

Chapter summary - Same as chapter two.

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II. the vision of the seven churches, (2:1-3:22)

E. CHRIST DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH OF SARDIS -- "YOU CAN BE DEADER THAN A DOORNAIL AND NOT EVEN KNOW IT!" (3:1-6)

"This letter had a different tone from previous letters. For the poor, but rich, church in Smyrna, our Lord had nothing but words of praise. For the churches of Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira, He had a mixture of praise and criticism. To the majority of the church at Sardis, He said nothing praiseworthy. Sardis may have been the first church in history to have been filled with what we call "nominal Christians." Sardis appeared to be alive, but was dead. The Lord is never impressed by the beauty of a well-kept mausoleum, knowing that inside are the bones of a dead man.

When John wrote this letter to Sardis, it was a wealthy city, but degenerate. Twice the city had been lost because the leadership and the citizenry were too lazy to defend themselves from their enemies. The attitude of the city was reflected in the demise of its church. Like the city that smugly dwelt upon its past glory, the church at Sardis had won a good reputation at one time and the members thought they had arrived; they were content in the beautiful building they had erected on the corner of Self-satisfaction and Complacency streets."¹

"Ancient Sardis, the capital of Lydia, was a most important city [founded about 1200 B.C. -- the Romans took control of it in 133 B.C.]. It lay about fifty miles east of Ephesus at the junction of five main roads; so it was a center for trade. It was also a military center, for it was located on an almost inaccessible plateau. The acropolis of Sardis was about 1,500 feet above the main roads, and it formed an impregnable fortress. The main religion in the city was the worship of Artemis, one of the "nature cults" that built on the idea of death and re-birth.

Sardis was also known for its [discovery on how to dye wool and for the] manufacture of woolen garments, a fact that has bearing on Christ's message to the church."

The message to Sardis is a warning to all "great churches" that are living on past glory. Dr. Vance Havner has frequently reminded us that spiritual ministries often go through four stages: a man, a movement, a machine, and then a monument. Sardis was at the "monument" stage, but there was still hope!"²

 **COMMENTARY:**

¹ Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*, p. 50

² Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos Library System.

1. Salutation, (1a)

NOTES:

INTERPRETATION:

The Greeting to the Church

¹ “**And to the angel** (*lit.*, “messenger” - possibly the pastor), **of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He** (Jesus Christ), **who has** (possesses), **the seven Spirits of God** (the sevenfold manifestation of God the Holy Spirit in these seven churches, [7 being a number of completeness, perfection]), **and the seven stars** (the seven angels [*which may actually represent the seven pastors* - {see note on Rev. 1:16}] of the seven churches of Asia; which may also symbolize God's faithful witnesses or ambassadors):

F APPLICATION:

There was hope for the Sardis Church because Christ was the Head of the church and He was able to bring new life.

All of the church’s man-made programs can never bring life, any more than a circus can resurrect a corpse. The church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and its life comes from the Spirit. When the Spirit is grieved, the church begins to lose life and power. When sin is confessed and church members get right with God and with each other, then the Spirit infuses new life—revival!³ This not only happens corporately, but individually as well.

2. Commendation, (*none*)

3. Reproof, (1b)

INTERPRETATION:

The Public Reputation of the Church

“**I know** (in detail), **your works** (your deeds), **that you have a name** (a reputation), **that you are** (Spirit filled, spiritually), **alive, but** (the reality is), **you are** (spiritually), **dead**, (you are using spiritual words and are promoting spiritual programs; but you are functioning on a completely human level -- You talk like Christians, you look like Christians and you act like Christians; but your heart is as unchristian as ever.)

F APPLICATION:

John MacArthur offers these danger signs of a dying church. A church is in danger:

1. when it is content to rest on its past laurels
2. when it is more concerned with liturgical forms than spiritual reality.
3. when it focuses on curing social ills rather than changing people's hearts through preaching the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ
4. when it is more concerned with material than spiritual things

³ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos Library System.

6. when it is more enamored with doctrinal creeds and systems of theology than with the Word of God
7. when it loses its conviction that every word of the Bible is the word of God Himself.

No matter what its attendance, no matter how impressive its buildings, no matter what its status in the community, such a church, having denied the only source of spiritual life, is dead.⁴

The church at Sardis was a good example of what the Pharisees and Saducees were when Jesus accused them of being spiritually dead. (cf. Matt. 23:27-28)

4. Exhortation, (2-4)

INTERPRETATION:

The Noticeable Imperfections of the Church

² (Snap out of your complacency, awaken from your sleep and), "**Be** (constantly), **watchful** (on guard, attentive),⁵ **and strengthen** (fan into flame), **the things** (the few flickers of spiritual life), **which remain, that are** (even now), **ready to die** (and will bring your all but nonexistent spirituality to complete extinction), **for I** (Jesus Christ), **have not found your works perfect** (they are of an impure quality), **before God**, (they don't measure up to Christ's standards).

