

SERIES: THE ELEVENTH HOUR

Title: The Seven Churches of Revelation

Text: Rev 1:19; Rev. 2-3

Introduction

I don't need the church. I don't need "organized" religion. It is full of hypocrites.

- I think of my home.
- There is garbage, there is laundry. There are dishes that need to be washed. There are messes that need to be cleaned up. There are repairs that need to be done.
- We organize to do these things.
- We make mistakes in the home and in relationships, but it does not mean that HOME is bad.
- You have your home. Why not leave your home and decry its value because of the messes in it, or the differences that may arise.
- We have values in our house and have stated that the values need to be lived by in our home and in our lives. Is this organized religion?
 - Do you not have values in your home?
- We do not slander the need or validity of HOME because of the messes, the arguments, or even the moments of brokenness that may occur within it.
- The Church is made up of broken people who rely and depend on the Savior to forgive them and the Spirit to help them live lives that honor God.
- The church organizes to pay bills, teach the values, grow in the knowledge of the Lord, assist in missionary endeavors that people may be saved. We organize to prepare for the gathering of the people to worship in song and in the Word.
- The Church has Scripture-given values that we teach and live by.
- You have not been hurt by the church... you may have been hurt by a person or people in the church.
- Jesus created the church and has called it His Bride and we are members of it. How can we hate the Church and be the Bride of Christ? It is impossible.

In Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, Jesus tells John to write a letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor. These churches were churches in what is now modern Turkey.

Rev. 1:9-11

⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

- Partner in tribulation – after 70 AD
- Exiled to Patmos– by Domitian
- **Jesus says** to WRITE to the churches.

Rev 1:19-20

¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ *As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

- What to Write
 - Things that are
 - Things you have seen – the vision of the Scroll
 - Things that are to take place after this – millennium and heaven
- Seven Stars in His hand – Angels of the churches
- Seven Lampstands He stands in the middle – The churches

Who are the Angels of the churches?

- Seven Stars
- Used 176 times in the NT (usually of heavenly angels), but only the context determines whether a human or celestial messenger is intended. For example:
- (*ággelos*) in Rev 1:20 can refer to heavenly angels or key leaders (perhaps pastors) of the seven churches.
- They could be the pastors...they could be heavenly beings over these churches
- Some scholars interpret the angels of Revelation 1:20 as heavenly beings. Others view them as the human messengers who bore John’s letter. Others identify them as those who actually read the message to the congregations, that is, church leaders such as pastors, elders, or bishops. A pastor of a church functions as a “messenger” for God, delivering God’s Word to the congregation.
 - Personal guardian angels
 - Regional overseeing angels
 - Chapter 3 - ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.’
 - Likely, angelic beings
 - The point is that the Lord Jesus holds these in His hands as he stands in the center of the churches.
- Multiple places where seven angels are mentioned in the book
 - They are before the throne of God.
 - Seven angels of the churches.
 - Seven angels blow the trumpets.

- Seven angels pour out the bowls wrath.
- Seven angels having seven plagues.

Who are the churches of Revelation?

- ...*“Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”* (v. 1:11)
 - The book is to be written to the present churches
 - The book is to be sent to the present churches
- Jesus stands in the midst of His Churches
 - *“...and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man...”*
- **The things that you have seen...present**

Three Viewpoints on the churches

The historical churches

The church through history

The church universal

To Each Church Jesus repeats a formula:

- He names the church.
- Jesus states a description of Himself.
- He begins with, “I know your works...”
- He ends with, “He who has ears to hear let him hear...”
- He shares a commendation.
- He shares a condemnation.
- He gives them a solution.
- And he tells them the reward for obedience.

The Church in Ephesus – The Loveless Church

- Rev. 2:1-7
- The City of Ephesus
 - Located at a major port on the Aegean Sea and housed one of the seven wonders of the world (a temple to Artemis)
 - Founded by Paul and was a very prominent church in Asia Minor

Rev 2:2-5

² *“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you*

did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent...”

