

LESSON ELEVEN

LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES (Cont.)

A. LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF PERGAMOS (Revelation 2:12-17):

1. DESCRIPTION: The word "Pergamos" means, "married." When the Persians conquered Babylon the headquarters for the Babylonish religion moved from Babylon to Pergamos. During the time of the persecutions Antipas was one of the martyrs.

When Constantine professed conversion to the Christian faith, he united church and state. The church now became married to the world and was guilty of spiritual fornication. The cross took the place of the eagle as the standard of the nation, and then Christianity was made the religion of the Roman Empire. The persecution ceased and the state began to dictate to the church. Images and worldliness came into the church.

In this church were two false doctrines:

- a. DOCTRINE OF BALAAM: When the children of Israel had reached the land of Moab on their way to Canaan, Balak, the king, sent for Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel. When the Lord did not permit Balaam to curse Israel, he taught Balak how Israel might be seduced to sin by committing fornication with the daughters of Moab. This brought the judgment of God upon them.
 - b. DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANES: This was the teaching of the priesthood rule over the laity. It would be noted that this doctrine got a strong foothold at the Council held at Nicea, in AD 325. Here the laymen outnumbered the Bishops 5 to 1, but when it was over the Bishops had complete control. God said that he hated this doctrine. It is not surprising that from the same council dominated by political intrigue came the false teaching of the Trinitarian Theory.
2. COMMENDATION: The Lord commended Pergamos for: a) Holding fast to the Name of Jesus and 2) Not denying the Lord's Faith.

These were two of the greatest qualities for any church, and Pergamos did this even when the headquarters for the Babylonish religion was centered there. One of the faithful martyrs is mentioned. We do not know much about Antipas, but the Lord saw fit to mention his name.

3. CONDEMNATION: This church was condemned because of "Spiritual Fornication." She was married to the world. Constantine perverted the church by giving to the church many large buildings and supplied the clergy with costly vestments.

Although this church started out with pure doctrines true to the Name of Jesus, it was polluted with a sensuous form of worship and many pagan festivals. It was during this time that the dogma of the Trinity was adopted and Post-Millennialism had its origin.

4. ADMONITION: The admonition was the simple message of repentance. The alternative would be that they would be judged with the Word, the two-edged sword.

B. LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA (Revelation 2:18-29):

1. **DESCRIPTION:** It is fitting that this is the longest of the seven letters for the Church of Thyatira represented the thousand years of the dark ages. Thyatira comes from two words: "sacrifice" and "continual." Certainly the Roman Catholic Church was a church of continual sacrifice. The finished work of Calvary was rejected and in its place were substituted works, penance, indulgences and masses. The crucifix is a symbol of continual sacrifice. This was a church that had been overcome with pagan heathenism and idolatry.

In His letter the Lord calls Himself the "Son of God" drawing attention to His Deity. He describes Himself as having eyes like a flame of fire and feet of brass. His eyes were penetrating and discerning. He was able to search the reins and hearts (Revelation 3:23). Even the motives and attitudes of the heart are seen by His omniscience.

2. **COMMENDATION:** This church had many works of charity and is commended for it.
3. **CONDEMNATION:** The main rebuke was tolerating the presence of Jezebel and allowing her to teach and seduce the Christians to fornication and idolatry.

For political reasons King Ahab married Jezebel, the daughter of a pagan king of Tyre and Sidon. She introduced Baal worship and attempted to kill all of God's prophets and priests. The priests of Baal were wicked sex perverts. Jezebel led Israel into depths of degradation. Our Lord referred to it as "the depths of Satan" (Revelation 2:24).

Apparently there was a woman, in the church of Thyatira, who was a wicked influence in the church. The Jezebel of the Old Testament had been dead for almost a millennium but the demon that possessed here was now controlling another woman in order to corrupt the church. She was a self-styled prophetess (Revelation 2:20), just as Jezebel took the lead in the religious life of Israel.

We see a picture of here as a system within the harlot church of the last days (Revelation 17).

4. **ADMONITION:** The exhortation is to hold fast until Jesus comes. Although the church of Thyatira was a church of compromise, apparently there were a few that were still holding to the truth. There were to hold fast and overcome.

The promise was that they would have power over nations and reign with Christ in His Kingdom.

C. LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF SARDIS (Revelation 3:1-6):

1. **DESCRIPTION:** The name "Sardis" means, "escaping ones" or those who "come out." This was the church of the Protestant Reformation. This began when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. Although Luther revived the doctrine of "Justification by Faith" he sought the approval of political leaders, and the result was state churches. The Reformation churches still continued rituals and did not examine many of the false teachings of the Roman church including the false theory of the Trinity.
2. **COMMENDATION:** The Lord commended them for their works although they were imperfect. The shortest commendation was given to this church and it actually became a condemnation. It would seem that the Lord was pleased with the early stages of the Reformation but displeased with what followed. It is not enough to start well, but we must continue on.

