

What Christ Thinks of The Church II

by
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Thyatira – The Busy Church

Verse eighteen of Chapter Two gives the first words of the message to the church at Thyatira, with their link to the description of Christ in Chapter one. "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass."

Then comes the actual beginning of the message, in verse nineteen: "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."

Evidently this was a busy church in every sense of the word. One would suppose that a busy church (or a busy Christian) would naturally be healthy spiritually, that all would be in order, and the life of the individual or church would reflect the "love of God [which] is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost . . ." (Rom. 5:5). We shall see whether their busyness was deeply rooted in true fellowship with God.

This congregation apparently was doing more than any of the other churches that are recorded here, and to it was sent the longest message, perhaps in some ways the message that has in it the most disappointment as far as the Lord is concerned. First of all, notice the list of the works that He said He knew. When He said to them, "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works." You will realize that He mentioned works the second time. That's a good, outstanding record. The busy, industrious, and diligent person is appreciated, but notwithstanding all this good record, we read these words to the church at Thyatira: "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee," and we're going to see a certain judgment of our Lord upon this busy group. There is a serious fault at Thyatira, and He is going to reveal it to them.

Let me ask you this: have you ever had any reason to go to a doctor for an examination? Would you not expect him by his examination to discover whether there is anything wrong or abnormal in your body that needs to be treated? Will the fact that she is an industrious worker in the community, or a diligent and kind mother, going to make any difference in what he reports about the cancer that she has? No, the very fact that she is a good woman will be all the more reason why he should tell the truth. Here our Lord is pointing out the shortcomings of a busy, useful church, for we read in Hebrews 12:6 that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." So let us not be impatient, but rather let us be thankful that we have a faithful Lord who will honestly reveal to us the situation as He sees it.

As we are considering this church at Thyatira we realize that this is a group of people that you would call busy Christians. Their works, charity, service, faith and patience are so great that they have a sense of superiority, and yet, perhaps unwittingly, they may be tolerating amongst themselves that which hurts and that which spoils their testimony. Over and over again we find the Lord draws attention, not so much to some sin they have overtly committed, but to something that they have allowed to creep in. It is a good deal like having a garden. If you are a gardener, and you're trying to raise vegetables you will also have weeds! So it is with reference to things that hurt our spiritual life. It isn't that we necessarily promote these sinful acts, or want them, but if we permit them to grow, we can be in danger and that's what hap-

pened here in this busy church.

There are no doubt many sincere persons like Martha. You remember the story about Mary and Martha. Martha was busy about much serving, and she came to the Lord and asked Him to speak to Mary because Mary was leaving all the work for Martha to do. I want to draw your attention to the fact that the Lord did not sympathize with Martha, for He said to her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41, 42). By this we are not to understand that Martha is wrong, rather Jesus was pointing out that in this particular instance, Mary had chosen more wisely than her sister. Martha was a good woman, and later on, at the time of the death of Lazarus, Martha received real blessings from the Lord. But when Martha complained because Mary was not working all the time, in this Martha was wrong and the Lord Jesus said, "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." And what was that good part? She sat at His feet and she heard His word.

We ought to be busy, but we should never permit work to take the place of worship, and communion with the Lord.

Now let us turn to that which was sinful in Thyatira. "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," This is what He held against the church, and verses 22 and 23 give a full statement of the influence of, and the punishment for this subversive element in the church. Notice "thou sufferest," for there is no evidence that the church at Thyatira especially sought this woman, but they allowed her. "Thou sufferest" was a matter of permission granted, not necessarily initiative on their part, but they allowed this condition to exist. I think this is what I would call a symbolic name, for a certain kind of doctrine or teaching. I am not sure that there was anyone woman in that church who was guilty of this sin, and I don't know that her name was Jezebel, but this is a symbolic use of an historical name, to link the evil deeds of Jezebel (the wife of Ahab and herself the daughter of a pagan in Tyre who was both king and priest) with the sins of the church at Thyatira. Jezebel had religion, but it was not belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. She was married to an Israelite who was one of God's people, but when she married Ahab and became a queen in Israel, she brought her own ideas along with her. Ahab built an altar to Baal for her and she brought her own priest into Israel. She was sincere in her pagan faith, to be sure, but she was aggressive about spreading her false religion, and she thoroughly confused the whole nation of Israel. Traditionally, they trusted in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and yet Queen Jezebel was in a prominent position and she was spreading her own ideas which were contrary to the laws of God. Eventually Jezebel was confronted by Elijah and destroyed by Jehu, but the story is one of tragedy to a nation through a person who came into Israel and taught a religion that was not true. Israel of old suffered this woman Jezebel which called herself a prophetess, and was not only willing but eager to "teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."

