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II. Chapter Two - The Letters to the Churches, part one

A. Introductory comments -

1. Some scholars have suggested that these letters were separate, independent work that was later incorporated into the Book of Revelation. This theory however seems unlikely since they are well integrated into later chapters. The view for these notes will be that the letters are an integral part of the work from the start and were part of it from the beginning.
2. The messages to the Churches are, in fact, crucial to Revelation since it roots the message in the real world of the Church. Jesus speaks directly to real men and women in real communities, good bad and indifferent. These are people who need hope and who may and have faltered. Into this real scene the message of hope and encouragement is essential. Likewise, the call to repentance and conversion is also needed. Both messages are set powerfully against the background of Christ, the omniscient Lord of history's judgement upon the world.
3. The seven letters all follow a basic plan
 - a. All open with the formula, "To the angel of...write"
 - b. Then follows the formula, "These are the words of..." and then follows some description of Christ using titles mostly from the preceding vision in chapter one.
 - c. Christ's message always begins "I know..."
 - d. Then follows an outline of virtues or faults with corresponding praise or blame.
 - e. Then follows a final recommendation
 - f. Then there is a promise to the "victor" (i.e. the one who follows the advice) which is either preceded by or followed by the formula "He who has ears, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."
4. It is notable that the message is attributed both to Jesus "These are the words of..." and to the Holy Spirit, "Listen...to what the Spirit says to the churches." The three Persons of the Holy Trinity each speak together and are One God, therefore in total agreement on all things.
5. There are numerous theories on the meaning of the Letters.
 - a. There are those who hold that these are simply historical letters to historical Churches and that any other meaning other than this is purely accidental and speculative.
 - b. Another interpretive principle is to relate the letters to spiritual phases through which an individual might pass. Thus the letters can either evoke insight in spiritual gifts or spiritual troubles. Likewise, solutions and exhortations can serve to assist the person understand and remedy, where necessary, spiritual problems in life.
 - c. Some have also held that the letters represent seven periods or ages of history through which the Church would pass. This point of view is held by many Protestants and many Catholics - primarily by those who hold a futurist interpretation of the book. They see a progression presented in the Letters that the Church would go from

a state that was pretty good to a bad state. Thus a progressive decline exhibited in the Church.¹ It is difficult to apply such a theory however since wide speculation is often required. When does the first age begin and end? How about the second age? How do we fix the dates.² Where are we now? Which Church applies to our place in history?

d. Another historical theory however that seems more likely is that the Letters each correspond to seven periods of Old Testament History in order. Thus they are a recapitulation of covenant history. The value of this theory is that it shed light on how and why the Letters draw on the seven periods of Old Testament history in their content. We can look to these periods and have them applied to us now and thus learn from them. This theory is set forth as follows:

- (1) The Letter to the Church at Ephesus - This letter contains the language of paradise: *To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.* Thus we have reference to the very beginning of time.
- (2) The Letter to the Church at Smyrna - Here we may have a reference to the patriarchal age: *Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested* This may be a reference to Joseph in Egypt. Who was thrown into prison on account of slander, false charges brought upon him by Potiphar's wife.
- (3) The Letter to the Church at Pergamum - Here there may be a reference to the age of Israel in the desert: *But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam³ who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality. So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*⁴ In effect God

¹Scholars may hold this point of view for many reasons but it is easy to see why it might appeal to Protestants and to certain Catholics who want to emphasize that the earliest days of the Church were the best but then a rot set in which for centuries has led the Church away from Christ. Thus, according to many who hold this view, the only solution is to reject what the Church has become and go back to the "pristine simplicity" of the early days. Hence the appeal of the letters as warnings about the future.

²This critique does not devastate the theory. It is merely a presentation of a difficulty that this theory evokes.

³Balaam was a prophet hired by Balaak to seduce Israel in the wilderness after forty years of wandering in the desert.

⁴There is also evoked here another aspect of what Balaam did. He said to the Moabites in effect: If you can't beat Israel, join them by getting your women to join yourselves to their men. Thus alliances could be formed and the God of Israel would be angered. Then he would remove favor from Israel which, thus weakened would be conquerable. This event is described in

says to the Church at Pergamum that they resemble the condition of his people at that time in the wilderness and that he will speak with the sword of his mouth to slay all evildoers.

- (4) The letter to the Church at Thyatira - The period of the Israelite Monarchy and in particular the period of David: *But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel⁵...He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces⁶*
- (5) The Letter to the Church at Sardis uses images drawn from the prophetic period: *I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. {2} Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God.* This was the gist of what all the Old Testament Prophets proclaimed.
- (6) The Letter to the Church at Philadelphia contains language

Numbers 25: *While Israel dwelt in Shittim the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; and the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you slay his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor." And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation, and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the inner room, and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman, through her body. Thus the plague was stayed from the people of Israel. Nevertheless those that died by the plague were twenty-four thousand. (Num 25:1-9).*

5Jezebel was a foreign queen who perverted the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem by influencing Ahab to evil acts. This is described in the following text: (1 Ki 16:30-32) *And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all that were before him. {31} And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him. {32} He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria.*

6Here is a reference to Psalm 2:5-10 which was of the Davidic Period and had its original meaning in reference to David *Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."*

from the period of the return from exile under Ezra and Nehemiah which speaks of the rebuilding of the Temple: *I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name...hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. {12} He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.* This is language drawn from Haggai, Ezra and Nehemiah who tried to reassure the people who returned from exile weak & powerless. They felt daunted by the task of rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem. Now Christ reassures the Church at Philadelphia that though they seem weak and small be of good cheer since they shall be a pillar in the temple of the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven.

