

The Seven Churches

Revelation 2-3

1. The Passionless Church – Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7)

- a. Description of Jesus (v. 1)
 - 1) He holds the seven “messengers” of the churches in His hand and walks among the lampstands (churches).
 - 2) This church, while it strayed from its first love, could not blame Jesus. He upheld the pastor and desired to purify the church.
- b. Commendation (v. 2-3,6)
 - 1) They could not tolerate evil.
 - 2) They were doctrinally sound and could “sniff out” heresy.
 - 3) They endured persecution for Jesus’ name with endurance.
 - 4) They abhorred a lifestyle of self-indulgence (“practices of the Nicolaitans”).
- c. Correction (v. 4)
 - 1) They lost their love/passion for the Savior.
 - 2) They had the outward shell of religion but were operating within their own strength.
 - 3) God had departed long ago, and they never missed Him.
- d. Instruction/Warning (v.5)
 - 1) Remember, repent & return.
 - 2) The threat of losing their status as a “church” of the Lord was based upon their lack of love for their Savior.
- e. Closing and Promise (v.7)
 - 1) Eternal life awaits the victorious one.
 - 2) As a Christian, we ARE victorious (Romans 8:37)
- f. Summary – A wildfire revival broke out in Ephesus during Paul’s 2 year stay there (Acts 19:1,10). This church is also the one to whom the great letter of Ephesians was written. It

had at least one remarkably committed pastor named Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3ff). Yet, with its rich heritage, this church lost its fervor for its Lord and Savior. It is not only important how we start. We must finish well, too.

2. The Purified Church – Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11)

a. Description of Jesus (v. 8)

- 1) Jesus knows what it's like to die unjustly. He knows what it is like to experience persecution.
- 2) But Jesus conquered death giving us the ability to look death in the face without fear (Hebrews 2:14-15)

b. Commendation (v. 9)

- 1) Jesus knows (by experience) what these dear Christians went through.
- 2) He knew that their tormentors were motivated by Satan.

c. Correction (n/a)

d. Instruction/Warning (v. 10)

- 1) More suffering was on the way but they were encouraged to face it without fear.
- 2) The Devil sends trials to defeat us. God sends trials to strengthen us, never to make us stumble (James 1:2-4).
- 3) They were told to be faithful to God and His Word, even if it cost them their life. This revealed the genuineness of their faith in Christ.

e. Closing and Promise (v. 11)

- 1) There may come a time when a Christian will die for his or her faith...but everyone is going to die sometime anyway.
- 2) The comfort of the Christian is to know that while we must go through the 1st (physical) death, we will *not* go through the 2nd (spiritual) death in eternal hell.

f. Summary – Just as an intense fire will purify metals, so will churches that are experiencing persecution usually be purified. Persecution separates the “real” Christians from those who aren’t really serious about the Lord. Those who aren’t genuine will leave because they will not suffer for something they do not believe. Those whose faith is real will find that suffering can be used by God to make them more like Jesus.

3. The Passive Church – Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17)

a. Description of Jesus (v. 12)

- 1) The fact that Jesus had a “sharp, two-edged sword” implied imminent divine judgment.
 - 2) This reference would cause them to realize that for too long, they had tolerated what Jesus abhorred.
- b. Commendation (v. 13)
- 1) The fact that this church resided near “Satan’s throne” spoke to the fact that they were surrounded by total and outright evil. An altar to Zeus was built in this city.
 - 2) Even upon pain of death, they did not deny the Lord who bought them.
- c. Correction (v. 14-15)
- 1) This church was holding to genuine faith while maintaining passivity at blatant sin.
 - 2) “Teaching of Balaam” – (see 2 Peter 2:15; Numbers 22-25). Balaam could not curse the OT nation of Israel so he devised a plan for Israel’s enemies to infiltrate Israel’s camp with women. These women would seduce the Israelite men into intermarriage and bring with them their pagan gods. “Teaching of Balaam” refers to fornication and idolatry.
 - 3) “Teaching of Nicolaitans” – this seems to have been characterized by sensual self-indulgence.
- d. Instruction/Warning (v. 16)
- 1) Repent!
 - 2) Either the church will deal with the problem or an incensed Jesus will come and deal with it.
- e. Closing and Promise (v. 17)
- 1) The “hidden manna” refers to the bread placed in the ark of the covenant. This is a reference to Jesus who is the Bread of Life.
 - 2) A “white stone” with one’s name on it was used to admit one to entertainments.”¹ This symbolizes our “ticket” to heaven.
- f. Summary – The church at Pergamum, while maintaining an admirable commitment to their Lord allowed sin to infiltrate their church. They needed to learn that they must be no more passive toward sin than Jesus is.

4. The Poisoned Church – Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29)

¹ A.T. Robertson, Robertson’s Word Pictures, vol. IV, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 307.

a. Description of Jesus (v. 18)

- 1) “The Son of God” points to His deity and all privileges and abilities that go with it.
- 2) The fiery eyes and bronze feet let them know that Jesus, who could see everything that was going on had the right and ability to stomp out with divine judgment the sin they had tolerated.

b. Commendation (v. 19)

- 1) This church had an impressive list of godly attributes.
- 2) They, unlike the church at Ephesus, had grown stronger than when they began.

c. Correction (v. 20-21)

- 1) Someone in the church (probably referred to as Jezebel to associate her with the evil OT character) was not being stopped in their ploy to bring sexual immorality and idolatry into the congregation.
- 2) Forgiveness after repentance (even for this “Jezebel”) was offered but she refused.

d. Instruction/Warning (v. 22-25)

- 1) Unless repentance took place, divine judgment would be swift and overwhelming.
- 2) The end result would be a godly fear in other churches that would see God’s lack of tolerance for sin.

e. Closing and Promise (v. 26-29)

- 1) The right and ability to reign would be given to the Christian during the millennial reign.
- 2) The “Morning Star” refers to Jesus (Rev. 22:16) and the close relationship we presently enjoy and the future enjoyment in heaven.

f. Summary – The church at Thyatira had all of the signs of outward (and inward) godliness and yet they tolerated the poison of sin to infiltrate their church. Sin *must* be dealt with as a poisonous snake and either avoided or killed.