"To teach." Sometimes we are actually snared into trouble because we are so glad to have somebody willing to teach, we just turn the class over to them. Churches so often look for teachers, and finally somebody comes along and says he's willing to teach. There seems to be no qualification but willingness. I remember a man became quite prominent. He taught in the Sunday School and became one of the officers of the church. He did not believe the Bible was the Word of God. He did not believe that Jesus had to die for us in order that we might be saved. He believed that you ought to do what was right and good, and if you lived a decent life, God would receive you. That was his honest belief.

He was actually an officer in the church, and the time came when he opposed the preacher, having acquired a large following in the church.

The church at Thyatira suffered this woman Jezebel "to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication." This would not necessarily be physical fornication, in my estimation. It could be, but this is

not in keeping with the New Testament way of using the term, which usually carries the meaning of accepting wrong ideas about God. God looked upon Himself in His relation to His people as though He were the husband of Israel. Israel was His bride. And so far as God was concerned, Israel was married to Him and He was, in a sense, married to Israel. If Israel's heart and mind turned to any other god, He counted the nation like a woman who had turned away from her husband. The prophets called it adultery. And so this woman Jezebel taught the people and seduced the members of the church at Thyatira to accept other ideas than the truth of the gospel. In the days of Jezebel, Ahab's wife, sin was only cleansed out of Israel by severe measures. I do not know any other way in which the sin of false teaching and departing from the word of God can be cleansed in our day but by severe measures. But we allow teaching and preaching to go on in the church today in such a way the people will cease to accept the truth of the gospel, and I do not know any way that any church can be cleansed except by the judgment of God.

Not only did Jezebel teach and seduce the servants to commit fornication, but "to eat things sacrificed unto idols." This means to participate in pagan practices and it conveys the idea of enjoying them! In other words, this church was lax and careless about what doctrine was being taught. The Lord Jesus said, "I gave her space to repent." But God is not a fool; His patience will not last forever. There is a feeling abroad today that men may do anything, and it will be all right, because God is good natured and kind, the "man in the sky" idea with its blatant irreverence. They are due to be tragically surprised, because God won't do that. He gives one an opportunity, but that opportunity can be gone. Verses 22 and 23 convey the idea that the only prospect we have is one of severe judgment from God upon all who tolerate unsound teaching. He says, "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." In other words, God indicates that He is going to deal in judgment where sin is found. When He says, "I will kill her children with death," you may be puzzled. I would say that if you find a church which tolerates worldliness, tolerates teaching that draws people away from the gospel, and makes them worldly, you will soon see the consequences if you look at their young people and their children. When He says "I will kill all her children with death," there should be heart searching and fearful expectation, because the disastrous results of tolerating worldliness in the church are found in the lives of the young people, and the same thing is true in our families and our homes. If in our families and homes, we tolerate interests that make for the contamination of the world, we shall find that among our children and young people there will be a lack of turning to God and a lack of faith in Him.

The Lord continues, "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. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come." Here you have a special message to those in that church who never agreed with the carelessness of the majority. There were some people who recognized what was happening, and who stood out against the tendency to let carelessness prevail.

Today there are those in the congregation who know the attraction of modern ideas and see the danger, and the Lord knows who they are. Now here's an interesting thing: when people have not known the depths of Satan (and the word known shows that it is not so much a matter that they never were acquainted with it, as that they never did esteem or accept it), when people have not accepted a degrading doctrine, the Lord says to them, "I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come." What burden would such people have? I think it would be the burden of enduring unsound doctrine. Perhaps you already know that if you're in a church, and from the pulpit or from the Sunday School teacher you hear things that aren't true, it is a real burden to the soul. To stand true in the presence of tolerated heresy, to be standing faithful in the very church where people are teaching things that are wrong, is the burden. And so far as the Lord is concerned, He said, I'm not going to put any more upon you than that. Hold fast! And it means hold fast in spite of unsound teaching. "Hold fast till I come." Apparently, relief is not promised "till I come." For some Christians, this is their commission, their task, all

life long, to withstand the popular trend into unsound teaching.

