

Letters

Review of Last Week. 7 Letters to 7 Churches. The church at Ephesus had left or abandoned their first love.

Why did Jesus include these letters in a book about revealing himself? Many want to skip the seven letters and get on with the real revelation. But Jesus is revealed in our world through believers. We are the ones the world looks at to find and see Jesus.....that is a scary thought when you think about the state of the church of Jesus today in our culture.

There are three ways really to think about these seven churches and the letters. One, they are letters to seven churches in the first century. Two they are letters to the entire church of all time and they reveal to us the condition of the current church. And three, they foreshadow the future of Jesus' church through time. Each letter representing an era of the church and we are living in the last letter.

Each of these letters have the same style. There is first a Commendation.....then a Condemnation....then a charge....then a promise.

Now we move to the second letter.

Revelation 2:8 (ESV) — 8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

Smyrna (MAP) is today Ismir, Turkey. The second largest city in Turkey behind Istanbul. There are no ruins left of the church of Smyrna

Commendation

Revelation 2:9–10 (ESV) — 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.

Jesus tells them....I know....I am aware.....I see what is happening to you...It is not beyond my control.....I am allowing it....I know. I know your tribulation.

I know that you have lost everything. All your material possessions are gone. They have taken them all. To the world you may seem poor....but to me....Jesus says, you are so rich.

This is what Jesus thought of them, and if Jesus considered them rich, then they were rich. Our estimation of ourselves is far less important than God's estimation of us. i. In contrast, the Christians at Laodicea thought they were rich, but they were really poor (Revelation 3:17). Laodicea was a poor rich church. Smyrna was a rich poor church. Better to be a rich poor church than a poor rich church.

I know the slander. I know what people are saying about you. I know the lies. They are coming from people who say they are Jews but are not. They are a synagogue of Satan.

This comes from Acts 15 when God led the disciples to teach the gentiles that they are saved by faith, not by becoming Jewish....getting circumcised...and observing the Mosaic Law.

This decision was the beginning of the Great Divorce between Judaism and Christianity. Jews were very tolerable. You could be orthodox, moderate, or just a cultural Jew and be welcome in the synagogue. What did you have to do to get kicked out?

You have to believe what Paul believed...Christ has done what the law was unable to do. Jews couldn't deal with that. God's Law, from God's lips to Moses to you was obligatory. The law is the law. You must obey it. You can choose not to obey it as long as you acknowledge that it is still God's obligatory law.

What you could not do, from a Jewish perspective, is to say it is not necessary to obey the Law. That is why Christians were not allowed in the synagogues and why early persecution came from Jews not Romans.

No work or food in Jerusalem. Pauls collection

It wasn't until the Romans realized that this new Way was not part of Judaism that they began persecuting them.

This is one of the strongest supports that we do not have to follow Mosaic Law. Jesus Himself says those who are persecuting Jesus from a Jewish perspective are deceived by and being led by Satan.

No Condemnation

What Jesus said to this church is important, but what He didn't say is also important. Jesus didn't have a single word of rebuke or correction for the Christians in Smyrna. All He had was the promise of a crown—and the encouragement to be faithful until death, which is literally "become faithful until death."

It wasn't that the church at Smyrna was perfect. They had plenty of weaknesses and issues I am sure. Just like every church.

Smyrna another wealthy trade city. But this city was critical for being the place when worship of the Roman Emperor was mandatory and rebellion was punishable by death. In 95 AD this church was being slaughtered.

This church is unique because there are no words of condemnation from Jesus. They were already giving up their lives. They were not going to have time to repent or change anything. They were all going to be slaughtered and they knew it.

That is likely why Jesus chose to remind them that He had overcome death and is now alive. This is a martyred church.

The association with death—and the victory of resurrection—is throughout this letter. The name Smyrna comes from the word myrrh, a sweet-smelling perfume used in embalming dead bodies.

The Roman Emperor Domitian (a.d. 81–96) was the first to demand worship under the title "Lord" from the people of the Roman Empire as a test of political loyalty

Foreshadowing of the Antichrist? Roman leader demanding worship.

"Emperor worship had begin as spontaneous demonstration of gratitude to Rome; but toward the end of the first century, in the days of Domitian, the final step was taken and Caesar worship became compulsory. Once a year the Roman citizen must burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar; and having done so, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had performed his religious duty."

