

THROUGH THE BIBLE REVELATION 2-3

There are around 340,000 Christian churches in the United States. That's over 300 different denominations.

And each of these denominations, if not each church itself, has a different flavor and focus. Christianity and church life in America seems extremely diverse...

Which reminds me, "***How many Southern Baptists does it take to change a lightbulb?*** Only one, but 16 million had to vote on it first... ***How many Roman Catholics does it take to change a lightbulb?*** Nine, one to change it, and eight to raffle off the old one...

How many Charismatics does it take to change a lightbulb? Three, one to cast it out, and two to catch it when it falls... ***How many Presbyterians does it take to change a lightbulb?*** Change? What's change?...

How many Amish does it take to change a lightbulb? A lightbulb? What's a lightbulb...

How many Church of Christ does it take to change a lightbulb? Only one, but if anyone else tries it, the light won't come on.. ***How many Episcopalians does it take to change a lightbulb?*** Three, one to do it, one to bless the element, and one to say how much they like the old one... ***How many Methodist does it take to change a lightbulb?*** They don't know, but there's a committee studying the issue... And last, but not least, ***How many CC guys does it take to change a light bulb?*** One, but he's never on time." *Ouch!*

We assume churches are like ice cream - they come in 31 flavors - *but that's not how Jesus sees us!*

I believe Revelation 1-3 teaches there are only *seven types of churches* and *seven sorts of members*.

In chapter 1 Jesus routed His Revelation through the Apostle John to seven of the churches in Mediterranean Asia - *what is today, Western Turkey*.

Thus, Chapters 2-3 are nicknamed, *"Talking Turkey."*

In 1:11 Jesus instructed John, *"What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea..."*

There were other churches in the Asian province - at least a dozen - but Jesus chose to address these seven. So, the question arises, *"Why did Jesus select these churches, and why are they listed in this order?"*

First, realize these seven cities were all connected in a horse-shoe shape by Roman roads. Historians suggest these cities were stops on the postal route.

Mail came by sea to the port of Ephesus. From there the Pony Express followed a circuit... north along the coast to Smyrna and Pergamos - then the route swung inland, east to Thyatira - afterwards it turned south, through Sardis, and Philadelphia - arriving in Laodicea.

All seven cities were within 50 miles of each other.

These were cities with actual churches - that had real people, real hardships, real blessings... And Jesus writes each of these churches a customized letter.

We can learn a lot, *both personally and corporately*, from Jesus' analysis of each of these seven churches.

In the Scriptures the number “**seven**” speaks of *spiritual perfection and completion*. I believe these seven churches are a representative sample of ALL churches - *at that time, through the ages, even today*.

There're 340,000 congregations in America, but there're really only 7 types of churches and Christians.

You can find you - and me - and us - in these letters.

In fact, I believe the order these letters were delivered is no accident. There was more to it than making it easy on the mailman. The spiritual postage on these letters is enough to send them much further.

Amos 3:7 is a provocative verse. It relays a divine principle, “**Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.**”

In essence, God keeps us in the loop. *He's upfront* about what *He's up to...* From creation to Christ, **the OT** records God's workings and ways... **The Gospels** recount the earthly ministry of Jesus... **Acts** is the first 30 years of the church... But what about the 1900 years since - *the Christian era? Has God commented?*

I've heard it said, "A good mailman always keeps you posted." And based on Amos 3:7, I believe God has kept us posted! He recorded the Church Age in advance - *in these seven letters to the seven churches*.

As we study them, you'll see how each one bears a resemblance to a succeeding era of church history...

From **Ephesus**, the Early Church - to **Smyrna**, the Church of the 2nd and 3rd centuries - to **Pergamos**, the Byzantine Church - then **Thyatira**, the papal church of the Middle Ages - on to **Sardis**, and the churches of the Protestant Reformation - through **Philadelphia**, and the missionary zeal of the 19th century - down to **Laodecia**, and the modern Church...

You can trace church history through these seven churches. Author Joseph Seiss, sums it up, "The churches of all time are comprehended in seven..."

Chapter 2 begins, "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...'" In chapter 1 we learn this was Jesus. The risen and exalted Lord writes a letter to His Church. It's to "*the angel*" or "*messenger*."