Paul's word to Timothy is clear. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine" (2 Tim.4:1, 2).

The time will come when sound doctrine will be laughed at or ignored. At such a time, the word from God is to stand fast, stand steady in spite of the popular push into doctrine which is unsound. We close this chapter with a tremendously strengthening word from Paul: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil . . . Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:11, 13).

Sardis – The Dead Church

"He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars" (3:1) refers us back to the Lord Jesus Christ in Chapter One, verse 16, "and he had in his right hand seven stars."

If you saw a congregation (or a Christian) showing no sign of life at all, would you hold out any hope for growth in that group, or in the life of that individual? Sardis is "The Dead Church." This is not a church wiped out by disaster, or obliterated by catastrophe; it is just dead. By this, we mean dead as a body in a casket is dead, as the tree in your back yard is dead, withered at its roots, bearing neither leaves nor fruit, with no growth, because there is no life in it.

Let us note what is said, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Let us consider that for a moment. "Thou hast a name that thou livest." That would mean, it seems to me, that the church at Sardis had a good reputation, as far as it went. It was spoken of as being a live church, and by that we mean it was an active church. In all probability, this church at Sardis had a regular program to which they were very faithful. "Thou hast a name that thou livest." There's no intimation here of lack of activity, with church doors closed, only opened once a week, no prayer meetings! The reputation they had was that of being an active church, a living church. But the verse continues, ". . . and art dead."

Let us look at the meaning of this word *dead*. How would a church be dead? By showing no interest in the person of Jesus Christ! Its members go on with their activities, sing their songs, hold choir practice, have their missionary talks, young people's socials, and so on. But there is no evidence that anybody there is having any personal dealing with Jesus Christ, or have any interest in the souls of men. Such a church has no interest in prayer. They open and close their meetings with prayer. The preacher prays, and when the officers are called on, they pray, but the church doesn't really care about prayer. They don't have prayer meetings. They do not have appointed times when the people come to the church just to pray. Nor in their own homes do they have family worship. They are dead as far as prayer is concerned.

The same is true with reference to having communion with the Lord. Suppose you mention the things of heaven as you visit with one of the families of such a church. They have no interest in heaven! They are apt to consider you as a very peculiar person indeed! Their conversation is all about this world. Such a church fits the description before us, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

It makes you think about wax flowers, which look like flowers but are not. Remember, these paper or wax flowers don't grow. They never change, they do not bear fruit, they do not reproduce. There are churches that are not really spiritually growing, they never draw closer to the Lord. They bear no fruit, and no one is ever brought into the presence of God, through their witness. We need only to say they are dead. I am stressing this matter because I want you to realize that this experience can happen among busy Christian people.

"Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God." This is very significant to me. Let us consider it thoughtfully. "Be watchful." In other words, begin to pray. "Watch and pray." Try to be aware of spiritual conditions around you; face

them as they really are! "Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." This is what such a church needs to do. Its members need to ask themselves, what do we still esteem to be true in the gospel? There may be a great part of the Bible you either do not know, or have not heard, for you haven't studied your Bible very much. What part of the Bible do you know and do you believe? Someone will say, "Well, I believe the Gospel of John." Fine! Well, read it over and over, asking the Spirit to speak through it. Someone else will say, "I believe in the Sermon on the Mount." Fine! Find the Sermon on the Mount and read it, carefully and prayerfully.

"Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die." What do you still hold dear? Do you believe in prayer? Then pray. "Strengthen the things which remain." If you are not strong spiritually, you'll have to start where you are, and begin to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." Start at the weak spot and ask God for faith.