- (7) The Letter to the Church at Laodicea - There is language here that corresponds to pharisaical Judaism of the first century: *I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* Recall how Christ railed against the Pharisees and others who thought they were doing so well keeping the 613 precepts of the law and felt saved and justified due to that fact. He said that unless our holiness surpassed that of the scribes and pharisees we would not see the kingdom. He also warned that the opulent temple would be destroyed.

B. **The Letter to the Church at Ephesus** - *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. {2} 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; {3} I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. {4} But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. {5} Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. {6} Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. {7} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'*

1. Ephesus is praised for its discernment of the truth and for its hard works and suffering. Yet, something, has overtaken the Ephesians and they have lost the first intensity of their love. Perhaps they have become too accustomed to the presence of evil in their midst and no longer resist it and fight it off. Verse 5 suggests that the Ephesians have become accustomed to sin, failed to repent and therefore have stepped onto the slippery slope leading to destruction. Christ reminds them of the lost reward in verse 7
2. **angel** - we have already discussed theories here about the angels. Let it simply be noted here that the Greek word *Aggelos* means Angel or messenger. In fact the word angel in English simply derives from the fact that angels are God's messengers. Thus this text could be interpreted simply to mean "Write the following to messenger of the Church at Ephesus." This is not likely however, given the Old Testament background⁷ discussed above. Further, John never attributes the word *aggelos* to a human person.
3. **Ephesus** - The city of Ephesus was the capitol of Asia Minor (Modern day Turkey). It was a great commercial and religious center. Ephesus was renowned in the ancient world for its temple and cult of Artemis and for its cadre of magicians. The temple was huge and considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. There was a stadium, a racetrack, and a theater that seated 24,000. There were also libraries and market places. All in all the city was magnificent and crowned by a grand columnaded main street. The temple was the central attraction and the silversmiths who plied quite a trade in their idol making for the cult of Artemis were the ones who rose up in riot against Paul who was cutting into their business. (Acts 18-20)
4. **The words** - The Greek phrase *tade legei* are an archaic Greek saying like the English phrase "Thus saith..." It is a straight-forward rendering of the Hebrew phrase: Thus says Yahweh. It was also a Greek formula used to begin royal edicts.
5. **of him** - That is, Jesus. Here as in all the Letters there is a description of Jesus given rather than his name and title. The descriptions are drawn

⁷cf also Dan 10:13, 20,21.

from the vision in Chapter 1. In this case we have: ***who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.***

6. ***I know*** - Just as in the Old Testament Prophets when God knew the situation of those whom he addresses.⁸
7. ***Those who call themselves apostles but are not*** - A problem in the early Church was with itinerant preachers who claimed apostolic authority for their words. Note that when Paul describes the false apostles he is dealing with Judaizers⁹. We also have confirmed our hypothesis that the Harlot is Jerusalem, not Rome. In addition, Paul had foreseen that false teachers would trouble the Ephesians Church (Acts 20:29-30)
8. ***you have abandoned the love you had at first*** - exactly what is referred to here is unknown. However, we can each probably resonate with the reality that is described. Love greatly motivates one to do all the beloved asks with joy. However, as love grows cold things are avoided and requests seem more burdensome. Thus although the Lord can praise the Ephesians for the deeds previously done, he notes that the very thing which brought forth those deeds (love) has cooled and thus the deeds will also be omitted as love grows cooler.
9. ***Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first.*** - Return to the original state that caused the effects of good deeds.
10. ***If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent*** - good deeds and the keeping of the commandments are essential for the survival of the Church and civilization. If a people persist in sin. God will take the kingdom from them and give it to a people who will yield a rich harvest: *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.*" (Mat 21:43)
11. ***Yet this you have, you hate the work of the Nicolaitans which I also hate*** - What we know of the Nicolaitans comes from the Fathers of the Church. Most of them trace the heresy to one of the seven deacons mentioned in Acts 6:5, Nicanor. Evidently he fell into error and led others into heresy which had two basic components. First they held that it was not big deal to eat the food (meat) sacrificed to idols. Secondly, they promoted a type of

⁸For example Hosea 5:3 - *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot, Israel is defiled.* & Amos 5:12 - *For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins -- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.*

⁹(2 Cor 11:12-13) *And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And 2 Cor 11:4-6 For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.*

loose living and hedonism. The Nicolaitans according to many of the fathers, abandoned themselves to pleasure. It will be noted that in Acts 15: 28-29 the leaders of the Church set conditions under which Gentiles could enter the Church: that they abstain from things offered to idols and from sexual immorality. The Nicolaitans broke both terms.

C. **The Letter to the Church at Smyrna - *And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. {9} "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. {10} Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. {11} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.'***

