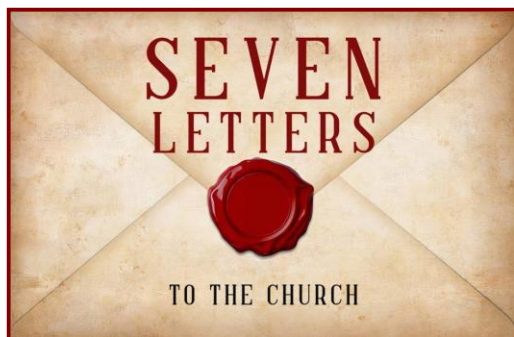




Topic: What Kind of End-Time Church Am I? (The True Revelation of Me)

Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea
~Revelation 1:11 (NLT)~

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INTRODUCTION

As I pen this lesson, I can say that in all of my 38 plus years of being actively involved in the church; of all the messages I have heard preached and/or taught over those years, it has been a rare experience of mine to hear much preached or taught from the book of Revelation. I often wonder what the apprehension is as to why not many preachers or teacher delve into this book. It is perhaps because some have difficulty understanding the many unusual and intricate symbolic languages and visions contained within this book. Or could it be fear and anxiety from the terrifying images and depictions of divine judgment written with the pages of the book of Revelation. Maybe it's because of the uncomfortability with persecution of Believers the book addresses. Regardless of whatever be the reason why some avoid this book, the book of Revelation is perhaps the most insightful and predictive book in the Bible. For within the pages of the book of Revelation, we come to the realization of the conclusion of all God plans for those who trust, believe, and follow in obedience His planned purpose for their life and we conclude all God intends for those who reject God. The main message of the book of Revelation is a powerful declaration of Jesus Christ's ultimate victory over evil and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom...*WHAT AN EXCITING FUTURE AWAITS THE PEOPLE OF GOD!*

Well, we are about to go on a journey through the book of Revelation that will reveal the depths of who we are as Believers approaching the end-time. In the book of Revelation, the Lord instructs His servant John who the Lord has caused to be exiled to the isle called Patmos for the purpose the Lord has for John. The Lord takes John, as John records it, in the Spirit on the Lord's day. John says, there he heard a great voice as of a trumpet saying unto him... *"Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches..."* the Lord would identify. The seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation represent both literal churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and symbolically, different aspects and stages of the Church through history. They offer a message for all Christians, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses found within the Church. We can also say the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation comprises of all those who believe in and follow Jesus... We are individually and collectively a part of the body of Christ, the Church of Christ. Taking this position, we believe that what John was called to write to the seven churches in Revelation represents the life of every Believer in Christ Jesus who are the Church of Christ. The words the Lord writes to these seven churches should both concern and inspire Believers to the point that they seek to be the church the Lord is calling for in these end-times.

Jesus' message to the Churches of John's Revelation. Jesus wrote to the seven churches to provide encouragement, correction, and instruction to real, contemporary congregations facing persecution and temptation under Roman rule, while also offering symbolic representation of the spiritual states of all churches throughout history and at the end time.

OUR STUDY

Why a study on the seven churches of Revelations?

Each letter written to the churches serve as a model, revealing Christ Jesus' concern for the spiritual condition of His people, urging them to overcome adversity through faith and to prepare for the Lord's return. As we are approaching the latter days or the end times events, it is most critical and important that the Believer in Christ Jesus, the child of the Most High God be diligent to do as the apostle Paul encourages us to do in the book of Philippians 2:12... *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but not much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, (NKJV).* We should all be inspired to be the church in the latter day the Lord is not only calling us to be but the church the Lord is pleased with. Of the seven churches in the book of Revelation, not all are/were pleasing to the Lord; not all of the letters written to these seven churches were friendly letters. The seven churches are often viewed as models representing different phases or spiritual states within the broader history of the church, both collectively as a group of Believers and individually as us being the body or church of the Living God.

It is our aim and goal through this lesson to delve into these seven churches in Revelation to glean from them the valuable lessons for us, as Believers, in this present age. It is our heart that while it is day light savings time we walk circumspectly not as fools but as wise; that we redeem the time the Lord has allotted unto us to be about the good work of the Lord; to fulfill our God ordained assignment here in the land.