"For I have not found thy works perfect before God." This word *perfect* occurs over and over again in the New Testament, and does not necessarily refer to a "hundred per cent pure" ideal. The word *perfect* here means "ripe." The word *perfect* here means "carried on to completion." The word *perfect* here means "actually demonstrated and realized." For instance, if you were planting beans in a garden, you might say you had perfect beans, when you are actually bringing the beans into the kitchen. You have an apple tree and you call it a perfect apple tree, when you bring the baskets of apples in. "I have not found thy works perfect," means I have not found your works completed; you did not carry your tasks through to completion.

"I have not found thy works perfect before God." You failed to follow through to results and now what are you going to do? "Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." Bring into action some of those things in which you really do believe and carry them out to completion.

"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." The meaning here is clear. When you first became a Christian what brought you to Christ? Bible reading? Then get out your Bible and start reading it prayerfully. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard." You traveled a certain route to Him? Travel over the same route again. "Hold fast, and repent." *Hold fast* means "grip resolutely to yourself the things that you really do believe." Hold them fast to you, keep them in your heart, repent. This word *repent* simply means "change your ways." You have been neglecting certain things. What were they? Bible reading? How often do you take up the Book and read? Daily? On Sunday morning? Never? Change your ways! What do you do about prayer? Do you just return thanks at the table? Do you have a few minutes of prayer at night, but at no other time? Change your ways! Pray more! Pray more often, pray longer . . . just pray more. The thing to do is to change your ways, to repent. In other words, at this point the Lord Jesus is saying, Sound the alarm! Rally your forces now! Strengthen the things which remain!

Now comes a definite word of warning: "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come to thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." If neglect of the things of God: Bible reading, prayer, testimony is to be your watchword, God warns you that He will come in punishment. He is warning that something unexpected can happen to you, suddenly, as a thief in the night. This warning is to the people who already are dead. That is to say, they are in a state where their life is not responsive to God. Although Sardis was a dead church, there is one thing to remember, God can raise the dead. And if a church knows it is dead, it might conceivably wake up. This church had a name that it lived, and that was a dangerous thing. People are inclined to think they are all right, and that is the danger point; the life may be slipping away then.

In verse four, we come to something that is quite different. The same church is still under warning, but here is something that is almost like stars shining in the dark night sky. Listen to this: "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." This sets forth the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ knows everybody in the church. He

holds each individual responsible to Him, and He looks deep into the very heart. So to this particular group of people there in Sardis, this dead church, He said you've got a few people in you that have not defiled their garments. "Thou hast a few names" indicates that there will always be a remnant, some people who do believe the Lord. And in the darkest night these people are like stars. Even in Sardis, even in a dark, dead situation, these people shone out.

He continues: "They have not defiled their garments." How would you defile your garments, so far as the Lord is concerned? The word *garment* is generally spoken of with reference to a person's actions or habits, and we sometimes call our manner of dress "a habit." The Lord makes it clear that they have not all defiled their garments. They did not all indulge in fleshly actions, or show personal pride. There were a few names who were not selfish, and not proud, "and they shall walk with me in white." I think one reason for speaking about "white" is that they have kept their garments clean. These are people who have personally been faithful to God and they have "kept their garments clean" by watchful, careful, dedicated conduct. And these people are found right in the middle of the dead church. If you should ever find a whole congregation which seems to be dead, don't be fooled by that. The Lord has His remnant every place, and there will be people yearning and longing for the glory of God.

"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." What a wonderful promise is given to this dead church, for such people in it as are awake.

For ourselves, the application is plain. Whether it is an entire congregation which is backward and lagging, and we are distressed about it, or whether you or I feel dull spiritually, dormant, almost dead, there is always a spark of faith! Fan that spark until it burst into glowing flame! "Strengthen the things which remain." God grant us wisdom and grace so to do.

Philadelphia – The Faithful Church

After loyal, suffering, careless, busy and dead churches, we arrive at "The Faithful Church," in Philadelphia. Men and women of the world are apt to respect the sincere, earnest Christian, even if riches or prominence are not involved. Such was the testimony of the church in Philadelphia; it was faithful.

It would be a salutary thing for each one of us to read the first chapter of Revelation at least once a week, reading slowly and permitting its glory and beauty to flood the soul. Here we have a picture of our risen, ascended, glorified Lord as He is *now*!