"All that the Christians had to do was to burn that pinch of incense, say, 'Caesar is Lord,' receive their certificate, and go away and worship as they pleased. But that is precisely what the Christians would not do. They would give no man the name of Lord; that name they would keep for Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. They would not even formally conform.

The persecution of this church continued into the second century. At that point it was led by a man named Polycarp. In 155 AD he was a very old and frail man...at least physically.

On the way to the city, the police chief and other government officials tried to persuade Polycarp to offer a pinch of incense before a statue of Caesar and simply say "Caesar is Lord." That's all he had to do, and he would be off the hook. They pleaded with him to do it, and escape the dreadful penalties. At first Polycarp was silent, but then he calmly gave them his firm answer: no.

The proconsul persisted. "Take the oath and deny Christ and I'll set you free!" Polycarp answered, "For eighty-six years I've served Jesus; how dare I deny Him now" The proconsul finally gave up, and announced to the crowd the crime of the accused: "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian."

They arranged a great pile of wood and set up a pole in the middle. As they tied Polycarp to the pole, he prayed: "I thank You that You have graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour, that I may receive a portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Your Christ." After he prayed and gave thanks to God, they set the wood ablaze.

Charge

Revelation 2:9–10 (ESV) — 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.

According to Jesus, the persecution about to come against the Christians of Smyrna was from the devil. At the same time it was measured and limited by God. Surely, the devil

wanted to imprison them for a longer time, but God limited the tribulation to ten days. ii. Being thrown into prison was severe persecution. In that day, prison was never used to rehabilitate someone, and rarely used to punish someone. Normally, you were thrown into prison as you awaited trial and execution.

"For a man to become a Christian anywhere was to become an outlaw. In Smyrna above all places, for a man to enter the Christian Church was literally to take his life in his hands. In Smyrna the church was a place for heroes."

However, there is no compelling reason to believe it means anything other than ten days of severe persecution, with an emphasis on the idea that it is a limited time.

Promise

Revelation 2:10–11 (ESV) — Be faithful unto 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. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

The promise of a crown was especially meaningful for the Christians of Smyrna. • The city of Smyrna had a "crown" of beautiful buildings at the top of Mt. Pagos • In Smyrna, worshippers of pagan gods wore crowns • In that culture, good citizens and winning athletes received crowns iv. Jesus promised a special crown—the crown of life. A champion athlete received a crown of leaves, which would soon get brown and die. Jesus' champions receive the crown of life.

Third Letter

Revelation 2:12 (ESV) — 12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

Pergamum (MAP)

When John wrote, Pergamos had been the capital city of the region for more than three hundred years.

It was and is a gorgeous city. The old city sat on top of a big mountain with a flat top. It too is a wealthy city on the trade routes.

This was also an extremely religious city. It had temples to the Greek and Roman gods Dionysus, Athena, a major temple to Zeus. This temple to Zeus will play a role in this letter in a moment.

This city was especially known as a center for the worship of the deity known as Asclepius. Represented by a serpent, Asclepius was the god of healing and knowledge. There was a medical school at his temple in Pergamos. Because of the famous temple to the Roman god of healing, sick and diseased people from all over the Roman Empire flocked to Pergamos for relief.

"Sufferers were allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple. In the temple there were tame snakes. In the night the sufferer might be touched by one of these tame and harmless snakes as it glided over the ground on which he lay. The touch of the snake was held to be the touch of the god himself, and the touch was held to bring health and healing."

It also had three temples dedicated to the worship of the Roman Emperor.

The city was a noted center for culture and education, having one of the great libraries of the ancient world, with more than 200,000 volumes.

Jesus reminds Him that His words are two edged sword. That should be a warning to them about what Jesus is going to say.

This reminds us of the passage in Hebrews 4:12: For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Jesus would use this sharp two-edged sword to make some separation among the Christians in Pergamos.

Commendation

Revelation 2:13 (ESV) — 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.

Then Jesus says....I know where you live....ooh. Sounds ominous. You live where Satan has his throne. What he is referring to is the Great Temple of Zeus. at Pergamum.

Yet you remain true to my name. You are in a very sophisticated and very Pagan city. Yet you are keeping the faith.

You didn't waiver even when Antipas was martyred. In the city where Satan lives...where the temple to Zeus is.

