

LESSONS FROM THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

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PREFACE

- John addressed the book of Revelation “**to the seven churches**” (Rev. 1:4), indicating the letters would be read in all the churches.
- The church conditions described in the letters describe conditions that prevail throughout every era.



LOVELESS CHURCH (2:1-7) — EPHESUS

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



LOVELESS CHURCH (2:1-7) — EPHESUS

- Christ commended Ephesus for its works, labor, patience, abhorrence of evil, detection of false teachers, steadfastness in bearing burdens, and for not growing weary (v.2-3; see also 1 John 4:1; Gal. 6:9-10).
- In spite of these traits, Ephesus was soundly rebuked: “**I have this against you, that you have left your first love**” (v.4; see also Matt. 22:37-40; Gal. 5:6; 1 Cor. 16:22; James 1:12).
 - There are Christians in church every Sunday who have left their first love or have begun that process.
- Christ identified the problem and outlined the remedy: “**Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works**” (v.5). The message to Ephesus is clear: get back on track, do the work, preach the Gospel with zeal, love the Truth, and love each other.



SUFFERING CHURCH (2:8-11) — SMYRNA

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



SUFFERING CHURCH (2:8-11) — SMYRNA

- Christ commended Smyrna for their faithfulness: “**I know your works, tribulations, and poverty (but you are rich)**” (v.9; see also Matt 6:33; Psalm 23:4).
- Smyrna’s suffering was about to grow worse (v.10a), leading Christ to provide two exhortations needed by all Christians of all eras:
 - 1) “**Do not fear any of those things**” (v.10a; see also Matt. 10:28; 1 John 4:18; Rom. 8:28, 38-39).
 - 2) “**Be faithful unto death**” (v.10b; see also 2 Tim. 3:12; James 1:12; 1 Cor. 15:58).
- Our response to suffering should not be fear but courage, patience, thanksgiving, and faithfulness.



COMPROMISING CHURCH (2:12-17) – PERGAMOS

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



COMPROMISING CHURCH (2:12-17) – PERGAMOS

- Christ commended Pergamos for holding fast despite living “**where Satan dwells**” (v.13; see also Eph. 4:1, 6:11-13; 2 Cor. 11:12-14).
- In spite of their faithfulness during persecution, the Lord rebuked Pergamos for holding the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (v.14-15; see also Num. 22-25; 31:15-16).
- Pergamos condoned and accepted false doctrine rather than reject and rebuke it (v.15; see also Tit. 1:9; Gal. 1:6-8; Psalm 119:104; 2 John 9-11).
- They were exhorted to repent, otherwise Christ would fight against them with the sword of His mouth (v.16).
- This message to Pergamos illustrates the constant danger of doctrinal compromise. We must never compromise the Truth, or the teaching of it, no matter the circumstances.



CHURCH TOLERATING APOSTASY (2:18-29) — THYATIRA

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

CHURCH TOLERATING APOSTASY (2:18-29) – THYATIRA

- Though much was wrong in Thyatira, Christ still commended them: **“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first”** (v.19).
 - Contrast this with Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7).
- Jesus condemned the church’s tolerance of Jezebel, who led the church to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols (v.20-23; see also 1 Kings 21:25; 2 Kings 9:7-10, 30-37; 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).
 - Jezebel was given an opportunity to repent, but she refused (Rev. 2:21).
 - The church should have withdrawn from Jezebel (1 Cor. 5:1-5; Rom. 16:17), but it appears they did not. Therefore, punishment would come to all who participated in her wickedness (v.22-23; 1 Tim. 5:22).



CHURCH TOLERATING APOSTASY (2:18-29) – THYATIRA

- Christ exhorted the faithful remnant: **“Hold fast . . . And he who overcomes, and keeps My works to the end, to him I will give power over the nations . . . and I will give him the morning star”** (v.25-28).
- Thyatira serves as a reminder of the danger of allowing erring brothers and sisters to negatively influence the church (1 Cor. 5:6-8).



DEAD CHURCH (3:1-6) — SARDIS

1 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."



DEAD CHURCH (3:1-6) — SARDIS

- There is no commendation to be found with Sardis: **“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”** (v.1; see also Matt. 23:27-28).
- The church’s complacency would be their downfall (v.2; see also Prov. 1:32; Zeph. 1:12; Rom. 13:11-14).
- Christ warned: **“I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you”** (v.3; see also Rev. 16:15; Matt. 24:43; 1 Thess. 5:2-4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Luke 12:19-20, 21:34-36).
- The unprepared / unfaithful were commanded to repent (v.3), while the faithful were praised for their worthiness and encouraged to continue in their faith knowing the promised reward (v.4-5; Matt. 22:11-12; Rev. 21:27).



FAITHFUL CHURCH (3:7-13) — PHILADELPHIA

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

FAITHFUL CHURCH (3:7-13) — PHILADELPHIA

- Christ commended Philadelphia: “**You have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name**” (v.8; see also John 14:15; Matt. 10:32).
- Philadelphia was promised: “**Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth**” (v.10).
 - The Lord promised to aid Philadelphia during the persecution coming upon first century churches (v.11; see also Rev. 6-18).
- The message to Philadelphia reminds us that we must “hold fast,” “persevere,” and maintain the “little strength” we possess while waiting for the Lord’s return (1 Cor. 15:58).



LUKEWARM CHURCH (3:14-22) — LAODICEA

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

LUKEWARM CHURCH (3:14-22) — LAODICEA

- Laodicea was abhorrent to Christ because they were “**lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot**” (v.15-16).
 - The only cure to lukewarmness is to become reinvigorated in our service to God and “**be zealous**” for Christ (v.19; see also Tit. 2:11-14).
 - The Lord see lukewarmness as “nakedness” that needs be clothed (v.18).
- Their lukewarmness is evidenced by their contentment with material wealth and lack of awareness regarding their spiritual poverty. Laodicea was “**wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked**” (v.17).
 - The Lord rebuked Laodicea because He loved them (v.19).
 - Jesus encourages, disciplines, instructs, and counsels, but He does not force Himself upon us (v.18, 20; see also John 14:23).



LUKEWARM CHURCH (3:14-22) — LAODICEA

- If we are lukewarm, salvation is far from us because Heaven is not for those who are only partially dedicated to the cause of Christ or half-hearted (Matt. 7:13-14).
- Heaven is only for those who are fully obedient to the Father: "**To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne**" (v.21; see also Matt. 7:21; John 6:38-40).



CONCLUSION

- Each message to the seven churches of Asia concludes with a similar statement: “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches**” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
- Note that it is not what the Spirit “said” about past churches, but what the Spirit “**says**” to all churches.
 - This is a warning for churches today to “**hear what the Spirit says**” lest we become like six of the seven churches of Asia who were rebuked for their sins.

