

The Last Letters to the Seven Churches

Part 1

The letters to the Seven Churches can be considered in a number of ways.

First, as letters to local Churches with a specific message for the church addressed. As such, we see them *historically*. However, we also believe, because Revelation is a book of *prophecy*, we are to see these seven churches *prophetically*. These letters may be looked upon *typically* as well as *practically*. Practically because all Scripture has been written for our learning.

Our first observation is that although these seven letters were addressed to seven churches each in a different city, *all seven* were sent to each of the Churches named. Revelation 1:4,11. Thus we learn that although there was a specific message for Ephesus, it was not for Ephesus alone. That same message had an application for each of the other six churches. Perhaps we could re-word that. There was a *specific* message for the Church to which the letter was addressed but there was a *general* message for all the Churches. The very fact that there are *seven* messages, we believe, indicates these represent *all* local Churches of every generation throughout Church history. Seven is the number of completion.

Another observation In each letter the message is to be considered as a letter to the *corporate body*, and then, secondly, as a message to individuals connected with that body because each letter concludes with a challenge to the individual Revelation 2:7,11,17,29 etc.

Thus we should see that the messages to the Churches have not to do with how we are saved, but rather how the Church is to serve after it has become the Church. The messages are addressed to Churches and not to the Heathen world!

The meaning of the names of the Churches, and also the *order* of their selection must also be considered as being significant. Ephesus means “desired” or “desirable one.” Smyrna means “myrrh” one of the ingredients used for embalming the dead. Pergamos means “marriage” or “married.” Thyatira means “continual sacrifice.” Sardis means “remnant” Philadelphia.. means “brotherly love”. Laodicea.. means “the people rule”

After having seen the area where these Churches were located, it is evident that the selection and the order of that selection was intended to present a prophetic message.

Selection is seen in the fact that other cities with Churches were in the area, but not named. Order of selection is seen in that any of the seven could have been named first.

Scholars have seen a picture of the **trend** of the Churches throughout history. Being desirable at first, the Churches depart so far from the foundation, that at the end of the age Christ is seen, no longer **in the midst** but outside knocking at the door. This is the condition at Laodicea. It is my opinion that we are seeing this condition coming upon us today. Churches that are earthly rich but spiritually poor. Feeling that they are in need of nothing, but are going on without Christ in their midst. On the basis of all Scripture, we must conclude that the end of the Church age will be as the end of all ages before it. At the end, a departure, an apostasy, with only a godly remnant remaining and a Laodicean condition prevailing. As Paul wrote, “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” 2 Timothy 3:4.

“turning away from the truth and being turned to fables” 2 Timothy 4:4

“In the last days of the Church age it will be “difficult to be a Christian” so The Living Letters translates 2 Timothy 3:1.

To **Ephesus** Jesus said, if the Church did not repent, He would remove the candlestick out of his place.” That is, move the light from the location. Revelation 2:5. This was true, not only of Ephesus, but all seven of the Churches, and beyond that, to any and all local churches. There can come a time when a local church is no longer the light bearer and thereby ceases to have reason to exist. Many Churches become clubs, and nothing more.

When local churches fail in their Divinely appointed mission, and cease to be a church, the city in which they exist is doomed to destruction. History has proven this to be so with the locations of these seven churches. Smyrna, the persecuted Church, where no failure was voiced against it, is the only city site remaining. It has been re-named Izmar.

On a modern map of Turkey, **none** of the seven cities named in Revelation are listed. In the mind of the present-day Turks, these areas have no great significance except for the dollars left by tourists who visit the sites of the ruins.

In each letter Jesus says, “**I know**” There is nothing in any church or individual life that He does not know. But in these Chapters, introduced in chapter one in the garments of a Judge, He is seen judging the Churches. And we have concluded that **how** He judges these churches is an indication as to **how** He will judge at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

At Ephesus He looks at their **doing**. Verse 2 their **works**. Here was an active church and an aggressive church. Verse 3 their **labour**. This is mentioned twice(in verses 2,3,)It was toil. Hard work. the fatiguing kind of work. It cost them something to do this. Verse 2-3 their **patience**. Also mentioned twice. This was real endurance. Persistent in the work. They did not give up. Verse 3 they had not **fainted**. Not grown weary in well doing. Their **doing** was commended. At Ephesus He looked at their **doctrine**. They did not tolerate evil. They were orthodox. Impurity was not allowed. When all the world about them was

worshipping Diana (Acts 19: 26-27) they stood against idolatry. And were commended for their **doctrine**. At Ephesus, He looked at their **discipline**. They had searched out and tried the false Apostles among them(verse 2). And are commended for doing so. But then, He looked at their **devotion**. And here He found them wanting. Only His eyes could see their hearts. It is here they had failed in leaving, not losing, their first love.

In verse 5, He calls them to repent of this or the light will be moved. There is no thought involved that He meant they would lose their salvation. It was their service that was in question.

Verse 6 informs us that there are things in Churches that the Lord hates. We do well to hate what He hates! What the Nicolaitanes stood for, no one seems to be sure. Scofield notes “they divided the equal priesthood of all believers into “laity” and “clergy”, which was the beginning of the evil of Popes and Cardinals and priests, above the common people.” As I write these lines the present Pope is in Jordon and about to visit Israel. In Jordon he told the Islamic people that they were one with him! Is it any wonder that there are things Christ hates?

Verse 7. If the Churches do not hear, that does not hinder the **individual**. He who hears and heeds will be **rewarded** with fruit from the tree of life, not now in Eden, but in the true paradise of God. The promise is of **reward**, not salvation.

To the suffering Church at **Smyrna**, Jesus presents Himself as the “one who has died and now lives.” verse 8. There is life beyond this life. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” 1 Corinthians 15:19 (most to be pitied) “Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.” Psalm 30:5.