Condemnation

Revelation 2:14–15 (ESV) — 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.

He is referring to an event in Numbers where the Moabite women seduced the Israelite men and then turned them toward their god and away from the God of Israel. These sexual exploits result in the corruption of the Israelites.

The teaching of Balaam is accommodation. Accommodation to the culture of the times. Don't judge them or fight them, can't we just all get along. Lighten up a bit. That is exactly what the Nicolaitans were saying.

Sexual immorality marked the whole culture of the ancient Roman Empire. The person who lived by Biblical standards of purity was considered strange. Much like our culture today.

The rebuke was not only against those who hold the doctrines of Balaam and those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. The rebuke was also against those who allowed them to continue (you have there those ... you have those).

Jesus knows that there is a whole movement in this church of accommodation to the culture of Pergamum....which is the city where Satan lives and the temple to Satan sits up high on the hill.

Charge

Revelation 2:16–17 (ESV) — 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.

Jesus says, If you don't do something about this, I will.

Promise

Revelation 2:16–17 (ESV) — 16 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.'

Fourth Letter

Revelation 2:18 (ESV) — 18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Thyatira (MAP)

This was the smallest and least important of the seven cities Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 and 3. In history, we have no record that the Christians of Thyatira suffered any significant political or religious persecution. i. "The elder Pliny dismissed Thyatira with the almost contemptuous phrase 'Thyatira and other unimportant cities

Still, this city was a center of business and trade. It had many active trade guilds, each having their own patron deity from the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods.

Acts 16 mentions Lydia of Thyatira, who was a seller of purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. "Thyatira was famous for the manufacture of a purple dye, and numerous references are found in secular literature of the period to the trade guilds which manufactured cloth."

Thyatira was believed to be the least politically significant of the seven towns of the churches in Asia, according to historical records. The city's strength was in trade, and there was no emphasis on any one religion in this city. As a result, the Christians were

applauded for their dedication, tenacity, and growth in good works in this working-class community.

Eyes that see all truth. Feet of One who has been tested in the fire.

Commendation

Revelation 2:19 (ESV) — 19 “ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

This church seems to have it going on. Jesus says, I know....your works.....you love...your faith....your service....your patient endurance....and I know you are growing in those things. What you are doing now is more than what you were doing the beginning

Condemnation

Revelation 2:20–24 (ESV) — 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.

The name Jezebel had a powerful association. If we call someone a Judas or a Hitler it means something strong. It was also a strong thing to call this woman Jezebel. “She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal ... Jezebel herself had a most unenviable record of evil.”

This “Jezebel” at the church of Thyatira wasn’t really a prophetess, she only claimed to be one. Yet, it seems the Christians there received her as a prophetess, and that is why Jesus gave them this warning. i. Jesus said this would happen in Matthew 24:11: Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. Those words were first spoken with a view to the end times, but there have always been those who call themselves prophets in the church, but are not.

Later in this letter, Jesus would also reveal a link to the work of Jezebel and false doctrine: this doctrine ... the depths of Satan, as they say (Revelation 2:24). It seems that this Jezebel led others in the church at Thyatira to discover depths of Satan.

This shows the sin of the church of Thyatira. On the outside, they were a model church, showing works, love, service, faith, and patience. Yet there was significant corruption inside the church. The sin of the church was that they allowed this corruption.

Before Jesus told the Christians in Thyatira what they must do, He first told them what He would do. Jesus would chastise this Jezebel, and cast her into a sickbed, along with those who commit adultery with her. i. The reference to adultery is important. It speaks of both sexual adultery and spiritual adultery. When these Christians honored other gods, they were unfaithful to the Lord who saved them.

For this reason, the figure of a sickbed is fitting. They were guilty of adultery, both sexual and spiritual. It is as if Jesus said, “You love an unclean bed. Here, I will give you one, and cast you into a sickbed.”

21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead. 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.

Charge

Revelation 2:24–25 (ESV) — 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. 25 Only hold fast what you have until I come.

Promise

Revelation 2:26–29 (ESV) — 26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority 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.'

Fifth Letter

Revelation 3:1 (ESV) — 1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

Sardis MAP

Sardis, in west-central Asia Minor, was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia and a wealthy and important commercial trading center. As a pagan city, Sardis was home to the well-known temple of Artemis, which still exists today in ruins. The church at Sardis was surrounded by paganism and idolatry but failed to stand out amidst the darkness.

