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Revelation was written at the end of the first century following the birth of Christ. There were Christian churches established throughout the Roman (and barbarian) world. However, Christ was concerned with the seven mentioned in this book.

These were the product mainly of the evangelical work of Paul and his fellow-workers in their travels throughout Asia Minor. Today, these congregations would be in modern-day Turkey.

We should note that the messages are addressed to the "angel" (probably the leader) of each congregation. This is exactly as Paul instructed, as contained in Acts 20:28-30. The elders were to be the "overseers" (shepherds) of the flock. It was their responsibility to "feed the flock"; thus it was to them that Christ spoke. "*… send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia…*" (Rev. 1:11).

Notice also that if there is anything commendable about a congregation, he mentions that first.

Ephesus

Ephesus was functioning in the proper scriptural manner, but "*… thou hast left thy first love*. (Rev. 2:4). There is no mention here of false doctrines, innovations, or worldliness, but Jesus says, "*… thou art fallen…*". (Rev. 2:5). From what?

They fell by leaving their first love. Their zeal (first experienced at their conversion) had given way to indifference and lacked the vitality so necessary to being a true Christian. They no longer "*… hunger and thirst after righteousness….*" (Matt. 5:6).

They were in danger of becoming lukewarm, a situation discussed in a later address.

By allowing their first-love to become cool, their zeal to flag, they had left their first-love and must repent or lose their "candlestick".

Note Matt. 5:14-16, *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

Also, this is in keeping with the Lord's admonishment in Matt. 5:13, *"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."*

Ephesus was no longer able to *"reason"* their surroundings because they no longer had any *"savour"*. It was probably impossible to recognize them as Christians by their manner of life.

Smyrna

Smyrna was poor in this world's goods, but rich toward God (Rev. 2:9). It seems that they were in a locality that saw extreme opposition toward the Lord's work. They had already experienced *"tribulation"* and it is apparent that they would experience more (vs. 10).

Some would be *"imprisoned and tried"*.

There was probably little opportunity to spread the kingdom at this locality, due to the opposition, but they were admonished to *"be thou faithful unto death"*. This seems to be an admonition to endure until their passing, or to the extreme persecution, martyrdom.

At this point we might remember the experience of Peter and John as recorded in Acts 4:19-20. They had been haled before the Jewish council for a miracle of healing in the name of Jesus. They were commanded *"... not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus."* (vs. 18). Their reply was, *"... Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."*

Pergamos

Pergamos lived in a very wicked place but they did not deny their belief if God and His Christ. However, they held two things which were unacceptable in the eyes of God.

Of the *"doctrine of the Nicolaitanes"*, we have no mention, other than the Lord hated it. What it was we have no further mention in the scriptures.

Of the *"doctrine of Balaam"*, there is much. Besides being overly ambitious for worldly gain, he counseled Balak to tempt the

Children of Israel, thereby being responsible for casting a stumbling block before them.

These idolatrous heathens became friendly with Israel, inviting them to their feasts and worship, mixing and mingling with them. Thus, Israel fell at this time for false doctrine and worldliness.

God had forbidden Israel to do this. *"… make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth."* (Exo. 23:13). *"… thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:"* (Deut. 7:2).

In the same way, he has commanded us to *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world …"* (1 John 2:15).

Also, *"… whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* (James 4:4).

We read in Num. 25:1-3 that Israel chose to remain camped near the Moabites and participated in their idolatry with them. Because of this, God was highly displeased. Not only did they commit idolatry with these heathens, contrary to God's commands, but they committed unspeakable acts with them, thus incurring the wrath of God. For this, they paid a terrible price.

So, the *"doctrine of Balaam"* is, we learn, not only unlawful worldly ambition for riches, but also teaching and tempting God's people with worldliness and false worship.

We also learn from 2 Pet. 2:13-15 that those holding this *"doctrine of Balaam"* are *"… Spots … and blemishes … while they feast with you; …".*

Pergamos was condemned for allowing this to continue in their midst. Jude :11 teaches us that these *"… have gone in the way of Cain* (remember him?) *and perished in the gainsaying of Core."*

Pergamos, it seems, was not a good example for any congregation to follow.

