ripened under the Papacy. We note the parallels – the prominence and apostasy by an “infallible” woman seen in the Roman “Mother Church.” She (the Church) claims to be the final teacher on all matters, rather than “thus says the Lord.” The Church promotes Mary as “the mother of God” and she is to be worshipped (a progression of the doctrine of Balaam). Appropriately, the Lord reveals His judicial character and identifies Himself as “the Son of God,” repudiating all notions of Mary worship. It is as noted, the emerging Great Harlot – mystery Babylon (Rev 17).

Practical portions

1. There are a number of things Christians must individually and collectively guard against seen in the failure at Thyatira:

- a. Seduction. When we compare the spiritual ruin of Thyatira with the purity of Smyrna, we observe that seduction can do what persecution cannot do. Seduction involves deception – a union of truth and error as in the case of Jezebel. She set Baal worship alongside the worship of Jehovah. There are professing Christians today, who, in the name of “love,” “ecumenism” and “multiculturalism,” declare Christ as “a” way to God, luring many into spiritual fornication and eternal judgment.
 - b. So called “new” revelations from God made by self-proclaimed “prophets” or “prophetesses.” “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1).
 - c. Idolatry - worshipping “images” or “saints,” have no place in individual or corporate Christian testimony. Images deny the reality of Christ in the believer, and of the reality of Christ in the midst of His local church. An idol or an image is not the biblical way of identifying ourselves or of proclaiming our faith, for we are to be *living* epistles, known and read of all men (2 Cor 3:2).
 - d. The notion that “the Church” is a “teacher.” It is unscriptural for a church to set itself up as having the authority to teach. The Church is *taught* - by those gifted to it by its ascended Head, as they are moved by Spirit and the Word (Eph 4).
2. There is encouragement amidst endemic apostasy and the spiritual burden it brings. The Lord has His eye on the faithful remnant. No war of opposition is enjoined upon it other than to “hold fast,” which is to be done in the light of the Master’s coming (1 Cor 15:58).

SARDIS – Lifeless Animation

Rev 3:1-6

Historical

The City: Sardis was an ancient and renowned wealthy manufacturing city, which came into importance during Roman rule. Like many cities in the region it lay along a prosperous trade route. It was noted for its pagan worship and numerous religious cults. The Temple of Artemis adorned its precincts.

The Church: It appears from secular records the church at Sardis continued into the 14th century.

Spiritual

The Divine Commendation: The message speaks only of its works being “known” and these “not perfect [incomplete] before God” (v 2).

The Divine Censure: Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (v 1).

The Church’s Condition: The church had a profession but it was without substance – a profession of life but in reality it was dead! There were works of some merit it appears, but these were incomplete (v 2). Here, too, there is a faithful remnant – those who have not defiled their garment (v 4).

The Divine Counsel: *Remember* – past divine dealings with them; *Retain* – hold fast that which remains; *Repent* – from incompleteness. They were to “watch,” lest the Lord comes upon them in judgment (v 3).

Prophetical – the rise of Protestantism

The spiritual condition of Sardis foreshadowed the rise of *Protestantism*, which is to be distinguished from the *Reformation* that preceded it. The latter was a work of the Spirit of God and was essentially *individual*. The Reformation restored certain foundation truths - individual salvation through divine grace (*sola gratia*); individual faith in Christ alone (*sola fidea*); acceptance of the sole authority of God’s word (*sola scriptura*); the believer’s individual priesthood. The former, Protestantism, like Babel is a work of man and is essentially *institutional*. It linked revived truths with the dead profession of ritual, denominationalism and clerisy. The Church took on other names. It built cathedrals to them, which enshrined their ministers and displayed their worldly power. The world, its wisdom and tools of commerce were brought into the Church to enable it to govern itself. No looking here for the Lord’s return for His Church!