F APPLICATION:

We can learn two very important matters from this one verse. One concerns complacency and the other concerns seeming impossibilities.

1. When Cyrus king of Persia, attacked Sardis, "Croesus felt utterly secure in his impregnable situation atop the acropolis and foresaw an easy victory over the Persians... After retiring one evening while the drama was unfolding, he awakened to discover that the Persians had gained control of the acropolis by scaling one-by-one the steep walls (549 B.C.). So secure did the Sardians feel that they left this means of access completely unguarded, permitting the climbers to ascend unobserved. It is said that even a child could have defended the city from this kind of attack, but not so much as one observer had been appointed to watch the side that was believed to be inaccessible.

History repeated itself more than three and a half centuries later when Antiochus the Great conquered Sardis...(195 B.C.)...⁶

Having a lack of concern, feeling invincible or that you've got it together, has been the ruin of many. Samson found that out, (Judges 16). His strength had left him and he didn't even know it!

⁴ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 111-112

⁵ The situation was dire but not totally hopeless. Immediate steps were to be taken to "strengthen what remains." Some persons and things were salvageable if quick and decisive action were taken. Otherwise, death would follow. (Gaeblein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, p. 448)

⁶ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 110-111

Complacency can literally get you killed. Especially if it is practiced by your leaders. **False security produces a certain calamity that never needed to become a reality.**

2. We all too often look at a desperate or seemingly impossible situation and give up. But with God nothing is impossible! (Lu. 1:37) God is a God of second, third and fourth chances. The disciple Peter and many other biblical characters found that out. **Improper insecurity produces a certain calamity that never needed to become a reality.**

The Former Reception of the Church

³ **“Remember therefore** (bear in mind in light of your plight), **how you have received** (the Person of truth, the Holy Spirit), **and heard** (the Word of truth, the Word of God); **hold fast** (keep and obey what you once received and heard), **and** (thereby), **repent** (turn from your defection from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God).

The Surprise Inspection of the Church

“Therefore (be it known that), **if you will not watch** (if you will not wake up from your complacency, if you will not fan your few remaining flickers of spirituality in to flame), **I** (promise you, I), **will come upon you as a thief** (who comes to take from you anything you possess of value), **and you will not know what hour I will come upon you**, (I will come unexpectedly, secretly, thus you will have no time to prepare a defense against me).

F APPLICATION:

The promised return of Christ is sure; the time of that return is unknown... As time goes on, the probability of Christ's return at the time of the then living generation becomes ever greater, and thus the more urgent it becomes for believers to watch for Him. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (I Thessalonians 5:2, 4). One of the saddest things a Christian could contemplate is the prospect of being engaged in some Christ-dishonoring activity at the moment of Christ's return, thus to "be ashamed before him at his coming" (I John 2:28).

Christians in such all-but-dead churches must not only awaken to the truth of Christ's second coming but must also look back to their own conversions, when they received Christ and heard His voice. To these great truths they must hold fast, repenting of their spiritual indifference.⁷

The Personal Sanctification of Some in the Church

⁴ **“You have** (though), **a few names** (a remnant of individuals), **even in Sardis** (as dead as the church is), **who have not defiled** (smeared or polluted), **their garments** (by returning to walk as the children of darkness rather than light [cf., Eph. 4:17-24; 5:1-18]);

⁷ Morris, *The Revelation Record*, p. 68

F APPLICATION:

God always has a remnant. In the days of Noah, his family alone was true to God and His Word. God had a remnant in Sodom, (Lot and his family). Elijah thought he was the only one who remained true to God, but God said that He had 7,000 men who had not bowed their knee to Baal. God always has who He needs, where He needs him, doing what He needs him doing, the way He needs it done, at just the right time.

The Special Distinctions of Some in the Church

“**and** (because of their righteousness), **they shall walk with Me** (as My companions), **in white** (as they walk in light rather than darkness -- testifying of their innocence and purity), **for they are worthy**, (as their person harmonizes with their reputation and are thus able to experience the joy of their salvation [cf., Psa. 1:1-3]).