Whether that's a pastor, or a literal angel, the point is Jesus sees, and knows, and cares about His Church...

And note where Jesus likes to hang out? Among the lampstands - the churches! In Matthew 18:20 Jesus told His disciples, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Make no mistake about it, Jesus loves His Church!

He writes to the church at Ephesus, “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.” What an impressive resume.

The Ephesians were doing a lot right... service, sacrifice, endurance, and spiritual discernment.

In Acts 20 Paul warned the Ephesian elders, “After my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” Here we learn they took heed to that warning! There was zero tolerance for falsehood.

Yet despite their sterling resume... “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”

There’s a classic country song by Hank Williams. The chorus goes, “Why don’t you love me like you use to do? How come you treat me like a worn out shoe? My hair is still curly and my eyes are still blue. Why don’t you love me like you use to do?” And this is sort of what the Lord is singing to the Church at Ephesus...

The furnace was there, but the fire has gone out.

Ephesus represents the early church of the apostles.

Just 60 years had elapsed between this letter and the birth of the Church, but already the love of many had grown cold. Christians were going through the motions without the devotion. There was no passion.

Note how Jesus phrases the problem. It's not that they "lost their first love," but "*left their first love.*"

If they'd lost it they wouldn't know where to find it, but since they left it they can trace back and rekindle it.

Verse 5 tells us how to revive our first love. The remedy consists of **3Rs - remember, repent, repeat.**

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen..." Or as the NIV puts it, "Remember the height from which you have fallen." Recall the time when you were passionate about your faith - *the fire that once burned.*

Then "repent" for allowing that flame to die out.

Then, "do the first works..." Repeat the activities that stoked the fire in the first place and caused faith to grow - *Bible study, worship, prayer, fellowship, witness.*

"Or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent." Jesus warns that unless we take heed and rekindle the fire, He'll pack up our lampstand, and sit us on the shelf.

He'd rather have no witness than one void of love.

Verse 6, "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." Here was another feather in their cap... They refused to tolerate bullies.

"*Nicolaitan*" is the combination of two Greek words: "nike" or "conqueror" and "laos" or "*laity, common folk.*"

There were Ephesians who liked to throw their weight around, and act superior. There was an *ecclesiastical elite*. Jesus hates this kind of snobbery - *so should we*. Leaders should serve not be served.

The Lord ends this first letter, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” To believers who recover their first love, God reserves the same sweet communion and intimacy for all eternity!

Verse 8, “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write...” Today, *Smyrna* is known as *Izmir, Turkey*.

The city is 35 miles north of Ephesus and was known for the aromatic resin harvested there. This church became a sweet-smell - a pleasant aroma - to God.

The root word for “*Smyrna*” is “*myrrh*” - a spice that was used as an embalming fluid for the deceased.

And the church of Smyrna became synonymous for the persecuted church throughout the ages - especially the scorned Church of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

During this period, Emperor worship was the chief religion of Rome. Smyrna was the home of the Temple of Tiberius - birthplace of this heretical egomania.

This church remained true to Jesus, and refused to utter, “*Caesar is Lord.*” One by one they were tossed to the lions or burned at the stake, crying, “*Jesus is Lord!*”

Smyrna's most famous martyr was Pastor Polycarp.

He told the Romans, "You threaten fire which burns for an hour and is soon quenched; for you are ignorant of the fire of... eternal punishment." Polycarp was burned at the stake, but the flames only encircled him.

The Roman executioner had to plunge a dagger in his side. And as legend has it, a dove exited his body.

Polycarp was one of 5 million believers martyred by Roman emperors between the years of 65 and 312 AD. The Foxes Book of Martyrs recounts the stories of the incredible faith of this persecuted, but faithful Church.

Jesus writes to Smyrna, "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life..." Jesus reminds them of His own martyrdom. He was faithful unto death, and God raised Him up. *This is their hope!*

Verse 9, "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)..." Their property was confiscated. They were deprived of inheritances and employment.

Their piety produced an earthly poverty. But "poor" was not how God saw them. To Him they were "rich!"

Their faithfulness had stored up riches in heaven.

Jesus says, "And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." Just as the crucifixion of Jesus was a joint venture of Jews and Romans, likewise the persecution of the early church. Christians who taught God's grace, and faith, encountered hostility from the synagogues.