Practical portions

1. Despite a rich beginning in newfound truth, a church can become dead by investing time, money and effort into establishing elaborate processes and organizations. It may claim moral virtue expounded by captivating “performers,” but inwardly it is “dead” – a “bouquet of plastic flowers” as another has said, lacking the life and perfume of Christ. It has a name that it lives and has devoted much energy to it, building a charter around it, but the church is lifeless – a mere “profession” having no “confession” of Christ. Such is the failure of denominationalism. “The Church” (“the Anglican Church,” “the Lutheran Church,” “the Presbyterian church” etc.,) has “a” name, identifying it with a denominational creed, majestic cathedrals, colleges, clerics and charters. Notably, when addressing Sardis the Lord did not use the term “my name” as He did when He spoke to Ephesus, Pergamos and Philadelphia. Here it is “a” name, a name other than the singular name of “Christ” – a “denominational” name, so characteristic of Sardis, historically, prophetically and contemporarily.
2. An error of Thyatira (Catholicism) is that the Church is to “teach” the world. The error of Sardis (Protestantism) is that the Church is to “preach” to the world i.e., make it a “better place,” “win it to Christ,” by being an agent for social change.

PHILADELPHIA – Righteous Awakening

Rev 3:7-13

Historical

The City: Philadelphia lay in a valley adjacent to fertile plains from which it harvested a great commercial bounty. One of its main crops was grapes, celebrated in the pagan worship of Dionysus the Roman god of wine. It was Dionysus who reputedly gave Midas his “golden touch.” The city was noted for its many temples and religious festivals. “Philadelphia” means “brotherly love” and so named by the king of Pergamum to honor his brother Attalus, whose loyalty had earned him the name “Philadelphus.”

The church: Little is known about the church outside the biblical record. Ignatius visited the city traveling from Antioch to his martyrdom. He sent a letter to the church at Philadelphia while on his way to Rome. Secular records tell of some a form of nominal Christian witness continuing up to WWI.

Spiritual

The Divine Commendation: *Fidelity* - they kept word of Christ; *Loyalty* - they did not deny the name of Christ.

The Divine Censure: There was none as there was none for the church at Smyrna. These were the only two churches that had no divine censure.

The Church's Condition: The testimony of the church at Philadelphia is a “remnant testimony.” The church lacked political and institutional power and had little in the way of worldly riches (v 8). However, it held to Christ's word and manifested His name. Christ was central to them and He drew near as noted in the expressions – “my word” and “my name”, and in His promise of His personal return. Such loyalty to the name of Christ was held amidst opposition and is rewarded, in that their opposition, the “synagogue of Satan” (the Jews as in Smyrna) will bow before them.

The Divine Counsel: Hold fast which thou hast – thereby let no man take thy victors crown (v 11).

The Divine Concession: The Lord had set an open door before them which no man can shut. They will also be kept from the hour of trial that is to come upon the world (vv 8, 10).³ This doubtless refers to the Tribulation, Daniel's 70th week. They are to live in anticipation of the Rapture – the Lord's coming to the

³ In 70 AD the “world” was not under tribulation – only Jerusalem. Those represented by Philadelphia are to be kept out of the *time* [hour] of trial i.e., its very experience (cf being saved *through* it). The Church will not pass through the Tribulation.

air for His church – “behold I come quickly” (v 11), the notable closing promise of Christ in Revelation.

Prophetical – separation from Protestantism, denominationalism & clerisy

This period marks a return to the *whole* word of God by a *subjected* and *separated* few, whose principal purpose in gathering was to testify to the *glory of Christ*. Gathering solely unto His name marks it. This church was a steward of Christ’s glory.⁴ This is the work of first love! Such love was abandoned in the early post-apostolic days and not recovered until the 19th century revival, where it was manifested in the stewardship of the glory of Christ, in whom is hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). The truths of the unity of Christ’s Body, Christ as the Head of the Body, His personal glory and His soon coming for the Church, were restored. Subjection to God’s word led to separation from Protestantism, denominationalism, clerisy and the world. This was a *revival* not a *reformation* – a return to the sublime simplicity of local church testimony unto His name accompanied by local autonomy and responsibility before that name.