F APPLICATION:

“Wake up! Be watchful! Repent! Remember the Word you have received and obey it!” This is the formula for revival. It is good to guard our spiritual heritage, but we must not embalm it. It is not enough to be true to the faith and have a great history. That faith must produce life and works.⁸

5. Promise, (5-6)

 INTERPRETATION:

The Eternal Possessions of Some in the Church

⁵ “**He who overcomes** (every genuine professor of Jesus Christ; the seed that has fallen on fertile ground [cf., Mat. 13:18-23]), **shall be clothed in white garments** (for all of eternity, which are neither spotted nor wrinkled [Eph. 5:27]), **and** (concerning the genuine believer), **I will not** (as the Scriptures promise [e.g., Mat. 25:34; John 5:24; 6:35-37, 39; 10:28-29; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 12:2]), **blot out** (remove), **his name from the Book of Life; but I will** (assuredly), **confess his name before My Father and before His angels**, (I will acknowledge him to be a genuine follower).⁹

The Moral Obligation of the Church

⁶ “**He who has an ear** (he who truly is saved and whose mind is spiritually discerning), **let him hear** (pay attention and act on), **what the Spirit says to the (seven), churches.”**’

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos Library System.

⁹ "I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life," is not a threat, but a confirmation. Jesus isn't insinuating that there is a chance a believer's name could be removed from the Book of Life, He is saying just the opposite; it never will be!

F APPLICATION:

The warning here is that we not grow comfortable in our churches, lest we find ourselves slowly dying. The encouragement is that no church is beyond hope as long as there is a remnant in it, willing to strengthen the things that remain.¹⁰

§ § § § § § § § § § § § § § § §

II. the vision of the seven churches, (2:1-3:22)

F. CHRIST DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA -- "FAITH, DON'T LEAVE THIS LIFE WITHOUT IT!" (3:7-13)

Philadelphia—in Lydia, twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis, built by Attalus Philadelphus, king of Pergamos, who died A.D. 138.¹¹

As most people know, *Philadelphia* means “love of the brethren.” Certainly, brotherly love is an important mark of the Christian. We are “taught of God to love one another” (1 Thes. 4:9): by God the Father (1 John 4:19), God the Son (John 13:34), and God the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). But it is not enough to love God and our fellow believers; we must also love a lost world and seek to reach unbelievers with the Good News of the Cross. This church had a vision to reach a lost world, and God set before them an open door.

Philadelphia was situated in a strategic place on the main route of the Imperial Post from Rome to the East, and thus was called “the gateway to the East.” It was also called “little Athens” because of the many temples in the city. The church was certainly located in a place of tremendous opportunity.

The only major problem with the location was that the area was prone to earthquakes. Philadelphia sat on a geological fault, and in 17 B.C. it was destroyed by a severe earthquake that also destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. Afterward, some of the citizens refused to move back into the city and remained in the surrounding countryside, which they called “the burnt land.” There did not seem to be much security in the city of brotherly love!¹²

Like all churches, the one in Philadelphia had its imperfections. Yet the Lord commended its members for their faithfulness and loyalty. They and the congregation at Smyrna were the only two of the, seven that received no rebuke from the Lord of the church. In spite of their fleshly struggles, the Christians at Philadelphia were faithful and obedient, serving and worshiping the Lord. They provide a good model of a loyal church.¹³

This church had right doctrine and right living going hand in hand. Where doctrine is present, without love, it is legalism. Where love is present without doctrine, it is humanism.¹⁴

¹⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos Library System.

¹¹ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; and Brown, David, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1998.

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

¹³ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 118

¹⁴ Jeremiah, *"Escape the Coming Night,"* p. 53

1. Salutation, (7a)

NOTES:

INTERPRETATION:

The Greeting to the Church

⁷ “**And to the angel** (*lit.*, “*messenger*” - possibly the pastor), **of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He** (Jesus Christ), **who is** (intrinsically - always has been and always will be), **holy** (“*hagios*” set apart, utterly sinless and absolutely flawless), **He who is** (always has been and always will be), **true** (genuine, authentic, real, verses false, perverted, hypothetical)

F APPLICATION:

All believers are positionally consecrated and set apart as holy to God through Jesus Christ. But there is not a human being alive (save Christ the God Man), who is intrinsically holy. Believers are made to be holy through an external agent; Christ. Our not having been and always being true proves it. Christ is professing His deity here. He is intrinsically holy and His being always true is proof of it!