Sardis lay on the junction of the principal highways linking Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum with the high country of inner Asia Minor. Lydia, of which Sardis was the ancient capital and royal seat, straddled the communications route between the Aegean coast and the hinterland and was in consequence an area where the Gr. and native culture met and creatively mingled. Under Croesus, whose name became a legend for wealth, prosperity, and the doom which sometimes falls shockingly upon the rich and fortunate, Sardis was famed for its affluence. Golden and silver minted coinage had its origin there, and the Pactolus River, which flowed nearby, almost always flowed with gold.

This church in many ways was the affluent church.

Him who has the seven spirits and the seven stars

Commendation

Revelation 3:1–3 (ESV) — " 'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive,

Jesus is telling them. I don't miss anything. I see the work that you are doing. I know what you are doing and more importantly I know the real reason you are doing it. I know what really motivates you. I know what your reputation is. You have a reputation of being a thriving, active, got it going on.....church.

People looking in at your church think you are alive and well.

Condemnation

Revelation 3:1-3 (ESV) 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.

This church is doing all sorts of things but for all the wrong reasons.

What kind of reasons? The affluent church,,, Maybe money.....maybe growth....maybe popularity....They are not doing it for Christ.

Charge

Revelation 3:3–5 (ESV) — 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.

He will either straighten them up or He will remove their church.

Promise

Revelation 3:5–6 (ESV) —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. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. 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.'

Sixth Letter

Revelation 3:7 (ESV) — 7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

Philadelphia MAP

Phileo is the Greek word for friendship or love among brothers. Thus the city of brotherly love.

it was founded by the apostle John. The apostle of love...another one of his churches.

Christians of the first century lived in an uneasy relationship with Judaism. Most Jewish Christians probably attended the synagogue, took part in ritual worship and used the Hebrew

Scriptures as their Bible. Then on the first day of the week they met with those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

At the same time, the church considered itself the rightful spiritual heir of Judaism — the new Israel (Galatians 6:16). It had accepted Jesus as its Lord, the Messiah spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures. The church saw itself as composed of spiritual Jews who had received "circumcision" through the Holy Spirit (Romans 2:28-29). This naturally caused a rift between Christians and Jews, as they both claimed to be God's people.

That meant Jewish Christians often endured exceptional pressure and stress. They were called apostate Jews by their own relatives. Non-Christian Jews accused Christians of being usurpers. They insisted that Jews and not Christians had the open door to God's presence and the keys to the kingdom. The Christians in the Asian city of Philadelphia were among those who took the brunt of these claims. Then, in about A.D. 96, John, in the book of Revelation, assured those in the church that they were, indeed, the heirs to salvation (Revelation 3:7-13).

who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

The immediate background of the phrase was the claim of the Jews in Philadelphia that they were the true people of God who held the key to the Kingdom of God. John contradicts this claim by asserting that the key to the kingdom which had belonged to Israel really belongs to Jesus as the Davidic messiah (5:5; 22:16) and had been forfeited by Israel because she had rejected her Messiah

The local Jewish community of Philadelphia may claim that the kingdom belongs to the Jewish community. But they "are liars" (3:9). Christ has used the key of David to set an open door before the church, not the synagogue. The door to the synagogue may be closed to the Christian; the door to Christ's heavenly kingdom is wide open. But even as the church is persecuted — and its members martyred — it should remember the promises of its leader, Jesus Christ. He alone holds the key to God's presence and has opened the door to his kingdom and the church's salvation.

Commendation

Revelation 3:8–11 (ESV) — 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.

I am opening a door of opportunity that you can step through if you choose to do it. I know you can't do it through your power but you have kept my name and have not denied me.

False Jews again will discover that Jesus loves them. .

Revelation here underscores the notion that the Jews are no longer the people of God as a national or ethnic entity, since they have rejected their Messiah (Matthew 21:33-43, especially verse 43). The new Israel — the church — has taken their place as God has

moved forward to fulfill his promise of grace. The church is the true "Israel of God" even though it is largely composed of Gentiles

Revelation 3:9, however, looks to the time when the Jews will finally acknowledge (thus, "bow down" to) their Savior and the largely gentile church as the people of God. In that time, "All Israel [that is, the Israelite people as a whole] will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

Jesus is telling them that a great opportunity awaits them and they can accomplish this great thing through His power, through His overcoming their enemies- the false Jews, they just need to persevere and keep working

Condemnation

Charge

Revelation 3:11–13 (ESV) — 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. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Promise

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.