1. Background - Smyrna was another port city 35 Miles north of Ephesus. It was renowned for its loyalty to Rome and ritual worship of the emperor. Of all the cities in Asia Minor, Smyrna was the loveliest. It was often called by the Romans the flower of Asia, or alternately, the crown or ornament of Asia. It was a planned city and thus had orderly streets, broad and handsome, laid out in a grid pattern with fine square paving blocks. Likewise, the buildings were of a uniform architectural style. There was a large stadium there and a magnificent public library. It's geographical position enabled the prevailing westerly winds to blow gently through its streets making it as Aristedes said, "As fresh as a grove of trees." In economic terms, Smyrna was wonderfully situated. A major trade route to the East passed right through it. Likewise, the sea was to its West and a very protected harbor provided a wonderful setting for trade. Smyrna was indeed a beautiful and thriving cities and its citizens knew it too. There was thus a tendency to pride. It is perhaps in this light that we can see why Christ refers to himself as ***the first and the last***. It is as if to say that all the worldly distinctions and rivalries are as nothing compared to the glory of the eternal and unchanging God who is, who was, and who is to be. If this is a rebuke at all it is certainly mild. In general it is to be observed that the Church at Smyrna is not rebuked, rather it is consoled and encouraged
2. Statement of the problem - Christ himself states the basic issue: ***I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.***
 - a. Tribulation - A feature of the city which stands out and helps to set the context for the crisis which they endure is the presence of the Jews. In Smyrna the Jews were especially numerous and influential. For example, they contributed over 10,000 denarii for the beautification of the city. In Smyrna they were also especially hostile to the Christians. Thus we find in the letter the reference to ***those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*** It is said that at the martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna in 155 AD, the Jews were even willing to break the Sabbath rest to see him burned alive. They came running with lit tapers to start the fire. The presence of these Jews combined with the strong loyalty of the city to Rome produces a difficult environment for the Christians living there. This very environment

was encountered by Paul on his missionary journeys and the mixture of Jews, Christians and Romans proved to be volatile. The reason for this was the temperament of the Roman authorities. They tended to be rather tolerant of religious differences and seemed rather bored by the disputes among Jews and Christians. (Recall how reluctant Pontius Pilate was to become involved with the differences about Jesus). One thing however that would cause the Roman civil authorities to act swiftly and intervene in religious matters was the threat of civil unrest. Any possibility of a riot would invoke immediate measures to preserve order. Here then is the likely context for the suffering of Christians in Smyrna. The text itself tells us that the source of the persecution was Jews. But by themselves the Jews could do little to Christians. Thus, what happened, was that the Jewish leaders would invoke the Roman fear of unrest and thus cause a Roman clampdown or suppression of Christians. There are many times in Acts where this very scenario is enacted. Recall these four incidents Paul suffered on his missionary journeys as described in Acts

- (1) In Antioch (Acts 13:50) *But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.*
 - (2) In Iconium (Acts 14:1-2) *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue, and so spoke that a great company believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.*
 - (3) In Lystra (Acts 14:19) *But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the people, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.*
 - (4) In Thessalonica (Acts 17:5) *But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people.*
- b. Poverty (But you are rich) - The Greek word is πτωχείαν (*ptocheian*), which describes the really destitute rather than the working poor (wherein the Greek word Penia would be more appropriate). This poverty is directly linked to the affliction the Christians suffer. Hence it would appear that they were in some way deprived of their livelihoods or assets. This may have been done through violence, or to the death of a providing family member, or perhaps to the violence of mobs who attacked and destroyed their homes or businesses. Yet they are called rich and this too is a consistent theme in the New Testament: that those who are materially poor are often most spiritually rich. Likewise, the

rich tend to be less spiritual because they are less dependant on God. This has been our experience in America, the richer we become the less time, money or talent we have for God. Here are some example of the link to poverty and spiritual richness.

(1) (James 2:5) *Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?*

(2) (Luke 6:20) *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*

(3) (2 Cor 6:10) *We are seen as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

3. What will happen - ***the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.***

a. The phrase "ten days" is not likely meant literally for it was an expression which means, a short time.¹⁰ Why must they be tested though? This is because, poverty by itself, is not holiness. Endurance and faithfulness despite hardships and poverty do however constitute a spiritual richness and holiness. So it is with us. If we suffer, we must do so with faithfulness. It is possible to suffer and then to grumble and loose faith. This is then a double tragedy. Our prayer ought to be the words of the song, "*Lord help me to hold out, until my change comes.*" Or again, the words of another song: "*Trials dark on every hand, and we cannot understand all the ways that God would lead us to that blessed promised land. But he guides us with his eye and we'll follow till we die and we'll understand it better by and by*"

b. It is easy to stay true to the faith for a day or for a few days. The difficult thing, the important thing is to do so right through life. It is easy to keep the faith when things are going well, and difficult to do so when difficulties arise. Consistent behavior which lasts one's whole life is the only kind which deserves to be called fidelity.¹¹

4. The encouragement and the promise -***Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life...He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.*** The worse thing in this world is not suffering or even death, the worse thing is to have no hope of ever over-coming. Hence the Lord shows the reward to those who are saved, but must live in hope of the full experience of that salvation (cf. Romans 8) The phrase "second death" refers to eternal perdition, i.e. Hell. Damnation is the worst thing. The first

¹⁰The phrase occurs elsewhere in scripture. For example in Dan 1:11-12 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

¹¹Pope John Paul, Homily 27, Jan 1979.

death not only cannot harm the faithful individual but it is actually the door to heaven. As Paul wrote in Philippians: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again* (Phil 1:21-26). In terms of the specifics of the "second death" more will be seen later in this book but it is good to anticipate it here:

- a. (Rev 20:14) *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire;*
- b. (Rev 21:8) *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."*

5. Finally it is noteworthy that Jesus calls himself He ***who died and came to life***, As if to recall the fact that he knew suffering, persecution, imprisonment, false charges, and even death. But he cast off death like a garment and reigns supreme. He says, Have confidence, I have overcome the world.

