

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Dr. Stanford E. Murrell

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Chapter 1

A Return to the Heart's First Love

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

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Revelation 2:1-7

Anyone who has attempted to study the *Revelation* can appreciate at once how difficult the material is to comprehend. For over 2,000 years the Church has wrestled with the majestic mysteries that unfold and the multitude of symbols. The number seven is one symbol that is found frequently. It occurs 54 times in the *Revelation* and is often used to speak of completion, fulfillment, or perfection. There are

- seven churches 1:4
- and seven spirits 1:4
- seven lampstands 1:12
- seven stars 1:16
- seven seals on a scroll 5:1
- seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb 5:6
- seven angels 8:2
- seven trumpets 8:2
- seven thunders 10:3
- seven heads of the dragon 12:3
- seven heads of the beast 13:1
- seven golden bowls 15:7
- and seven kings 17:10

Another number with great symbolic significance is 1,000. It is used 28 times in the *Revelation*. Like the number seven the number 1,000 speaks of completion, fulfillment, or perfection. For example, John sees many angels and elders and beasts surrounding the throne of God and their number “was 10,000 times 10,000 and thousands of thousands” (5:11). In chapter 7 a 144,000 of all the tribes of Israel are considered. If it is not forgotten that the early church

referred to the converts of Christ as spiritual Israel (Gal. 3:7) then it is easy to understand the reference of John as speaking of the completed Church of Christ. That Israel was viewed as being the Church is reflected in James 1:1. The epistle of James is for the Christian community and yet it is addressed *“to the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad, greeting.”*

Despite the mysteries and symbolism of the *Revelation* there is a simple message being communicated. The message is that the Church persecuted is still the Church militant and shall one day emerge triumphant. The Church will be bloodied and scared in the spiritual conflict but it shall triumph over the forces of evil. The redemptive work of Christ shall be brought to completion or fulfillment. Neither the false religions of the world, the hostile political systems, or Satan himself shall stop the Church in its march to victory. The three major enemies of the Cross-are to be defeated.

In numerical symbolism the Holy Spirit leads John to remind the saints they shall continue to rule and reign with Christ for He *“hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever Amen”* (Rev. 1:6). Unfortunately with the passing of time the Church has forgotten to consider itself in kingly terms and priestly behavior. Much spiritual blessing is lost. The great joy of being part of another kingdom ruled over by the sovereign Lord is lost. Consider this scenario.

Imagine for a moment that you are the heir to the throne of a vast empire. Imagine that as royalty you receive word that a powerful foreign army has invaded your land. You must flee for the enemy is hunting you. You have been marked for destruction. In haste you do not stand still but leave all of the symbols of regal splendor. The fine clothes are left in the closets. The servants are told to scatter for their own safety. New occupants will soon settle in the royal dwelling place. The money to buy fine items is no longer available. The power to command has been reduced to a few trusted followers. If a person were to meet you in poor clothes, without servants or money, and no signs of authority, is it not possible they might laugh if you were to say, *“I am the true heir to the kingdom.”*

Let us press the speculation a step further. Suppose that you and your spouse had children and then you died. However, before death you called the children together and said to them these words. *“Children, never forget you are sons and daughters of royalty.”* The irony is that what is presented as speculative fantasy is spiritual reality. When Jesus walked the earth He came as the King of all kings and Lord of all lords though He was clothed with humility (Phil. 2:5-7) and none of the trappings of glory. As the Sovereign of the universe Christ walked in exile in His own land. But then He surrounded Himself with spiritual children so that it can be said that *“as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God even to as many as believed on Him”* (John 1:12).

No wonder John in his old age and heir apparent to the kingdom of heaven gathered his disciples around him and whispered words of hope and courage to them. *“Children, never forget your Father is a King. And so He has made you kings and priests unto God.”* Here then is spiritual truth for the Church. Every Christian is a son or daughter of divine royalty. Every believer has a rich spiritual legacy given by right of nobility of the new birth. The gospel call comes to remember what Christ has done for His own and to express nobility of birth. The gospel call comes to remember to function with nobility of soul and to express a regal bearing. For Christians in the western world this is a challenge because the mindset is different from the occidental world. Western culture is pre-occupied with physical activity. Self esteem and the esteem given to others is linked by productivity. But in the oriental world much more value is

placed upon being. The western world asks, “*What do you do?*” The oriental world asks, “*What are you.*”

The Bible comes from an oriental frame of reference. The emphasis in Scripture is on what a person is and not so much on what a person does. Emotions, feelings, and thoughts are much more matters of concern than how many sales were made or how many units were produced. Understanding the worldview the Bible was written with will help in appreciating the message sent to the first church mentioned in the *Revelation*, the Church of Ephesus. Historically the city of Ephesus was a cultural center. It was a commercially prosper place attracting worldwide trade. The city was also a religious center where the goddess Diana was worshipped. The people of Ephesus honored Diana by building her a marvelous temple, which became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Christianity came to Ephesus when Paul preached the gospel. Later, Timothy was the bishop of the Church and Paul wrote one his epistle to the assemble. Initially the Church at Ephesus did well and prospered. The community of saints was light in the midst of a dark pagan culture. The believers were zealous in many religious activities.

- **The Church performed good deeds.** When the people were hungry the Church of Ephesus fed them. The poor were given food, clothing, and shelter. The sick were cared for and the dying were comforted.
- **The Church labored to exalt Christ.** It was not enough that the Church knew about Jesus, others must know the Lord as well.
- **The Church persevered in the faith.** The saints were “patient” in the sphere of faith. While the gospel is not a works salvation it does demand good works as a sign conversion.
- **The Church did not tolerate evil.** Men and women who were in error morally or ethically were not allowed to practice sin in the midst of the saints. The Church in Ephesus would not have tolerated what was allowed in the Church of Corinth (1 Cor. 5:1ff).
- **The Church was discerning in doctrine.** When individuals such as Nicholas claimed to be apostles the believers were mature enough to test them (Acts 1:1-3 cf. 1 Cor. 9:1).
 - An apostle was one who had been called by God.
 - An apostle was one who was with Christ during His ministry.
 - An apostle was one who had seen the risen Lord.
- **The Church endured periods of persecution.** Jesus said, “*Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.*” The Church at Ephesus knew what it was to suffer for the sake of righteousness.

There is much to commend in the Church of Ephesus. The members of the assembly were willing workers who hated evil while moving towards a greater state of maturity manifested in spiritual discernment all the while enduring unjust moments of suffering. “Nevertheless,” and the awful words of Revelation 2:4 were stated. “*I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*” The Church of Ephesus had left their first love? How did that happen? There is any number of ways for religious people to be caught up doing work for Christ they forget the Lord Himself. It is possible for the believer to lose his first love.

- **Love for Christ can be** lost by reading the Bible out of a sense of duty but with no delight in meditating on the Lord.
- **Teaching what is not practiced can cause a person to lose love for Christ.** It is possible to teach on prayer and not pray. It is possible to teach on forgiving others and harbor resentment and bitterness in the heart. It is possible to teach about Christian compassion and never show it.
- **Love for Christ can be diminished by performing Christian duties with a spirit of resentment and bitterness.**
- **Hearing Biblical doctrine and not believing all that the Scriptures teach can destroy love for Christ.**
- **Love for Christ can be lost by not believing that prayers are answered.**

On a more positive note love for Christ can be recaptured.

- **Love for Christ can be kindled afresh by remembering the greatness of salvation.**
- **Studying the life of Christ and the words He spoke can rediscover love for Christ.**
- **Passionate prayers offered to Him can renew love for Christ.**
- **Receiving those words that are able to save the soul can find love for Christ returning.**

If any local assembly, if any individual Christian is caused to see a lost for their first love then a solemn word of warning of coming judgment is to be heeded. *Revelation 2:5-6 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.* The reference is not to loss of salvation for the security of the soul does not depend upon good works. Rather, the testimony of the saint can be removed. The apostle Paul was fearful that when he had preached to others he should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:27 “*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*” It is a great tragedy not to be useful to the Lord because the light of our life’s

testimony has been extinguished. Therefore, *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”* (Rev. 2:7). *“ A promise of great mercy [is given] to those who overcome. The Christian life is a warfare against sin, Satan, the world, and the flesh. It is not enough that we engage in this warfare, but we must pursue it to the end, we must never yield to our spiritual enemies, but fight the good fight, till we gain the victory, as all persevering Christians shall do; and the warfare and victory shall have a glorious triumph and reward. That which is here promised to the victors is that they shall eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. They shall have that perfection of holiness, and that confirmation therein, which Adam would have had if he had gone well through the course of his trial: he would then have eaten of the tree of life which was in the midst of paradise, and this would have been the sacrament of confirmation to him in his holy and happy state; so all who persevere in their Christian trial and warfare shall derive from Christ, as the tree of life, perfection and confirmation in holiness and happiness in the paradise of God; not in the earthly paradise, but the heavenly, (Rev 22:1-2)”* (M. Henry).

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 2

Nothing to Fear

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

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Revelation 2:8-11

Her name is not known but she died of a lingering illness some years ago. As the hour of her departure approached she placed her hand in the hand of her beloved husband. Quietly they rested in the presence of Christ. The Lord's assurances that all was well unfolded in a spirit of peace and quiet acceptance that this was His arrangement. Softly, in syllables barely audible the lady of grace turned to her husband and whispered her last words: "*Faithful even unto death.*" Her spirit was gone. The gentle lady went away from her home in the body to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6).

Down through the ages Christians saints have received constant strength through the words of the apostle spoken to the Church of Smyrna. Smyrna was a rich and prosperous city located about forty miles N of Ephesus. The ancient world referred to Smyrna as the crown of Ionia and the ornament of Asia. Sometime during the first century the gospel came to Smyrna. Many people believed and were converted to Christ. The church in its infancy was immediately persecuted. The saints were stripped of their social and economic status so that the entire world knew the church endured tribulation and was poor. Satan himself targeted the believers at Smyrna for special attack. From Nero to Diocletian the hands of Roman emperors were dipped in martyrs' blood. One of the best known of the early church fathers to die as a witness was Polycarp (c. AD 169).

The Death of Polycarp

Polycarp's martyrdom is described in a letter from the Church of Smyrna, "*and to all the brotherhoods of the holy and universal Church*", etc. The letter begins with an account of the persecution and the heroism of the martyrs. Conspicuous among them was one Germanicus, who encouraged the rest, and when exposed to the wild beasts, incited them to slay him. His death stirred the fury of the multitude, and the cry was raised "*Away with the atheists; let search be made for Polycarp*".