As we continue the general theme "What Christ Thinks of the Church," let me remind you again that the types set before us in these seven churches are potentially true of the whole Church or, for that matter, of any individual Christian.

You will note also, in the study of the entire passage before us (Revelation, Chapters Two and Three) that there are seven promises given to overcomers.

We have become aware of the realistic candor of the Lord's judgment. The Lord Jesus Christ doesn't conceal, exaggerate, or camouflage anything. There is a certain plain, straightforward truthfulness in what the Lord says as He faithfully points out aspects in our lives that need attention.

Look again at the characteristics of the churches. First, Ephesus, a loyal church, but lacking in love, and actually, a backslidden church, as great as it was. Then there was Smyrna, the rich-in-faith, poor-in-things church, which was being persecuted. Pergamos, despite much good, was the church which harbored "Satan's throne," and because of its easygoing permissions was a licentious church. Then came Thyatira, a busy, active church with a great program, but with a Jezebel of a woman leader and notoriously lax about truth in the matter of the teaching doctrine. Next, we had Sardis, the dead church. True, there were a few faithful witnesses in that church, but the best way to describe Sardis is simply to say that it was dead.

Now we come to Philadelphia, as described in Chapter 3:7-13. This is the church of the open door,

avored of the Lord, and I have called it "The Faithful Church."

Now the Scriptures reveal that as the Word of Jesus Christ goes out into all the world it always fits the need of a particular situation, or an individual problem. Of all the people who hear the gospel, some are not committed to the Lord. They have never accepted the Lord as their Saviour, and the Lord says to them very simply, "Come." And everything depends upon their coming.

Then there are those who already believe. They do understand that the Lord Jesus died for them and they are trusting in Him, and the Lord has a word for them. "Abide." Then for those who abide with Him and who actually are His, having experienced a deeper walk with Him, the word is "Go." Now the Lord Jesus speaks all those three words. He says *come*. He says *abide*. He says *go*. He not only tells me to go but He keeps His eye on me as I follow His command, and He sees the things I do. It is interesting to note that there are two churches among the seven we are studying, for whom there is no criticism. This is true of the suffering church at Smyrna, and it is true of the church at Philadelphia. The church at Philadelphia actually did according to its ability and for it there is no word of criticism. Look at verse 8. "I know thy works." He begins thus to every one of the churches, which is as much as to say, I have been keeping my eye on you, I have been watching you as you witness and as you go. "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." In other words, to this church He says I have given you an opportunity to witness and to serve. Then He explains why in verse 8 where He says ". . . for thou hast a little strength, and has kept my word, and has not denied my name." Perhaps you wonder why He was so appreciative of a church that had just a little strength. I believe it was because with the little strength they had, they served. When He says, "thou hast a little strength" this is not meant as criticism, but rather a recognition that this church was not favored in any marked way.

However, this is true about them: "[thou] . . . hast kept my word." That is, they believed each promise as it was given. When they understood a promise came from God, they took that promise as it was and they believed it. "And hast not denied my name." Whenever you see the name of the Lord Jesus Christ brought into the conversation and honored, you may be sure that His power and His strength will surround the one so honoring His name. Paul wrote of such strong faith in Romans, Chapter Four, when telling of the faith of Abraham, who "considered not his own body now [as good as] dead . . . nor yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Abraham believed that what God had promised He was able also to perform. Now, that's the way it was with this church in Philadelphia. They had not denied the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In committing themselves to obey the Lord they had moved forward, definitely trusting in Him. They had taken every word of His as true and they believed that every word He spoke, He would be able to fulfill. The little faith they had, grew as they exercised it.

Some of you may wonder whether or not a person can obey the Lord if he has only a little faith. Let me draw your attention to several helpful instances in the Scriptures. Think of the day when the disciples were in the boat crossing the lake, and a storm arose. They were struggling with their oars against wind and high waves, and suddenly they saw the Lord Jesus walking on the water. You remember how it frightened them, for they thought they had seen a ghost. Then He spoke to them, "Fear not, it is I." Then Peter said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me to come out on the water." And the Lord Jesus said, "Come." And Peter went. We cannot see into Peter's mind, but we feel sure he was not absolutely confident. Peter's nature was to act impulsively, and you will recall that as he stepped out on the water he saw the waves boisterous and began to sink. And he cried out, "Lord, save me, I perish." And the Lord Jesus reached out, took him by the hand, lifted him up and then said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" I want you to notice that Peter didn't have much faith. He had enough faith to get out of the boat and onto the water, but his faith faded when he saw the waves boisterous. This is not a criticism of Peter. With the little faith he had, he stepped out. I am sure you see the parallel with the Philadelphia church, as they stepped out with what faith they had.