How ironic, the Jews claimed to be children of God, but in reality they were tools in the hands of Satan.

Yet, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.” Jesus says, *No fear!* We have hope in heaven - comfort on Earth. Trust God with your future.

Amazingly, whenever the Church is persecuted it only grows stronger. Persecution purifies and multiplies. The church father, Tertullian, commented, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Nothing negative was said of Smyrna. Persecution has a way of knocking the straddlers off the fence.

Verse 10 includes another detail, “Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.”

Some folks take “*days*” to mean “*periods*” - and have identified 10 waves of intense persecution starting with Nero, 64-68 AD - and ending with Diocletian, 303-312.

Jesus’ final word to the persecuted church is, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” There’s an old saying, “Born once die twice. Born twice die once.” *That’s true!*

If you’re born again by the Spirit of God you’ll die physically - but spiritually, you’ll live forever with Jesus.

Verse 12 begins another letter, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword...'" Notice, in each letter Jesus introduces Himself in a way that's relevant to that particular church. The problem in Pergamos was compromise. Thus, the cure for this church is "*the sharp two-edged sword*" of the Word of God.

Jesus continues, "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is." When Babylon fell the ancient cult of Nimrod - its idols and pagan priests relocated to Pergamos. This was sin city - a tough place to be a Christian - yet the Church stood firm.

Verse 13, "And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." Who this "*Antipas*" was, we're not sure, but his faithfulness epitomized that of the Church.

So far so good for Pergamos, "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality." Balaam was an "*ancient Harry Potter*." He was a wizard hired by the Moabites to curse Israel.

Yet when God stopped Balaam from uttering his curse, Balaam countered. Rather than a head-on assault, he was the architect of a backdoor approach.

He gathered all the Hooters' girls in Moab, and kegs of beer to go with them, and used it to entice Israel with compromise. The Pergamos church was *willing to lay*

down their life for Christ, but they weren't willing to lay down their rights and live faithfully for Him every day.

The Church is like a ship. Ships are made to be in the water. But if water gets into the ship it's a problem.

And likewise, the Church is built by God to be in the world. *Let's shine our light.* But when the world gets into the Church we sink. *Compromise springs the leak.*

When the Church goes to bed with the world by adopting human wisdom, and worldly philosophy - God equates it to *"infidelity."* We're unfaithful to the Lord.

And this is what plagued the Byzantine Church. In 312 AD Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity. He wanted everyone to follow suit, so he incorporated pagan practices into Christian worship. He tried to make Christianity more palatable to Roman tastes.

What emerged over the centuries was a new brand of Roman Christianity with no real biblical basis at all.

Practices like *praying for the dead, the veneration of the saints and Mary, extreme unction, purgatory, infant baptism, Lent, the use of icons, celibacy of the priesthood, the office of the pope* - were *Christianized*.

Tragically, Constantine's strategy did far more harm than good. Church tradition overshadowed Bible truth, and distracted believers from the centrality of Christ.

This is what always occurs when Christians **compromise** the essentials of what they believe.

Satan's strategy is the same today, as it was in Balaam's day, "If you can't beat them, join them."

If the devil can't persecute and intimidate the Church he'll infiltrate and contaminate it from the inside out.

Pergamos is a testimony. The Church will never win the world by being like the world. We need purity.

Verse 15, "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." Prior to Constantine the church met in homes. Few pastors got paid. But afterwards a professional clergy developed.

Whereas in the NT, the greatest was "servant of all." Once the church gained social stature its leaders became proud and privileged. And it's this sense of entitlement that Jesus hates. Pastors should exist to serve the people. The people don't exist to serve them.

Jesus says to the compromised church, "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth." There comes a time when Jesus actually fights against His own church!

Verse 17, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat." Repentant believers who neglected the bread of God's Word will be blessed by God with spiritual food and substance.

“And I will give him a white stone...” A Roman trial judge displayed a black stone to announce a person’s guilt, but a white stone marked their innocence.

A white stone was an assurance of forgiveness.

“And on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” Believers that don’t compromise will know a special intimacy with God!

He’ll give us a *white stone name* that only He knows.

And any man who’s gone through life with a girl’s name - like “Sue” or “Sandy” - can appreciate the promise of a new name! In heaven Jesus will call me “Rocky!” or “Bear!” or “Duke!” - something manly.