2. Commendation, (7b-10)

INTERPRETATION:

The Evangelistic Opportunity of the Church

“**He** (Jesus Christ), **who has** (in His possession), **the key** (symbolizing control and free access) **of David** (symbolizing the messianic office),¹⁵ **He** (Jesus Christ is thus the One), **who** (sovereignly), **opens** (doors of opportunity, service), **and no one shuts** (no one can stop His blessing), **and** (Jesus also), **shuts** (doors of opportunity, service), **and no one opens**, (or can force Christ to bless in a way He determines not to)”:

⁸ “**I know** (in detail), **your works** (your deeds). **See, I have set before you an open door** (full of opportunities),¹⁶ **and no one can shut it** (no one, not even the devil, can terminate your opportunities or stop you from taking full advantage of them);¹⁷

COMMENTARY:

¹⁵ Jesus alone has the sovereign authority to determine who enters His messianic kingdom (cf. John 10:7, 9; 14:6; Acts 4:12). Revelation 1:18 reveals that Jesus has the keys to death and hell; here He is depicted as having the keys to salvation and blessing. (MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 119)

¹⁶ The open door means, first, a wonderful opportunity to preach the gospel, and secondly, the operation of God's grace creating willing ears to listen and eager hearts to receive it. (Cf. 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Acts 14:27.) Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, p. 75 I believe that this open door included a missionary outreach to Asia.

¹⁷ The situation of the city fully explains this saying. Philadelphia lay at the upper extremity of a long valley, which opens back from the sea. After passing Philadelphia the road along this valley ascends to the Phrygia land and the great Central Plateau, the main mass of Asia Minor. This road was the one which led from the harbor of Smyrna to the north-eastern parts of Asia Minor and the East in general, the one rival to the great route connecting Ephesus with the East, and the greatest Asian trade-route of Mediaeval times.... Philadelphia, therefore, was the keeper of the gateway to the plateau. (W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, pp. 404-5)

F APPLICATION:

We need to do everything we can to be and do our best for Christ as we live for Him and serve Him. But, at the same time, we must realize that the fruit of our labors is not dependent upon our expertise. Not only will the gates of hell not prevail against Christ as He builds His church, but neither will our inability's, failures or lack of resources. If God opens the door of opportunity or blessing, He is the only one that will be able to shut it. We can miss out on the opportunity or blessing while someone else takes advantage of it, but the door will not close until Christ has accomplished His complete will, with us or without us. We simply need to be prayerfully available as He leads. To see where God is working and join Him.

 INTERPRETATION:**The Three Greatest Strengths of the Church**

for (or the reason being), **you have** (or you personally possess), **a little strength** (but your main body of strength is in Me, Your Lord, [Ex. 15:2, 3; Psa. 18:1, 2]), **have kept My word** (you obey My Word [*you don't mock it, deny it, or pick and choose from it*]), **and have not denied My name**, (you not only rely on My strength and obey My Word, but you also honor and proclaim My name before others).

F APPLICATION:

If believers would but devote themselves to the faithful exercise of these three aspects of their faith, they would certainly obtain a better resurrection, (Heb. 11:35; 1 Pet.). Everyone of these aspects of the Christian faith are obtainable to the richest and poorest, the greatest to the least, and the most intellectual to the simplest among us. So wonderful, so powerful, so significant is a local church family who is blessed to have a group of these persons in their presence, that all of Asia was the theirs to harvest.

 INTERPRETATION:**The Deceptive and Destructive Enemies of the Church**

⁹ “**Indeed** (watch and see that), **I will make those of the synagogue** (the assembly), **of Satan** (servants of the devil, [Rev. 2:9]), **who say they are Jews[ish]** (believers), **and are not,**¹⁸ **but lie—indeed** (watch and see that they who persecute you, will not be able to close the door I open unto you, but), **I will make them come and worship before your feet**, (i.e., they will be overthrown and humbled before your eyes; constrained to come and worship Me before you), **and to know that I have loved you**, (because if I am for you who can be against you [Rom. 8:31]?! Who could ever separate you from the love of Christ [Rom. 8:35-39]?!)

¹⁸ God describes a true spiritual Jew in Romans 2:28, 29.

The Daily Expectancy of the Church

¹⁰ “**Because you** (in spite of Satan's synagogue), **have kept My command to persevere** (to keep the faith), **I also will keep you from the** (future), **hour of trial** (the distinct period of time described in the rest of this letter; Revelation, [Dan. 9:25-27]), ¹⁹ **which shall come upon the whole world** (the entire human race), **to test** (to examine, expose), **those who dwell on the earth**, (to expose the people for what they really are).²⁰

F APPLICATION:

These Philippian believers did not see the fulfillment of this promise in their lifetime, as Abraham did not see the fulfillment of his promise in his; (e.g., as having as many descendants as the stars and possessing all of the land all around him). Yet Abraham and the Philippian believers remained faithful. God has given every believer numerous promises, but many of them will not be fulfilled this side of heaven. Believers must be just as determined to keep the faith as the Philippian church and Abraham; no matter what we see happening around us.