- Commendation - Doing everything right
 - Good works, perseverance in persecution, church discipline, and stand against false teaching.
- Condemnation - They had left their first love
 - Everything looked good on the outside, but their hearts were not in it.
 - Jesus says works without love is an issue for Him.
 - The church’s devotion to Christ was fading.
- Solution:

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. (v.5)

 - Remember
 - “Remember therefore from where you have fallen.”
 - Repent
 - Stop, turn around, go the correct direction
 - Repeat
 - “Do the works you did at first.”
- Reward:
 - ‘...grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’ v.7

The Church in Smyrna- The Oppressed Church

- Rev. 2:8-11
- The City of Smyrna
 - The home of Homer and the temple of Athena. It was known as one of the most beautiful bustling seaports. Polycarp, John’s disciple and bishop of Smyrna was martyred by Rome in the 2nd century.

Rev 2:9-10

⁹ “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life...”

- **Commendation** – Perseverance and Faith

- *“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”* (v.9)
- You may have people in non-Bible believing churches who claim to be Christian angry at you for being strong in the faith.
- **Condemnation** – (no condemnation)
- **Solution** (2:10):
 - Have no Fear.
 - Do not fear what you are about to suffer.
 - Have Faith.
 - Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- **Reward:**
 - *‘The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’* v.11

The Church in Pergamum - The Corrupt Church

Rev. 2:12-17

¹² *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.*

¹³ *“I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war 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 the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’*

- The City of Pergamum
- This was the location of Rome’s provincial capital. It was a major cultural hub and housed a library that rivaled the Library of Alexandria.
- The place where Satan dwells – the seat of Rome
 - The altar of Zeus built on the Acropolis. It was the most famous altar in the world
 - 100 sq feet, 40 ft. high. Sculptures all around its base
- Antipas
 - The traditional (possibly fictional) Antipas was reputed to be the Bishop of the Christian church at Pergamum, and that he was martyred for his faith because of his consistent faithful witnessing in the face of all the satanic evil present there.

- When Antipas was advised: "Antipas, the whole world is against you!" Antipas reputedly replied: "Then I am against the whole world!"
- Antipas was supposedly roasted alive in a hollow life-size bull, which had a bonfire under its belly, because Antipas refused to renounce his faith in Christ Jesus. Like at the temple of Zeus

The Church

Rev 2:13-15

¹³ *"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."*

Jesus describes Himself as:

'...him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'

The Bible...the scriptures

The authority

- **Commendation – your doors are open though persecution is there**
 - *"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith..."*
 - People are being killed for their stand for Christ. And at least they have their doors open.
- **Condemnation – Paganism, Idolatry, Immorality**
 - Teachings of Balaam
 - Eat food sacrificed to idols in the face of those suffering
 - You drink and celebrate alcohol with a friend who is an alcoholic
 - Sexual immorality
 - Condone, commit, celebrate and affirm
 - Teachings of the Nicolaitans
 - works, beliefs, and behaviors
 - The name "Nicolaitans" is derived from the Greek word *nikolaos*, a compound of the words *nikos* and *laos*. The word *nikos* is the Greek word that means to conquer or to subdue. The word *laos* is the Greek word for the people. It is also where we get the word laity. When these two words are compounded into one, they form the name Nicolas, which literally means one who conquers and subdues the people. It seems to suggest that the Nicolaitans were somehow conquering and subduing the people.

- Ireneus and Hippolytus, two leaders in the Early Church who recorded many of the events that occurred in the earliest recorded days of Church history, said the Nicolaitans were the spiritual descendants of Nicolas of Antioch, who had been ordained as a deacon in Acts 6:5.
 - Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.
 - Not a Jew. Background immersed in occult activity
 - Changed religions twice
 - They were men “...of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...”(v. 3)
 - They had been chosen, they were presented by the people to the apostles, who laid hands on them, installing and officially ordaining them into the diaconate.
 - Early Church leaders, Nicolas taught a doctrine of compromise, implying that total separation between Christianity and the practice of occult paganism was not essential. From Early Church records, it seems apparent that this Nicolas of Antioch was so immersed in occultism, Judaism, and Christianity that he had a stomach for all of it. He had no problem intermingling these belief systems in various concoctions and saw no reason why believers couldn’t continue to fellowship with those still immersed in the black magic of the Roman empire and its countless mystery cults.
- The Christian who engages in the occult, divination, pagan mysticism.
- This is everywhere in the church. people seeking answers from sources that are not of God and entertaining that the two can co-exist. They cannot
 - Occultism was a major force that warred against the Early Church.
- **Solution**
 - Repent - that means, stop!
 - Rooted - Your Christianity is rooted in the truth of God’s Word
- **Reward**
 - *To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’ (v. 17)*
 - Jesus speaks in a language that draws the mystics’ mindset.