Seventh Letter

Revelation 3:14 (ESV) — 14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

Laodicea MAP

Another very wealthy city on the trade routes. It is next to two mountains...They will play a role in this letter.

It is quite inland. When you look across the valley from Laodicea you see Kamukale and Heirophilus

Kamukale has hot springs that bubble up from the mountains and they have a very high calcium deposits. So it looks from Laodicea like it is covered with snow. But when you walk there those calcium fields have pools of warm water about 90 degrees in temperature.

It looks cold but it is hot.

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

Commendation- None

Condemnation

Revelation 3:15–21 (ESV) — 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.

Neither hot or cold....think about the mountain that looks Cold but is hot....

If you were hot on fire with the Holy Spirit I could work with that....If you were cold and had strong emotions against me I could work with that too. But you are neither...You don't care either way.

Jesus says...You don't care and it makes me want to vomit. KJV says spew 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.

Your church thinks you are rich. You have the incredible building, the incredible television ministry, the resources are pouring in, you have everything and you have it in abundance. Your church thinks you have it going on. You think you don't need anything. You are smug and self reliant and it makes me want to vomit.

You say I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing....But am Jesus and I say...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.

Jesus says look...you have fallen for the imposter.....You need to come back to me and I will give you what you really need.

Look Jesus says....I don't hate you. Your actions make me want to vomit but I haven't given up on you. I discipline those that I love so you will repent.

Charge

Revelation 3:20 (ESV) — 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.

This verse is often taken out of context to use in evangelism. The door here is not the door to your heart....it is....and don't miss this....the door to the church!

I am Jesus....I have come to the church that has everything you could ever want as a church....but they have locked me out. I am literally trying to get back into my church....I am outside...at the door....can't you hear me knocking!!!

Look at how desperately He wants in. He is not going to barge into the church that doesn't want him. But He says...I am knocking.....If ANYONE....just one person...no matter who they are....no matter what role they play...it doesn't have to be the pastor....anyone....I anyone will just open the door for me I will come in.

Promise

Revelation 3:20–22 (ESV) — 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. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ”

Seven Letters to Seven Churches

One the primary level of the text there are seven literal churches, with seven literal pastors and seven literal congregations.

At the secondary level...our church....any church....can fit into one or more of these 7 categories. This is a message not only to the original 7 churches but to the complete number of churches today. Which category does Remnant fit into? Every church seems to have things it is doing well and areas to improve.

Ephesus: The church that had abandoned its first love for Christ (Revelation 2:4). Smyrna: The church that would face severe persecution (Revelation 2:10). Pergamum: The church that needed to repent of sin (Revelation 2:16). Thyatira: The church whose false prophetess was leading people astray (Revelation 2:20). Sardis: The sleeping church that needed to wake up (Revelation 3:2). Philadelphia: The church that had patiently persevered (Revelation 3:10). Laodicea: The church with lukewarm faith (Revelation 3:16).

Several patterns of warning seem to jump out at us....Avoiding sexual immorality.....trying to conform to or mimic the culture in which we are placed....Covenants with non believers...Being seduced physically or spiritually by things that are not of God... Avoiding the world's materialism.....creating activities or programs that lock Jesus out.

When you are honest with yourself....every church today has all of these seven issues. The church has failed to represent Christ to the world. That is in many ways the summary of the Revelation of these 7 churches. We have failed or are unable to bring about God's will on earth. He is using the seven churches to make the case for the coming judgment. The church cannot save the world....only Jesus can.

On a third layer...many believe that Jesus is outlying seven milestones in the history of the church from the time he leaves until he returns.

1. The Church in Ephesus, the loveless church.. represents the First Church in Acts. Growing by leaps and bounds doing extraordinary things but choosing to abandon their first love. Working hard, faithful, in relationship with Jesus but the fire is gone. Look at how they started out...

Acts 2:42 (ESV) — 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

They studied the Word....they were in community with one another....they shared communion...and they prayed....They didn't just do them, they were devoted to them. The Lord is fully present in the Word of God...He is the Word in the flesh...He is present when we are gathered together...He is present in communion....and He is present in prayer. That was the early church....devoted to doing things with Jesus.