Polycarp was persuaded by his friends to leave the city and conceal himself in a farmhouse. Here he spent his time in prayer, "*and while praying he [fell] into a trance three days before his apprehension; and he saw his pillow burning with fire. And he turned and said unto those that were with him, 'it must needs be that I shall be burned alive'*". When his pursuers were on his track he went to another farmhouse. Finding him gone they put two slave boys to the

torture, and one of them betrayed his place of concealment. Herod, head of the police, sent a body of men to arrest him on Friday evening. Escape was still possible, but the old man refused to flee, saying, *"the will of God be done"*. He came down to meet his pursuers, conversed affably with them, and ordered food to be set before them. While they were eating he prayed, *"remembering all, high and low, who at any time had come in his way, and the Catholic Church throughout the world"*. Then he was led away.

Herod and Herod's father, Nicetas, met him and took him into their carriage, where they tried to prevail upon him to save his life. Finding they could not persuade him, they pushed him out of the carriage with such haste that he bruised his shin. He followed on foot till they came to the Stadium, where a great crowd had assembled, having heard the news of his apprehension. *"As Polycarp entered into the Stadium a voice came to him from heaven: 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man'. And no one saw the speaker, but those of our people who were present heard the voice."* It was to the proconsul, when he urged him to curse Christ, that Polycarp made his celebrated reply: *"Fourscore and six years have I served Him, and he has done me no harm. How then can I curse my King that saved me."* And with those words Polycarp was set on fire.

Because of Smyrna the Church of Christ was given valuable lessons. First, He who was dead and is alive is ultimately aware of what happens to His people. The Bible says that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. While it is true there is a divine general benevolence towards all mankind, there is a special intimate eternal relationship that the Son has with His bride.

- As the Good Shepherd the Lord has given His life for His sheep.
- As the Rock of Ages He was smitten.
- As the Lamb of God He was sacrificed.
- And it was all done so His beloved would be protected.

Unlike the First Adam who turned on his wife, the Last Adam will protect His bride. Even when she disappoints Him He bears the ultimate wrath of Divine justice on her behalf. *"I know,"* He says. And because Jesus Christ knows what His people are going through they take hope and find fresh courage. In the midst of suffering the Savior is always present. This thought leads to the observation that tribulation shall always come to the Church. It is not always easy to identify with saints who suffering for the cause of Christ. For the moment God has been pleased to allow the Western Church much liberty and freedom from state persecution unlike the Church in other parts of the world. But if we dared to look and learn, if we dared to listen we could see the sufferings of our brothers and sisters elsewhere. We could hear the screams and cries of others. Oh how good God has been to Americans. At the moment we do not have to endure too much for our faith. Christians in the Western world are not unduly ridiculed. We are not beaten. Following a profession of faith we keep our jobs, build our churches, and freely educate our children in religious matters. Because we have been given much the Lord has much to expect of us. One expectation is not to forget the sufferings of others who must endure tribulation and poverty for the sake of the Lord. In China and Russia, in Africa and Central America, the Church of Christ suffers. This suffering is consistent with the prediction of Scripture, the history of Christendom, and the disposition of Satan. Each of these points are crystallized in the Doctrine of Tribulation.

The Doctrine of Tribulation

1. The word “*tribulation*” is found 22 times in the Authorized Version.
2. The word “*tribulations*” is used four times in the Authorized Version.
3. To suffer tribulation (Gr. *thlipsis*) is “*to suffer affliction,*” “*to be troubled,*” “*to suffer due to the pressure of circumstances, or the antagonism of persons*”.
4. In examining the passages that speak of tribulation it is evident that all of God’s people in all ages have known emotional, spiritual, and physical affliction.
 - Sometimes the tribulation the saints suffer is a result of Divine discipline.
 - *Deuteronomy 4:30-31 When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; 31 (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them.*
 - Sometimes tribulation is a form of testing.
 - *Matthew 13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*
 - **It is possible to forget the grace of God who delivers from tribulation.**
 - *Judges 10:14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.*
 - *1 Samuel 10:19 And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.*
 - It is normal to want to be delivered from any and all forms of sufferings.
 - *1 Samuel 26:24 And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation.*
5. Of particular concern is the Christian and tribulation that is not the result of discipline. The Bible clearly makes the following statements.
 - The disciples of Christ, for as long as they are in the world shall have tribulation.

- *John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*
 - Only through much tribulation will believers enter into the kingdom.
 - *Acts 14:22 [Paul went about] Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*
 - The value of tribulation is that it produces patience.
 - *Romans 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;*
 - *Romans 12:12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;*
 - To endure tribulation is not to be loved less by Christ for nothing shall separate the Christian from the Lord's faithfulness.
 - *Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*
 - God will find a way to comfort those who suffer for righteousness.
 - *2 Corinthians 1:4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*
6. Paul found reasons to rejoice in the midst of tribulation and therefore did not want anyone to worry about him.
- Paul discovered something about inner joy regardless of circumstances.
 - *2 Corinthians 7:4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*
 - Paul learned how to give thanks in every situation and to glory in tribulation.
 - *Romans 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;*
 - Paul learned how to enjoy a reflected glory at the sufferings of others because he was proud of them.
 - *2 Thessalonians 1:4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:*

- Paul taught others to enjoy a reflected glory in the sufferings he endured.
 - *Ephesians 3:13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*
7. When the believers at Thessalonica were surprised at the sufferings they had to pass through, Paul reminded them he had taught how they must suffer.
 - *1 Thessalonians 3:4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*
 8. John, on the isle of Patmos, does not divorce himself from tribulation.
 - *Revelation 1:9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*
 9. The tribulation of the saints is well known to the Lord.
 - *Revelation 2:9-10 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*
 10. God's people will always emerge victorious no matter how great the tribulation.
 - *Revelation 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

The conclusion of the matter is that the prediction of Christ, the example of the apostles and the history of the Church indicate that the saints shall suffer right up to the time when Jesus comes again. One of the best known works that brings all of this together is the *Book of Martyrs* by John Fox. John Fox was born in England in the year 1517 the year the Protestant Reformation began. He grew up during the turbulent times of King Henry VIII and later "Bloody" Mary. As a devout Catholic, Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine, slew Protestants in an effort to return England to Catholicism (1553-1558). Fox began to record the major and minor incidents of that era. Then he went back into history to document a trial of blood. When John Fox died in 1587 at the age of 70 the bloodletting against Christians continued. It has not ceased in the present hour. "I know", Jesus said, "thy tribulation."

Of course not all tribulation or suffering is physical. There are emotional sufferings that come from being misjudged, spoken evil against. There is blatant hatred that is expressed towards Christians when individuals speak out against abortion, homosexuality, nuclear proliferation, racial discrimination, low income housing, or any form of social or political injustice. Any public stand for righteousness will bring tribulation. Nevertheless the Church militant must rise to engage in the spiritual battles of time. On the eve of D-Day, June 6, 1944, when the Allied Forces invaded France along the shores of Normandy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower briefed the soldiers reminding them, *“There is no victory at bargain prices!”* General Eisenhower knew he was sending thousands of young men out to suffer in a terrible way. He knew the beaches of Normandy would turn crimson with the blood of mangled bodies blown apart. In like manner Christ knew that His Great Commission would demand great sacrifice physically, financially, and emotionally which is why one of the terms for believers is that of a soldier. 2 Timothy 2:3 *“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* Christians must endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ. The poet asked,

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flow’ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed thro’ bloody seas?*

“I know thy tribulations,” says Christ who was dead and is alive.

There is another great lesson the church of Smyrna can teach the saints and that is spiritual wealth is of far greater value than material prosperity. While much money is needed to advance the kingdom of heaven the Church must guard its heart against a *“Health and Wealth”* gospel called *“Name It and Claim It.”* Ministers are commanded to *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; 18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;”* (1 Tim. 6:17-18). In the divine economy spiritual riches are good works. A Church may have limited economic resources and still be commended and hear the Lord say, *“But thou art rich.”* What a wonderful commentary on the Church of Smyrna. *“But thou art rich.”* The Church was rich because

- souls were being saved;
- and the saints were being edified.
- Believers were baptized and found serving the Lord.
- The fruit of the Spirit was manifested.
- God’s power was present.

The Church was spiritually rich.

In the midst of physical tribulation and financial poverty the One who was dead and is alive instructs His people to *“fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.”* Yes, there will be suffering for it is the disposition of Satan to hurt the saints but Christians are to fear not. There is an emotion stronger than fear and that is faith—faith in the promises of God.

*Have faith in God,
He's on the throne,
Have faith in God,
He watches over His own.*

To those who have faith in the midst of life's greatest sorrow two promises are made. Individuals shall receive a crown of life and shall never have to fear hell, a reference to the second death. To those who are faithful God gives eternal life minus any fear of the future. Yes the Christian must persevere in the sphere of faith but God preserves His own. These two truths are foundational pillars to build a life upon. *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."*

The Doctrine of Rewards in Heaven

1. The Bible does teach there are rewards for Christian service.
2. The rewards promised in heaven are sometimes represented by the symbol of a crown.

The apostle Paul wrote,

- *2 Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

The Lord promised the Church of Smyrna,

- *Revelation 2:10 ...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

3. In the Greek culture a crown might be either an ornamental headdress worn by a king or queen or a wreath worn as a symbol of victory in an athletic or military contest.
4. Before considering the significance of the crown awarded to victors, we should have a clear conception of the nature of heaven's rewards, for we are likely to equate them with our earthly reward system – equal pay for equal work. The idea of merit is involved.
5. In contrast a heavenly crown is not given on the basis of merit. Consider the words of Christ.
 - *Luke 17:7-10 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*
6. Heaven's rewards are all a matter of God's grace. They are God's generous recognition of selfless and sacrificial service.
7. G. Campbell Morgan warned that professing believers who engage in Christian service for a spiritual reward are really acting in the spirit of a non-Christian.
8. Christ Himself did not serve in order to get a selfish reward. Rather, *"He emptied Himself. He served 'for the joy set before Him.' Yes, but what was that joy? The joy of lifting other people and blessing them"* (*The Gospel of Luke*, p. 197).