Revelation 1:1-2 (NKJV)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

The book of Revelation opens sharing with us the purpose for which it is written...to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. Wow, it can't get any clearer than this. Inside this most exciting and apocalyptic book are the stories of seven churches that serve as example to the Believer, the Church of the Living God to inspire the Believer to strive to make their calling and election in Christ Jesus sure. Over the next few weeks, we will examine each church with the goal to glean from each the Lord's will and His calling for us to be the church He is pleased with.

To The Church of Ephesus...

Revelation 2:1 (NLT)

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:

The first letter written is to the church of Ephesus. It is noteworthy to highlight that the text tells us this letter to the Ephesian church is the message is from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands. This can only be in reference to Christ Jesus who is the head of the church. The lampstands are the churches themselves, set as lights in a dark world; the stars are the pastor of the churches, held in God's hand. The stars held in God's hand is indicative of the fact that it is the leaders of the church who hold the responsibility of leading the people in the way they should go. Jesus begins the letter by affirming the Ephesians' positive actions.

Revelation 2:2-3 (NLT)

² I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars.

³ You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

We can see from Jesus' words the church of Ephesus was a hard-working group of Believers full of fortitude (patient endurance). These are the Believers in our church who show up every time the church doors open with a heart ready and willing to do whatever is needed done in the church. Not only that, these Believers embody strength of character, courage, and endurance to face adversity, temptation, and suffering with steadfastness. These Believers are the gate-keepers of the truth and do not compromise with evildoers, and they show patient endurance in bearing up under hardship. However, because it is Christ Jesus' desire to keep us from stumbling (falling) and to present us faultless before the presence of God's glory, Christ Jesus will at all cost reveal the depth of who we are or the extent to which we may yet be still lost for the sole purpose of bringing us to the rightful place in Him that He has ordained.

So, Christ Jesus goes on to lead John to reveal in the letter to the Ephesian church their shortcomings.

Revelation 2:4 (NLT)

But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first.

Wow! This hits to core of the heart. Here is a church who is noted for being hard-working; for having the appearance that they are striving to be in the right place with the Lord, yet in all that they do in and for the Lord, they are missing the most important quality of being a true passionate follower of Christ Jesus. They no longer had the same passion for Christ Jesus as when they first believed; their work was no longer motivated by love. Where Christ Jesus was once their first love, there is now a spiritual coldness or lack of spiritual passion for the things of God and His people. The passion or love for Christ Jesus that fueled their every work in the past has now been replaced with complacency and spiritual fatigue. True, they yet may be seen as the dedicated workers in the church; always arriving on time and being in place but where is their true heart for God? A loss of heart for God can be visible in one's behavior. The warning signs are there if only we pay attention. So, how would I know if my passion for the God is decreasing or is not as intentional as it once was? Here are five signs that gives us a look at where our love for the God is.

- Worship of any kind, or style seems empty
- The Word of God falls flat
- A day goes by without considering God and His desires
- Making big decisions in our life without first seeking God's guidance in prayer
- No longer looking forward to being with Jesus

While we may at a point find ourselves in this place, the blessing is that we do not have to stay in that place. There is never a time wherein God is not beckoning us to walk closer to Him. God will always leave the door open for us to walk back in.

Revelation 2:5 (NLT)

Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.

After pointing out how far they have fallen away, they are told what they must do to be restored to their

first love. It's just like the love of God to not only point out what our ill ways are but to also show us the way to make things right in His sight.

How do I keep Christ Jesus as my first love or how do I return Christ Jesus as my first love if I have drifted?

To keep Christ Jesus as my first love or to rekindle my first love with Christ Jesus, I must make Christ Jesus my first priority. This is evidenced by spending quality time with Him through prayer and Scripture reading, remembering His immense love and sacrifice. I must cultivate a relationship of worship, confession, and thanksgiving, recognizing my deep dependence on Him. The greatest show of my love for Christ Jesus is revealed through my following His commandments, serving others, and creating a lifestyle of devotion rather than mere church duty.

Revelation 2:7 (NLT)

Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

Here, Jesus promises a blessing to those who heed the words written in the letter. He promises to give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. The “tree of life” and the “paradise of God” refer to the new heavens and new earth.