Let us consider another illustration. You remember the time when Peter's boat was by the shore, and Jesus got into the boat, and asked that it be moved out a little way, so He could preach to the large crowd on the land. Then the Lord Jesus turned to Peter and said to him, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Peter said, "Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing." "Master, the fish aren't out there. They're not running tonight." But then Peter said, "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net," and they did so. Now will you think I am out of line if I suggest to you that when Peter let down that net he really had misgivings about the results? I am inclined to think that there never was a project undertaken, in obedience to the Lord's word, with more misgiving than when Peter gave the order to lower those nets! It was contrary to every judgment he had as a fisherman, but he did it because the Lord said so. He had enough faith to obey, and when he was ready to take up the net, he had to call his partners, since there were so many fish that he had to get help to land them. He fell at the feet of the Lord Jesus and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Sinful – why? Because he had doubted the Lord. I want to draw your attention to the fact that even though he doubted, he obeyed. And that is what counted!

Take the case of Martha. She and Mary had sent for the Lord Jesus because Lazarus was sick, and the Lord had waited until Lazarus died and then he came. You will recall that the Lord asked them where they laid him, and they took Him out and showed Him the grave. The Lord Jesus said, "Take ye away the stone." That was the command, "Take away the stone." Martha protested, saying, "Lord, he has been dead four days. By this time he stinketh." But the Lord Jesus replied, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou should see the glory of God?" He gave the command and Martha told Him what she was thinking, She knew her brother was dead. And because she obeyed His word despite her doubts and misgivings, she was blessed. I am trying to emphasize the fact you may have only a little faith, but if you will follow the Word of the Lord with the little faith you have, and depend upon His power, you can expect blessing. The Philadelphia church had obeyed the Lord, even without strong faith, and the Lord commended them. Do you remember the parable about one man who had five talents, another man two talents, and another had just one talent? Jesus set forth an important spiritual truth here. "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." And He will say the same to you and to me, if we exercise such faith as we have.

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan" (v .9) brings various things to your mind. We were studying about Satan earlier, and we were thinking of the "synagogue of Satan." When the Lord Jesus told His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem to be killed, and on the third day He would be raised from the dead, Peter went to Him and said, "Lord, don't do this." But Jesus said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." The synagogue of Satan will be the group of people who are influenced by Satan's ideas rather than heeding the prompting of the spirit.

"Which say they are Jews, and are not" (2:9). Outwardly they were considered to be Jews, but inwardly they failed to live in accordance with their faith. Dismiss the Jews, and think of your own denomination. I will think of mine! I know of the opposition that comes from people that claim to be Presbyterians, but really are not. You may be in another denomination, and may know those who actually will oppose the gospel although they claim they belong to your group. We always find people who claim to be faithful members of the church, but actually their lives do not show any fruit of the Spirit.

"Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet and to know that I have loved thee." I believe the Lord is indicating that He is going to bless this church so openly that other people will have to admit that God has actually been working through them.

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." This is a wonderful promise! The church in Philadelphia is assured of the Lord's personal care in the dark hour of trial, and this church was given such safekeeping. This will be your experience if you will go along with the Lord

and follow His leading. Step out with the little faith that you have, even though you're fearful and doubtful about the outcome. Because you are obeying Him, you can be sure that He will take care of you.

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The Lord will return suddenly and unexpectedly and He will return to judge. So He said, "Hold that fast which thou hast." Continue as you have begun. You might well wonder, what do I actually have? Do you believe the Bible? Hold to that! Do you believe in the cross of Calvary? Hold to that! Do you believe in prayer? Hold to that, even though nobody else prays. Do you believe in Providence? Hold to that confidence in Providence, for God will watch over you. Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Well, hold to that. Do you believe in heaven? Praise God, one day you're going there. Do you believe in Christ's intercession, that He is praying for you now? Hold to that belief even if nobody else does. Do you believe in His coming again? Hold to that most precious and glorious promise! "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."