D. **The Letter to the Church at Pergamum - *And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. {13} "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. {14} But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality. {15} So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. {16} Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. {17} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.'***

1. Pergamum was forty miles north of Smyrna. It was not an economic center but a cultural one. It was perhaps the most famous of the cities of Asia Minor. It was built on a tall hill and dominated the area around it due to this fact. It had a huge Library second only to the Library of Alexandria Egypt. There were over 200,000 parchment rolls in the library. In fact the very word "parchment" derives from the name of the city.¹² The city was also a major religious center. In particular, the worship of the god, Asclepias was conducted there. In the Greek system he was the God of healing and there were shrines to him near most ancient hospitals. Thousands came to Pergamum for relief of their sicknesses. The ancient title for Asclepias was Asclepias Soter - Asclepias the Savior. Such a title would obviously make a Christian shudder and it may be in this connection that there is the reference to Pergamum as the place *where Satan's throne is*. It may also derive from the fact that the emblem of Asclepias was the serpent. The serpent in Jewish and Christian iconography was a symbol for Satan. Some scholars have also held that the title comes from the fact that Pergamum was an administrative center for the Romans in Asia. Since there was Caesar worship and pagan hedonism associated with Rome, it was therefore the seat of the Great Satan, i.e. Rome. This may be true but it would depart from the ordinary caution and courtesy shown Roman authorities in other books of the New Testament.
2. The Encouragement - despite previous persecutions the Lord praises them for keeping the faith. Evidently there were persecutions that included death for Antipas was killed. Of *Antipas* we know nothing except that Christ shared his own title, Faithful Witness, with him. This, because it is a title used in reference to Christ, is special. Hence, we can conclude that Antipas was of high character and courage.
3. The Rebuke - Christ indicates what he has against them: *you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a*

¹²Parchment is the smoothed and thinned skins of animals. There are legends that say it was invented in Pergamum.

stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality. So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. It appears that some at Pergamum however have turned from their heroic witness to the faith. Some have begun to compromise their faith by taking part in pagan ritual banquets and "sacred fornication" rites. Thus the sin becomes one of intermixing with the practices of the world. But the Christians are to be a sacred people, a people set apart.

- a. A comparison of this situation is drawn with story of Balaam¹³ who encouraged Moabite women to marry Israelite men and draw them into the worship of the god of Moab.
- b. It is difficult to distinguish those who hold the teaching of Balaam and those who hold the teachings of the Nicolaitans. The root words have the same meaning. Balaam is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek phrase *nikan laos* meaning to conquer the people. Both words describe an evil teacher who is able to seduce the people with false teaching. Hence, in the Old Testament Balaam was able to seduce some of the Jews to mix with the nations. What we know of the Nicolaitans comes from the Fathers of the Church. Most of them trace the heresy to one of the seven deacons mentioned in Acts 6:5, Nicanor. Evidently he fell into error and led others into heresy which had two basic components. First they held that it was not big deal to eat the food (meat) sacrificed to idols. Secondly, they promoted a type of loose living and hedonism. The Nicolaitans according to many of the fathers, abandoned themselves to pleasure. It will be noted that in Acts 15: 28-29 the leaders of the Church set conditions under which Gentiles could enter the Church: that they abstain from things offered to idols and from immorality. The Nicolaitans broke both terms. Although the text here distinguished the Balaamites from the Nicolaitans, it is

¹³Balaam was a non-Israelite prophet of great renown among the pagans. When King Balak of Moab was confronted with the arrival of the Israelites (on the way to the promised land) he was alarmed at their vast number and sought Balaam to curse them. Balaam seems indecisive about going to curse Israel since he initially refused King Balak's request because the God of Israel had ordered Balaam not to curse Israel. Nevertheless, we next see him going forth apparently to curse Israel. God is angry and hinders his progress by scaring Balaam's donkey who sees an angel with a flaming sword. (That Balaam cannot see the angel but his donkey can is an ironic detail: Balaam, the greatest seer among the pagans, cannot even see what his donkey can!) Eventually after Balaam started beating the donkey, God allowed the donkey to speak in protest and eventually let Balaam see the angel who warned him again not to curse Israel. Thus, Balaam spoke only what God permitted him to say. Later however, God allowed Balaam to facilitate Israel's sin. Balaam said to the Moabites in effect: If you can't beat Israel, join them by getting your women to join yourselves to their men. Thus alliances could be formed and the God of Israel would be angered. Further, the women would likely be able to lead their husbands to the worship of the god of Moab. Thus angered, the God of Israel would remove favor from Israel which, thus weakened would be conquerable.

- difficult to determine exactly how they were distinguished.
- c. The translation here (the RSV) reads that some "practice immorality." The Greek word is πορνεύσαι (*porneusai*) however which is better translated with its sexual connotation. Many other translations render it "commit fornication." This is more accurate. The context is likely the pagan religions among the Greeks and Romans with had communion with their gods through fornicating with "sacred prostitutes." Some scholars claim that though the term literally means "fornicate or commit adultery," its more metaphorical sense is "idolatry." This is true enough but it must be recalled that the whole marital image and covenant language used here makes the sexual imagery appropriate. For a soul espoused to God, idolatry is infidelity, adultery.
4. The warning: ***Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.***- The Lord warns them of the serious penalty for continued infidelity. The emphasis is on what the Lord will do. We may also behold the penalty from the human perspective- namely, that long persistence in sin inevitably makes the word of truth seem obnoxious, threatening and dangerous. It is tragic to think that Jesus, the savior of the world could be seen by some as a warrior against them or as a thief.
 - a. The Warning here also harkens to the same story of Balaam and it is worth recalling here: *While Israel dwelt in Shittim the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; and the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you slay his men who have yoked¹⁴ themselves to Baal of Peor." And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation, and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the inner room, and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman, through her body. Thus the plague was stayed from the people of Israel. Nevertheless those that died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.(Num 25:1-9).* In this context Christ's threat seems directed not only to those who persist in error but also to the whole Church at Pergamum. Note that even after Israel finally disciplined those who committed error, a plague still descended on them. We

14i.e. married Maobite women and followed them into idolatry.

see this today in America. even though not every one is guilty of doing wrong, there is a collective responsibility to the degree that we have so long tolerated sin, evil, and indecency in our midst. We thus reap the whirlwind even after we finally punish wrongdoing.¹⁵

b. There are several examples of the word of God waging war on those unprepared for it or in need of its corrective power.