¹⁹ This is an explicit promise that the Philadelphia church will not endure the hour of trial which is unfolded, beginning in Revelation 6. Christ was saying that the Philadelphia church would not enter the future time of trouble; He could not have stated it more explicitly. If Christ had meant to say that they would be preserved *through* a time of trouble, or would be *taken out* from within the Tribulation, a different verb and a different preposition would have been required.

Though scholars have attempted to avoid this conclusion in order to affirm posttribulationism, the combination of the verb “keep” (teurein) with the preposition “from” (ek) is in sharp contrast to the meaning of keeping the church “through” (dia), a preposition which is not used here. The expression “the hour of trial” (a time period) makes it clear that they would be kept *out of* that period. It is difficult to see how Christ could have made this promise to this local church if it were God’s intention for the entire church to go through the Tribulation that will come on the entire world. Even though the church at Philadelphia would go to glory via death long before the time of trouble would come, if the church here is taken to be typical of the body of Christ standing true to the faith, the promise seems to go beyond the Philadelphia church to all those who are believers in Christ (cf. Walvoord, *Revelation*, pp. 86-8). Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

²⁰ The **coming** that Christ refers to differs from those promised to others of the seven churches (e.g., 2:5, 16; 3:3). Those earlier promises were warnings of impending temporal judgement on sinning congregations (cf. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:28-30). The **coming** spoken of here, however, is to bring the hour of testing that culminates in our Lord's second coming. It is Christ's coming to deliver the church (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1), not to bring judgment upon it. (MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 125)

Also, at the end of each passage that addresses one of the seven churches, individuals are addressed (e.g., “to him”), as well as the corporate church and seven churches, (“says to the churches”). (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) I believe that the same promise that is made to these Philippian believers as a corporate body, would a equally apply to the individual believers of the other churches who have likewise keep the faith.

3. Reproof,

None

4. Exhortation, (11)

INTERPRETATION:

The Daily Expectancy of the Church

¹¹ “**Behold, I** (Jesus Christ), **am coming quickly**, (suddenly, unexpectedly, imminently; not to judge you, but to receive you)! (So), **Hold fast** (keep a firm grasp on), **what you have** (the truth that you understand, the progress you have made by grace and the service you have thus far accomplished), **that no one** (not even those of the synagogue of Satan), **may take your crown**, (may cause you to lose your full heavenly reward).²¹

F APPLICATION:

Christ's imminent appearance should sustain our focus and energize our perseverance. Being thus focused and energized, we should further determined not to give up the fight by surrendering any truth or worthy service. Believers must not forget that it is not how we start the race, but how we finish it, that determines our reward.

"An old Southern preacher said, 'It's time for our church to wake up and sing up, preach up and pray up and never give up or let up or back up or shut up, until the church is filled up or we go up. Amen.'"²²

5. Promise, (12, 13)

INTERPRETATION:

The Future Stability and Residency of the Church

¹² “**He** (singular), **who overcomes** (as the Philadelphia believers as a whole presently are), **I** (Jesus Christ), **will make him a pillar** (place him in a place of stability, permanence, honor and security), **in the temple** (the abode), **of My God** (My Father, [*His temple is heaven, as all of heaven is God's temple*]), **and he** (the overcomer, the believer [*1 Jn. 5:5*]), **shall go out no more**, (eternally in God's kingdom with the believer dwell. He will no longer be exposed to the temptations and trials of this life as tears will be wiped away, death will be no more, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain; for the former things will have passed away [21:4]). **And I will** (also), **write on him the name of My God** (so all will know that he belongs to My Father), **and the name of the city of My God** (so all will know that his citizenship is in heaven), **the New Jerusalem, which** (literally), **comes down out of heaven from My God. And I** (even), **will write on him My new name** (that will intensify him with Me and Me with him in a special way).

²¹ Observe that the warning is "no man take thy crown." It is not, "Let no man take thy life," or "thy salvation." That is eternally secure in Christ. Being born of God, I cannot lose my salvation; but, if I am not a faithful servant, I may lose my *CROWN*. (Ironside, *Revelation*, p. 57)

²² Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*, p. 55

F APPLICATION:

To the conqueror will be given the assurance that he belongs to God and to the new Jerusalem and to Christ, and that he will everlastingly share in all the blessings and privileges of all three.²³

INTERPRETATION:

The Present Responsibility of the Church

¹³ “**He who has an ear** (he who truly is saved and whose mind is spiritually discerning), **let him hear** (pay attention and act on), **what the Spirit says to the** (seven), **churches.**”

§ § § § § § § § § § § § § § §

II. the vision of the seven churches, (2:1-3:22)

G. CHRIST DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA -- "HOW TO BE GOOD FOR NOTHING!" (3:14-22)

Laodicea— Located on a plateau several hundred feet high, Laodicea was geographically nearly impregnable. Its vulnerability to attack was due to the fact that it had to pipe in its water from several miles away through aqueducts that could easily be blocked or diverted by besieging forces.