Take note, like the Ephesian church, we too can easily fall prey to a cold, mechanical observance of religion. Like the Ephesians, many tend to focus solely on doctrinal purity and hard work, to the exclusion of true love for Christ Jesus. As this letter shows, no amount of zeal for the truth or moral rectitude can replace a heart full of love for Christ Jesus.

To The Church of Smyrna...

Revelation 2:8 (NLT)

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive:

The identity of the First and the Last, who died and came to life again can only be in reference to Christ Jesus. Unlike the letter written to the church of Ephesus, the Lord offered no rebuke to the church of Smyrna. Instead, the Lord acknowledged their trials and their sufferings.

Revelation 2:9 (NLT)

I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan.

The message to the church of Smyrna was one of encouragement. The church of Smyrna is one of only two churches among the seven in Revelation to receive no criticism from the Lord. Instead, the letter acknowledged their suffering, poverty, and persecution. It is comforting to know that even in our most trying and most difficult moments in our life experiences the Lord sees us. Not only that but the Lord calls us “rich” perhaps at the time in our life wherein we see only our poorest state. The church of Smyrna teaches the child of God so much in how we are to walk in relationship with the Savior.

Revelation 2:10 (NLT)

Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.

Here in this text lies the blessing for the child of God; the Believer in Christ Jesus; the one who has embraced a true-life saving relationship with the Savior. The Lord tells the church of Smyrna to not be afraid of what they are about to suffer. He then goes on in more detail as to the suffering they will encounter and the purpose of the suffering. We come to realize that in every situation; in every trial and tribulation; in every unwanted and sometime unwarranted circumstances, God does have an ultimate purpose and the ultimate confidence that what He has put within us (*His Holy Spirit*) is able to stand and withstand any opposition we face. The example of this church should inspire the Believer in holding to the truth of who they are and whose they are and what they are able to do because of who they are and whose they are. We can persevere in the face of persecution knowing that it is only temporary and that God will not only fight this battle for us but will deliver us in the end.

To The Church of Pergamum...

Revelation 2:12 (NLT)

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword:

This is the message, Christ Jesus commanded John to describe Him as possessing the sharp two-edged sword. This description reminds the us that Christ Jesus wields all power and authority. It also lets us know that the Word of the Lord is able to pierce paganism and destroy the world of Satan which surrounded the Pergamum church. The city of Pergamum was a major center for pagan and imperial worship, which made it a difficult place for Christians to live.

Revelation 2:13 (NLT)

I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan's city.

Here the Lord acknowledges the difficult environment of the church. Yet, even in our difficult environments, we are called upon to remain faithful and loyal to the Lord. Jesus commends the church of Pergamum for their holding fast to His name and for not deny His faith. No matter how hostile our world becomes, we must hold fast to what we know and what has been proven concerning our Lord. The Lord knows whate'er betide and He will take care of us. The Lord has deposited within every born-again Believer His Holy Spirit that enables them to overcome.

Revelation 2:14 (NLT)

But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin.

Here the Lord rebukes the church of Pergamum because some members of the church followed the example of Balaam by introducing moral corruption into the church. The book of Numbers, chapters 22

through 25 records the efforts of King Balak in attempting to get Balaam to curse the people of Israel. When this failed due to the Lord intervening by letting Balaam know that the people of Israel were blessed of the Lord and could not be cursed, King Balak convinced Balaam to lure the people of Israel into taking actions on their own to bring a curse upon themselves by yielding to sin. It is important for the child of God to understand there is nothing anyone can do to us that can bring us to an unpleasing place in Christ Jesus but there is something we can do to take ourselves out of the good graces of Christ Jesus.

Revelation 2:15 (NLT)

In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching.

The teaching of the Nicolaitans was a false doctrine known for comprising the word of truth. This teaching gave false credence that one can live in a manner contrary to that commanded by the Lord and yet still be considered a Believer of and in the Lord. The Nicolaitans were known for conquering and subduing people in their teaching that freedom in Christ granted a blank check to sin. The fault of the Believers in Pergamum was not so much that they had followed this pernicious teaching but that they had allowed it to be vocalized in the congregation. In our world which is surrounded by some influences aimed at luring or drawing people into its corrupt and despicable way of living, it is most crucial that we stay awake and alert. No matter what our society says or the norm does, if it goes against the blood stained banner of Christ which is an honorable and holy banner, we must separate ourselves. The blessing is that through the power of the God's Holy Spirit, we have all we need to be in the world but not subject to the world's methodology.