(1) (John 18:5-6) "*Whom do you seek?*" he [Jesus] asked them, They answered him, "*Jesus of Nazareth.*" Jesus said to them, "*I am he.*" Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When he said to them, "*I am he,*" they drew back and fell to the ground.

(2) (Heb 4:12-13) *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

(3) (Mat 22:46) *And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions.*

(4) (Mark 5:16-17) *And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood.*

5. The Promises to those who heed the warning and repent: ***To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.*** There are three things mentioned here which might be curious to the modern reader.

a. ***the hidden manna*** - This is possibly a reference to Jewish tradition that, although it is not recorded in the Bible, was nonetheless familiar to First Century Christians. In the apocalyptic tradition (in this case Second Baruch) of the Jewish people was a story told of Jeremiah the Prophet. When the Jewish people finally took possession of the Promised Land they were no longer in need of the Manna which sustained them in the desert. a pot of the Manna was put into the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 16:33-34, see also Hebrews 9:4). In the 6th Century BC the Babylonians invaded Judah and destroyed the temple. The Ark was never seen again. But the Rabbis had a legend (recorded in Second Baruch and also

¹⁵(Hosea 8:7) *For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads, it shall yield no meal; if it were to yield, aliens would devour it. & (Zec 7:13-14) "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the LORD of hosts, {14} "and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate."*

alluded to in 2 Maccabees 2:4-8) that Jeremiah the Prophet took the pot of Manna and hid it in a cleft on Mt. Sinai. The legend also held that when the Messiah came the manna would be rediscovered. Thus, to Jewish ears to eat of the hidden manna was to enjoy the fruits of the messianic age. We can see too what tradition Jesus tapped into when he said that he was the bread come down from heaven for a man to eat and never die. Hence the Eucharist may be alluded to here as well. However, promise of the gift of the hidden manna still seems future oriented and this could not apply to the Eucharist per se. The answer to this objection however is contained in the teaching that the Eucharist is a foretaste of the glory that will be fully shared only in the kingdom of heaven. The promise of the hidden manna may also be seen as a counter to the participation in the sacred meals of the pagans. Here too there is a liturgical overtone in the argument. The Eucharist is the sacred meal of the Christian. Paul contrasts the Eucharist to pagan meals as well when he warns the Corinthians that they *cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons...cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons* (1 Cor 10:21). Thus the Eucharistic overtones are deep here and do not preclude an appreciation of the wider Jewish cultural context of the legend of Jeremiah.

- b. **White stone** - this is probably a reference to the custom of showing a little stone with a mark on it to gain access to a banquet. It has also been remarked that in the ancient world, black stones were used by law courts and juries to denote a guilty verdict whereas a white stone denoted innocence. Thus the reference here might also be to the favorable verdict imparted to every faithful Christian who was justified by the blood of the Lamb.
- c. **a new name** - In the Old Testament and in the ancient world a new status was signified by a new name. Thus, Abram became Abraham and Sarai became Sarah (Gen 17:5). Jacob became Israel after he wrestled with God in the desert (Gen 32:38). It should also be noted here that we have covenant/marriage language at work. To see this note how Isaiah also records the new name for Israel: *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. {2} The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give. {3} You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. {4} You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. {5} For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry*

you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.(Isa 62:1-5) That this name is known only by the one who receives it stresses one's individuality and the personal quality of salvation and relationship to God. Though community is important, it must not be forgotten that Christ died and rose for each of us individually and knows us personally.

E. **The Letter to the Church at Thyatira - *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. {19} "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. {20} But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. {21} I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her immorality. {22} Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings; {23} and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. {24} But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay upon you any other burden; {25} only hold fast what you have, until I come. {26} He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, {27} and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; {28} and I will give him the morning star. {29} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'***

1. This is the longest and perhaps the most difficult of the Letters. It is somewhat ironic since Thyatira is the smallest and least significant of the cities. It is 40 miles southeast of Pergamum. First and foremost it was a commercial town. It lay on a trade route along a road which connect Pergamum with Sardis. There seem to have been a lot of trade guilds in Thyatira. It was also an important area of fabric dye. (In fact it was from here that Lydia the purpler hailed (Acts 16:14) It was an outpost of Pergamum in a way and had served in the past as a garrison to protect Pergamum. There was no particular religious significance to this city. It was not a center of Greek or Roman worship. It does not seem that the Christians there were in serious or on-going threat of persecution. Since we know little of Thyatira however, it is difficult to reconstruct the historical context. But the problem could well have stemmed from the presence of the trade guilds. It was essential for a merchant to belong to the guilds but there was a problem for Christians since the guilds often held communal meals in or near pagan temples. The meat eaten had often been sacrificed to the gods. Further there was often drunkenness and loose morality evident at these meals. The likely problems is that there was a movement led by a women (addressed as Jezebel) which argued for compromise with the world's standards. After all livelihoods would be threatened otherwise. The answer of the risen Christ is unequivocal: Christians must have nothing to do with such compromises.
2. The letter opens with a description of the risen Christ which seems threatening: *the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze*. The image is drawn from the image in Daniel 10:6. The flaming eyes stand for blazing anger against sin and the

awful penetration of that gaze which strips away all disguises and sees into a persons inmost heart. The brazen feet are a symbol for the immoveable power of the risen Christ.