Practical portions

1. An assembly comes together around the Person of Christ – *exclusively*, owning no other name and glory. His glory is in His name! This brings great delight to the heart of the Head.
2. The word of God in its entirety must be the church’s sole charter.
3. A church may be “little” in the eyes of the world – poor in possessions and property and be politically insignificant, but its riches and strength lie in its proper relationship to Christ and His word. The assembly is to be a faithful steward of the glory of Christ.

LAODICEA – Endemic Apathy

Rev 3:14-22

Historical

The City: Laodicea (“judgments of the people”) lay on a crossroad between Miletus and Ephesus. Established in the 3rd century, the city became financially

⁴ In Isaiah 22:22 Eliakim (in the days of Hezekiah) received the key to the house of David and became the steward of its glory. He replaced the unworthy chief minister Shebna who sought only his own glory (seen in the procurements for his lavish tomb). How typical of Romanism and Protestantism in that they rob the treasury of Christ to serve their own glory. Fittingly, Christ, the Antitype of Eliakim (cf Shebna, type of the Antichrist who seeks his own glory), presents Himself to Philadelphia as the One having the key of David. With this key He sets forth an open door before the church at Philadelphia – the door to the stewardship of His house and to the treasures of His glory.

independent and prosperous under Roman rule. It was noted for its commerce in woolen materials, banking and exchange, servicing the constant stream of merchants and travelers. Yet for all its wealth the city did not have its own water supply and had to rely on piped water from hot springs some distance away – arriving quite possibly as “lukewarm” water.

The Church: Paul mentions the church at Laodicea when he tells of his great conflict for them and for other churches (Col 2:1). In Colossian 4 he greets the believers at Laodicea. When these seven letters were written the church at Laodicea was established and well known.

Spiritual

The Divine Commendation: None.

The Divine Censure: *Apathy; Complacency; Self-sufficiency.*

The Church’s Condition: The church was spiritually apathetic – lukewarm, neither hot nor cold (v 15). It was rich in goods but spiritually poor, pitiable, blind and naked. It was independent of the Lord, their self-sufficiency eloquently portrayed in that the Lord is shut out. “Behold I stand at the door and knock” (v 20). Laodicea means “rule by the people” – reflecting a *laissez-faire* democratic condition within the church. The church was a gathering by the people and for the people, with Christ left out. It lost sight of the truth that the local church is the house of God - pillar and ground of truth (1 Tim 3:15).

The Divine Counsel: The Lord’s threefold counsel to the church answers its impoverished spiritual condition. 1. Buy “gold tried in the fire” that it may become rich in regard to the *glory* of Christ, something the church had lost sight of. This is necessarily their *first* purchase. 2. Buy white raiment to cover the shame of its nakedness and be clothed with the garments of righteousness and salvation. These things they had to “buy” by giving up worldly wealth. 3. Anoint their eyes with the truth that it may gain spiritual discernment and insight. 4. Be *zealous* not apathetic. *Repent* of its self-sufficiency and apathy.

The Divine Concession: Despite its failings, the Lord was gracious, evinced in that tender posture and plea to the individual – “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” (v 20).

Prophetical - Apathy and indifference (Present Days)

The carnal theme of this last phase of the Church is “our rights.” The glory of Christ is set aside in favor of the judgments of the people - the “rights of women,” the “rights of Sodomites,” “ethnic rights” etc. Responsibility to God is denied. Natural man is not required to be “reborn” unto salvation from sin

but to be “reformed” according to society and self. The Church is seen as a democracy serving the voice and rights of the people and not a theocracy serving the righteousness of God. Church leaders are elected according to “equal opportunity.” The professing Church boasts independence in wealth, but languishes in spiritual poverty. Doctrine is depreciated and it is seen as an inconvenience.