Revelation 2:16 (NLT)

Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

What a beautiful word of redemption the Lord offers the church. Repentance opens the door for the Lord's forgiveness to be wrought. It is not the will of the Father that no one perishes but that all should openly accept the Lord's forgiveness and deliverance from sin only wrought through a sincere heart felt repentance.

Revelation 2:17 (NLT)

Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.

In this verse Jesus concludes His letter to the church at Pergamum by extending an invitation and making a promise. He invites anyone with ears to hear the Spirit's messages to the churches. The invitation is similar to what Jesus said during His earthly ministry: "He who has ears to hear, let Him hear" (*cf., Matthew 11:15*). Of course, Jesus' invitation to hear means more than simply taking in audible sounds. It means to heed: to accept and to obey. In James 1:22 this meaning is clear. James writes, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

The reference to everyone who is victorious receiving some of the manner that has been hidden away in heaven, some Bible scholars say it is the connection of Christ Jesus with the manner of Moses' day that came down from heaven.

To The Church of Thyatira...

Revelation 2:18 (NLT)

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Thyatira. This is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes are like flames of fire, whose feet are like polished bronze:

This reference of the Son of God having eyes like flames of fire is relative to Jesus' penetrating sight, seeing clearly to the true nature of things. So, we can say the message Christ Jesus is about to write to this church will reveal all truth concerning who the church of Thyatira truly are. The reference of the Son of God having feet like polished bronze is relative to Christ Jesus' immovable rule and His sovereign dominion as King whose governance cannot be shaken.

Revelation 2:19-20 (NLT)

¹⁹ I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things.

²⁰ But I have this complain against you. You are permitting that woman—that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet—to lead my servants astray. She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols.

After commending the church of Thyatira for their good deeds of which Jesus calls out five, Jesus begins to address where they have erred in their life and walk with Him. The church of Thyatira has garnered an allowance for the teaching of Jezebel in the church. Jezebel was persuading members of the church to practice immorality and idolatry. While the Bible names Jezebel, a better understanding is to not look at a person but to look at the spirit operating in the midst of the Believers. In fact, the name Jezebel, which is a Hebrew girl's name, carries the meaning "unexalted" or "without cohabitation". We could possibly liken this to a child of God who has allowed an unexalted or unconnected to God influence infiltrate the truth of God they once held. In the Old Testament, the person Jezebel was the wife of king Ahab of Israel. She was a vicious, violent woman, who promoted the worship of Baal, the sun god, and who killed many of God's prophets and even sought unsuccessfully to kill the prophet Elijah (*cf.*, *1 Kings 16—22*). This is the type of spirit the Lord tells John that has been allowed to operate among some in the church of Thyatira. They have allowed a false spirit promoting immoral and idolatrous practices to operate in the church. Additionally, this spirit commonly practiced the eating of food dedicated to idols which polluted the sanctity of the Lord's church. We must be careful not to open ourselves up to immoral and idolatrous behavior regardless who says it's okay. The Lord is calling for His church to be a chaste bride prepared for the bridegroom. The practice of immoral behavior is the same as the practice of evil, sinful, or otherwise wrong behavior. Since morality refers to things that are right, immorality has to do with things that are wrong and sinful.

Revelation 2:21-23 (NLT)

²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to turn away from her immorality.

²² "Therefore, I will throw her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer greatly unless they repent and turn away from her evil deeds.

²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person. And I will give to each of you whatever you deserve.

In a remarkable display of grace, Jesus had given time for repentance; however, it was rejected. What danger it is to refuse to repent for wrongdoing, especially when offered by Christ Jesus. At her own ill, Jezebel will be thrown into a "bed of suffering". This is the result of our failing to change our ways when

they are pointed out by God's Holy Spirit (through His Holy Word). The Bible tells us in Galatians 6:7 that God is not mocked; whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. We have no one but ourselves to blame if/when we suffer the fate of our own misguided ways or failure to do what we know is right in the sight of God. Here in this letter Christ Jesus also vows to put the same fate on all who took part in these evil deed and likewise refuse to repent and turn from their evil. In the end, Christ Jesus tells them that all the churches will know that He is the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person and He is the one who will give to each of us whatever we deserve. Wow...when we consider this it begs the question...what manner of man ought we to be?