Thyatira

Thyatira was a charitable, patient, working church. She had evidently improved in working. However, they had a woman member, Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess who was

teaching and leading astray some of the church members from their faithfulness. Some of the members did not hold with her doctrine and did not know the *"depths of Satan"*, as she taught. (We know the *"depths of Satan"* to the extent that we tolerate and serve him.)

The Lord called what she was doing *"adultery"*. What is meant by this is probably "spiritual" adultery. When, in a marriage, someone other than one's lawful spouse is brought into that relationship, it constitutes adultery. Just so, when one brings someone, other than Christ into this special relationship, it is thereby corrupted, thus constituting "adultery".

Note: There are some who disagree with this explanation, citing vs. 20, *"… to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."* This possibly may be true. However, it would not change the meaning except to change from the literal to the metaphorical.

Evidently, it was not all who participated in this sinful act with her (vs. 24). To them, Jesus addressed (vss. 24-25, *"… I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come."*

It appears that the sins of Jezebel and her adherents *"had not this doctrine"*. Christ did not tell them to depart the congregation, but rather told them to *"hold fast till I come"*.

Sardis

Sardis was in sad shape as a congregation. She had a *"name that thou livest, but art dead"*. I cannot detect a reproach from Christ for a specific sin, but it seems they were dead spiritually. They, as a congregation, were not even lukewarm, but frigid cold. Of course, it would not be wrong to refer to this as sinful.

Their reputation (name) would have others believe that they were alive, but, in reality, they were dead.

Christ cautions them to *"hold fast, and repent"*.

It seems that a small spark still smoldered within their number and Jesus did not want it to die. *"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."* (Rev. 3:4).

Again, he did not command the faithful ones to depart; merely to *"hold fast"*.

Philadelphia

This is a case of a congregation beset with imposters who said they were Jews, and were not. Just what advantage this would be to them is not clear. It is impossible that this situation was similar to that of the church at Antioch, where some disciples from the Jerusalem church were insisting that the Gentiles *"... must be circumcised, and keep the law ..."* (Acts 15:24).

Whatever the circumstances, they were liars, and the Lord was sorely displeased at this. He gave them an opportunity to go ahead with His work: *"... I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ..."* (Rev.3:8). They had *"a little strength"*. They were to take advantage of this open door; continue their good works.

This seems to be the condition of so many faithful congregations today, and should be a good example for all.

Laodicea

Unlike some of the other congregations mentioned, Laodicea was not on fire with the zeal of their *"first love"*, nor were they stone cold, as were others. It seems that they were merely "lukewarm". This, it appears, was distasteful to the Lord, so He was prepared to spew (vomit) them out of His mouth (vs. 16).

Some foods are tasteful when hot and some are preferred to be eaten cold. Neither are desirable eaten lukewarm. To follow this further, it seems that they could have the Christian life both ways. Like so many churches today, they would probably accept any teaching that did not disturb their peace of mind. They were contented and they didn't want anyone "rocking the boat".

They were self-satisfied in their opulence and proud of their standing in the community. The problem was that they had put the Lord out of their congregation (vs. 17).

Does his strike a chord in our minds? Have we seen "big" congregations like this? This is surely NOT a good example for any congregation to follow today!

To all of these churches, Jesus admonished, *"… he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches …"*. What He said to them was *"hold fast"*, *"repent"*, *"be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain"*, and *"buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich"*.

The rewards were great for all those who gave heed and responded accordingly. *"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life…"*, *"… I will give thee a crown of life …"*, *"… I will give power over the nations"*. These promises (and many more) were assured to *"him that overcometh"*.

Each of us should look inward today and ask, "Which of these seven churches am I a member of? There are seven choices.

Jesus says, *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."* (Rev. 3:20).

Your brother in the Lord,

J. D. Logan