Practical portions

1. The local church exists for the glory of Christ not for the voice and glory of man. It is not to be a democracy – “If any man hears **my** voice.”
2. We must live in the light of the truth that man, saved or unsaved has no “rights” under divine grace and before a righteous God.
3. We are to guard against the Laodicean trend to “Christianize” the man of the world. Table A outlines the broad relationship between the Church and the world over the Church Age. There has been an insidious intrusion of the world into the Church to the point where today the Church and the churches are seen to exist largely for the natural man, and a steward of *man’s* democracy and glory. Such a sorry state had its roots in Ephesus where there was failure in regard to the pre-eminence of Christ and the stewardship of *His* glory. Man in his benighted heart has not only *repositioned* the Lord outside the Church, he has also shut the door in *rejection* of Him. Because of this the Lord will spew the self-professing Church out of His mouth. We note therefore that the vast professing Church is spurned and the Lord’s appeal is to the *individual* within: “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” (Rev 3:20).
4. Let us revisit the word of God, especially the teaching of the Colossian epistle with its pre-eminent and unchangeable glory of Christ – the AMEN, which is the antidote to spiritual apathy and the foil to man’s perceived self-sufficiency (Col 4:16).
5. Laodicea is “lukewarm,” the death-cold condition of Sardis has combined with the fervent heat of Philadelphia and the Spirit of God quenched.⁵ Assemblies that once possessed fervor for Christ’s glory have slipped into Protestantism – making alliances with denominations; building federations among themselves; appointing hierarchical governments, seeking social influence and acceptance. May we guard against such trends by holding fast that which remains.
6. May we never depreciate the importance of doctrine, for doctrine defines who we are, what we do and why.

⁵ The Lord’s statement to *Laodicea* “I would that thou wert cold ...” (3:15), refers to that which is profitable – “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (Pr 25:25). It is not a reference to the death-cold spiritual state as in *Sardis* which He condemns.

Church	Table A: The relationship of the Church to the world over the Church Age
Ephesus	The Church largely apart from the world
Smyrna	The Church persecuted by the world
Pergamos	The Church ruled and corrupted by the world
Thyatira	The world ruled and conscripted by the Church
Sardis	The Church ruling itself according to the world
Philadelphia	The Church ruled by the Spirit and wholly apart from the world
Laodicea	The Church ruled wholly by and for the man of the world

Seven aspects of Christ's glory (Table C)

Each letter begins with a divine glory associated with Christ.

1. The Lord *Himself* declares an aspect of His glory to the angel of each church. His glory takes on supreme significance and leaves no doubt as to its relevance to all churches.
2. Each aspect of His glory is declared *before* commendation or censure. What the Lord has to say to each church must be viewed in the light of His particular glory in each case. For instance, to the church that left its first love, He declares His pre-eminent glory; to the church under persecution and death, He declares His resurrection glory.
3. Each aspect of Christ's glory answers the particular spiritual failing or promise to the associated church and is an antidote to the mere professor to overcome. If an assembly or a believer is to recover from a poor testimony, or remain in a correct testimony, it can only be done by having the glory of Christ in view.

The Overcomers (Table D)

Who are they? What do they overcome? In answering these questions (and others from Scripture), we must not violate biblical truth and allow Scripture to interpret itself. Consider the following.

1. As believers in Christ, our hope and promises are not realized because of our victorious *striving for* Christ, but because of our *standing in* a victorious Christ.
2. Receiving the promises on the condition of victorious living is a subjective matter. What degree of victory or overcoming assures the promises?
3. Do all believers encounter all the challenges so as to have an opportunity to overcome them all and gain all the promises? For instance, what of those who do not encounter the trials of suffering as in Smyrna? Do they miss out on the promise relating to the second death and, are they then not part of the First Resurrection (Rev 20)?