Laodicea was founded by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus II and named after his first wife...It has been calculated that 7,500 Jewish men lived in Laodicea; there would have been several thousand more children. Even the talmud spoke scornfully of the life of ease and laxity lived by the Laodicean Jews.

With the coming of the Pax Romatia (peace under Rome's rule), Laodicea prospered. It was strategically located at the junction of two important roads: the east-west road leading from Ephesus into the interior, and the north-south road from Pergamum to the Mediterranean Sea. That location made it an important commercial city...So wealthy did Laodicea become that it paid for its own reconstruction after a devastating earthquake in A. D. 60, rejecting offers of financial aid from Rome.

The city was also famous for the soft, black wool it produced. The wool was made into clothes and woven into carpets, both much sought after. Laodicea was also an important center of ancient medicine. The nearby temple of the Phrygian god Men Karou had an important medical school associated with it. That school was most famous for an eye salve that it had developed, which was exported all over the Greco-Roman world. All three industries, finance, wool, and the production of eye salve, come into play in this letter to the Laodicean church.²⁴

COMMENTARY:

²³ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, p. 75

²⁴ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 135

1. Salutation, (14)

NOTES:

INTERPRETATION:

The Witness to the Church

¹⁴ “**And to the angel** (*lit.*, “messenger” - possibly the pastor), **of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen** (Jesus Christ, the God of truth, the One who brings all of God the Father's promises to pass [Isa. 65:16]), **the Faithful and True Witness** (the one who is completely trustworthy, perfectly accurate, and thus always reliable), **the Beginning of the creation of God** (the originating source of creation through whom God works [Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2]).²⁵”

F APPLICATION:

When one is at a crossroads in his life and his next decision may mean the difference between life and death or contentment and misery, a completely trustworthy and perfectly accurate individual would be a God sent. Jesus Christ is saying to us here that He indeed is a God sent. Jesus sees and knows all things. He will not withhold anything that would profit the fulfilling of our purpose in this life. He will admonish us with flawless devotion. He will support us with unlimited kindness. We have but to go to Him, listen to Him and follow His counsel. Having a person like this is not the issue, Christ is here for all who will come to Him. Coming, listening and following is the issue.

2. Commendation

None

3. Reproof, (15-17)

INTERPRETATION:

The Works of the Church

¹⁵ “**I know** (in detail), **your works** (your deeds), **that you are neither cold** (*metaph., unmoved, unresponsive* - as an unbeliever who makes no pretense about his lack of interest in spiritual matters or personal holiness [not hypocritical]), **nor** (are you), **hot**, (*lit., “boiling;” metaph., excited, zealous* - as a believer who is spiritually alive, being impacted by Christ and impacting others on for Christ).

²⁵ Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Logos).

The Wish for the Church

I could wish you were cold or hot, (one or the other).²⁶

NOTES:

The Perception and Reality of the Church

¹⁶ “**So then, because you are lukewarm** (*lit., "tepid," Metaph., indifferent, halfhearted, unenthusiastic, languid* in your faith), **and neither cold nor hot, I will** (i.e., I am about to), **vomit²⁷ you out of My mouth,** (cast you aside as repulsive and useless).²⁸

F APPLICATION:

John Stott wrote: "The Laodicean church was a half-hearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth-century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion."

We are so afraid of being on fire for Christ; we don't want to be labeled as fanatics or extremists, yet in every other area of life we shed our proper manners and exude enthusiasm... Emerson said that noth-

²⁶ Christ rebuked them for being **neither cold nor hot** but lukewarm. His metaphorical language is drawn from Laodicea's water supply. Because it traveled several miles through an underground aqueduct, before reaching the city, the water arrived foul, dirty and tepid. It was not hot enough to relax and restore, like the hot springs at Hierapolis. Nor was it cold and refreshing, like the stream water at Colossae. Laodicea's lukewarm water was in a useless condition. (MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 136)

I do not hold the view that this "lukewarm" congregation represents a non-believing church, as does John MacArthur and others. I contend as does David Jeremiah and others that Christ is talking to believers. I think Henry Morris's arguments are the best on this matter.