Revelation 2:24-25 (NLT)

²⁴ But I also have a message for the rest of you in Thyatira who have not followed this false teaching ('deeper truths,' as they call them—depths of Satan, actually). I will ask nothing more of you

²⁵ except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come.

Christ Jesus encourages those who had remained faithful to continue in their faithful walk with the Lord. He tells them to hold tightly to what they have until He comes. This is the message for those who are yet holding on to the truths of God's Holy Word in spite of the persuasive environment and the allurements of men who desire to live according to their own lustful and evil desires. We must remain woke and not allow ourselves to become comfortable with the world's status quo to the point that we are rocked to sleep.

To The Church of Sardis...

Revelation 3:1 (NLT)

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars: "I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead."

Here in this letter as in the other letters, Christ Jesus makes it clear that He is the one sending the letter to the church. The reference to the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God is a testament to Christ being the complete or perfect Spirit of God. Christ Jesus quickly identifies what's wrong with the church of Sardis. He tells them, "I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead". This description is indicative of a church full with unsaved people going through the motions of religion. We can be people who give the appearance that we are alive in Christ Jesus by our outward appearance and our outward deeds but truthfully be a people who have yet to embrace an intimate relationship with the Savior and Lord. Any person having spent any amount of time in a church environment can easily assimilate the outward actions and behavior of a Believer and yet be as far away from being a true Believer as any other unrepenting person in the world. Anything that we are dead to we are insensitive toward. We have no connection to therefore we cannot feel anything concerning whatever we are dead to. We must be more careful in being true Believers in Christ Jesus than just having a reputation and being spiritually lifeless inside.

Revelation 3:2 (NLT)

Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God.

To wake means to start paying attention to our need for salvation, to stop being careless about our heart's condition before God. It is a careless heart toward God that disqualifies one from meeting the requirements

of God. This is because it is in the heart of a man where the issues of life reside. The Bible views the “heart” not as a physical organ, but as the core of a person’s being, encompassing their will, intellect, emotions, and desires from which all actions flow. If we are dead to or have no care for the things of God, it is a condition of our heart. Here in this verse, Christ Jesus urges them to “Wake Up!” They are to strengthen what little remains; those who have just a little life left. This is encouraging to us because, as long as there is still life (physical) in our body, we have an opportunity to become truly alive in Christ Jesus and thus meet the requirements of a loving God.

Revelation 3:3 (NLT)

Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don’t wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.

Here Christ Jesus challenged the church of Sardis to remember, recapture, and repent. They needed to recall the truth it had received when it first received it. Any Believer that is sliding away from the truth must remember their initial encounter with Christ Jesus. Instead of continuing to drift into a state of deadness, thinking we are all right in our current condition, we must wake up. We must seek after the same fervor (passion) we had in the beginning of our meeting the risen Savior.

Revelation 3:4-5 (NLT)

⁴ Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

⁵ All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine.

What a word of encouragement to those who remain faithful. Christ Jesus says of them...“they are worthy”. To be worthy is to match up with something—the profession of faith in the mouth matches the reality of faith in the heart. This is who we must all strive to be. Then we can be part of the faithful ones who are promised to walk with Jesus in white; the ones whose names will never be erased from the Book of Life and who Christ Jesus will announce before His Father and His angels as belonging to Him.

To The Church of Philadelphia...

Revelation 3:7 (NLT)

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. This is the message from the one who is holy and true, the one who has the key of David. What he opens, no one can close; and what he closes, no one can open:

The description of Christ Jesus given here emphasizes His holiness, His sovereignty, and His authority. Christ Jesus is the one who opens and shuts, and no one can say Him nay.

Revelation 3:8 (NLT)

I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me.