The Church in Thyatira – The Carnal Church

Rev. 2:18-29

The City of Thyatira

- Founded under Alexander the Great and was noted as a major trade center. It was noted for being a rare trade location of a particular purple dye. Lydia, one of Paul's converts came from here (Acts 16:14)

The Church

- The all-inclusive welcoming church...Everyone is welcome and no conditions about your life in spiritual and moral issues

Jesus seen

- Eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.
- Eyes see all
- They bring judgment
- His judgment is holy and righteous

Rev. 2:19-20, 23-24

¹⁹ *"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.*

²³ *And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.*

- **Commendation – Appear loving, faithful, patient, and serving others**
 - *"...works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first."* (v.19)
- **Condemnation – False Teacher, toleration, and practitioners of Immorality**
 - The preacher, the prophet, the voice declare the allowance of Immorality.
- **Solution – Repent, Hold Fast**
 - To the teacher and practitioners and those affirming—Repent, or:
 - Sickness, tribulation, death to teacher and children
 - To the those not tolerant and practicing:
 - Hold fast until I come
- **Reward – authority over the nations**
 - The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,

The Church of Sardis – The Dead Church

- Rev. 3:1-6

The City--the modern town of Sart

- Herodotus recounts a legend that the city was founded by the sons of Heracles, This city was the Ancient capital of the Lydian empire. It became the capital of the Satrap of Persian Empire.
- It was situated on the top of a high plateau. It had been conquered by many empires over the centuries; been occupied over 3500 times.
- After Greece conquered it new buildings included a *prytaneion*, *gymnasion*, theater, hippodrome, as well as the massive Temple of Artemis still visible to modern visitors.

The Church

Rev. 3:1-4

¹ *"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. ⁴ Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.*

- **Commendation** – None
 - Reputation in a sinful world means nothing.
- **Condemnation** – Nominal Christianity is Dead .
 - When he comes he is against you.
 - The reference of the thief places these dead people with the lost.
- **Solution** – Wake Up, Get Strong, Turn Away.
 - Wake up; your sleep is dangerous!
 - Strengthen and keep (hold fast) to what the Scriptures say.
 - Turn away from the deadness.
- **Reward** – Walk with Jesus
 - *"...people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy."* (v.4)
 - They will walk in white – Look at the garments of the true Bride of Christ

The Church of Philadelphia – The Faithful Church

- Rev. 3:7-13
- Known as the "Gateway to the east" was known for its grapes, textiles and leather goods.

Jesus – Holy One who opens and shuts doors

The Church

Rev. 3:8-12

⁸ *"I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."* ⁹ *Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.* ¹⁰ *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.*

¹¹ *I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.* ¹² *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*

- **Commendation**- Little but Loved
 - They kept His word with patient endurance
 - They did not deny His name
- **Condemnation** - None
- **Solution** - Hold fast, receive your crown.
 - Know that a little lived out faithfully is great in the eyes of the Lord.
- **Reward** - Open doors, a pillar, named with God
 - *I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.* (v.12)
 - Named with God

The Church of Laodicea – The Lukewarm Church

Rev. 3:14-22

The City

- The ancient capital of Phrygia. It was renowned for its creation of banking. It was also known for its medical school and costly fabrics.

Jesus--the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

The Church

Rev. 3:15-19

¹⁵ *"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!"* ¹⁶ *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.* ¹⁷ *For*

you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

- **Commendation** - None
- **Condemnation** – “You make me sick!”
 - Neither hot nor cold – indifferent
 - He spits us out of his mouth
 - Think we are rich but we are poor.
 - Thinking we are clothed but we are naked in our shame.

- **Solution**
 - Be Pure – Be refined
 - Buy His treasure, His gold refined in fire – purity
 - See the truth - Anoint our eyes with the salve that will allow us to see the truth
 - Hear Him
 - Open up to Him

- **Reward** – Abide with Him, Dine with Him, Sit with Him
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 eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

What is the message to you and me?

- Remember from where you have fallen. Wake up!
- Repent, go the correct direction. Turn away from deadness and lukewarmness
- Return to your first Love. Seek holy things.
- Repeat the works you did at first.
- Be rooted in and hold fast to the truth of God’s Word.
- Reject false teachings and affirmation of immorality.
- Restore your faith - a little lived faithfully is a lot.
- Reject fear of what you are may suffer.

Prayer