Verse 18, “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass...’”

Thyatira was the smallest and least important of the seven cities. Perhaps the believers there thought they could slip through the cracks. *They were off the grid.*

But not so! Jesus has eyes like a flame. He sees all.

“*Brass*” is a biblical idiom for judgment. Here Jesus has feet like brass. He’s not afraid to put his foot down.

“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.” This was a church with a full slate of service.

“Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.” Apparently, the compromise that was sown in Pergamos had ripened up the road in Thyatira. It’s said, “Tolerance is

the virtue of the man who has lost his conviction.” Tolerance ruled supreme in Thyatira.

There a woman, a wicked Jezebel, who led this church into full blown idolatry. In the OT, Queen Jezebel was the person who introduced Baal worship into Israel. Now another Jezebel is at it - *in the church*.

There was a pagan temple in Thyatira run by a priestess, and dedicated to all religions. The church there took pride in its tolerance... **But where all gods are worshipped; the One, true God has been forsaken.**

And likewise, during the Middle Ages the seeds of compromise blossomed into full blown idolatry. Mary of Nazareth went from *a noble example* to *mother of God*.

All kinds of idolatrous notions rose around Mary - her **perpetual virginity, immaculate conception, ascension into heaven**. Today Roman Catholicism considers Mary **a co-redeemer** with Jesus. This is blasphemous.

Recall Jezebel was the queen who falsely accused Naboth. She had him stoned, so she could take his vineyard. This is what happened in the Dark Ages.

The Inquisitions were a tool used by the popes to kill off their rivals, and confiscate wealth. During this period the doctrine of **papal infallibility** developed. Even **the selling of indulgences** (*divine pardons*) took place.

Jesus says of this church, verse 21, **“And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.”** Thyatira had exhausted the Lord’s patience!

“Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.” Notice, the Thyatiran Church remains today, for Jesus threatens to throw her into Great Tribulation - *judgments that are yet future*.

Here’s a church that will miss the rapture unless it repents of its spineless tolerance of spiritual infidelity.

Verse 23, “I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.” Notice these words are printed in red letters. They’re the words of Jesus.

And they’re strong words! This is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild, this is the One who puts His foot down!

Realize, the same Jesus who died to *save your soul* will *bust your chops* if you try to play Him for a fool, and pretend He doesn’t care about how you really live life.

You show your love for Jesus by how you work, and have sex, and spend money, and order your daily life.

“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come.” Though Thyatira represented a compromised religious system, not all its members had fallen away from the truth that’s in Christ. A few had held fast.

This proves it's possible to be a true believer even in a heretical church. *Can a Roman Catholic be saved? Yes!* Though the Gospel is clouded by tradition, it's still present. Hold fast to the essentials and you'll be saved.

Verse 26, “**And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' - as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.**” The morning star appears just before the break of day. And what event occurs prior to the Day of the Lord - His coming judgments? *The rapture!*

Here Jesus promises the faithful believers in Thyatira an early exit - they too will be raptured. “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**”

Chapter 3, “**And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."**”

The word “**Thyatira**” means, “**continual sacrifice.**” And this is how Roman Catholicism distorted communion.

The Bible teaches that Jesus was offered “**once, for all**” on the cross - yet Catholics believe the bread and wine are the literal body and blood of Christ, thus they sacrifice Jesus afresh every time they hold a mass.

It's no accident then, that “**Sardis**” means “**escaping ones.**” This is the church who committed themselves to biblical truth, and bravely rejected the Roman heresies.

Rome teaches that **grace** *is not enough* - good works are also necessary to be right with God... **Christ** *is not enough* - you need the intercession of a priest...

Faith *is not enough* - participation in the sacraments are needed to gain God's favor... **Scripture** *is not enough* - church tradition is also authoritative...

And **glory to God** *is not enough* - the church, and namely the Pope, should also share in Christ's glory...

The word "protestant" means "one who protests."

And Sardis countered with **five solas**... Sola-gratia, sola-Christos, sola-fide, sola-Scriptura, and Sola-Deo Gloria. Or **grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, and the glory of God alone.** This became the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation.