3. **CONDEMNATION:** They had a name that they were living but actually they were dead. Their works were not perfect (complete). They had much ritual and ceremony but no true life.
4. **ADMONITION:** The Church of Sardis was admonished to do five things:
 - a. **Be watchful:** This refers to our Lord's return but the church of the Reformation did not teach the Second Coming of Christ.
 - b. **Strengthen the Things That Remain:** This was an exhortation to strengthen the doctrines of the Reformation, salvation by faith and the authority of the Word of God.
 - c. **Remember Therefore How Thou Hast Received:** Revive the knowledge received from the Word of God and not compromise with ritual.
 - d. **Hold Fast:** This exhortation is needed today when worldliness is taking over in so many churches.
 - e. **Repent:** If the Reformation Church had been willing to repent, God would have led them on into truth.

In verse five we have the statement that our names will not be blotted out if we overcome. This proves the fallacy of the teaching of Unconditional Eternal Security of the Believer.

D. LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA (Revelation 3:7-13).

1. **DESCRIPTION:** The word "Philadelphia" means "brotherly love." This is the revival church of the last days. It undoubtedly will be the church that will be raptured when Jesus returns. The Lord has no criticism of this church and has promised an escape from the Great Tribulation.
2. **COMMENDATION:** The Lord commends the Philadelphia church on several points:
 - a. **A Little Strength:** This referred to their numerical strength. They were few in number but they certainly were not feeble. They had much spiritual strength even though there were not many of them. This is true of the real church today.
 - b. **Kept My Word:** Not only did this church believe God's Word but they obeyed the Word. The church that is waiting for the Lord's return will be obeying the Word of God.
 - c. **Not Denied My Name:** This definitely referred to Salvation in the Name of Jesus. The Philadelphia church will be baptized in Jesus' name for the remission of sins. The pressure from the world will be to deny the Name of Jesus but this church will be true to the Name.
 - d. **Kept the Word of My Patience:** The Philadelphia church was faithful and true. There was no compromise with the world. They were steadfast in living a life of holiness.
3. **CONDEMNATION:** There is not one word of rebuke here.
4. **ADMONITION:** The exhortation is to not let go of what they have received. Jesus is coming soon. He will have a church when He returns. If the Philadelphia church does not hold fast what they have, the Lord will raise up others to take their place.

There are two promises given to this church:

- a. **An open door is set before them that no man can shut.** This undoubtedly refers to the open door of preaching the gospel to a lost world. No man can stop the gospel from being preached. This open door may also refer to the door opened into heaven (Revelation 4:1). No man can hinder the true church from being raptured when Jesus comes.
- b. **In verse ten there is given a definite promise of escaping the Great Tribulation.** The church will be raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation period.

E. LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA (Revelation 3:14-22):

1. **DESCRIPTION:** Laodicea means "The Judging of the People." It is the very opposite of Nicolaitanism. The rule of the priest is not substituted by the rule of the laity. In history it is the end-time church of Apostasy.
2. **COMMENDATION:** The Lord finds nothing in this church to commend.
3. **CONDEMNATION:** There was much about this church that the Lord condemned. The Church of Laodicea claimed to be wealthy and have need of nothing. However, the Lord stated that she was poor, wretched, miserable, blind and naked. The church was lukewarm, self-satisfied, complacent and indifferent to the presence of Jesus. This church had much profession but no possession. Such a church is disgusting and sickening to the Lord. He would spit her out.
4. **ADMONITION:** The Lord told her to repent (verse 19). She was told to buy gold tried in the fire, to buy white raiment that she might be clothed, and anoint her eyes with eye salve that she might no longer be blind.

F. THE DOORS OF REVELATION (Revelation 3:8, 20; 4:1):

One of the saddest pictures in the Bible is that of our Lord standing at the door knocking. This is used many times to illustrate the standing at the sinner's heart. Jesus does knock at the heart's door of every unsaved man. However, this message is addressed to the Laodicean church. Here is an apostate church with its doors closed and Jesus locked out.

The other doors are doors of opportunity of preaching the gospel, and the door opened in heaven for the entrance of the church.

One important fact to be noted is that when the Lord closes a door, no man can open it. Likewise when the Lord opens a door, no man can close it. At the same time the Lord will not break down a door when man has locked the door against Him.