Here as in the other letters, Christ Jesus let the church of Philadelphia know that He (Christ Jesus) knows all the things they have done and that because of their works (which were good) Christ Jesus has set before them an open door of opportunity that no one possess the strength nor the authority to close. Christ Jesus

goes on to commend this church for how even though they were weak in strength, they yet obeyed His word and did not deny Him. This, like the church of Smyrna, is the church every born-again Believer to strive to model after.

Revelation 3:9 (NLT)

Look, I will force those who belong to Satan's synagogue—those liars who say they are Jews but are not—to come and bow down at your feet. They will acknowledge that you are the ones I love.

What a relationship with the Savior! To walk up right in the sight of God, to obey His every command, to be a witness of His expressive love to the point that other will see your light and your good works that they will acknowledge that you are truly loved by the Savior. There is a reward for us if only we hold out; if only we maintain even when in our own strength, we feel as if we can't.

This verse also reminds us of what David wrote in Psalm 110:1...

Psalm 110:1

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.

Those who hold dear to the truth of God and who, at all cost, never deny the name of the living God have the promise that in just a little while, the Lord will cause all their enemies to bow at their feet; the Lord will put every enemy that rises up against the child of God under their feet. This is encouraging to know that all of our good; all of our obedience unto the Lord; all of our whole hearted dedication to the Lord is not in vain; it will not go unnoticed by the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NKJV)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

This is the comfort and the consolation we have when we keep the Lord as not only the love of our life but the focus of our life as well. Our steadfast in holding firm the commands of the Lord; our immovable spirit is standing strong in the truth; and our always being about the work of the Lord will pay off in ways we have yet to imagine or that have yet entered our heart.

Revelation 3:10-11 (NLT)

¹⁰ Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.

¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown.

It is comforting to know that our patient endurance in the Lord will be rewarded with protection from the great time of testing that will come upon the earth. While this protection is ultimately in reference to the end-time events, we can also take comfort in knowing that even now; even in our current state of trials and tribulation, our Lord will protect us as we patiently endure while we await the Lord's deliverance. The reference to "hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown" inspires us to remain awake and remain diligent in these last and evil days we are yet living in that we do not become consumed with the things occurring in the world to the point that we lose our faith; lose our hope.

Revelation 3:12 (NLT)

All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. And I will write on them the name of my God, and they will be citizens in the city of my God—the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. And I will also write on them my new name.

This is the promise of eternal life with God in Christ Jesus that is reserved for all who are part of the church of Philadelphia. Those who struggle with weakness Christ Jesus makes everlasting pillars in the house of God. This is the great reward for all our labor here in the land of the living. This is the hope that assures us that all will be well in the end.

To The Church of Laodicea...

The seventh and final letter to the churches of ancient Asia Minor is to the church in the city of Laodicea.

Revelation 3:14 (NLT)

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:

In identifying Himself as the “the Amen”, Christ Jesus emphasizes His faithfulness, sovereignty, and power to bring all things to their proper completion.

Revelation 3:15-16 (NLT)

¹⁵ *I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other!*

¹⁶ *But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!*

In contrast to the other six churches, the Laodicean church has nothing to commend them for. Here is a church who has neither blatantly denied Christ Jesus nor blatantly acknowledge Christ Jesus. These are those who sit in churches and believe the message of the gospel but are not really sold out to Christ Jesus nor meaningfully engaged in His mission. The sad truth is that there is no middle ground. Christ Jesus prefers that we be either hot or cold. If we are hot, we are right where we need to be; if we are cold, there is a chance that we can be persuaded of the truth of Christ Jesus and thus become hot. To be lukewarm describes someone who believes they have heard it all about Christ Jesus; believe they know the way; and who live as if they are somehow okay in being who they are. Christ Jesus says He will spit you out of His mouth.

Revelation 3:17 (NLT)

You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

It is a harmful thing to think you are okay when you are anything but okay. There are people among every us (in our homes; in our neighborhoods; on our jobs; in our churches) who consider themselves okay. They truly believe they are complete as complete can be in who they are. The sad truth is that they do not realize they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Sure, they may appear, on the outside, to have it all together; to be living the life perhaps you and I dream for ourselves. With their apathy came a spiritual blindness; they claim to be rich, blessed, and self-sufficient. They boasted about their wealth, but they needed genuine faith that was far more valuable than material wealth. Perhaps they were rich in material things. But spiritually, they are in a pitiful condition, made all the worse in that they could not see

their need. This was the case with the church of Laodicea as this is the case with some of us as well. Claiming to be the church of the Living God, we are a people filled with self-deceived hypocrisy.