9. The fact that the laborer in Christ's parable who was hired to work only at the eleventh hour received the same wage as the one who had worked all day underlines the fact that most of the wage he received was not earned, but was a generous gift from the master. When one of the full-time laborers charged his master with unfairness, he replied:
- *Matthew 20:13-15 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? 14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*
10. We are not told precisely what form the rewards or crowns in heaven will take. Many Bible teachers are impressed with Dr. John MacArthur Jr.'s view: "*Believers' rewards aren't something you wear on your head like a crown. . . . Your reward in heaven will be your capacity for service in heaven. . . . Heaven's crowns are what we will experience, eternal life, eternal joy, eternal service, and eternal blessedness*" (Heaven pp.114-115).
11. As novel as this view is it may not go far enough. All that is being said is that faithful service results in eternal life, eternal joy, eternal service, and eternal blessedness – all of which are initial gifts of grace by faith in Christ.
12. It may be that in some form of public commendation the Lord will want to honor those who have honored Him, not in a general manner but in a specific way.
13. In the New Testament, there are two Greek words translated "*crown.*" One is *diadema*, a royal turban worn by Persian kings.
14. It is always the symbol of kingly or imperial dignity. It refers to the kind of crown Jesus receives.
15. The other word is *stephanos*, the victor's crown, "*a symbol of triumph in the Olympic games or some such contest – hence by metonymy, a reward or prize*" (Vine).
16. It was a crown of leaves or vines, beautifully woven. This is the word that is used to denote the rewards of heaven.
17. Here are the crowns mentioned in Scripture:
- **Crown of Life.** This crown is bestowed in recognition of enduring and triumphing over trial and persecution even to the point of martyrdom. The motivation must be love for Christ.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

- **Crown of Righteousness.** This crown is awarded to those who have completed the Christian race with integrity, with eyes fixed on the coming Lord. It is the reward for fulfilling the ministry entrusted to one.

2 Timothy 4:6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

- **Incorruptible Crown.** This crown is won by those who strive for mastery, for excellence. Here Paul was using the figure of the pentathlon with its tremendous demand of physical stamina. The crown is awarded to the disciplined.

1 Corinthians 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

- **Crown of Rejoicing.** This is the crown of the soul-winner. It will be cause for rejoicing when, in heaven, we meet those who have been won to Christ through our ministry. This crown is open to every believer.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

- **Crown of Glory (Shepherd's Crown).** This promised award for spiritual leaders in the church should provide strong motivation for sacrificial pastoral ministry.

1 Peter 5:2-4 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

18. None of these crowns, however, is awarded automatically. There are qualifying conditions attached to each, and it is possible to forfeit a crown through unwatchfulness.

19. In the letter to the church at Philadelphia, the risen Lord warned the believers,

- *Revelation 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

20. Philip Doddridge wrote:

*'Tis God's all-animating voice
That calls thee from on high,
'Tis His own hand presents the prize
To thine aspiring eye.
That prize with peerless glories bright,
Which shall new luster boast,*

*When victor's wreaths and monarch's gems
Shall blend in common dust.
Blest Savior, introduced by Thee
Have I my race begun;
And crowned with victory at Thy feet
I'll lay my honors down.*

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 3

Satan in the Sanctuary

~*~

Revelation 2:12-17

*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write;
These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;
I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is:
and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith,
even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr,
who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*

*But I have a few things against thee,
because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam,
who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel,
to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

*So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,
which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly,
and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

*He that hath an ear,
let him hear what the Spirit
saith unto the churches;
To him that overcometh will
I give to eat of the hidden manna,
and will give him a white stone,
and in the stone a new name written,
which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

~*~

It is within the heart and experience of professing Christians to be faithful or faithless. God's people at any given moment can do good or evil. Individuals can be spiritual or worldly. They can be on fire with holy zeal or as cold as the winter's frost. A casual review of one's own spiritual biography will probably reveal conflicting experiences. During one season of the soul the saint might enjoy a mountain top moment of sweet fellowship with Christ. Eagerly the *Word of God* is received and listened to as often as possible. The heart burns with longing for soul winning experiences. Prayer meeting is anticipated for the privilege of corporate and private prayer is recognized. Personal devotions are held because they are precious. But something happens. The initial intense spiritual emotions begin to subside. The impulses of worldly passions stir. The mind becomes enamored with other sights and sounds. Now the preaching of the *Word*

is not given priority. One excuse after another is found to stay away from the preaching of the gospel. There is no longer the appetite for the spiritual banquet with its many delectable delights. Prayer meeting becomes cold, formal, and shallow. Souls are no longer sought. The Christian moves into a spiritual Twilight Zone. The heart is neither hot nor cold with religious zeal. Some of the saints at the church of Pergamum were like that. Individuals were neither hot nor cold. The church was wonderfully spiritual in some areas but terribly wicked in other ways. Perhaps the leadership was also engaged in secret sins. Charles Spurgeon told the story of the preacher of whom it was said, "*He preached so well when he was in the pulpit that people said he should never come down. But then he lived so poorly that people said he should never return.*" As the saints at Pergamum struggled with their hearts there were two good deeds they performed which the Lord commended.

- The Christians exalted the name of Jesus.
- They kept the faith even to the point of death.

It was not easy or popular to exalt the name of Christ. But the Christians wanted to do what they could to promote the work of the kingdom because they loved the Lord who loved them and saved them. On a southern battlefield during the Civil War a soldier had an artery of his arm shattered severely by the fragment of a shell. He was fast bleeding to death. A passing physician bound up the artery and saved his life. As the physician was leaving the young man cried out, "*Doctor, what is your name?*" *No matter,*" said the doctor. "*But doctor, I want to tell my wife and children who saved me,*" Came the response. When Christ comes to bind our spiritual wounds that will kill us and save our dying souls there is a natural longing to tell others what He has done.

*I'm not ashamed to own my Lord
Or to defend His cause;
Maintain the honor of His Word,
The glory of His cross.
Jesus, my God! I know His Name,
His Name is all my trust;
Nor will He put my soul to shame,
Nor let my hope be lost.
Firm as His throne His promise stands,
And He can well secure
What I've committed to His hands
Till the decisive hour.*

*Then will He own my worthless name
Before His Father's face,
And in the new Jerusalem
Appoint my soul a place.*

~*~

Isaac Watts

Not only did the saints at Pergamum witness for Christ but they were faithful even unto death. Not everyone has been or will be asked to die for Christ but the willingness to give one's life for the Lord must dwell in every heart.

In the early days of the Church there was a man named Antipas who was arrested, falsely accused of crimes against the state, tried, and sentenced to death because of his unswerving allegiance to Christ. "*Renounce Jesus and lived,*" he was told. "*I love my Lord and shall die if necessary,*" was his reply. In the hour of death Antipas was human. There was a measure of fear and apprehension. Nevertheless, Antipas paid the ultimate price. He was a faithful martyr. He never wavered in his final decision. In every century the Church cries out for people who have the spirit of Antipas and will be a faithful witness. The story is told of a Methodist minister who was so distressed by members of his congregation and so sharply criticized for many decisions made he despaired. He went to the bishop to resign. To the minister's surprise the bishop did not readily accept his resignation but asked a series of questions. "*Do your people literally spit in your face*". "*No. Of course not,*" replied the minister. "*Do they ever bodily punch you?*" "*No.*" "*Have they ever dressed you up, mocked, and laughed at you?*" "*No.*" "*Have they ever stripped and scourged you, crowned you with thorns and...*" "*No!*" cried out the pastor and then he added, "*God helping me, until they do, I will hold on.*" A spirit of holding on until the end should characterize God's people. A willingness to be made expendable for the Lord's sake can be found in the hearts of Christians determined to be found faithful.

*"Are ye able," said the Master,
"To be crucified with Me?"
"Yea," the sturdy dreamers answered,
"To the death we follow Thee."*

Refrain

*Lord, we are able. Our spirits are Thine.
Remold them, make us, like Thee, divine.
Thy guiding radiance above us shall be
A beacon to God, to love and loyalty.
Are ye able to remember,
When a thief lifts up his eyes,
That his pardoned soul is worthy
Of a place in paradise?*

Refrain

*Are ye able when the shadows
Close around you with the sod,
To believe that spirit triumphs,
To commend your soul to God?*

Refrain

*Are ye able? Still the Master
Whispers down eternity,*

*And heroic spirits answer,
Now as then in Galilee.*

Refrain

~*~

Earl B. Marlett

While we long to be able to be faithful to the Lord even unto death we need to be aware of the forces of evil which are present to draw our hearts from the Lord and destroy the good results of holy deeds in order to provoke the wrath of God. The wrong that Christians do is produced in part because of erroneous teaching. Never underestimate the power of a false teacher or a false teaching. False teaching leads to an inappropriate style of living. Therefore, be careful.

- **Be careful of legalism.** There is a modern form of Phariseeism which will focus attention on what is done or not done. Spirituality is established by outward conformity to certain practices. While it is not wrong to have standards it is wrong to go beyond what the Scriptures warrant should be imposed on others.
- **Be careful of spiritual intellectualism.** The apostle Paul warned that knowledge can “*puff*” a person up and make them feel intellectually superior to all others. Undue attention can be paid to a formal study of the Scriptures to the point that practical holiness is lost.
- **Be careful of the Doctrine of Balaam.** The doctrine of Balaam has reference to a story recorded in the book of Numbers (cf. Num. 22-23; 31) which may briefly be told.

Following their divine deliverance from Egypt the nation of Israel was moving towards the Land of Divine Promise. Because God was giving them military victory Hebrews were able to conquer all who opposed them.

In the area of Moab lived a king named Balak who became fearful of his kingdom. Balak began to look for a non-military way to confront and defeat the army of Israel. In some way the name of the Hebrew prophet Balaam was brought to his attention. Balak discovered that for a price Balaam could be bought. Balaam would be willing to utter spiritual words against the Israel if the price were right. Balaam was willing to market his spiritual gift.

In 2 Peter 2:15 this “*way of Balaam*” is severely denounced. The apostle speaks of those “*Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;*”

Despite Balaam’s willingness to prostitute his spiritual gift there was a practical problem. Every time he opened his mouth to speak against Israel he found himself saying pronouncing a blessing upon the people. Nevertheless, Balaam was

determined to have the money promised and so he found a way to lead the nation into great sin in order to provoke God to wrath. Balaam taught the people to engage in sexual relations with those who were not part of the covenant (cf. Num. 24:1-2).

Balaam suspected that once unholy marriages took place the hearts of the Israelites would be turned from God to embrace the gods of the heathen culture of Palestine. And that is exactly what happened.

The church at Pergamum had in its midst those who embraced the doctrine of Balaam. Marriages between people of faith and non-faith began taking place. Alternative life styles became acceptable to those within the Christian community much like major denominations today are allowing homosexual marriages to be performed within the church.

Because the church at Pergamum was allowing the doctrine of Balaam to be promoted unchallenged a warning went forth, *“if you do not deal with false teaching I will come unto you quickly and will fight against them.”*

Besides allowing the doctrine of Balaam to be promoted the church of Pergamum allowed another harmful doctrine sponsored by the Nicolaitans. Bible scholars are not united in identifying the Nicolaitans. It has been suggested that the doctrine they advocated established an unwarranted spiritual hierarchy where by church officials no longer served the people but ruled with arrogance and insensitivity. May the Lord give His people once more men and women and young people with the heart of a servant. How nice it would be if it were said when introducing church officials, *“This brother is a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ in the local assembly”*. The results would be fewer conflicts in Christendom. Now among the biblical principles used to guide a local assemble the following three concepts must be included.

