

Lesson Four
Letters to the Churches Con't (2:18-3:22)

Letter to the Church at Thyatira (2:18-29)

Background of Thyatira

Thyatira had more trade guilds than any other city in Asia Minor. Social meals were associated with trade guilds in the name of pagan deities. It was not uncommon for such social events to turn into public lasciviousness and debauchery. This created tension for Christians who belonged to such guilds.

Letter to Thyatira

1. Greeting (2:18a). "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write."
2. Son of Man (2:18b). Fiery furnaces and bronze were common of the industry in Thyatira. In Scripture they are images of judgment.
3. Commendation (2:19). There is much to be commended in this church. The church was growing in its Christian faith.
4. Rebuke (2:20-21). The church tolerated a female prophetess who led people astray. She is called Jezebel because she taught doctrine that caused people to participate in adultery and idolatry. Some ancient religions incorporated fertility rites and orgies in the name of pagan deities. Jesus was patient with this church and gave her time to repent of her tolerance.
5. Warning (2:22-23). Jesus promised that those who refuse to repent will fall sick and experience tribulation. Their children will experience the same. Jesus' judgment will lead other churches to be warned of the strength of the Lord!
6. Reward (2:24-28). Reward is promised to the saints who have not committed these sins. "Deep things of Satan" describes the serious danger of these sins. Jesus will not require more from them than to be faithful and not fall prey to Jezebel. Saints who endure will be given "authority over the nations" (Matt.5:5b; 19:28; I Cor.6:2; Rev.20:4).
7. Hymn (2:29). "He who has an ear let him here what the Spirit says unto the churches."

Letter to the Church at Sardis (3:1-6)

Background of Sardis

The name Sardis means "two cities." It originally was located on the mountain plain of Tmolus but growth required it to expand to the lower part of the mountain. It was known for its many military battles. Its primary religious influence was Cybele, the Greek mystery religion that was known for its fertility rites and worship of nature.

Letter to Sardis

1. Greeting (3:1a). “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write.”
2. Son of Man (3:1b). The description of Jesus references his omniscience. Jesus has perfect ability to see all things.
3. Commendation (3:4). Only a few Believers had not participated in the idol worship that was so common in Sardis. A clear contrast is made between those who have compromised their commitment, “soiled their garments,” with the few who have not, “they will walk with me in white for they are worthy.”
4. Rebuke (3:1c). This church is rebuked for its spiritual weakness. It has a reputation of being “alive” but this is not true. Many churches are applauded by man but the opinion of Christ runs contrary.
5. Warning (3:2-3). Jesus commands them to awake from their spiritual slumber. Believers must awaken or else Christ will return without them being prepared. The picture of Christ coming “like a thief in the night” is a common NT image (Matt.24:43; Luke 12:39; I Thess.5:2; II Pet.3:10; Rev.16:15). Believers who are spiritually asleep will be caught off guard when Jesus returns.
6. Reward (3:5). Saints who overcome will be “clothed in white garments,” which is a promise of eternal life. The Bible makes much use of a book of life (Ex.32:32; Ps.69:28; Luke 10:20; Phil.4:3; Heb.12:23; Rev.13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). Jesus acknowledging his saints before the Father is also well known in Scripture (Matt.10:32; Luke 12:8).
7. Hymn (3:6). “He who has an ear let him here what the Spirit says unto the churches.”

Letter to the Church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Background of Philadelphia

Philadelphia was founded by the city Pergamum. It was established to bring culture to the barbarians. The name of the city was derived from the love Attalus II had for his brother Eumenes II. It was located on a major Roman trade route.

Letter to Philadelphia

1. Greeting (3:7a). “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write.”
2. Son of Man (3:7b). Jesus is described as the “holy one,” which is symbolized by his white radiant appearance. Since Jesus is “true” his prophecies can be trusted (1:2). Jesus holds the “key of David,” which represents his messianic authority to include and exclude people in his kingdom.
3. Commendation (3:8). Because of the church’s good works, Jesus gives the church of Philadelphia an open door. It was given an opportunity to take the gospel to the

barbarians. There may be no better commendation the Lord can offer to a church than and open door of opportunity!

4. Rebuke. No work of rebuke is offered to the church at Philadelphia.
5. Warning (3:9-11). Perhaps Believers were suffering persecution from non-believing Jews. Jesus said that these Jews will experience humiliation. Non-believing Jews must concede to the faith of the Church. Verse 10 previews two major themes in Revelation. One is the Great Tribulation or the “time of testing.” Second are the judgments from God “upon the whole world.” Christ will keep them from this terrible time (9:4). Jesus instructs the Believers to persevere because He is coming soon (1:1).
6. Reward (3:12). Saints who overcome are promised inclusion in the “temple of My God.” Temple references a dwelling place of God. “Pillar” may suggest special recognition. Saints are also promised to receive “the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God” (7:3; 14:1; 22:4). Oh the promise of belonging to God!
7. Hymn (3:13). “He who has an ear let him here what the Spirit says unto the churches.”

Letter to the Church at Laodicea (3:14-22)

Background of Laodicea

Laodicea was located on the Lycus River and is known for its wealth, industry, banking, and medical school. The pagan temple Men Karou housed the school of medicine. People came to the medical school primarily for its ear ointment and eye salve. While it had a bountiful supply of wealth, its water supply was limited.

Letter to Laodicea

1. Greeting (3:14a). “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write.”
2. Son of Man (3:14b). Amen is a statement of veracity. Jesus is the faithful and true witness. This is testified by His divinity as the “Beginning of the creation of God.”
3. Commendation. No commendation is given to this church. Perhaps the wealth and medical school gave folks cause to be self-reliant.
4. Rebuke (3:15). Jesus rebuked this church for being lukewarm. Believers in this church were not battling heresy but spiritual indifference. Lukewarmness of Believers presents a negative witness of Jesus and leads people to reject Jesus.
5. Warning (3:16-20). As a result Jesus will “spew” or vomit them out of his mouth. Jesus was sick of their indifference, half-heartedness, and lack of zeal. The church had pride in its wealth, “I am rich.” However, Jesus said they were spiritually poor and needed to “buy” spiritual prosperity from him. The church had pride in its clothing, but Jesus said they were spiritually naked. The church had pride in its eye salve, but Jesus said they were spiritually blind. Jesus does not love this church less than the other churches; he

disciplines those he loves (v.19). Believers must repent and accept the invitation of Jesus knocking. If so, they will be participants in the messianic banquet (19:7-10).

6. Reward (3:21). Great reward is offered to a weak church. All Believers will reign with Christ (22:5).
7. Hymn. “He who has an ear let him here what the Spirit says unto the churches.”