5. The Pulseless Church – Sardis (Rev 3:1-6)

a. Description of Jesus (v. 1)

- 1) Jesus had the Holy Spirit that was given to each believer.
- 2) Jesus had the “messengers” to each of the churches in his control.

b. Commendation (v. 1a)

- 1) They were busy doing all of the things a church should do.
- 2) They even had a reputation among those who observed them that they were a “vibrant” church.

c. Correction (v. 1b)

- 1) To understand Jesus’ correction, we must understand the city. Sardis enjoyed security behind impregnable city walls. It wallowed in material wealth. Its people gloated in the esteem of being the capital city in the area. It seems that virtually every need was met ... and there was no felt need for Jesus.
- 2) They had no spiritual vitality. They were characterized by empty rituals. They were D-E-A-D, dead.
- 3) Their services were probably lifeless. No one was getting saved. No one had a desire to tell others about the Gospel. People didn’t care about growing in their walk with the Lord.

d. Instruction/Warning (v. 2-4)

- 1) Fan the flame of what little is going right in the church. There is still a godly remnant (v. 4)
- 2) Repent!
- 3) Lack of repentance will bring swift judgment.

e. Closing and Promise (v. 5-6)

- 1) Eternal life in heaven characterized by complete purity is assured.
- 2) Jesus will not be ashamed to speak of them to God.

f. Summary – Cannot serve God and the world. A love for the world will cause Christians to desire God less. Sin will not be taken seriously and the church will die. It might maintain its attendance and may even grow, but there will be no spiritual vitality as it falls into meetings filled with lifeless rituals.

6. The Persevering Church – Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13)

a. Description of Jesus (v. 7)

- 1) Jesus is noted for His godly characteristics of holiness and truth. (It is in the light of these characteristics that we see the sin that too often characterizes us.)

- 2) He holds the keys to the heavenly kingdom that the “dead in Christ” will one day inhabit.
- b. Commendation (v. 8-10)
 - 1) Because of their faithfulness in their godly walk to this point, Jesus offered an “open door” or more opportunities to serve Him.
 - 2) Making those from the synagogue of Satan “come and bow down” at the feet of this church can mean:
 - a. Some of Satan’s group would get saved and join the church in worship of the true God.
 - b. Satan’s group would one day acknowledge respect for these godly Christians.
- c. Correction (n/a)
 - 1) A Christian/church does not have to go through persecution like the church at Smyrna to be godly.
 - 2) We can strive for and achieve godliness no matter the circumstances.
- d. Instruction/Warning (v. 11)
 - 1) Persevere! Don’t stop what you’re doing!
 - 2) The crown may refer to eternal rewards that are sent ahead of us when we live obedient, godly lives. The extent to which they would be rewarded depended upon whether or not they persevered in their works.
- e. Closing and Promise (v. 12-13)
 - 1) They would be placed in God’s presence forever.
 - 2) Their eternal security would be signified by the names of God, the heavenly Jerusalem and Jesus placed upon them.
- f. Summary –
 - 1) This church gives us an example of what we are supposed to be like. But at no point is there room to rest on what has been done. We should embrace every opportunity for ministry God gives us and persevere.

7. **The Pathetic Church – Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22)**

- a. Description of Jesus (v. 14)

- 1) Jesus was the personification of truth. He is the measuring stick by which we will be judged.
 - 2) Creation came about by the work of Jesus. Therefore, He has a right to own and rule what He created.
- b. Commendation (n/a)
- 1) This is the only church that Jesus had nothing good to say about.
- c. Correction (v. 15-17)
- 1) This church was located in a city that “became the wealthiest, most important commercial center in the region.”²
 - 2) They walked the line so that they were not really “ungodly” but the fact is that God didn’t fit into their agendas. They had learned to satisfy their inner longing for God with the mindset of materialism and felt no need for an intimate relationship with the Savior.
- d. Instruction/Warning (v. 18-20)
- 1) They were to recognize that the temporal wealth they enjoyed didn’t satisfy/solve their deepest spiritual need.
 - 2) They were to recognize that if they really were saved, God would discipline them. They were to repent.
 - 3) Instead of being worshiped inside the church, Jesus was at the door knocking, asking to be invited in. He would renew His relationship with them if they responded.
- e. Closing and Promise (v. 21-22)
- 1) If their relationship with Jesus evidenced itself in perseverance, they would reign with Jesus one day.
 - 2) They would sit on Jesus’ throne since Jesus was granted the right to sit on God’s throne.
- f. Summary – Churches in cultures characterized by material wealth often experience spiritual poverty (their commitment to Jesus is shallow and is characterized ironically by spiritual pride). (See Matthew 6:24)

² The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997), 1997.