- **Let there be a proper minister.** Sheep need an Undershepherd. As the Undershepherd follows the Chief Shepherd so the sheep should follow their leader (s).

The church is blessed when it has a man or a group of men who feel compelled to engage in the formal work of the gospel ministry, not as an aside but because they have been

“tapped on the shoulder” to use the expression of Peter Marshall,

“called of God” to use the thought of Paul (Rom. 1:1),

or removed from following the plough to cite the experience of Elisha. 1 Kings 19:20 *“And he [Elisha] left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.”*

- **Let there be a proper support group.** The local assembly needs individuals who are anxious to serve in the most humble way to maintain the facilities and do whatever the pastor(s) feels is necessary to advance the work of the kingdom.
- **Let there be a holy purpose for existing.** The purpose for the existence of the local assembly is to promote the gospel and to help others in their time of need. How well this is being done can be tested by where the money is being invested. Jesus said, Matthew 6:21 *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*
- **Let there be sound doctrine.** *Mark 12:38-40 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, 39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: 40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.*

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Church

Chapter 4

The Judgment of Jezebel

~*~

Revelation 2:18-29

*“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; 19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. 20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce **my servants** to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. 21 And **I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.** 22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. 25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. 26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.”*

~*~

Of all the places where the seven churches of the Revelation were located Thyatira was the smallest. Nevertheless, it receives the longest letter to the assemblies. The Old Testament prophet asked, *“For who hath despised the day of small things?”* Certainly not God. From a tiny seed grows a mighty oak. From a group of twelve restless men grew a church that reaches the seven continents of the world. The Church of Thyatira was located in a rich agricultural area. It was famous for one thing—a rich purple dye. From a certain shellfish came one drop of dye which was carefully preserved. Anyone who knew how to extract the dye and use it to color material could grow rich as a seller of purple. In the small town was such a person, a Christian woman by the name of Lydia. The conversion of Lydia to Christ is recorded in Acts 16:14-15. *“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”*

Notice the significance of the particular words, *“whose heart the Lord opened.”* If ever a man, woman, or child is to come to Christ the Lord must first open the heart for the *“heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* (Jer. 17:9).

- The deceitfulness of the heart is reflected in the secret sins, which the soul feels compelled to perform despite the risk of open shame.
- The deceitfulness of the heart is manifested in the way wrong decisions and wrong actions are justified when exposed.
- The strength of the deceitfulness of sin is found in the soul's sense of helplessness and hopelessness from any complete deliverance from its bondage. Sovereign grace is needed. God must set the captive free. The Lord must open the heart to gospel truths.

One-day sovereign grace came to Lydia. The Lord opened her heart and she in turn may have taken the gospel within the commercial community of Thyatira. There is no record in the Scripture of any evangelistic effort in the city but as the song says,

*It only takes a spark to get a fire going.
And soon all those around can
warm up to its glowing.
That's how it is with God's love.*

The Son of God has something to say to the Church as He appears in the role of Judge for His eyes were like unto a flame of fire and His feet were like unto fine brass. Historically the Church has known Christ in many roles. In the Old Testament He was the angel of Jehovah. While on earth Christ was the Son of Man, the Lamb of God, the Sin Sacrifice. Such is Christ in the State of His humiliation. But in His state of exaltation He is Lord of lords, and King of kings. In His glory all power in heaven and on earth has been given Him so that He rules and reigns over all creation. It is the glorified, sovereign, absolutely righteous Lord that John would have His readers see. It is the Just Judge of the universe that John reveals in the Revelation. Here is the dimension of Christ that is worthy of careful consideration and holy honor. The Lamb is now the Lion. The meek and lowly now has burning eyes and brass feet. He who on earth came not to judge the world, He who came not to condemn the world but to save it, this One has a serious message to all professing saints.

- First, there are kind words of consideration and understanding. A recent sign on a church billboard read: “*He who judges must first understand.*” “I understand,” says Jesus. “*I know. I know thy works.*” In the Church of Thyatira good works were prominent. The poor were helped. The homeless found shelter. People saw a need and filled it. The saints found a hurt and healed it.
- The Church had a measure of charity or agape love. Agape love is giving love. It is the type of love, which expresses the Divine essence of God who so loved that He gave. The Church gave. The saints at Thyatira also served each other. They did not throw money at a problem and forget it. Nor did they ignore the work that needed to be done. A Church that serves is a Church that receives Divine commendation.
- In the area of faith the Church at Thyatira excelled so that spiritually speaking the people could remove mountains.
- And they were people of patience. When the time of testing came from the political pressures of the day due to Emperor worship the church resisted, remained faithful to Christ, and endured the consequences of their actions.
- Moreover, the Church was not living in memories for the Bible says their last works were greater than their former works. That is an important point. No local assembly can long survive if it lives on memories. Every assembly needs to make a commitment to remember the past but to live in present with hope for the future.

In spite of all the good comments the Lord had for the Church of Thyatira there was a matter of grave concern. The Church had allowed a woman called “Jezebel” to teach. Through her teaching the saints were being led to commit fornication and to eat things offered to idols. All this was being done in the name of a prophetic ministry. By calling the woman “Jezebel” the apostle John could be referring to several things.

- **It is possible the reference is to the pastor’s wife.** The basis for this belief among a few commentators is based on the fact that some of the ancient manuscripts add “*sou*” to the word “*woman*” meaning “*thy woman*” or “*thy wife*” (Rev. 2:20).
- The term “Jezebel” may be merely a symbolic reference to the historic Jezebel. In the Old Testament there is the record of King Ahab of Israel who, being a weak man, was dominated by the woman he married, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. Her name was Jezebel. She is presented as one of the most evil and ruthless characters of the Old Testament.

It was Jezebel who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of Baal.

It was Jezebel who did what she could to destroy the genuine worship of Jehovah.

It was Jezebel who was responsible for the killing of Naboth in order to take possession of his vineyard for her pouting husband. Dr. R. G. Lee called King Ahab, "That most vile toad of a king who sat upon the throne."

It was Jezebel who killed almost all of the prophets of God and tried to murder Elijah.

It was Jezebel who was so wicked Elijah singled her out for a special prophecy. She would die suddenly and dogs would lick her bone.

Jezebel was a cruel woman. She painted her face pretty and her soul black. She pulled the strings of political power until she was strangled with the cords of intrigue.

Jezebel played fast and loose with life and lovers but in the end the dogs licked her bones clean (1 Kings 22:38ff).

As the name "Hitler" is forever associated with the mass annihilation of six million Jews so the name "Jezebel" is forever identified with spiritual wickedness.

- It maybe in the city of Thyatira there was a literal woman named Jezebel who called herself a prophetess. While pretending to speak in the name of the Lord this Jezebel was really leading people into sexual immorality and offering sacrifices unto idols.

It is instructive to notice in the Bible the prominent place of sexual sins among the people of God.

- ❑ **In Genesis 6 we read the story of inappropriate marriages taking place between the godly line of Seth and the ungodly line of Cain due to sensual attraction.** The result was the Great Flood. *“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 2 That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. 3 And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. 4 There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. 5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. 7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. 8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. “*

- ❑ **Many years after the Flood when the earth was repopulated and the nation of Israel had been called into existence we find that the daughters of Lot committed incest with him.** The results of this unholy union were the nations of Moab and Ammon. Genesis 19:36-38 *“Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. 37 And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. 38 And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.”*

- ❑ **Abraham himself was not above inappropriate sexual relations** for he went in unto Hagar and she bore a child who hand has been against his blood relatives to this day. Genesis 16:15 *“And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael”*

- ❑ **Following the Exodus one of the most grievous and shocking sins of the delivered people is that they are found dancing lewdly around a golden calf of their own creation.** The sexual activity of the children of Israel is discretely referred to in the English Bible this way. Exodus 32:5-6 *“And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. 6 And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.”*

There seems to have been at the same time the golden calf was worshipped much of the revelry that marked the feasts of the pagan; for it is added that, after they had `eaten and drunk,' they `rose up to play.' The ancient historian Herodotus gives an account of a solemn feast which the people of Egypt celebrated at the city of Bubastis in honour of the goddess Diana. *`To her (he says) they offer many sacrifices; and while the victim is burning they dance, and play a hundred antics, and drink more wine than in the whole year beside; for there convene there about 700,000 men and women, besides children.'* In another feast to the goddess Isis, the same historian relates that they indulged in such impure rites that he shrunk from describing the scene, (cf. Herodotus, b. v., ch. xvii.)

- **There is the story of Esther.** Before she became queen and was able to help her people, what was she doing? She was being prepared to sleep with the king for a one night. Esther 2:13-14 *“Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. 14 In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.”*

- **The illicit relations between King David and Bathsheba are well known. 2 Sam 11:3-5** *“And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? 4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. 5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.”*

- **Turning to the New Testament we find the shocking situation in the church in Corinth.** 1 Cor 5:1-2 *“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.”*

The sensual sins of professing saints are well documented. So is the sin of idolatry, which is covetousness (Col. 3:5). It would be easy to say that people who engage in gross immorality are not really Christians. However, the Lord Himself calls the people at Thyatira *“My servants”* showing ownership. We must not be shocked when we hear of sexual immorality by church members for fallen humanity is just that.

This is not to suggest that gross immorality is to be tolerated in the sense that nothing is said or done to protest illicit behavior. Something must be said, in private if possible, in public if necessary. The Bible teaches the mind of Christ on this matter. When known immorality is discovered there is to be a gentle confrontation with the expressed purpose of bringing the person(s) to repentance and restoring them to full fellowship. Gal 6:1 *“Brethren, if a man [woman or young person] be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”*

What the Lord commanded He practiced. In gentleness and yet with all due severity to the church of Thyatira the Lord had something to say. He wanted His people to repent of their sensual sins in particular and for this reason. The body of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which also means the body is the dwelling place of God. 1 Cor 6:19-*“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”*

In order to encourage repentance the Lord gave time to repent *“But they repented not.”* Sometimes, because people are allowed to continue in secret sins of rebellion against the Lord's known will it seems as if nothing will happen. But something does happen when there is no turning away from evil over a period of time.

