

Text: Rev 2.1-29

A traditional dispensationalist view of the seven churches:

The seven churches addressed were in existence in the first century, and what characterized each of them has marked other local churches in various locations throughout church history. However they also reveal the history of the church from the time John wrote to the Rapture in seven successive periods.¹

- Rev 2.1-7 — Ephesus, *the backslidden church*, Christ to AD 100
- Rev 2.8-11 — Smyrna, *the persecuted church*, AD 100-300 [Constantine]
- Rev 2.12-17 — Pergamos, *the tolerant church*, AD 300-600
- Rev 2.18-29 — Thyatira, *the tainted church*, AD 600-1500
- Rev 3.1-6 — Sardis, *the Reformation church*, AD 1500-1750
- Rev 3.7-13 — Philadelphia, *the true church*, AD 1750-1950
- Rev 3.14-22 — Laodicea, *the nauseating church*, AD 1950 to Rapture

The list above is Jesse Boyd's list, he held to this view. Dr. Custer did not, instead referring to seven historical churches which represent typical churches of every age.

Major problems with the "Church History view"

- Too subjective (those who hold the view differ among themselves where to put the historical dividing lines)
- No exegetical reason for assigning any of these churches to any "era" of church history (contradicts the literal-grammatical method of interpretation)
- Each of these churches existed when John wrote, exhibiting the characteristics John describes

Instead of standing for the progress of Church history, they stand as typical of types of churches at any given time in church history. These are the things "that are" (Rev 1.19).

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Rev 3.20.

I. Ephesus (1-7)

- A. The Lord who rules the churches addresses the angel (the current pastor) of the church in Ephesus (1)
- B. This church is **commended** for its faithfulness and endurance and commitment to the truth (2-3)
- C. This church is **condemned** for the loss of its first love — “busy and faithful, but cold in heart”² (4)
- D. This church is **counseled** to repent and do the first deeds, or else lose its very existence (5)
- E. One final **concession** – this church opposes the Nicolaitans [a group we know nothing about] (6)
- F. The promise to the overcomer: eating of the tree of life (7)

II. Smyrna (8-11)

- A. The Lord who suffered addresses the pastor of the suffering church (8)
- B. This church is **commended** for their endurance of suffering (9)
- C. There is no **condemnation**.
- D. This church is **counseled** not to fear or lose heart, their tribulation is but for ‘ten days’ [*i.e.* a short time] (10)
- E. The promise to the overcomer: he shall NOT NOT be hurt by the second death (11)

III. Pergamum (12-17)

- A. The Lord whose word is sharp addresses the pastor of Pergamum (12)
- B. This church is **commended** for its faithfulness under persecution in a violent place, the seat of Satan [Pergamum noted for emperor worship, among other things] (13)
- C. This church is **condemned** for its toleration of false teachers, the Balaam-teachers and the Nicolaitans (14-15)
- D. This church is **counseled** to repent or else face war with Christ (16)

² Donald C. S. Johnson, *Thru the Bible Notes* (unpublished, 2005), NT, Week 29, p. 12.

- E. The promise to the overcomer: the hidden manna (that sustenance the world does not know), the white stone of acquittal, and the new name of redemption (17)

IV. Thyatira (18-29)

- A. The Lord who is a consuming fire addresses the pastor of Thyatira (18)
- B. This church is **commended** for its zeal in good works and perseverance, deeds that were increasing (19)
- C. This church is **condemned** for tolerating 'the woman Jezebel' – a false teacher who compromises many (20-23)
- D. This church is **counseled** to hold fast to what they have (not compromising with the error around them) (24-25)
- E. The promise to the overcomer: the right to reign with Christ in his kingdom (26-29)

Conclusion:

As typical churches, one can evaluate the situation of any church and know what God thinks of that church. We should especially evaluate our own church.

As believers, all the promises to the overcomers are potential blessings each of us might strive for.

But in our striving, we must remember the warnings of the condemnations as well, repenting of any compromises we make in the pure ministry of the word.