At Smyrna, the church had tribulation, trials and poverty. They were poor in material things but rich in faith. James 2:5 As the church at Ephesus was troubled with Nicolatanism, so this church was troubled by false brethren, Jews of the synagogue of Satan. Perhaps we can understand this best by remembering that Jesus said of the Pharisees, “Ye are of your father the Devil” John 8:44. Religious people who have not been born again will always trouble a local church.

They were to suffer “tribulation ten days.” First see this as a literal time of intense suffering at Smyrna, but also as a prophecy of the great persecutions to come from the hands of the Romans, during the ten great periods of persecution and martyrdom. To those martyrs He promised “the crown of life” James 1:12

Crowns, elsewhere in the Bible are always ***rewards***. Salvation is not a reward, it is a gift and there is a difference. Again the appeal is to the individual. The promise is personal. Those who will suffer a severe ***physical*** death will never face the awfulness of the ***second death***. Revelation 20:14

The word ***Pergamos*** means “married.” There seems to be little doubt that the selection of this Church indicates the developments in Church History. The Early Church period represented by Ephesus was the desired one but in three generations it was already cooling off spiritually, having left its first love. The word myrrh, from which the word ***Smyrna*** is derived suggested suffering and trial. Represents the age of the Martyrs when the Church suffered great tribulations but remained faithful. No charge of failure is leveled against that Church.

Saints in our generation would not think that they are going through the ***Great Tribulation*** had they accepted the fact that the Church has only been promised tribulation in every generation! John 16:33 “.in the world ye shall have tribulation.” Are we as faithful as this church at Smyrna?

The period represented by ***Pergamos*** –the Church became married to the world when Constantine united Paganism with Christianity giving it Easter eggs, Bunnies & hot cross buns! The heathen practices of relics, religious pictures, and outward forms of worship all entered the Church , so that we can now safely say that much so-called Christianity is but glorified heathenism. Jesus introduced Himself to Pergamos as the One “with a sharp sword with two edges.” Revelation 2:12. Such a sword divides! And since the days of Pergamos there has remained divisions in local churches. For if a Church is going to stand for things that are ***right***, divisions will continue until Christ returns. And if it is Christ who holds the sword, then He is the one who creates the divisions. They are necessary. The ecumenical movements of today, trying to bring outward unity of all religions, is allowed of God , but is of men and not of God.

The Church at Pergamos dwelt where “Satan’s seat is” Revelation 2:13

The ancient Babylonian religious system was alive and well at Pergamos. History proves that that religion was transferred from Pergamos to the Vatican in Rome. And Romanism is but a continuation of heathenism mixed with Christian phrases and words. Satan was the originator of religion, Christ the originator of Christianity and they are not the same. All religions seek to do something to make men acceptable to God. Christianity declares that only Christ can make men acceptable to God. Satan dwells in religion. Never forget that!

Revelation 2:13 is an example of the fact that there are things in these letters that are strictly local. Antipas is named as a faithful martyr. He may be typical of others, but most certainly lived and died at Pergamos before the writing of the Book of Revelation

At Pergamos there were some who “held the doctrine of Balaam” verse 14, as well as the “doctrine of the Nicolaitans” which again, Jesus says “He hates”. We need to ponder those words in these days when doctrine is being despised and ignored. Dr. Carnell wrote: “It is better to be divided by truth than to be united by error” Like all the messages to the Churches there is a call to repent.

Repentance is not merely shedding tears! repentance results in a deep work in the conscience. Repentance includes recognition of wrong doing against the Lord. Repentance includes humiliation. Repentance includes contrition, broken down with sorrow for sin. Repentance includes godly sorrow. Repentance includes a change of mind. Repentance includes a change of attitude. Repentance is always connected with genuine faith. (Acts 17:30)

HE threatens if there is no repentance, He will come and fight against them. The Lord **against** the Churches? We do not even like the thought, but it can be so! Again the call is to the individual to hear, and such are promised a reward. A reward that will only be known when it is received.

Then there is the message to **Thyatira**. The word means “continual sacrifice”

To this Church Jesus is presented as The Son Of God, with flaming eyes and feet of brass. Both speaking of Judgment. Again He knows and commends them for their works, but they allow Jezebel, who claims to be a prophetess to teach and seduce to evil, even idolatry. She was a recognized leader. Were the meaning of the names **Thyatira** and the union with **Jezebel** representative of the decline in all the churches with Romanish corruption? Some even use Jezebel to be a type of the Pope. But there is evidence in history that the Papacy began to control a majority of those who named the name of Christ. Even then there were some who had not known the depths of Satan who were exhorted to “hold fast till He come.” Jezebel was given space to repent, but she repented not. A gracious Lord always gives space for repentance. But as in the days of Noah, “His Spirit will not always strive with man” Genesis 6:3

The sentence upon Jezebel and her children is severe. But once again we notice the judgment here is according to works (verse 23) therefore the subject matter is not salvation. The call again to the individual and the promises of rewards for those who have ears to hear. The promised reward includes “power over the nations;” The text reminds me of

Psalm 149:8,9 “To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron: To execute upon them the judgment written: *this honour have all the saints*. Praise ye the Lord.” The faithful at Thyatira will rule with Christ when He returns to reign on earth. 2Timothy.2:12. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

Can this verse mean that those who have suffered for the cause of Christ *most* during this present life, will receive the greatest honour in the days to come? As there are degrees in punishment (it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee Capernaum, Matt. 11:24) so there are degrees of reward for saints. This seems to be the teaching of the Scriptures. Hebrews 10: 30-31 “ For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge *his people*. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living (not angry) God.” As surely as Jesus stood as the Judge of the Churches, so surely will He ,one day, be judge of all who have named the Name of Christ.