- **The heart grows hard and stops feeling guilt and remorse.** The apostle Paul spoke of individuals *“Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness”* (Eph. 4:19).
- **The heart that grows hard and stops feeling guilt and sorrow shall be confirmed in evil.** Revelation 22:11 *“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”*

- The heart that grows hard and stops feeling guilt and sorrow because it is confirmed in evil shall also know the Judgment of Jezebel as described in *Revelation 2:22*. “Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”

Observe in this verse a sharp contrast between the luxurious couch where sexual sins were first committed and the bed of pain. The purpose for the painful judgment is declared in *Revelation 2:23* “and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.” The Bible teaches that one-day all the deeds that men do shall be evaluated. *2 Corinthians 5:10* “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” One day your works shall be examined for the purpose of approval or disapproval and so shall mine. When our works are evaluated it will be revealed that some have known the depths of Satan—while claiming to be prophets and preachers and servants of the Most High God. But it will also be revealed that others have not known the depths of Satan. There are those who have not acquired a knowledge of evil by personal experience. For the soul that is faithful there is a Divine promise of being able to share in the glory that shall come at the parousia or the appearance of Christ. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying:

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

The Letter to Sardis

Chapter 5

Revelation 3:1-6

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. 5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. 6 He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

~*~

Following the letter to the angel of the church in Thyatira, John is instructed to write to the church in Sardis. For the first time there will be no word of praise. The condition of the church was very serious. He that hath the seven Spirits of God wanted the people to know how desperate their condition was. The reference to the seven spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His gifts (Isa. 11:2) ministering to the seven churches identified as the seven stars. The seven churches are under the sovereign control of the Lord Jesus Christ. To His church at Sardis the Lord begins to speak and says, *"I know thy works...."*

It is impossible for Christ not to know the works of His people for He is very God. He is also extremely interested in the activities of each congregation. And as He observes the Lord of glory evaluates what He observes. It was the considered opinion of Christ that the church of Sardis was living a lie. They had a public reputation for being alive and yet before God were dead. Here is a great paradox. A church can have many programs that help many people and still be dead in the sight of God. The programs are not wrong but neither do they guarantee life. The people of God must make sure that spiritual life is present by having no sins un-confessed and no sins un-mortified. Sin brings spiritual death.

1. **Sin is the death of the will.** It is possible to listen to the voice of temptation so often that habits are developed which can no longer be broken. One of the characteristics of the doomed is a confirmation in sin. Rev 22:11 *"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still:"*
2. **Sin is the death of feelings.** The process of becoming enslaved to sin does not happen overnight. The conscience must be suppressed. Sin *"petrifies the feelings."*

3. **Sin is the death of all that is lovely.** Sin can take the most innocent and beautiful young girl and turn her in a centerfold model. Sin can take the most promising young man and turn him into a selfish, egotistical person intoxicated with ambition. Sin can take the church of Jesus Christ and turn it into a sanctuary of Satan.

The church must be careful to put away sin and then to guard its spiritual life. There are four things that can be done.

First, the church is to "watch." Failure to watch can lead to spiritual harm and it can lead to physical harm. The year was 546 BC Sardis was a rich and powerful city, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. Because of its strategic location high upon a mountain, the people of Sardis thought they could not be harmed. The wealthy King Croesus foolishly embarked upon a war with Cyrus of Persia. Thinking he could defeat Cyrus, King Croesus consulted the oracle at Delphi and was told: "*If you cross the river (Hayls) you will destroy a great empire.*" Croesus crossed the river and indeed destroyed a great empire. His own! Still, the king was not worried. He could still find safety in his city. But again he was mistaken for Cyrus had offered a special reward to anyone who could find an entrance into the city. As it happened, a certain Mardian soldier called Hyeroeades had seen a Sardian soldier drop by accident his helmet over the battlements, and then watched as the soldier made his way down the precipice to retrieve it. It was obvious that if the Sardian soldier could retrieve his helmet then there was a crack in the rock that an agile man could climb up to and over the battlement. That night Hyeroeades led a small band of Persian troops up by the fault in the rock. The battlements were not being watched and Sardis fell. In the year 214 BC history repeated itself. This time the invader was Antiochus III. Once again the people of Sardis had failed to watch properly for the attack of the enemy. The city was conquered. For the Christian community watchfulness is to be a constant attitude. "*It is time,*" wrote Paul, "*to awake out of sleep*" (Rom. 13:11). In particular the Christian is to:

1. Watch against the wiles of the devil.
 - *1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*
2. Watch against temptation.
 - *Matt 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*
3. Watch for the coming of the Lord.
 - *Mark 13:35-37 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: 36Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*
4. Watch against false teaching.

- *Acts 20:29-31 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

While the church is watching, she should remember that Christ is watching her.

The second command of Christ is to, "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." In any church there are ministries which are ready to die because they are not supported and strengthened by the presence and energy of the saints. It takes time and energy and resources for the church of Christ to know LIFE. There is work to do. We must strengthen the things that remain and who knows. Perhaps God will restore some of the former things.

The third command for the church of Sardis is to remember. In particular the church was to remember how they first heard the gospel and how it first received the glorious gospel of truth.

Then fourth, the church was called upon to repent, to feel sorry for sin, and to turn from sin. Repentance is the sovereign grace gift of God. If a people find himself or herself without this gift, they can seek God and ask for it. The alternative to non-repentance, to non-remembrance, to non-strengthening the work, to non-watching is certain judgment in time as well as in eternity. Revelation 3:3 *"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."*

Fortunately, there were a few in Sardis, which had not sinned before God in a grievous manner. They had not defiled their garments by acts of immorality. To them it was given to walk with Christ in white. To walk in white might refer to a time of festivity (Eccl. 9:8), a time of victory, or a period of purity (Matt. 5:8). It could refer to the resurrection or even Christian baptism. Those who over come were also promised not be blotted out of the Book of Life. As a concept, the Book of Life is mentioned several times in Scripture.

1. Moses asked not to be allowed to stay in the Book of Life if his people could be saved (Ex. 32:32,33).
 - *Ex 32:32-33 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. 33 And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.*
2. The Psalmist hoped that the wicked would be blotted out (Psa. 69:28) of the Book of the Living.
 - *Ps 69:28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.*
3. Daniel 12:1 speaks of those who will be delivered in the Day of Judgment.
 - *Dan 12:1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there*

was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book

4. Paul says that his fellow labourers are written in the Book of Life (Phil. 4:3).
 - *Phil 4:3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*
5. People who are not written in the Book of Life are cast into the Lake of Fire.
 - *Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*
6. Only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life shall enter into blessedness.
 - *Luke 10:20 Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*

For those whose names are written in the Book of Life the spiritual world becomes very serious. Special attention is paid to the matter of revival. But how does a Church know if it needs a spiritual awakening. Leonard Ravenhill helps answer this question by a series of penetrating observations.

When is Revival Needed?

Leonard Ravenhill

1. When prayer ceases to be a vital part of a professing Christian's life, backsliding is present and revival is needed. [God's people must pray. They must pray individually and collectively.]
2. When the quest for biblical truth ceases and as one grows content with the knowledge of eternal things already received, there can be no mistaking the presence of backsliding, and revival is needed.
3. When the biblical knowledge possessed or acquired is treated as external fact and not applied inwardly, backsliding is present and revival is needed.
4. When earnest thoughts about eternal things cease to be regular and gripping, it should be a warning light to the backslider that revival is needed. [Time is short, death is certain, and eternity is real]
5. When the services of the Church lose their delights, a backslidden condition exists and revival is needed.

6. When pointed spiritual discussions are an embarrassment, that is certain evidence of backsliding and revival is needed.
7. When sports, recreation and entertainment are a large and necessary part of one's lifestyle, you may assume backsliding is in force and revival is needed.
8. When sins of the body and the mind can be indulged in without an uproar in the conscience, a backslidden condition is certain and revival is needed.
9. When aspirations for Christ-like holiness ceases to dominant one life and thinking, a backslidden condition is present and revival is needed.
10. When the acquisition of money and goods become a dominant part of one's thinking, this is a clear confirmation of backsliding and revival is needed.
11. When one can mouth religious words and sing religious songs without heart, be sure, backsliding is present and revival is needed.
12. When a person can hear the Lord's name being used in a vulgar way, when spiritual concerns are mocked, and eternal issues are loosely treated and there is no feelings of indignation, a backslidden condition exists and revival is needed.
13. When degrading movies and television can be watched and morally debilitating literature read, backsliding has occurred and revival is needed.
14. When breeches of peace in the brotherhood are of no concern, there is backsliding and revival is needed.
15. When the slightest excuse is sufficient to keep self from spiritual duties and opportunity, there is backsliding and revival is needed.
16. When one is content with lack of spiritual power and no longer seeks repeated enduements of power from on high, there is a backslidden condition and revival is needed.
17. When personal sins are easily excused by saying the Lord understands and remembers that we are dust, a backslidden condition is revealed and revival is needed.
18. When there is no music in the soul and no song in the heart, the silence testifies to a backslidden condition and revival is needed.
19. When there is a happy adjustment to the world's lifestyle, the truth of backsliding is revealed and revival is needed.
20. When the local assembly has fallen into spiritual declension and the Word of God is no longer preached with power and anointing and one is still content, there is backsliding and revival is needed.

21. When the tears for the lost are gone and the heart is cold and without emotion for the salvation of sinners, backsliding has taken place and there is a need for revival.
22. When the *Word of God* is not honored by personal presence and sound attention, backsliding is obvious and revival is needed.
23. When more emphasis is placed on external acquisitions instead of spiritual growth in grace and knowledge, a backslidden state is present and revival is needed.

**Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches
The Letter to Sardis**

Chapter 6

The Living Dead

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Revelation 3:1-6

*“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write;
These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;
I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

*2Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain,
that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.*

*3Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard,
and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch,
I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt
not know what hour I will come upon thee.*

*4Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which
have not defiled their garments;
and they shall walk with me in white:
for they are worthy.*

*5He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment;
and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life,
but I will confess his name before my Father,
and before his angels.*

*6He that hath an ear,
let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

~*~

Under Roman rule the city of Sardis became important as a commercial city. It was famous for its woolen manufactories and dying industry. In the year AD 17 the city was almost destroyed by an earthquake. However, because of the generosity of the emperor Tiberius, the citizens of Sardis crawled out from under the rubble and rebuilt. Into the city of Sardis came the gospel of Jesus Christ. A church was found that prospered, or so it seemed. One day the pastor of the assembly received a letter that began with these words. *“These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;”* The pastor understood. Here was a letter from the Lord Himself for only Christ controls the seven spirits and the seven stars. The seven stars refer to the seven churches of Asia Minor. There were local assemblies in

- Ephesus
- Smyrna
- Pergamus
- Thyatira
- Sardis
- Philadelphia
- Laodicea

The seven spirits is a cryptic reference to the fullness of the one Holy Spirit. Jesus was completely filled with the Holy Spirit. He prayed that when He returned to heaven the Father would send the Spirit to the church in more fullness and power. The prayer of Christ was answered. The Holy Spirit came often upon the early disciples to give them wisdom and power to advance the kingdom of heaven.

- *Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*
- *Acts 3:10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.*
- *Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,*
- *Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

On a day called Pentecost the physical presence of the Holy Spirit was manifested in a special way. Dr. R.A. Torrey suggests the day of Pentecost was not unique but representative of what can happen in any church in any generation that is willing to pay the price for spiritual power. Perhaps Dr. Torrey is right. It that He who has the Seven Spirits wants to release the power of the Spirit in the local assembly be it large or small.