In modern terminology, a church of dead orthodoxy is better off than one of prosperous but neutral evangelicalism.

The Laodicean church was not one of complete apostasy; its candlestick had not been removed, and the Lord was still in the midst of the candlesticks. Neither was it barren and cold, as many doctrinally sound churches had become, such as Sardis. It was apparently receiving many new members. It had a large and prosperous congregation, impressive facilities, and an active program. But it sought to be neutral on controversial matters, to maintain open dialogue with both left and right, to have recognition from the mighty and the wealthy and the intelligentsia. It was not cold to the vital truths of God, His Creation, His Word--but neither would it take a firm stand and proclaim a true witness. And Christ amazingly said, if they could not be "hot," He would rather see them "cold."

(Morris, *The Revelation Record*, p. 76)

²⁷ verb to vomit, to reject with extreme disgust, here alone in N.T.²⁷, Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Logos)

²⁸ Some churches make the Lord weep, others make Him angry; the Laodicean church made Him sick. (MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 136)

ing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm, but much of our Christian experience is as limp as an overcooked noodle.²⁹

The Laodiceans, ... were unstable and fickle. Christ is "the faithful and true witness"; He is unswerving in His fidelity. But the Laodiceans were unreliable. They accommodated themselves to the mood of the times. Frederick Tatford call this church "a spiritual chameleon."³⁰

In the Christian life, there are three "spiritual temperatures": a burning heart, on fire for God (Luke 24:32), a cold heart (Matt. 24:12), and a lukewarm heart (Rev. 3:16). The lukewarm Christian is comfortable, complacent, and does not realize his need. If he were cold, at least he would feel it! Both the cold water from Colossae and the hot water from Hieropolis would be lukewarm by the time it was piped to Laodicea.³¹

I fear that we are far too close to the world and what should be a period in our history when we shine the brightest, we find ourselves lukewarm and disgusting, to not only Christ, but to the unbelieving world as well.

¹⁷ **"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy** (because you believe you live in abundance), **and** (and think you), **have need of nothing'—and** (thus), **do not** (even), **know that you are** (actually), **wretched** (suffering affliction a midst's their affluence), **miserable** (in need of compassion and pity rather than the admiration they get), **poor** (starving spiritually in the midst of their abundance), **blind** (in spite of their famous eye salve; they are not able to see their actual spiritual state, nor find their way to real spirituality, nor avoid the present dangers their condition creates), **and** (if that were not pathetic enough, they are), **naked** (in a humiliating and destitute state, regardless of their checkbook balances and material assets)—

F APPLICATION:

It is obvious that it is not what a person physically possesses that makes him the person God created him to be. It is rather the godly values that possess the person himself. It is not being a possessor, it is being possessed. The more a persons values reflect God's, the more able the person is to be all that God created him to be and accomplish all that God has for him to do.

4. Exhortation, (18-20)

 **INTERPRETATION:**

The Counsel to the Church

¹⁸ **"I** (Jesus Christ, the Wonderful Counselor [Isa. 9:6]), **counsel you to buy** (acquire), **from Me** (be willing to pay the price and acquire from Me, what your money nor the world can provide), **gold** (the genuineness of your faith), **refined** (purified of any

²⁹ Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*, p. 61

³⁰ Benson, *Revelation: The Grand Finale of History*, pp. 22, 23

³¹ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Logos)

impurities), **in the fire** (through facing various trials), **that you may be** (truly), **rich** (that your faith may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ at His coming -- that you may rejoice with inexpressible joy and full of glory [1 Pet. 1:3-9]; **and** (also, acquire from Me), **white** (rather than your esteemed black garments, white), **garments** (of righteousness), **that you may be clothed** (adorned in holiness rather than wickedness), **that** (in order that), **the shame** (the disgrace and humiliation), **of your nakedness** (the absence of your spirituality), **may not be revealed** (made manifest for all to see); **and** (in all of your acquiring, be sure to), **anoint your** (spiritual), **eyes with** (My), **eye salve** (*"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."* [Jn. 14:16-17, 26]), **that you may see**, (*"the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"* [Eph. 1:18]).

¹⁹ "**As many as I love** (which is every genuine believer [Prov. 3:12; Heb. 11:5-6]),³² **I** (in My dealings with my children), **rebuke** (I expose and convict), **and chasten** (discipline and instruct accordingly). **Therefore** (having rebuked you in exposing your sinfulness and knowing I will chasten you accordingly), **be zealous** (be boiling hot rather than lukewarm), **and** (the way to begin is to), **repent**, (stop doing what you know is wrong and begin doing what you know is right).