4. The idea of a distinction in Christ's Body between overcomers and non-overcomers is unbiblical. It has given rise to false teaching such as the "falling-away" and "partial rapture" doctrines.
5. *All* believers *must* appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). It is there that the quality of life of *all* believers in Christ will be assessed and rewards given.
6. The promises to the overcomers in the seven letters comprise those things that all believers possess inalienably because of their life *in* Christ (i.e., not experiencing the second death)⁶, rather than that which they earn because of their life *for* Christ.
7. We must account for the grammatical context given by the expression "he that overcometh." "As in 2:22 [1 Jn], the article does not define a particular person but represents what is true of every such person."⁷
8. *All* believers are seen as overcomers in Scripture – overcomers of the world *in* Christ. "For whatsoever is born of God [i.e., in Christ] overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith [in Christ]. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God [and all that this entails]" (1 Jn 5:4-5)? Every believer in Christ is an overcomer in Christ, for Christ Himself is the Overcomer, "I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

Can we not conclude then that the seven expressions, "he [to him] that overcometh I will give..." *represent* what every true believer in Christ *is* and *has* – not what he/she is striving to gain? A believer is one who has continual and final victory over the claims of the world because of his/her *standing* in Christ and the *permanent* indwelling of His Spirit (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 15:57). He/she is one who receives the promises because of that standing (not striving). This conclusion is consistent with the truth of the believer's eternal security and, it unites with portions that represent the normal character that marks the believer's standing in Christ.⁸ Neither the world nor the gates of hell can prevail against the living stones which Christ is building into His Church. The above conclusion is confirmed by the answer to another question, "Who is *not* an overcomer?" (i.e., "one who is overcome by the world?"). He is an unbeliever, standing in Adam. In Revelation 21:7-8 the overcomer (the believer) is contrasted with the unbeliever who is destined for the second death. A further question arises. Why are the overcomers and the promises to them mentioned in these letters? Two reasons may be suggested. First, the

⁶ The Second Death (Rev 21:8) refers to the consignment of all the unrighteous to the place of eternal judgment – the Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20). It is a place of everlasting punishment (Matt 25:41); unquenchable fire (Mk 9:43-44) etc. Those who are of the First Resurrection (all the righteous) have no part in it (Rev 20:6).

⁷ W E Vine; *Collected Writings* Vol 3 p565.

⁸ The *representative* character of the true believer is in view in Romans 8:1-9 and Hebrews 9:28. In the former he is one marked by walking after the Spirit; in the latter as one marked by looking for the Lord's return (these portions have also been used to support the errant "falling away" and "partial rapture" doctrines).

representation of what marks us as believers and what we possess inalienably as overcomers in Christ, gives us assurance when experiencing trials in the world. This encourages us in our individual and corporate testimony to Christ. Second, it would provoke the conscience of the false professor – the one who is *not* an overcomer, and convict such a person to a true confession of Christ. He /she then becomes an overcomer. We note from the seven letters that the professing Church throughout history comprises “false professors” (i.e., the wheat and the tares, Matt 13).

The Remnant – Character, Commission, Conduct

Its character: There are a number of features that mark the character of the faithful remnant to be observed in these seven letters. In the case of Thyatira where the remnant testimony is first seen we have a notable instance of it. “As many as have not this doctrine [the spiritual fornication of Jezebel], and which have not known the depths of Satan [the mind that accompanies it].” In Sardis the remnant character is seen in those who have “not defiled their garments” by taking on a name other than Christ’s name. In the Philadelphian church we have the character of the godly remnant marked by two features vital to divine testimony. (1). Keeping God’s word. (2). Confessing the Lord’s name. The seven letters teach that it is not zeal, numerical strength, nor social power that characterizes the godly remnant. Such traits did not earn the Lord’s approbation resulting in an “open door that no man can shut.” The remnant character is marked by obedience to God’s word – the wisdom that Thyatira supplanted. It is marked by faithfulness to the Lord’s name that which Sardis set aside. This is more than doing works in His name as in Ephesus or holding it formally as in Sardis. It means *guarding* His name; *gathering* solely to it, and testifying to its *glory*. The Ephesian condition though deficient knows what first love and first works are. It is called to remember them and return to them. The Laodicean condition however has never known anything of first love or its works. It cannot therefore be called upon to *remember* and *return* them, only to *buy* them. In Philadelphia, the glory of Christ is evinced in that His name is singularly *owned* in the world. It had the “first works” because it had the “first love.” Revival involves a return to the *stewardship* of the first object of divine testimony – love which has as its object the glory of the Lord. Such was the spiritual character of Philadelphia, of remnant Israel during captivity, and it will be the preserving character of remnant Israel in the Tribulation.