Reformers like Luther, Tyndale, and Wesley sparked a spiritual revival in the church... Yet once the leaders died, the churches they spawned drifted spiritually.

What's happened today to Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists? Jesus says to the church at Sardis, ***"you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."***

Today, many mainline Protestant denominations continue to carry the name of a great founder, but they know nothing of his zeal, and his courage, and his fire.

It's said, ***"The work of God begins as a movement, it becomes a machine, it turns into a monument, and then it ends up a memorial."*** *This happened to Sardis.*

Astronomers say the light from the North Star takes 433 years to reach Earth. That means the star may've already flamed out. It could've died 430 years ago, and what we're seeing now is merely the light from its past.

Such was Sardis... The reputation of what it was, continued to shine after the church itself was dead.

Verse 2, “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.”

The Reformation rescued key biblical doctrines, but it didn't go far enough... As Jesus said, “I have not found your works perfect (*complete*) before God.” Sardis had a stellar beginning, but didn't continue and press on.

Jesus says to them, “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.” One mistake the Reformers made was their failure to rethink the biblical view on the end times.

Luther and others carried over Catholic eschatology.

Thus, there was no expectancy in the Sardis Church of the Lord's soon return. This is why Jesus challenges them to not only “*hold fast and repent,*” but “*watch.*”

“You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be

clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”

Notice, it's possible to have your name blotted out of the Book of Life. In short, **a good start is not enough.**

Paul told the Colossians to “**continue in the faith.**” Let's not just have a name that we're alive - let's look to the One Who has the seven Spirits, to fill us afresh over and over again with the power of His Holy Spirit!

Verse 6 wraps up the fifth letter, “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**”

“**And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write...**” “*Philadelphia*” is Greek for “**brotherly love.**” And this is what should characterize every church.

Philadelphia was on a major highway connecting Europe and Asia. It was called, “**Gateway to the East.**”

Beyond Philadelphia lay rugged regions: *Phrygia and Galatia*. The tribes who lived there were backwoods.

Philadelphia was built by men who wanted to use it as a launching pad for the Hellenization of Asia. From this city Greek language, and customs, and religion could be exported eastward to the uncultured masses.

And it's interesting, that the Christians living in Philadelphia also adopted a *mission mindset*. What made the city a bridge for the spread of Greek culture, also made it a suitable for the preaching of the Gospel.

The church at Philadelphia was a church on mission.

Like the vineyards that dotted the countryside, this was a fruitful church - **the Church of the open door.**

Verse 7, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens..."

Jesus introduces Himself as **the opener of doors.**

He has keys. He opens the door to God for us, and opens doors for us to be used by God in the lives of others. *Philadelphia was an opportunistic church!*

They had faith not fear. Rather than sit back on past victories they were focused on today's challenges and opportunities. **This was a church on the move!**

In Church history Philadelphia represents the missionary enterprises of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Great Awakenings were spurred on by men who walked through open doors to deliver the Gospel.

Even today, this church is using new technologies, and going new places, and reaching new generations.

Its motto is "**carpe diem**" - "**seize the day.**"

But that's not all. In verse 8 Jesus says, "**I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength...**"

Interestingly, Jesus says nothing negative of this church, yet it was a *little church* with "**little strength.**"

Apparently, it's not a church's size that impresses the Lord, *but what it does with what it has*. Is it faithful?

In fact, here's what makes a church great in the eyes of its Lord! Jesus says of Philadelphia, you **"have kept My word, and have not denied My name."** They kept God's Word, and they didn't deny His name! They were loyal to both God's *living Word* and His *written Word*.

Jesus promises, **"Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie - indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."**

Philadelphia was a little church - *on nobody's radar, but God's* - yet Jesus vows to vindicate their loyalty. He promises to prove to their enemies, that though rejected by men, this church was dearly loved by God.

Jesus says, **"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."** For 14 chapters, from 6-19, we'll see terrible judgments that will try all the Earth.

Today, the church suffers tribulation - but it's the world's tribulation upon the church. The day is coming when God will bring a tribulation upon the world - **"the Great Tribulation"** - **"the hour of trial"** - and from this God will spare all those who persevere in their faith.

Verse 11, “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more.” In the ancient world you gave honor to a noteworthy citizen by inscribing their name on a pillar in the local temple.