3. Then follows praise: ***I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.*** The external appearance is good. But we shall see that other problems are lurking behind.
4. But all so soon comes condemnation. ***you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.*** - Whoever the woman was, we are probably safe in concluding that this was not her actual name. There is likely invoked here the Old Testament Jezebel and this woman fills a similar role. The Jezebel of the Old Testament was an ambitious, strong-minded Phoenician princess. King Ahab of Israel, in order to strengthen his alliances with the Sidonians married her. She quickly exerted considerable influence over him and led him into idolatry by bringing him to worship Baal. She not only led him to idolatry, but actively opposed the prophets of God. The Lord punished Israel for the Queen's sinful actions by inflicting a serious drought through the prophet Elijah. The drought was broken only after Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal in a contest on Mt. Carmel. Elijah slew all the prophets of Baal after this. Jezebel then threatened him and he had to flee to Judah. After further abuses of power (eg. Naboth's vineyard 1 Ki 21:7) Elijah prophesied her death. She died by being thrown from her palace window and was devoured by wild dogs. Old Testament writers generally blamed her for the idolatry practiced by her husband and children. They also used her as a symbol for the danger of the Canaanite cults and the sin of idolatry. What then is intended by calling this woman in Thyatira Jezebel and who is she? Honestly, we have no idea. But she was obviously an evil influence in the model of Jezebel of old. Perhaps this means she was influential over leaders of the Church?
5. Jezebel teaches two errors: eating meat sacrificed to idols and fornication. Again, the translation here (RSV) does not do a very good job translating πορνείσαι (*porneusai*). See notes in Pergamum above. Since she has not repented (Christ) ***I will throw her on a sickbed.*** There may be a double entendre here in view of her fornication.
6. ***all the churches*** evidently the influence of Jezebel extended beyond Thyatira.
7. ***I am he who searches mind and heart-*** literally, the kidneys and the heart. For the Jews of that time, everything was shifted down one level. The heart was the seat of wisdom and the viscera was the place of emotions and feelings.
8. ***the deep things of Satan*** - In 1 Cor 2:10 and Romans 11:33 Paul used the phrase the deep things of God. What is likely behind the phrase “deep things of Satan” here is that the Gnostics may well have appropriated Paul’s phrase to themselves. They prided themselves on their secret

knowledge of God. If an early form of Gnosticism is behind the scenes here then John is probably using the phrase sarcastically. As if to say, "They claim to know the deep things of God but all their wonderful knowledge only helps them to know Satan more."

9. ***I do not lay upon you any other burden*** - cf Acts 15:28
10. ***I will give him the morning star*** exactly what is referred to here is not clear. In 22:16 Christ himself is called the morning star.

III. Chapter Three, the letters to the churches, part two.

A. **The Letter to the Church at Sardis** - *And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. {2} Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. {3} Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. {4} Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. {5} He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. {6} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

1. Seven hundred years before this letter was written, Sardis was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. It had been the kings' city of the kingdom of Lydia, an oriental city hostile to the Greek world. Fierce and proud they fought well to keep their enemies at a distance. The original city was built on a steep precipice overlooking the Hermas Valley. Eventually the town expanded to include the valley below. The wealth of Sardis was legendary. The river that ran through the lower city was said to run with gold. But the amazing wealth of the city began to make it soft and overly confident. Most thought of the city as an impregnable fortress. In the 6th Century, Cyrus the Persian conquered the city state. He did so merely by scaling the rock precipice at night. The watch towers were unmanned, so confident were the Sardinians of their town's natural defenses. This over confidence, combined with great wealth also made the Sardinians flabby. Thus, when Christ said, "... **repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.** He was tapping into a tradition wherein a lack of watchfulness had led to defeat. They were thus easily suppressed once the natural defenses were breached. It remained a conquered city in the Greek, and the Roman periods which followed. In AD 17 it was destroyed by an earthquake and then rebuilt. By the time this letter is written it was once again a wealthy city, the center of wool trade for the region. It was wealthy but soft and flabby. The lofty heights of the city on the hill, the city their ancestors were too lazy to watch, still lay in ruins. The Sardinians were content merely to build in the valley now. In this atmosphere it seems that the Christian Church too had a tendency to become soft. In fact, just like Sardis, it had lost its vitality and become a corpse: **you have the name of being alive, and you are dead.** This phrase is not meant in the literal sense of physical death but in the allegorical sense of the New Testament wherein sin is equated with death. Consider for example the following passages:

- a. (1 Tim 5:5-6) *She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers*

night and day; {6} whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

- b. (Luke 15:22-24) *But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; {23} and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; {24} for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'* And they began to make merry.
- c. (Rom 6:13) *Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.*
- d. (Eph 2:1-5) *And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins {2} in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. {3} Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. {4} But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, {5} even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)*

2. Consider the ways that sin is a type of death

- a. **Sin is the death of the will.** St. Augustine spoke of this in Confessions (VIII, 5): ... Bound as I was, not with another man's irons, but with my own Iron will...for when lust was served, it became a habit, and when a habit is not resisted it becomes a necessity.¹⁶ Thus, though the lustful cries of our own age are shouted beneath the banner of "freedom" it will be seen that they lead to a slavery far worse than imagined. Habits deeply ingrained are difficult to break.

(1) *"Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin." (John 8:34)*

- b. **Sin is the death of feelings and the death of the conscience.** We can observe that a sin committed for the first time may cause anxiety and feelings of aversion or disgust. But, as a sin is repeated these feelings disappear and may even be replaced by a certain pride at evil doing.