Such a concept should not be surprising or offensive. The sovereign God waits upon man to do that which he is responsible for. There is a spiritual labor that the redeemed can and must perform. The tragedy is that the Christian community can misunderstand just what the good work of redemption is. It is possible for a local assembly to become so involved with life like activities that it dies spiritually.

A historical observation allows a vivid description of the living dead. Such a Church takes on specific characteristics the first of which is excessive organization.

While all things must be done decently and in order there still needs to be freedom to make decisions and initiate change that is Spirit led. The vocabulary of the Church must include the phrase *“and the Spirit said.”* Acts 10:19-20 *“While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. 20So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”* (NIV)

Throughout history the Church has become so well organized that a sense of self-sufficiency takes over. And the spirit of self-sufficiency is worn as a badge of honor. The Church that pleases God best is the Church that is well organized, well disciplined but always dependent upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit. A Luther pastor once said to me, “*We Lutherans do not know the Holy Spirit. We are afraid of the Spirit.*”

In order to be Spirit led several factors must be present.

- **Prayer.** While Peter prayed the Spirit came to him.
- **Submission.** God will speak to the man who listens with the intent to obey.
- **Immediate obedience.** As soon as the Spirit spoke Peter moved.
- **Commitment.** Obedience to the Spirit brought criticism from others (Acts 11:1ff). Nevertheless Peter did what was right and was able to defend his behaviour.

When the Lord is in control of His Church, when the work of the saints is done in the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no attempt by anyone to dominate. Rather each person esteems others better than themselves. Phil 2:3-4 “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*”

Then second, to state the matter in a more positive manner, the Church that is alive and not dead in the sight of God is a Church that has a balanced ministry. Reflecting American culture a style of ministry is coming into the Church summarized in one word: specialization.

- **Bible Doctrine.** Some ministries place an emphasis on the intake of Bible Doctrine.
- **Soul winning.** It might be an emphasis on soul winning.
- **Missions.**
- **Social life.**
- **A particular age group.**
- **Christian education.**

The conclusion of the matter is that God wants balance in the life of the Christian. The Church that is healthy is the Church that ministers to the whole body of Christ. The Church that is healthy is the Church that is characterized by life manifested in several areas.

- **A common goal or vision.** The Psalmist said, “*Where there is no vision the people perish.*” The vision of the local assembly should be nothing less than fulfilling the Great Commission of going forth to make disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- **Time for worship and spiritual activities.** The holy time I speak of is not the time left over but the time that is prioritized. In the Christian’s worldview biblical passages should guide behaviour.
 - *John 9:4-5 “Night is coming, when no one can work.” (NIV).*
 - *Eph 5:16 “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”*
 - *Matt 6:33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

- **Healthy relationships.** Relationships are most healthy where there is great love, a love defined by the characteristics of 1 Corinthians 13.
- **Spiritual discernment.** Every Christian has a responsibility to test the spirits to see if they are of God. 1 John 4:1 “*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*” Spiritual discernment is necessary to avoid erroneous teaching and the rising of individuals who do not have the best interest of the Church at heart.
- **Sound doctrine.** There is a faith once and for all delivered to the saints. That body of truth is under assault today. Who will defend it? Who will defend the truth against
 - ❑ Self esteem theology
 - ❑ Liberation theology
 - ❑ The God is Dead Movement
 - ❑ Neo-orthodoxy
 - ❑ Dispensationalism
 - ❑ The Occult
 - ❑ The Cults
 - ❑ Arminianism
 - ❑ The Social Gospel
 - ❑ The Health and Wealth Gospel
 - ❑ The encroachment of quasi business/religious organizations and
 - ❑ A government, which believes it can define worship?

The healthy Church, the Church which is alive is the Church that believes the Bible is the Word of God and is willing to be changed by the Word, and led by the Spirit because there is a consciousness of being loved by God and ruled over by Christ.

For a Church that finds itself
 without a vision and
 with members who have little time for worship,
 unhealthy relationships,
 no spiritual discernment,
 and the absence of sound doctrine

two great works are required: *3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent” (Rev. 3:3).*

The soul is to remember how it first received the gospel. Oh how sweet it once was to know that sins could be forgiven and that God receives sinful men. The heart rejoiced when it heard that there is a way to be cleansed from the power and pollution of sin. And maybe even a

tear was shed at the sight of the dying Son of God. The command of Christ to His people is to remember.

The second command is to repent or face a certain and fearful judgment. It is as simple and as terrible as that. The conclusion of the matter is this. "*There is but one true, real and right life for rational beings; only one life worth living, and worth living in this world, or in any other life, past, present, or to come. And that is the eternal life which was before all worlds, and will be after all are passed away — and that is neither more nor less than a good life; a life of good feelings, good thoughts, good words, good deeds — the life of Christ and of God*". Charles Kingsley. Therefore, live Church, live.

The Doctrine of Repentance

1. The word '*repent*' when used in a general sense means literally '*to change one's mind*.'
- Genesis 6:6 *And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. 7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.*
2. However, when used of man, true spiritual repentance speaks of a sense of personal '*guilt*' with the hope of God's mercy. There is a sense of deep *regret* for the act of transgression committed.
 - Matthew 27:3 *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*
3. Repentance demands a deep *sorrow* for sin and a turning away from it to obey God. There is a fundamental change in one's life.
 - Matthew 9:13 *But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* (cf Luke 5:32)
4. In the Old Testament the classic case of repentance is that of King David, after Nathan the prophet accused him of killing Uriah the Hittite and committing adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. David's prayer of repentance for this sin is found in Psalm 51.
5. In the New Testament the keynote of John the Baptist's preaching was, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 3:2).
6. To the multitudes John declared, "*Bear fruits worthy of repentance*" (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8). It is not enough to simply say you are sorry.

7. When Jesus began His ministry, He took up John's preaching of the message of repentance, expanding the message to include the good news of salvation: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel"* (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15)

8. In Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God is seen the truth that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin:

by repentance, one turns away from sin;

by faith, one turns toward God in accepting the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a twofold turning, or conversion, is necessary for entrance into the kingdom

- Matt. 18:3 *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

9. *"Unless you repent,"* said Jesus, *"you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:3,5).

10. This is the negative, or judgmental, side of Jesus' message. The positive, or merciful, side is seen in these words: *"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"* (Luke 15:10).

11. After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, His disciples continued His message of repentance and faith (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 20:21; 26:20).

- Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

- Acts 26:20 *But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

12. Repentance is a turning

- ❖ from wickedness and dead works

- Acts 8:22 *Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*

- Hebrew 6:1 *Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,*

- ❖ toward God and His glory

- Acts 20:21 *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- Rev. 16:9 *And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,*

❖ eternal life

- Acts 11:18 *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

and a knowledge of the truth

- 2 Tim. 2:25 *In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;*

13. Repentance is associated with

❖ prayer

1 Kings 8:47 *Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness;*

❖ belief

- Mark 1:15 *And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

❖ baptism

- Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

❖ and conversion

Acts 3:19 *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;*

14. Repentance is accompanied by

❖ humility

Matthew 11:21 *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*

15. Repentance is God's will and pleasure.

- Luke 15:7-10 *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. 8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? 9 And when she hath*

found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. 10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

- *2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

16. Repentance is God's command.

- *Mark 6:12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent.*
- *Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:*

17. Repentance is a gift of God's sovereign love.

- *Acts 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*
- *Acts 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*
- *Romans 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*
- *2 Timothy 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;*

17. Apart from gospel repentance no one can be saved.

- *Luke 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Church

Chapter 7

The Church of the Open Door

Revelation 3:14-22

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About the middle of the third century BC, the King of Syria (261 – 246) Antiochus II settled an area forty miles SE of Philadelphia. He renamed the new settlement after his wife Laodice. The years passed and the town grew. Under Roman rule Laodicea flourished and became a center of commercial activity. So prosperous did Laodicea grow from trade that when an earthquake destroyed the city in AD 62 it was rebuilt by wealthy citizens without the help of the state. Sometime in the first century the gospel came to Laodicea. Some Bible scholars believe that Paul was the one who first presented to the claims of Christ to the citizens with a number of converts being recognized. In addition, it is suggested that the angel or pastor mentioned in Revelation 3:14 is Archippas, to whom thirty years previously, Paul had given a much-needed exhortation to be diligent in the ministry. Colossians 4:17 *“And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.”* The spiritual status of the Church is considered by Christ who is described as the Amen the faithful and true witness and the beginning of the creation of God. The title *“Amen”* is used only this one time in the New Testament referring to Christ because through Him the purposes of God are established. 2 Cor 1:20 *“For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”* When men say *“Amen”* they affirm a faith in what God has promised.

- *Deut 7:9 Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;*
- *Isa 49:7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.*

Not only is Jesus the *“Amen”* He is also the *“Faithful and True Witness.”* Some witnesses are not true or faithful. There are people who will lie under oath. Jesus is different. What He said can be trusted. What Jesus said was significant.

- Christ claimed to be the Son of God.
- Christ claimed to be eternal.
- Christ claimed to be the only way of salvation.
- Christ claimed He would rise again from among the dead.
- Christ claimed He would return a second time for all that believe.
- Christ claimed He was going to prepare a dwelling place for His own.

C. S. Lewis reminds the world that Christ was either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord. He was either very God or the Devil incarnate if He lied and gave forth false claims. A choice has to be made and it must be clear-cut. Jesus can either be worshipped or He can be hated as a Devil but He cannot be patronized. We believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Because Christ is who He claimed to be men worship Him as the beginning of the creation of God, or better, as the Ruler over God's creation (Rev. 3:14). The Authorized Version stands in need of being clarified here because in the divine economy the Bible presents the *Father* as the Author or ultimate originator of all things, the Son as the Executioner of the plan of God, and the Holy Spirit as the sustainer of what the Father designed and the Son brought into existence. We see all of this in the act of creation (Gen. 1:1-2) and in the area of salvation. The Father planned Creation and He planned the new creation. The Son executed the plan of the Father by calling the physical universe into existence and by calling souls to life out of spiritual darkness. The Son rules over all things with power and authority. The Holy Spirit goes forth to brood over the physical creation (Gen. 1:1-2) and He goes forth to sustain the new creation as well.