Verse twelve is a wonderful end for this message to "The Faithful Church." Note the number of times the words "my God" are used. Surely this emphasis should bring comfort and strength to our hearts today, for God has a special interest in people who will obey Him.

Laodicea – The Lukewarm Church

This survey of the whole church which we have seen as we have studied the seven churches in Revelation, Chapters Two and Three, has been a very grave experience for us. We have had many sober thoughts as we have noted that the Lord sees the heart, and He faithfully points out our shortcomings in order that we can repent and turn from such things to more complete obedience. In each case where the Lord has rebuked with warning, He has challenged us to overcome with promises of blessing.

Each message to these seven churches began with a brief picture of the Lord in some aspect of His present glory as found in Chapter One. Each section ends with a call and a gracious promise of what the Lord will do for those who overcome the difficulty that they are having in their particular situation. You will notice throughout this whole passage that each one of these churches is witnessing under pressure and trouble. You are very conscious of the fact that the Bible does tell us that in the world we shall have tribulation. The tribulation and trouble actually interfered to some extent with the efficiency and the effectiveness of the witness of these churches.

I believe it will be helpful to review, briefly, to emphasize these important lessons.

The first church was the church at Ephesus, a strong church, but we pointed out that she had "left her first love." This was a loyal church but cool – not aglow with love for the Lord, and she was warned to change her ways, or else she would be removed from her position. The second church was Smyrna and Smyrna was in great distress from persecution. Among other things she was plagued by hypocrites, people who called themselves Jews but were not. And she can be seen as a suffering church and yet staunch in her faithfulness. Next was Pergamos. I have the impression this was a big church, a rich church, and yet they tolerated the holders of false doctrine and while they were known to be steadfast under pressure, they were yet tolerant of much that was evil. Next came Thyatira, a church with a great record of busy activity and yet for all their business and their works, of which there were so many, their testimony was blemished because they allowed corrupt teachers who taught false doctrine. Thyatira was an active church, but unsound. Then we studied Sardis with a few faithful members, but on the whole, spiritually dead. Only a few people in it were still alive and awake. Next came Philadelphia and we found that this was the church that pleased the Lord. It was a church that had just a little strength, but it stepped out in faith with the little strength it had. Philadelphia was a small but a loving church, and a church that pleased Him.

Now we come to the final message and this is addressed to the church of Laodicea. In many re-

spects this is a classic situation, and yet it is a notorious church, spiritually lukewarm, and in grave danger. In fact, we call this "the lukewarm church." It was an affluent church, but it had no zest in its daily work and witness. Is it important for a church or an individual to be "on fire" for the Lord? To be zealous in the things of God? Laodicea failed here! The Church of Christ, we must remember, is a living thing in enemy country where it is important to exercise eternal vigilance and to be in continuing prayer.

Laodicea, is representative of our present era, the lukewarm church that is surrounded with wealth and affluence in a material sense and yet spiritually is poverty stricken.

The message of the church at Laodicea is rich with meaning, and as soon as we look at it our hearts are deeply touched. Of the seven churches that we have studied in these opening chapters of Revelation there are only two that are warned of being removed from their place . . . their candlestick removed. Strangely enough, the first church so warned was Ephesus. In many respects Ephesus was the strongest church of all. And yet they were warned because they had left their first love; they were told if they did not repent and do the first works that the Lord would come and remove their candlestick out of its place. And the last church, Laodicea, was the second to receive a warning, a church that was neither cold nor hot. It was also a strong church in many ways; it had large numbers and it was rich, but it was lukewarm. But, looking at these two, you will see they are not so different from each other. They are alike in that each is a case of heart trouble. Their hearts are wrong. They have grown cold. The Apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 16:22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus let him be Anathema." Then he adds the word "Maranatha." But just think of it! The Apostle Paul would have nothing to do with anybody who did not actually love the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament we are told of a certain king who was being guided by Elisha as to what he should do, but who disqualified himself from blessing because he quit too soon (2 Kings 13). Elisha gave a bundle of sticks into the king's hands and told him to smite the floors with them. He smote thrice, then stopped. Elisha deplored the fact that he quit. He said, "Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times . . . now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." In other words, he had limited the victory God would have given.