(1) *Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Phil 3:19)*

(2) *They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, {30} slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to*

¹⁶*Dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo: et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas.*

parents, {31} foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. {32} Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them. (Rom 1:29-32)

c. **Sin is the death of human dignity** - sin can so disfigure a person that he seems more like an animal. Even more, he may become lower than the beasts. Further he can treat others in a way that totally ignores their dignity.

(1) *One Sabbath when [Jesus] went to dine at the house of a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees, they were watching him. {2} And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. {3} And Jesus spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" {4} But they were silent. Then he took him and healed him, and let him go. {5} And he said to them, "Which of you, having an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" {6} And they could not reply to this. (Luke 14:1-6)*

(2) *So he (the prodigal son) went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. {16} And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate... (Luke 15:15-16)*

d. Contrasts worth noting:

(1) It will be noted that, unlike the previous churches, Sardis is not troubled by any heresy per se. Heresies are the products of searching minds at least. There is little merit in being orthodox merely due to the fact that one is too lazy to think for oneself.

(2) It will also be noted that there is no external persecution of the Church mentioned. Dead bodies are not attacked usually. A Christian however who is alive, active and devoted will draw attention, positive and negative. When Christ told us to pray for our enemies he presumed we'd have a few. A vital Church will always be under some form of attack.

(a) (Luke 6:26-27) *"Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,*

(b) (John 15:20) *Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.*

3. **Awake** - Watchfulness is a key term in the New Testament. There are several kinds of watchfulness to be distinguished.

a. Watchfulness is to be a constant attitude. And hence it is

sometimes used in scripture as an aorist imperative (a Greek grammatical term which describes on-going fulfillment of the verb.

- (1) (Rom 13:11-14) *Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; {12} the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; {13} let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. {14} But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*
- (2) (1 Cor 16:13) *Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.*
- b. Watchfulness against the wiles of the devil.
 - (1) (1 Pet 5:8-9) *Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. {9} Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.*
- c. Watchfulness against temptation.
 - (1) (Mat 26:41) *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*
- d. Watchfulness for the coming of the Lord.
 - (1) (Mat 24:42-44) *Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. {43} But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. {44} Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*
 - (2) (Mark 13:35-37) *Watch therefore -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning-- {36} lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. {37} And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."*
- e. Watchfulness against the climate of sin and for the quality of faithfulness
 - (1) (1 Th 5:6-9) *So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. {7} For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. {8} But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. {9} For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

- f. Watchfulness against false teaching.
(1) (Acts 20:29-31) *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; {30} and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. {31} Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.*

4. ***I have not found your works perfect*** - This might seem to be an excessive request of Christ. After all, none of us is perfect. And yet perfection is a central theme of the New Testament, not as a human work but as of work of God in man. How could it be that any thing less than perfection would result from God's work of grace and salvation? This call, this invitation to perfection is perhaps one of the strongest arguments for the existence of purgatory since most of us die not yet having received the full perfection of grace. How can we avoid the accusation against the Sardinians? Thus, it must be that Christ purges us of the imperfections that remain before drawing us to the full glory of heaven. Consider some of the many admonitions to perfection in the New Testament

- a. (Mat 5:48) *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*
- b. (Rom 12:2) *Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*
- c. (1 Cor 13:8-10) *Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. {9} For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; {10} but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.*
- d. (2 Cor 7:1) *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.*
- e. (Phil 3:11-14) *that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. {12} Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. {13} Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, {14} I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
- f. (Heb 12:22-24) *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, {23} and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, {24} and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.*

- g. (James 1:4) *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*
5. ***in the sight of my God*** - note how Christ speaks here in terms of his human nature. Thus he does not say "in my sight" as he could have. Perhaps in speaking from the reference of his human nature he reminds us of his sacred humanity and that he is fully and perfectly human. Though he was tempted in every way we are, he never sinned. Thus he is our hope, once in full possession of his saving grace we too will never sin again, we shall be perfect.
6. Christ then admonishes Sardis to do four things
- a. Remember - remember the good news of freedom from sin and glory that waits or those who are faithful.
 - b. Keep - it is not enough to hear the word. we must keep it faithfully. We must not be hears of the word only, we also be doers.
 - c. Repent - The first admonition of Jesus at the opening of his public ministry was, Repent and believe, the kingdom of God is at hand. There is here an on-going rhythm for Christian life. Faith calls us to obedience...and more faith comes as a fruit of the repentance implicit in obedience. Faith calls forth obedience which in turn makes on more capable of faith.
 - d. Stay watchful - The call is not a one-time matter. It requires an on-going watchfulness and self-control as discussed above.
7. ***If you will not awake, I will come like a thief*** - Christ is not a thief. He is master and owner of all. Likewise he is our savior, friend and brother. But to those he persist in wickedness he seems like a thief coming to put an end to their "profit" and fun. To one who "does his own thing" any authority figure or any one more powerful seems as a usurper and a threat since he may veto any plans made that day. Christ says in effect, if you don't want to see me as a thief when I come repent and be in friendship with me. Be of one mind and heart with me through grace and faith. If not I will seem as a thief. However you see me, know that I *will* come again,, just be ready!
8. There are three promises to those who have remained faithful or who will repent:
- a. They will be clothed in a long white robe - The image here is more of rays of light than of the color white. For example, see the following biblical verses
 - (1) (Mat 13:43) *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*
 - (2) (Psa 104:1-4) *Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honor and majesty, {2} who coverest thyself with light as with a garment, who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent, {3} who hast laid the beams of thy chambers on the waters, who makest the clouds thy chariot, who ridest on the wings of the wind, {4} who makest the winds thy messengers, fire*

and flame thy ministers.