So this ear of Church History takes us from AD 32 to about the time of persecution under Nero in 64 AD.

2. The Church at Smyrna- The persecuted church. The Martyred Church from AD 64 to 315 AD. That was the period of great persecution in the Church History.

3. The Church at Pergamum...The Political Church....representing the time from 315 when Constantine made Christianity the accepted religion of the Roman Empire until 590AD. Now the church is official. In this period, the church climbed in bed with the state. It is during this period that the church in Rome joins the State of Rome with the Pope. No longer separation of church and state. Advantages are that the church grew wildly during this period, disadvantage is that the church became corrupt.

Throughout the Bible we see the Israelites aligning with corrupt Kings and then God has to send a prophet to them to fix everything.

The same thing happened here. The church aligned with the State of Rome and accommodated itself to their culture...

4. The Church at Tyatyrria is the church of the Middle Ages 590-1517. It is fully established and moving along just fine....but some leaders of the church are taking it in the wrong direction.

5. The Church at Sardis is the church of the Reformation 1517 to 1800. The corruption of the church was evident and the outbreak of the Protestant movement was in response to that. The church, both Protestant and Catholic, moves into a time of repentance and reform.

6. The Church at Philadelphia we might see as the Revived Church era from 1800 to 1940. Those reformations within the Protestant and Catholic movements are now bringing revival to the church. It is during this time that we see the great evangelists of Church History.

7. The Church at Laodicea....1940 to present. A church that has everything it could ever need....every advantage...every resource...plenty of money...huge buildings.....but has locked Christ out.

Jesus warned that He would take away the lampstand of the churches who did not repent.....Europe is now a post-Christian society.

Have you visited the empty churches in Europe? They are not sites of worship they have become tourist sites. Vacant musoleums to churches that locked Jesus out.

Most churches today would not recognize Jesus if He knocked on the door....that is His point.

No matter which level you choose to engage these letters....First level as 7 letters to 7 churches....Second level which category our church fits into...or third level...the milestones in church history.....regardless on which one you choose....one thing is clear....

These seven letters are a warning to us from Jesus....He has showed us what was....He has showed us what is (and it is not pretty) and when we resume we will begin to learn what Jesus said will be.

Closing

The Modern Church

Have you thought about what Jesus' letter to Remnant would be? What would He commend....what would He condemn....what would He tell us to repent of...what warning would He give us?

Even though John wrote these warnings nearly 2,000 years ago, they still apply to Christian churches today. Christ remains the head of the worldwide Church, lovingly overseeing it.

Many modern Christian churches have wandered from biblical truth, such as those that teach the prosperity gospel or do not believe in the Trinity. Two of the most heretical and dangerous lies taught in some churches today. Others have grown lukewarm, their members just going through the motions with no passion for God. Many churches in Asia and the Middle East face persecution. Increasingly popular are "progressive" churches that base their theology more on current culture than solid doctrine found in the Bible.

The huge number of denominations proves thousands of churches have been founded on little more than the stubbornness of their leaders. While these Revelation letters are not as strongly prophetic as other parts of that book, they warn today's drifting churches that discipline will come to those who do not repent.

I think in many ways Remnant would receive all seven letters just like the original churches did. We are guilty of all seven. Some not as obvious as other churches today...but there just the same.

The individual

Just as the Old Testament trials of the nation of Israel are a metaphor for the individual's relationship with God, the warnings in the book of Revelation speak to every Christ-follower today. These letters act as a gauge to reveal each believer's faithfulness.

The Nicolaitans are gone, but millions of Christians are being tempted by modernizing and updating the church and her message. The false prophetess of Thyatira has been replaced by TV preachers who avoid talking about Christ's atoning death for sin. Countless believers have turned from their love for Jesus to idolizing material possessions. Many churches have

brought in heresy including the denial of the trinity....the acceptance of sexual perversions....and the denial of the very truth of God's Scriptures.

As in ancient times, backsliding continues to be a danger for people who believe in Jesus Christ, but reading these short letters to the seven churches of Revelation serves as a stern reminder. In a society flooded with temptation, they bring the Christian back to the First Commandment. Only the True God is worthy of our worship.

Seven letters....to seven churches.....to us. He who has an ear let him hear what Jesus says to the churches. Let's Pray