Now once more the sovereign Lord with the splendid title speaks in Revelations 3:15. Once again divine omniscience is exercised for we read that Jesus knows something. The Lord knows the Church of Laodicea is neither hot nor cold but lukewarm. It was, and is, the Lord's preference for those who profess His name be either frigid cold or boiling hot. Indifference makes Him nauseous. D. L. Moody once preached a sermon challenging the people of his generation to come out for Jesus Christ with all their heart or come out against Him. Elijah stood on the top of a mountain and cried to the people of Palestine, "*Why do you halt between two opinions. If Baal be God, then serve Him. But if Jehovah be God then serve Him.*"

The Lord has always preferred those who were passionate for Him. Indeed many souls start out with blazing heart. I remember a young man in my youth. He was a new comer to the Church and our youth group and he was different. He drove a new Mustang and felt called to preach. I heard him one Sunday morning as he struggled to share the gospel. Despite a poor showing in the pulpit people were still impressed with his zeal. He was going into the ministry. He was on fire for the Lord. Or so it seemed. Before long, the young man stopped attending church. One night I was at a store and ran into him. There was a can of beer in his hand. At first he was embarrassed but felt he must keep up the image of religion. I found out he had changed his mind. He was not going into the ministry after all. He was going into military service.

People do change. People start out in the Christian life like a blazing star but they burn out. I remember a godly SS teacher told me that very truth. "*Stan,*" he said. "*The church has far too many people who splash across the sky like a comet but then they fizzle out. God wants people who might not shine as brightly as a comet but like the stars at night, they are faithful.*" A professing Christian can be said to be lukewarm when sin is no longer shocking and the inner spirit is not saddened. The Holy Spirit is sensitive. He is always grieved with sin in the life, which is why the Bible says not to grieve, quench, resist, lie or blaspheme the Spirit. The soul that can behold evil and not weep, the heart that can secretly engage in those activities contrary to holiness is lukewarm. The testimony of some is like Lot of old there has been a looking towards Sodom, then a movement towards the place of evil, and finally there is the soul's saturation in abomination.

Then second, according to Matthew Henry, a professing Christian can be said to be lukewarm when there is no real purpose to the Christian life. Holy affections are gone. The body may continue to perform religious rituals but there is no inner joy. Love for sinners is lost. Attendance on hearing the Word of God is neglected.

Third, a professing Christian can be said to be lukewarm when personal devotions are not attended. The Bible is not read on a regular or systematic basis. There is no in depth Bible study. Prayer is neglected and meditation is non-existent. Fourth, a professing Christian can be said to be lukewarm when the fruit of the Spirit is not manifested. Instead of love there is friction and hostility; instead of joy, inner turmoil; instead of peace there is emotional distress. Instead of suffering long, revenge and retaliation is sought. Instead of gentleness there is a harsh attitude. Instead of goodness there is meanness and instead of faith there is fear and insecurity. Lukewarmness does not happen immediately. Ice water does not melt suddenly. There is usually a slow process of change. Spiritually the same is true. Lukewarmness does not happen all at once. It is a progressive condition caused by a number of factors.

- First, lukewarmness is caused by unconfessed sin. 1 John 1:9 is not used and sweet fellowship is lost.
- Second, lukewarmness is caused by neglecting to exercise spiritual graces. The basics of the Christian life include Bible study, service, witnessing, prayer, and sanctification. When these means of spiritual grace are neglected the soul cools off from a red-hot love for the Lord.
- Third, lukewarmness is caused by self-satisfaction with one's total spiritual status. The Church at Laodicea had grown financially sound and it affected its spiritual life. I read an interview of a pastor in *Leadership Magazine*. He said he had pastored churches with a million-dollar deficit. Surprisingly enough he said he would rather pastor a church with a deficit in order to avoid the implication that financial security is the same as spirituality. Jesus had an assessment of the Church at Laodicea. He saw the Church as being wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

The Church saw itself as being rich and having need of nothing. Here is a lesson worth considering. Man can evaluate himself but the final evaluation belongs to the Lord. An immediate goal of every church is to discern how the Lord sees it. What would the Lord say about this assembly? Despite His harsh evaluation the Lord is gracious with His people for in Revelation 3:18 Divine counsel is offered. Wise people will always listen to good counsel. It is the counsel of the Lord that the Church "*buy gold tried in the fire*". The language is symbolic but with spiritual significance. So what does it mean? We know that neither salvation nor sanctification can be purchased with physical coins. But there is a purchase price. The believer must give up covetousness. The Church must give up selfish interests. The local assembly must look for people to help for then she will be rich in the things that matter as souls are saved and individuals are helped.

Again, the Church is counseled to buy white raiment in order to clothe their spiritual nakedness. The only way to buy white raiment is to be righteous for it is righteousness that will clothe the soul in the sight of God. The righteousness that clothes the soul is the righteousness that seeks with passion to do and to be all that Jesus desires. There is kindness and gentleness in the soul. There is goodness, love, and peace.

Then third, the Church is counseled to anoint their eyes with eyeslave, which might easily refer to studying the Word of God in order to behold the Lamb of God. "*Be zealous and repent.*" That is the Divine counsel. But will the Church listen? It is one thing to know what to do. Wise counsel is not enough. There must be a measure of obedience. The problem at Laodicea was not so much ignorance, as it was disobedience. The rebellious was not open defiance as much as passive resistance. Like the parable of the father who told his son to do something, the boy said he would obey but did it not. Because many believers are like that there must be an inner stirring of the soul and the stirring must come from a conscious realization that all is not right. The stirring must come from a conscious listening to the sound of the Savior. And the Savior is knocking. Can we hear the knocking? If we can then there can be an opening of the heart's door leading to fellowship. The Church of the open door will never be spewed from the Lord's mouth. The Church of the open door is the Church that will be invited to supper with the Savior. The Church of the open door is the Church that will enjoy an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

Handout Questions

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 1

A Return to the Heart's First Love

1. Why is *Revelation* so challenging to study?
2. What does the number seven represent?
3. What does the number 1,000 represent?
4. What evidence is there that the Church was considered to be Spiritual Israel?
5. State the main theme of the *Revelation*.
6. List three great enemies of the Church.
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7. What evidence is there that Christ rules and reigns now?
8. What verse teaches that the kingdom is a present reality of which Christians are members of royalty?
9. How is the worldview of the western nations different from the eastern nations?
10. List the good comments the Lord has for the people at Ephesus.
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11. How can the Christian lose his or her first love for the Lord?
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12. In what ways can the Christian recapture their first love for Christ?
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13. In what way can the Christian eat again of the “Tree of Life” which is in the midst of the paradise of God?
14. What verse teaches that the Revelation is written in symbols and so should not be pressed for literal details?
15. The apocalyptic style was designed to _____ as well as to _____.

Handout Questions

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 2

Nothing to Fear

1. Describe the city of Smyrna.
2. Who was Polycarp?
3. Why is it not easy to identify with physical suffering of other saints?
4. Of the twenty-six times the word “*tribulation*” is used in Scripture which passage could be pointed to in defense of the theory that Christians will escape tribulation?
5. What book did John Fox write?
6. What two truths are foundational pillars to build a life upon?
7. List the five crowns that Christians shall receive?
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As predicted by the Lord Himself in Revelation 2:10, "*you will suffer persecution for ten days,*" this church saw at least eight of the ten periods of persecution under Roman Emperors:

<i>Nero</i>	<i>AD 54-68</i>	<i>Paul beheaded and Peter crucified</i>
<i>Domitian</i>	<i>AD 81-96</i>	<i>John exiled</i>
<i>Trajan</i>	<i>AD 98-117</i>	<i>Ignatius burned at the stake</i>
<i>Marcus Aurelius</i>	<i>AD 161-180</i>	<i>Justin Martyr killed</i>
<i>Severus</i>	<i>AD 193-211</i>	
<i>Maximinus</i>	<i>AD 235-238</i>	
<i>Decius</i>	<i>AD 249-251</i>	
<i>Valerian</i>	<i>AD 253-260</i>	
<i>Aurelian</i>	<i>AD 270-275</i>	
<i>Diocletian</i>	<i>AD 284-305</i>	

Diocletian is considered the worst emperor in Rome's history and the greatest antagonist of the Christian faith. He led a violent attempt to destroy the Bible from the face of the earth. Under his leadership many Roman cities held public burnings of the sacred Scriptures. During the second and third centuries this persecution age saw hundreds of Christians brought into the amphitheater of Rome to be fed to angry lions while thousands of spectators cheered. Many were crucified; others were covered with animal skins and tortured to death by wild dogs. There were covered in tar and set on fire to serve as torches. They were boiled in oil and burned at the stake, as was Polycarp in the city of Smyrna itself in AD 156. One church historian has estimated that during this period, nearly five million Christians were martyred for the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Handout Questions

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 3

Satan in the Sanctuary

1. What is within the heart of every Christian?
2. Characterize the spiritual condition of the Church at Pergamum.
3. List two good deeds that the Lord commended.
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4. Who was Antipas and why should he be remembered?
5. Never underestimate the power of a _____ or a _____.
6. List three areas Christians should be careful.
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7. What does the doctrine of Balaam refer to?
8. List four principles that should guide every local assembly.
 - Let there be _____
 - Let there be _____
 - Let there be _____
 - Let there be _____

Handout Questions

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 4

The Judgment of Jezebel

1. Which of the seven churches John wrote received the longest letter?
2. What was the church of Thyatira known for?
3. Where is the conversion of Lydia recorded?
4. List three ways the heart can be deceitful.
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5. Describe the Church of Thyatira in the following areas.
 - Love.
 - Service.
 - Faith.
 - Patience.
 - Present commitment to Christ.
6. List three possibilities for the name “Jezebel.”
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7. Provide scriptural evidence that sexual sins have always plagued the people of God.
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8. How should private sins be handled and public sins be handled?
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9. What are two grand objective of the Church in dealing with sins of the saints?

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10. Describe what happens when there is no turning away from sin.

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11. What will happen to members within a particular congregation that will not repent of their sins?

12. What promise is given to all Christians who will honor their gospel duties?

Handout Questions

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 5

The Living Dead

1. The reference to the seven spirits of God represents _____.
 - *Isaiah 11:2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;*
2. How are the seven churches symbolized? _____
3. Sin brings spiritual _____.
 - Sin is the death of the _____
 - Sin is the death of _____
 - Sin is the death of _____
4. List four things a church can do which is physically alive but spiritually dead.
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5. Describe the six times the Book of Life is mentioned in Scripture.
 - Exodus 32:32-33
 - Psalm 69:28
 - Daniel 12:1
 - Philippians 4:3
 - Revelation 20:15
 - Luke 10:20
6. Personal accountability. What points did you find most convicting on the handout *When is Revival Needed?* In other words which points do you need to do something about?
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Handout Questions

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 6

The Synagogue of Satan

1. What does “*Philadelphia*” literally mean?
2. What did Christianity threaten to do to the Jewish social and religious life?
3. Who did Jesus say fulfilled the prophecy of the coming of Elijah?
4. Who has been given all power to rule the nations of the earth?
5. Is this rule a present reality or a coming possibility?
6. What was to happen when the Messiah came to Israel?
7. The New Covenant promised to Israel is declared to be fulfilled in what New Testament passage?
8. Why did members of the Jewish community find it so difficult to believe that ancient prophecies were being fulfilled in Christ?
9. What three great titles are applied to Christ?
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10. Who was Eliakim?
11. Make a distinction between the various works of men.
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12. Why was the Lord so gracious to the Church of Philadelphia?
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13. What is meant by the statement, “*Not all Jews are Jews.*”

14. Into what periods did the Jews divide time?

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15. List three promises the Lord made to the Church of Philadelphia.