Its commission: The Church, the *Body* of Christ cannot be remnant in composition or character. The *local church* however in its *testimony* can and

should have a remnant character. “Holding fast” is the commission the coming Lord gives to the remnant in Thyatira. It is the commission the *soon-coming* Lord gives to Philadelphia (2:25; 3:3; 3:11).

Its conduct: This commission is to be undertaken according to three cooperative principles, individually and collectively: *self-judgment* in the light of God’s word; *subjection* to God’s word; *separation* from the world.

A Word of Encouragement

Many assemblies today are numerically small; they have little to no community acceptance or influence (not that this is a problem); they see few “converts”; their meeting places are comely; their pattern of gathering is considered outdated and derided by the world. All this can bring discouragement to those within – particularly to the young believer who, because of peer pressure is especially prone to making unfavorable comparisons between their assembly and other churches. How are we to respond? Sadly, numerical growth and social acceptance - unconsciously or consciously, have in many cases become the overriding measures of “spiritual success.” This has led to some assemblies slipping into Sardinian or Laodicean conditions. They federate to enhance strength and security. The *divine pattern* of gathering which brings *glory to God* is surrendered to the taste and tenor of the world, adopting its music, methods and democracy. Divine principles are set aside to accommodate people’s rights and community interests. In this country some once steadfast assemblies now call themselves “Community Churches” in their appeal for acceptance by the community. How tragic! But observe beloved, that our Lord in His searching letters to the seven churches never commends community acceptance. He condemns it because such acceptance means the community has been brought into the church. Further, He never commends numerical strength; neither does He condemn numerical weakness; nor does He ever promise numerical increase - even for faithfulness in first love and works. How could He in the light of Matthew 18:20? The Lord’s promise to awakened first love - an open door that no man can shut, contrasts with His threat in the light of its abandonment – the removal of the lampstand. Numerical strength and attractiveness to the world are Babylon’s measures of spiritual success. To the world Philadelphia is insignificant, meeting none of its criteria for success and appeal. These are met in Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea, the world’s “pillars of Christianity.” But what puts the gleam in the Lord’s eye when He looks upon Philadelphia? Though opposed and of little strength, it stands for Him outside the camp - Thyatira (Roman Catholicism), Sardis (Protestantism) and Laodicea

(Ecumenism). All is for the appraisal of the Lord, nothing for the applause of the world. The worth of a church's testimony does not depend on numerical strength or worldly wisdom (1 Cor 1:20; 26), but upon the indwelling Spirit and Christ in the midst - however few are gathered unto Him. How precious and encouraging the truth, that local churches though small in number can not only be a vital testimony to the Lord but gain His glowing commendation. Such is the distinguished testimony of the diminutive churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev 2:10; 3:11). How reassuring, that He who knows the end from the beginning has placed the testimony of these two churches in the divine prophetic record. How encouraging, that this prophetic record reveals that the character, commission and conduct of remnant Philadelphia will continue until the Lord comes. Should we then despair because an assembly is marked by them? Should not we, as believers regard it as a blessed privilege to play a committed part in them - within a *golden* lampstand as a faithful steward of the glory of Christ – loves first desire?

