

Text: Rev 3.1-22

We are considering the seven churches of Asia as typical of churches in the Church Age, the age of the world in which we live. You will find churches that exhibit the characteristics at any point in church history.

I. Review (ch. 2)**A. Ephesus: cold-hearted orthodoxy (2.1-7)**

Rev 2.4 you have left your first love.

B. Smyrna: persecuted faithfulness (2.8-11)

Rev 2.9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)

C. Pergamum: error infiltrating (2.12-17)

Rev 2.14 because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam

D. Thyatira: error tolerating (2.18-29)

Rev 2.20 you tolerate the woman Jezebel, ... she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality*

II. Sardis (1-6)**A. The Lord addresses Sardis as the one who has perfect insight (through the Spirit) and complete power over them (1a)****1. Revisiting the phrase “the seven Spirits of God”**

a. See the parallel in 1.4: we took this to refer to the Holy Spirit

b. OT Background:

1) Some point to Isa 11.2-3 (but there the ref. is only to the Spirit plus six virtues)

2) Better is Zech 4.2-6: seven lamps and “not by might ... but by my Spirit”

“While there is but one Holy Spirit, he does not invest himself incrementally in the churches but is always available simultaneously, in his fullness, to all seven congregations.”¹

¹ Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 39, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2012), 59.

2. Here the Son has both the Spirit and the messengers, perfect insight, there is no contradicting his assessment of the church

B. There is little commendation of this church, only sober **counsel** (1b-2)

1. The church works (“deeds”), seems alive, but is dead (1b)

2. The Lord counsels the church to wake up, and strengthen what virtue remains (2)

a. “Not completed” means “not filled up”

b. “The offense is that Sardis has not filled the standard expected by the risen Lord.”²

C. This church is **condemned** as if already dead (3)

1. The Lord calls for repentance (there is hope)

2. Failing repentance, the Lord will come as a thief in the night (as he does to unbelievers)

The city of Sardis fell twice in ancient history when invading armies ascended its heights by an unknown pathway, suddenly falling on the city and conquering them.

3. “The threat suggests that dead and dying churches are frequently oblivious to either their condition or to the imminent threat.”³

D. There is a **commendation** of a few individuals who remain righteous amid this dying church (4)

1. These live holy and separated lives, despite the error around them

2. Their reward is to accompany the Lord in the triumphal procession

“All Roman citizens wore the pure white toga on holidays and at religious ceremonies... and hence the city on festivals and holidays is called ‘Candida urbs,’ the city in white. Especially on the day of a Triumph white was the universal colour ... and there can hardly be any doubt that the idea of walking in a Triumph similar to that celebrated by a victorious Roman general is here present in the mind of the

² Patterson, 39:122.

³ Patterson, 39:122.

writer when he uses the words, 'they shall walk with me in white'."⁴

E. The promise for the overcomer (5)

1. The overcomer will likewise be clothed in white
2. The Lord will not erase his name from the book of life (double negative: emphatic "NO!")
3. The Lord will rather confess him before the Father

This is not a threat! It is an emphatic promise. One should not take it to imply that it is possible for a believer to have his name blotted out of the book of life. It is a promise that such will NEVER happen.

Constable calls it a "litotes," an "understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary (as in 'not a bad singer' or 'not unhappy')"⁵

III. Philadelphia (7-13)

A. The Lord addresses Philadelphia as the one with absolute authority (7)

1. He who is holy: the chief (or essential) attribute of God
2. He who is true: distinct from men, who are fickle and false
3. He who has the key of David: (See Isa 22.20-23) the only one with access to God
4. This one opens and shuts and no one can contradict him

B. This church knows only **commendation**, it may be small ("little power") but a great open door is set for it (8)

1. Philadelphia had a reputation as a "missionary city" for Hellenism (promoting Greek culture and language)

⁴ William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 386.

⁵ Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

2. The Lord made the church of Philadelphia a missionary church, promoting his gospel

C. There is no **condemnation** of this church.

D. This church has detailed promises:

1. The Lord will make their antagonists bow down at their feet and acknowledge the Christ who loved them (9)

a. There is no record of a historical event like this

b. The ancient prophecies speak of the nations performing such worship in the day of the Lord (see, e.g., Ezek 36.19-24, 32)

c. In this sense, the nations will acknowledge that the Lord of the churches is the Lord of all in the end times

2. The Lord will keep the saints 'out of' the period of Tribulation that is coming upon the earth (10)

a. The language of the verse point to the coming Tribulation, what Jesus called "the great tribulation" (Mt 24.21)

b. The Lord said this tribulation was so severe, the days would be shortened (Mt 24.22)

c. The promise to "keep you from" the coming tribulation is literally, "out of," *i.e.* to remove you from the tribulation, not to keep you through the tribulation

d. The passage is perhaps the strongest support for the pre-tribulation Rapture in the Bible

See also 1 Cor 15.51-52, 1 Th 1.10, 4.16-17, 5.9

3. The Lord promises his saints that he would come for them quickly; quickly means suddenly and without warning (11)

E. The promise for the overcomer: to become a pillar in the temple of God; recognized forever as one who stood for God on earth (12)

IV. Laodicea (14-22)

A. The Lord addresses this church as "the Amen," the One whose faithful and true Word can be depended upon (14)

1. Address emphasizes the Lord's trustworthiness

2. Also emphasizes his authority over Creation as the author of Creation
- B. There is **no commendation** for this church
- C. This church is **condemned** because it is stagnant in its spiritual life, as disappointing as water that is neither cold nor hot (15-16)
1. The symbolism of hot and cold somewhat misunderstood
 2. The water supply in the region varied considerably
 - a. Nearby (2 miles) Hierapolis had hot springs which refreshed some ailments with hot mineral baths
 - b. Colossae (10 miles) had great cold spring of water that provided a torrent of well-tasting refreshment
 - c. Laodicea had no near supply, but aqueducts brought mineral laden water some distance that was lukewarm by the time it arrived
 3. The picture is that the church of Laodicea was like its water supply, nauseating
 - a. If they were hot, they could provide relief to weary souls
 - b. If they were cold, they could slake the thirst of thirsty hearts
- D. The Lord **counsels** this church to become aware of its need and turn to the Lord for remedy (17-18)
1. Realize your true condition (17)
 2. Buy from me those things you need (18)
 - a. They think they are rich; they need refined gold from the Lord for true riches
 - b. They thought Laodicean black wool provided fine garments; they need white robes (righteousness) from the Lord
 - c. They thought the mineral based salves of Laodicea gave them clear sight; they need God's truth to see themselves properly
- E. The call for repentance (19-20)
1. The Lord brings a hard message because he loves them and desires repentance (19)

2. The Lord stands outside the door of the church, knocking and calling for repentance (20)

F. The promise to the overcomer: to sit in authority with Christ in his throne – that is to share in the rule of his kingdom when the Lord establishes it (21)

Conclusion:

Revelation 3:22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Take warning, take a hard look at yourself, repent, revive, serve.