Can you think of a greater honor than your name on a pillar in Heaven? It goes to him “*who overcomes.*”

And “I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.” Not only will God write *our name* in His temple, but He writes *His name* on us.

As kids when we went to summer camp mom would always write our name in our underwear. She wanted us to make sure we didn’t lose what belonged to us.

And this is God’s attitude - we belong to Him!

Verse 13 says to us once again, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God...’”

Not “*beginning*” in terms of sequence, but in the sense of importance. The NIV translates, “the ruler of God’s creation.” Jesus is the final Word (“*the Amen*”), the reliable Word (“*the faithful and true Witness*”) - and He is and has the first Word. He is king of all creation.

Smyrna and Philadelphia are the two churches about which Jesus had nothing bad to say. Laodecia is the one church about which He has nothing good to say.

“*Laodecia*” means “the people rule.” Rather than submit to God, they marched to their own drummer.

They called Jesus “*Savior*,” but He wasn’t their *Lord*. Call the Church at Laodecia, “the hijacked Church.”

And the Lord judges them, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

Christians are like coffee. Piping hot is good. Iced coffee is a delicacy. Either *hot* or *cold* is what you want.

What you don’t like is in between... lukewarm, tepid, muted, room temperature coffee you’ll spit it out.

Laodecia had two sister cities in the Lycus Valley.

Ten miles to the east was Colossae, by a mountain stream. Six miles north was Heirapolis, known for its hot springs. Even today folks visit the thermal waters.

The water supply for Laodecia came from Colossae and Hierapolis. The Roman aqueducts can still be seen. But by the time the cold water arrived from Colossae the hot sun had warmed it up. Over the six miles from Heirapolis the hot water had cooled down.

Thus, Laodecian water was always lukewarm. If you were a visitor, and didn't know, you'd took a sip and spit it out. You'd be repulsed by its lukewarm taste.

And this was God's reaction to the spiritual temperature of the believers in Laodecia. They were neither zealous about the things of God, nor obstinate.

They were indifferent. They just didn't care. They had a faith that *couldn't be felt, and wouldn't be noticed.*

In short, they were comfortable. On Sundays they pretended to care, but Monday through Saturday they did what was easy... Rather than turn up the heat for Jesus they registered 98.6... average... mediocre.

And Jesus hates mediocrity. ***"I could wish you were cold or hot."*** In other words, **go big or go home!**

Jesus says in verse 17, ***"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked..."*** Notice, lukewarmness blinds you to the truth. Lie to yourself enough and you'll believe it.

The Laodecians thought they were rich, but in God's eyes they were bankrupt. In contrast, in 2:9 Jesus speaks of the persecuted church in Smyrna, ***"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)"***

How God sees and we see are not always the same.

Once a woman said to her doctor, ***"I've got an embarrassing problem. I pass gas constantly - you just can't hear it or smell it. In fact, it's happened a dozen times since"***

I've been here talking to you." The doctor prescribed some medicine and scheduled a return visit.

A few weeks later she returned, **"Doctor, the problem is no better. I still can't hear it, but now I can smell it."**

The doctor said, **"Good, now that we've cleared out your sinuses we need to start working on your ears."**

This was the problem in the Laodecian church. The believers were oblivious to their own stinky condition.

Jesus gives them advice in verse 18, **"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed..."**

The Laodecians need cloth themselves in Christ!

"And anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." The region was famous for a white powder used to treat eye infections. This church needs to apply some spiritual salve to their eyes to see clearly.

Verse 19 is reassuring, **"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."** Jesus rebukes only those He loves. Take heart - *and repent*.

Verse 20, **"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."**

Here's a verse often used to invite unbelievers to come to Jesus - but sadly, it was written to the church!

Jesus knocks on the door of this church because He's on the outside. He's a stranger to His own church.

It reminds me of the little girl who went home after church on a Sunday, and prayed, "Dear Jesus, we had a good day at church. I just wish you had been there."

All that's missing from some churches is Jesus!

Sadly, this may well be the picture of the last church, the modern church - Jesus, *on the outside looking in.*

"To him who overcomes..." - who refuses to drop to room temperature, but stays on fire with the Holy Spirit.

"To him... I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." May the Lord give us spiritual ears that'll take to heart His message to His Church.