I have oftentimes, in preaching about Lot, called him "the twilight Christian," not dark, not light, not day, not night. Lot's story is not a glorious story, and when I prepared my message on him I thought of people who are borderline Christians, people who are saved but never victorious. There was an experience in Peter's life like this. I suppose of all the things that Peter ever did, the one thing that gave him the greatest grief was the occasion when he denied his Lord. Have you ever wondered how he could do it? Have you ever wondered how Peter – who had been so close to Jesus day after day – under any conditions at all could deny that he even knew the Lord? I can tell you why. It was because Peter "followed afar off." I think that's true with some of us. We follow the Lord, but we're not close. I would urge every one to move up closer. It's always safer up front, and always dangerous when you're at the back.

This message to the Laodicean Church begins with the most grave warning, just as it ends with the most gracious promise. In this third chapter of the Book of Revelation let us look first at the fifteenth and sixteenth verses. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." I have done much reading and am conversant with much literature, but I don't think there is anything more expressive, more disdainful, or disgusting than this expression "I will spew thee out of my mouth." The phrase needs no interpretation, it is understood immediately. It means – unwanted! And this is what the Lord thinks of a church that has this characteristic of lukewarmness. And let us remember that what the Lord thinks of the Church He thinks of us. If any of us ever let the fire of devotion die in our hearts, and reach the place where we are neither hot nor cold, we are neither for Him nor against Him, we are in the position of the Laodicean Church, and the warning is for us, too. He would spew us out of His mouth.

Verse 17 points to the danger: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

I want to draw to your attention the serious fact that such a condition can be ,quite unconscious. You can be entirely unaware of It. A Christian can be oblivious of the fact that he is actually disgusting to the Lord, because he is neither for Him nor against Him, but just lukewarm.

Now we come to verse 18: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." We know that "gold tried in the fire," in the Bible, is generally associated with faith. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." In other words, conduct yourself in such a way that the Lord can trust you and thus your faith will grow, as you "abide in Him." "Gold tried in the fire" is the kind of faith that will believe in Him regardless of the circumstances.

"And white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." We read about "garments of righteousness," and the white raiment is the righteousness of God that is given to the saints. The messenger counsels this church to seek the righteousness of God – not their own righteousness – that they might be clothed with white raiment.

"And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." I think this "anointing of the eyes with eyesalve" is a type of the Holy Spirit, whose indwelling presence gives us a clearer vision. To sum up the teaching of verse 18: Increase your faith! Seek the righteousness of God! Yield yourself to the Holy Spirit of God!

"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." You get the impression from verse 19 that the Lord actually loved this church because He is rebuking them and He is intimating that He would chasten them. When you hear that phrase, "as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten," you think of the statement, "faithful are the wounds of a friend." We have the same idea in the book of Hebrews: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Then the Lord's warning and challenge are clear! "Be zealous therefore, and repent." Put yourself into it! Show Him your love by the warmth of your response to His call.

Then comes the marvelous twentieth verse: "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." Here stands this gracious Lord, who has been left outside the door by a careless and lukewarm church. They don't seem to care, but He cares, and He comes and knocks at the door. If anybody will open, He will come in and sup with him. I want you to notice that the condition of the church is general, but the process of turning to the Lord is specifically for one person at a time. The whole church is lukewarm, but the individual man will open to let Him in. This is a very, very precious promise. "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." This indicates that the problem of the church, like the problem of all Christian living, is personal. It is between the individual and the Lord, – between you and Him. As we reach the end of our study, how very important it is to know what Christ thinks of the church. He personally wants to have individual dealing with the individual church member, with the individual Christian. The whole matter of our personal relationship with the Lord and our personal service for the Lord is an issue that lies within our grasp. He stands and waits, but we must open the door; you must – I must. No one can do that for us. Verse 17 of the last chapter of this Book of the Revelation says, ". . . let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." The choice is yours, and when you yield yourself to Him, your heart and life will be flooded with His love and grace. But you must open the door.