Table B - Seven Churches - Prophetical Overview

Pentecost - the birth of the Church and the beginning of local church testimony to the glory of Christ			
Local Church	Its Spiritual Condition	Successive periods of Christendom, given by the Spiritual Condition of each Church	The relationship of the Church to the world over the Church Age
Ephesus	Abandoned Affection	Apostolic period (1 st century)	The Church largely apart from the world
Smyrna	Endured Affliction	Roman Persecution	The Church persecuted by the world
Pergamos	Worldly Alliance	Marriage of the Church to the State under Constantine	The Church ruled and corrupted by the world
Thyatira	Tolerated Apostasy	Middle Ages – The “mother” Church under Papal domination – Roman Catholicism (16 th century)	The world ruled and conscripted by the Church
Sardis	Lifeless Animation	The Reformation – Protestantism (16 th – 18 th centuries)	The Church ruling itself according to the world
Philadelphia	Righteous Awakening	Missionary zeal and revival of basic truth (18 th – 19 th centuries).	The Church ruled by the Spirit and wholly apart from the world
Laodicea	Endemic Apathy	Apathy and indifference (20 th century - ?).	The Church ruled wholly by and for the man of the world
The Lord’s Return for His Church – the end of local church testimony to Christ’s glory			

Table C - Sevenfold glory associated with Christ as given in the seven letters

Church	Spiritual Condition	The Lord's declaration	His particular glory	Explanation
Ephesus	Abandoned Affection	He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.	His pre-eminent glory.	The seven stars are held in His right hand, evincing divine authority and power belongs to Him as Head of the Church. His central position reflects His preeminence. The church had left its first love, a love which exalts Christ as pre-eminent in affection.
Smyrna	Endured Affliction	The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.	His resurrection Glory	He is the resurrection and the life to those facing death – their eternal hope. This glory is in opposition to the pagan goddess worshipped at Smyrna – the goddess of death and resurrection.
Pergamos	Worldly Alliance	He which hath the sharp sword with two edges.	His glory as the Possessor and Executor of the word of God	“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12).
Thyatira	Tolerated Apostasy	The Son of God, who hath	His judicial Glory	Here evil – leaven, festers within the church, and it calls for the Lord Himself

		his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.		to judge it. God has committed all judgment to the Son.
Sardis	Lifeless Animation	He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.	The glory of His Spirit	The church lost its true energy – the Spirit of God. The seven Spirits refer to the energies of the Holy Spirit in their perfection. “This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts’” (Zech 4:6).
Philadelphia	Righteous Awakening	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.	His righteous glory	The revived heart sees Christ’s holiness. In this it sees its own lack of it, and returns to the first principles of the faith. It can then become a faithful steward of Christ’s glory. Christ is the holy Steward who “has the key of the house of David upon his shoulder” (Isa 22).
Laodicea	Endemic Apathy	The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.	His unchangeable personal glory	He is the same yesterday today and forever – the AMEN, the Last Word, having sole rights in all things, for He was the beginning of all creation.

Table D - Promises to the Overcomers (*4th column source - gleaned from “The Book of Revelation,” John Ritchie)

Church	Promises to the overcomer	In regard to the believer’s inalienable blessings	*In regard to the believer’s progressive experience
Ephesus	He is given to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. <i>Eternal life</i> from the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. The tree of life is Christ.	<i>Redemption</i>	Death
Smyrna	Christ who is the “resurrection and the life” promises that though the believer falls to the first death (physical), he will not fall to the second death (eternal death).	<i>Resurrection Rapture</i>	Resurrection & Rapture
Pergamos	He is given to eat of the hidden manna, and a white stone with a new name on it, which only he and the Lord know.	<i>Renewing Renaming</i>	Judgment Seat
Thyatira	He will have power over the nations: He will be given the Morning Star (Christ at the Rapture). The believer will govern with Christ on earth.	<i>Rule</i>	Millennium – rule with Christ
Sardis	He will be clothed in white raiment; his name will not be blotted out the book of life; Christ will confess his name before His Father and His angels.	<i>Robing Recognition</i>	Millennium – confession before the Father
Philadelphia	He will be made a pillar in the temple of my God; he shall go no more out: he will have upon him the name of God, the name of the city of God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from God: he will have a new name.	<i>Responsibility Rest Residence</i>	Beginning of the eternal state
Laodicea	He will be granted to sit with Christ on His throne, even as He also overcame, and is now set down on His Father’s throne.	<i>Regality</i>	Eternity

J W de Silva 2004 (Melbourne, Australia)