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16. List three assurances the Christian can have.

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17. What three names will be given to the saints?

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18. How was the name of God “*put on*” every Israelite in the Old Testament?

19. In the New Testament how does the Holy Spirit inscribe God’s name?

20. List six spiritual truths to be learned from Revelation 3:7-13

Handout Questions

Seven Letters of Love to Seven Churches

Chapter 7

The Church of the Open Door

1.

2.

Handout Doctrines

The Doctrine of Tribulation

1. The word “*tribulation*” is found 22 times in the Authorized Version.
2. The word “*tribulations*” is used four times in the Authorized Version.
3. To suffer tribulation (Gr. *thlipsis*) is “*to suffer affliction,*” “*to be troubled,*” “*to suffer due to the pressure of circumstances, or the antagonism of persons*”.
4. In examining the passages that speak of tribulation it is evident that all of God’s people in all ages have known emotional, spiritual, and physical affliction.
 - Sometimes the tribulation the saints suffer is a result of Divine discipline.
 - *Deuteronomy 4:30-31 When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; 31 (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them.*
 - Sometimes tribulation is a form of testing.
 - *Matthew 13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*
 - **It is possible to forget the grace of God who delivers from tribulation.**
 - *Judges 10:14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.*
 - *1 Samuel 10:19 And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.*
 - It is normal to want to be delivered from any and all forms of sufferings.
 - *1 Samuel 26:24 And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation.*
5. Of particular concern is the Christian and tribulation that is not the result of discipline. The Bible clearly makes the following statements.

- The Disciples of Christ, for as long as they are in the world shall have tribulation.
 - *John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*
 - Only through much tribulation will believers enter into the kingdom.
 - *Acts 14:22 [Paul went about] Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*
 - The value of tribulation is that it produces patience.
 - *Romans 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;*
 - *Romans 12:12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;*
 - To endure tribulation is not to be loved less by Christ for nothing shall separate the Christian from the Lord's faithfulness.
 - *Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*
 - God will find a way to comfort those who suffer for righteousness.
 - *2 Corinthians 1:4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*
6. Paul found reasons to rejoice in the midst of tribulation and therefore did not want anyone to worry about him.
- Paul discovered something about inner joy regardless of circumstances.
 - *2 Corinthians 7:4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*
 - Paul learned how to give thanks in every situation and to glory in tribulation.
 - *Romans 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;*
 - Paul learned how to enjoy a reflected glory at the sufferings of others because he was proud of them.

- *2 Thessalonians 1:4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:*
 - Paul taught others to enjoy a reflected glory in the sufferings he endured.
 - *Ephesians 3:13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*
7. When the believers at Thessalonica were surprised at the sufferings they had to pass through, Paul reminded them he had taught how they must suffer.
 - *1 Thessalonians 3:4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*
 8. John, on the isle of Patmos, does not divorce himself from tribulation.
 - *Revelation 1:9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*
 9. The tribulation of the saints is well known to the Lord.
 - *Revelation 2:9-10 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*
 10. God's people will always emerge victorious no matter how great the tribulation.
 - *Revelation 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

The Doctrine of Rewards in Heaven

1. The Bible does teach there are rewards for Christian service.
2. The rewards promised in heaven are sometimes represented by the symbol of a crown.

The apostle Paul wrote,

- *2 Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

The Lord promised the Church of Smyrna,

- *Revelation 2:10 ...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*
3. In the Greek culture a crown might be either an ornamental headdress worn by a king or queen or a wreath worn as a symbol of victory in an athletic or military contest.
 4. Before considering the significance of the crown awarded to victors, we should have a clear conception of the nature of heaven's rewards, for we are likely to equate them with our earthly reward system – equal pay for equal work. The idea of merit is involved.
 5. In contrast a heavenly crown is not given on the basis of merit. Consider the words of Christ.
 - *Luke 17:7-10 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*
 6. Heaven's rewards are all a matter of God's grace. They are God's generous recognition of selfless and sacrificial service.
 7. G. Campbell Morgan warned that professing believers who engage in Christian service for a spiritual reward are really acting in the spirit of a non-Christian.
 8. Christ Himself did not serve in order to get a selfish reward. Rather, *"He emptied Himself. He served 'for the joy set before Him.' Yes, but what was that joy? The joy of lifting other people and blessing them"* (*The Gospel of Luke*, p. 197).
 9. The fact that the laborer in Christ's parable who was hired to work only at the eleventh hour received the same wage as the one who had worked all day underlines the fact that most of the wage he received was not earned, but was a generous gift from the master. When one of the full-time laborers charged his master with unfairness, he replied:

- *Matthew 20:13-15 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? 14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*
10. We are not told precisely what form the rewards or crowns in heaven will take. Many Bible teachers are impressed with Dr. John MacArthur Jr.'s view: "*Believers' rewards aren't something you wear on your head like a crown. . . . Your reward in heaven will be your capacity for service in heaven. . . . Heaven's crowns are what we will experience, eternal life, eternal joy, eternal service, and eternal blessedness*" (Heaven pp.114-115).
 11. As novel as this view is it may not go far enough. All that is being said is that faithful service results in eternal life, eternal joy, eternal service, and eternal blessedness – all of which are initial gifts of grace by faith in Christ.
 12. It may be that in some form of public commendation the Lord will want to honor those who have honored Him, not in a general manner but in a specific way.
 13. In the New Testament, there are two Greek words translated "*crown.*" One is *diadema*, a royal turban worn by Persian kings.
 14. It is always the symbol of kingly or imperial dignity. It refers to the kind of crown Jesus receives.
 15. The other word is *stephanos*, the victor's crown, "*a symbol of triumph in the Olympic games or some such contest – hence by metonymy, a reward or prize*" (Vine).
 16. It was a crown of leaves or vines, beautifully woven. This is the word that is used to denote the rewards of heaven.
 17. Here are the crowns mentioned in Scripture:

- **Crown of Life.** This crown is bestowed in recognition of enduring and triumphing over trial and persecution even to the point of martyrdom. The motivation must be love for Christ.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

- **Crown of Righteousness.** This crown is awarded to those who have completed the Christian race with integrity, with eyes fixed on the coming Lord. It is the reward for fulfilling the ministry entrusted to one.

2 Timothy 4:6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

- **Incorruptible Crown.** This crown is won by those who strive for mastery, for excellence. Here Paul was using the figure of the pentathlon with its tremendous demand of physical stamina. The crown is awarded to the disciplined.

1 Corinthians 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

- **Crown of Rejoicing.** This is the crown of the soul-winner. It will be cause for rejoicing when, in heaven, we meet those who have been won to Christ through our ministry. This crown is open to every believer.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

- **Crown of Glory (Shepherd's Crown).** This promised award for spiritual leaders in the church should provide strong motivation for sacrificial pastoral ministry.

1 Peter 5:2-4 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

18. None of these crowns, however, is awarded automatically. There are qualifying conditions attached to each, and it is possible to forfeit a crown through unwatchfulness.

19. In the letter to the church at Philadelphia, the risen Lord warned the believers,

- *Revelation 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

20. Philip Doddridge wrote:

*'Tis God's all-animating voice
That calls thee from on high,
'Tis His own hand presents the prize
To thine aspiring eye.
That prize with peerless glories bright,
Which shall new luster boast,*

When victor's wreaths and monarch's gems

*Shall blend in common dust.
Blest Savior, introduced by Thee
Have I my race begun;
And crowned with victory at Thy feet
I'll lay my honors down.*

The Doctrine of Repentance

1. The word 'repent' when used in a general sense means literally 'to change one's mind.'
 - Genesis 6:6 *And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. 7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.*
2. However, when used of man, true spiritual repentance speaks of a sense of personal 'guilt' with the hope of God's mercy. There is a sense of deep *regret* for the act of transgression committed.
 - Matthew 27:3 *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*
3. Repentance demands a deep *sorrow* for sin and a turning away from it to obey God. There is a fundamental change in one's life.
 - Matthew 9:13 *But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* (cf Luke 5:32)
4. In the Old Testament the classic case of repentance is that of King David, after Nathan the prophet accused him of killing Uriah the Hittite and committing adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. David's prayer of repentance for this sin is found in Psalm 51.
5. In the New Testament the keynote of John the Baptist's preaching was, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 3:2).
6. To the multitudes John declared, "*Bear fruits worthy of repentance*" (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8). It is not enough to simply say you are sorry.
7. When Jesus began His ministry, He took up John's preaching of the message of repentance, expanding the message to include the good news of salvation: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel*" (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15)
8. In Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God is seen the truth that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin:
 - by repentance, one turns away from sin;
 - by faith, one turns toward God in accepting the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a twofold turning, or conversion, is necessary for entrance into the kingdom

- Matt. 18:3 *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*
9. *"Unless you repent,"* said Jesus, *"you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:3,5).
10. This is the negative, or judgmental, side of Jesus' message. The positive, or merciful, side is seen in these words: *"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"* (Luke 15:10).
11. After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, His disciples continued His message of repentance and faith (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 20:21; 26:20).
- Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*
 - Acts 26:20 *But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*
12. Repentance is a turning
- ❖ from wickedness and dead works
 - Acts 8:22 *Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*
 - Hebrew 6:1 *Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,*
 - ❖ toward God and His glory
 - Acts 20:21 *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - Rev. 16:9 *And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,*
 - ❖ eternal life
 - Acts 11:18 *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

and a knowledge of the truth

 - 2 Tim. 2:25 *In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;*

13. Repentance is associated with

❖ prayer

- 1 Kings 8:47 *Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness;*

❖ belief

- Mark 1:15 *And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

❖ baptism

- Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

❖ and conversion

- Acts 3:19 *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;*

14. Repentance is accompanied by

❖ humility

- Matthew 11:21 *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*

15. Repentance is God's will and pleasure.

- Luke 15:7-10 *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. 8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? 9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. 10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*
- 2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

16. Repentance is God's command.

- Mark 6:12 *And they went out, and preached that men should repent.*

- Acts 17:30 *And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:*

17. Repentance is a gift of God's sovereign love.

- Acts 5:31 *Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*
- Acts 11:18 *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*
- Romans 2:4 *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*
- 2 Timothy 2:25 *In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;*

17. Apart from gospel repentance no one can be saved.

- Luke 13:3 *I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*