Revelation 3:18 (NLT)

So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.

In response to the Laodicean church's smug self-assessment, Jesus advises it to buy pure gold from Him. He also offers the church white garments and eye ointment. Gold, garments, and eye salve were Laodicea's chief exports. The apostle Peter described faith, approved by the test of fire, as much more valuable than gold.

1 Peter 1:7 (KJV)

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

The Laodicean church was blind to spiritual realities. Its focus was on earthly comforts and prosperity. Christ Jesus' instructions for them to buy ointment for their eyes so they would be able to see ties into something familiar to them. Laodicea was well known throughout the region for its production of eye salve that was used to treat a number of eye diseases. Christ Jesus offers salve that could cure spiritual blindness. Symbolically speaking, if the Laodiceans applied the eye salve Jesus offered, they would be able to see their lukewarm condition and subsequently repent. The Lord also offers to open our eyes so that we too can see our spiritual state, whether we are hot, cold, or lukewarm.

Revelation 3:20-21 (NLT)

²⁰ Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

²¹ Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

Revelation 3:20 is often used as an evangelistic appeal, yet its original context communicates Christ Jesus' desire for fellowship with His lukewarm church in Laodicea (the Christian). Rather than turn His back on them, he knocks, seeking someone to acknowledge their need for Christ Jesus and open the door. If only we who are lukewarm would repent, Christ Jesus would come in and take His rightful place within our heart. Christ Jesus closes His letter with a promise to the Believer who overcomes. Christ Jesus promises to give the right to sit with Him on His throne, just as He overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne. This is the message of promise to all who overcome; we will share Christ Jesus' future kingdom.

CONCLUSION

What can we learn from the seven churches in Revelation? Revelation chapter two and chapter three are key chapters in the book of Revelation as they explain the history of God's church—where it has gone astray, and what it needs to do about it. In these chapters, we get to listen in as Christ Jesus gives seven different churches a performance review. John writes to these seven churches as representatives of all churches. If you'll notice, at the end of every letter it says, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches". In other words, all of the criteria Christ Jesus uses to evaluate these seven

churches could potentially be applied to any church, and they have lessons for every Believer. It would be an inaccurate assessment to say that each of the seven churches only represents a different age in church history. In other words, Ephesus would be the early church, and Laodicea would be the church in the final stage of history, etc. According to this view, for example, the Ephesian church would represent the time when the apostles were alive and ministering. Then, the church at Smyrna would represent the post-apostolic era when the church was persecuted by the Roman empire. Laodicea, being the final church listed, supposedly describes the lukewarm church of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If this were accurate, it would mean that every church today is a lukewarm church living in the era of the Laodicean church. To purport that the Laodicean church symbolizes the lukewarm church of the last many decades is to completely disregard the multitude of churches around the world that are on fire with the power of the Holy Spirit and zealously engaged in evangelism and missions; these congregations don't look anything like the church of Laodicea. As a matter of fact, they are the complete opposite.

With that said, it is our position that the letters to the seven churches in Revelation are not simply historical documents preserved for a bygone era. They offer timeless lessons that speak directly to the heart of the church (Believer) today. Each letter addresses specific issues within the church, but together, they present a powerful picture of the challenges, temptations, and opportunities facing every Christian community. Christ Jesus' call upon us to avoid compromise with the world challenges us to stand firm in truth, even when culture pressures us to conform. As we reflect on these messages, we are reminded, my brothers and my sister that Christ Jesus walks among His church today, guiding, refining, and calling us to shine His light in a dark world. The letters to the seven churches also point us to eternal rewards, encouraging us to endure trials with the hope of Christ Jesus' return. So, let us each individually reflect upon our life examining and evaluating our relationship with the Lord and if we do not measure up to the church of Smyrna or the church of Philadelphia, know that while we have time we must heed the call of Christ Jesus to turn from our wrong ways to those that reflect the end-time church our Savior and Lord is looking for upon His return.

God's peace and blessing be upon you....

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