²⁰ "**Behold**, (I have said what I must, and now), **I stand at the door** (outside your church), **and knock**, (desiring to enter). **If anyone** (even if the church as a whole does not, if any individual believer), **hears My voice** (listens to My words of rebuke and counsel), **and opens the door** (repents and reasserts My influence upon his life), **I will** (mercifully, certainly and without hesitation), **come in to him** (replace his self with Myself), **and dine with him and he with Me**, (we will have all things in common again).

F APPLICATION:

Believers are not forced to obey their heavenly Father. If a believer wants to be rebellious, in spite of all that Christ has done for him, that option is open to him as it was with Adam and Eve in the garden. But, we are not free to choose the consequences of our decisions; as Adam and Eve found out.

Christ appeals to all believers to surrender to His leadership and invite Him to rule over their lives. Christ desires that we would make the same commitment that the Apostle Paul did, as he said, *"It is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me,"* (Gal. 2:20); *"for me to live is Christ,"* (Phil. 1:21). I *"present [my] bod[y] a[s a] living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [my] reasonable service,"* (Rom. 1:12).

³² "He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. And shalt thou be an exception? If excepted from suffering the scourge, thou art excepted from the number of the sons" [AUGUSTINE]. Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; and Brown, David, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, (Logos)

 INTERPRETATION:The Winners in the Church

²¹ “**To him** (singular), **who overcomes** (to him who repents of his lukewarmness and becomes rich, discerning and zealous in spiritual matters), **I** (Jesus Christ, the Amen), **will grant** (him the honor), **to sit with Me on My throne** (share with Me in My Messianic rule; participate with Me in My administrative responsibilities), **as I also over came** (being rich, discerning and zealous about My Father's business), **and sat down with My Father on His throne**, (sharing in His administrative responsibilities).

F APPLICATION:

"The assembly whom Christ just before threatened to spew out of His mouth, is now offered a seat with Him on His throne."--Fausset. Trench truly says, "The highest place is within the reach of the lowest; the faintest spark of grace may be fanned into the mightiest flame of love." [Trench] Let not the most wretched, defeated believer despair, --if only there be the least yearning for Christ. The most tender plea of all the seven is made to a *lukewarm* assembly. And the most distinct promise of actually sitting down with Christ upon His throne is given at the very close of the Church's testimony.³³

²² “**He who has an ear** (he who truly is saved and whose mind is spiritually discerning), **let him hear** (pay attention and act on), **what the Spirit says to the** (seven), **churches.**” ’ ’ ”

 SUMMARY:

Seven churches have been described in this last book of the Bible. In our present age we may have difficulty seeing ourselves as belonging to any of these churches; however some of their characteristics are found in each one of us.

- The church at Ephesus was once strong, but it had lost its first love. It had become lifeless, forgetting the passion and excitement of its original love for Jesus.
- The church at Smyrna was a suffering church, enduring hardship for its faith.
- The church at Pergamum had fallen under the influence of the pagan culture in which it lived.
- The church at Thyatira had become part of an evil cult.
- The Sardian church was so cold and dead that only the names in the church directory could have indicated any living members.
- The church in Philadelphia was a loving church, the one which the Lord had no negative words.
- Finally, we have visited the weak, lukewarm church of Laodicea.³⁴

³³ Newell, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 81

³⁴ Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*, pp. 64, 65

TRUTHS ABOUT DEFECTIVE CHRISTIANS AND CHURCHES

NOTES:

1. There are no Christians or churches, which are not in some way defective.
2. Christ knows and sees every defect, however small or large.
3. Many spiritual virtues cannot compensate for the defect which the Lord sees:
 - Hard work
 - Persecution
 - Loyalty
 - Morality
 - Orthodoxy
 - Integrity
 - Persistency (tenacity)
 - Empathy
4. Lack of love is a serious defect in any church or Christian.
5. The Lord threatens those who do nothing about their defects.
6. God rewards those who overcome their defects.
7. The Lord sustains and safeguards even defective Christians or churches. ---*John L. Benson*

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

1. Conditions of actual, individual churches.
2. Conditions through which any individual church may pass in its history
3. Conditions of individual Christians.
4. Conditions through which any individual Christian may pass in his life.
5. Conditions through which Christendom passes from the 1st to the 21st century. ---*John L. Benson*

- 1. Salutation, (1:1-3)**
- 2. Commendation, (1:1-3)**
- 3. Reproof, (1:1-3)**
- 4. Exhortation, (1:1-3)**
- 5. Promise, (1:1-3)**