- b. They will not have their names wiped out of the book of life¹⁷. In the ancient world, Kings kept books listing their subjects. The names were removed when a person committed a crime against the state or died. The image here is of being numbered among the faithful citizens of the Kingdom of God. There are numerous references in Both Testaments to the book.
- (1) (Exo 32:32-33) *But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin -- and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." {33} But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.*
 - (2) (Psa 69:28) *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.*
 - (3) (Dan 12:1) *"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book.*
 - (4) (Phil 4:3) *And I ask you also, true yoke fellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*
 - (5) (Rev 20:14-15) *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; {15} and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*
 - (6) (Rev 21:27) *But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*
- c. Jesus Christ will profess their names before his heavenly Father and the angels. This promise is also contained in the gospels.
- (1) *Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father, but whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father. (Mat 10:32-33)*

¹⁷Many fundamentalists hold to the "doctrine" once saved, always saved. This teaching is not biblical and here is yet another example of how the scriptures themselves testify that just because a person gets saved, doesn't mean he can never lose his status as among the saved. Serious and persistent sin can cause a person's name to be blotted out of the book of life.

B. **The Letter to the Church at Philadelphia - *And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens. {8} "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. {9} Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie -- behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you. {10} Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth. {11} I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. {12} He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. {13} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'***

1. Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven cities, founded in about 140 BC. It was founded for a special purpose that it might be a missionary of Greek culture and language to the regions of Lydia and Phrygia to the east. Thus its location was intentional; it was where the borders of Lydia Mysia and Phrygia all met. The fact was that this "missionary" effort was very successful. By 20 AD the Lydians no longer spoke their own language and were all but Greek in their culture. This likely the context of the reference Christ makes: ***Behold, I have set before you an open door.*** For now there was another great missionary opportunity: the spread of the Gospel. In addition, Philadelphia was on the edge of an open plain called the *Katakekaumenē* (Greek for "burned land"). This was volcanic soil from volcanos long extinct. Such land was fertile and Philadelphia had become a grape-growing land and was famous for its wine producing. But Philadelphia also had a problem related to previous volcanic activity. As is frequently the case with volcanic areas, geological faults ran under the area. In 17 AD nearby Sardis had been destroyed by an earthquake and was later rebuilt. Philadelphia, though not destroyed by that quake, evidently, had the pressure of the fault shift its direction for, after that quake, daily tremors shook the city and terrified the citizens. The city began to crumble as the stone buildings were slowly weakened and then toppled. It became downright dangerous to live in the city due to falling masonry and people began to flee and settle outside the walls in small huts. Those who dared remain within the walls of the city were deemed mad or fools. These were difficult years for the Philadelphians and they lived with uncertainty, never knowing when the ground would shake and they who have to flee for open spaces. Here too is a context for the words of the Lord to the city: ***I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it*** The people of this city knew well how precious the stability symbolized by the pillar was. Further they could understand

the glory of a city or a temple out of which no one would have to run. Even more, the mention of: ***the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven*** must have seemed glorious. Of all the cities, Philadelphia receives the highest praise and it can be seen that it deserved it. Though the tremors had ceased and the city had been rebuilt by the era of this letter, the citizens were an example of tenacious suffering and perseverance. Prolonged suffering often brings alive the virtues. It will be noted in later centuries that Philadelphia was the last Christian City in Asia Minor (Turkey) when the Turkish Muslims conquered it. It was not until the 14th Century that it finally fell and until modern times it still had a Catholic Bishop and approximately 1000 Christian Catholics.

2. ***The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens.*** There is an allusion here to Isaiah 22:22 which reads: *And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.* In the context of the passage from Isaiah it was a reference to the faithful steward of King Hezekiah, Eliakim who alone could provide access to the king. Thus the image is of Jesus who alone provides access to His Father's kingdom. *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12)
3. ***I have set before you an open door*** - the significance of this phrase was discussed briefly above. Philadelphia was ideally located for missionary activity in terms of the Gospel just as it had been for Greek learning and culture. It is clear however that the missionary success depends on Christ for it is he who holds the keys and he who has opened the door. It is helpful to examine other passages to see the missionary implication of this phrase of the "open door."
 - a. (1 Cor 16:8-9) *But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*
 - b. (2 Cor 2:12) *When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord;*
 - c. (Col 4:2-4) *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.*
4. ***Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie -- behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you.*** This is an interesting twist on a prophecies from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:
 - a. (Isa 45:14) *Thus says the LORD: "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying: 'God is with you only, and there is no*

other, no god besides him."

b. (Isa 49:22-23) *Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. {23} Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame."*

c. (Isa 60:14) *The sons of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you; and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*

5. And thus the phrases which were originally applied to Israel are now taken and applied to the Christian Church. This may seem paradoxical and yet it is not since the early Church saw itself as the true Israel. These words of Christ indicate that the persecutors are Jews nominally only. They are not real Jews, their claim is a lie. This leads us to a twofold understanding of the word "Jew(s)" as used in the New Testament. On the one hand there is the use of the term to identify an ethnic group that is distinct from Gentiles (non-Jews). In this case, one is called a Jew, whose is born of a Jewish mother. Even today the word "Jew" continues to refer to an ethnic group. Many Jews (even in Israel) are in fact, secular or atheistic. Hence the emphasis in this use of the word does not fall on religious belief so much as it falls on one's birth into an ethnic group. The second use of the word "Jew" in the New Testament does emphasize religious belief with a paradoxical result: Those are real Jews who accept the Messiah, Jesus. In so doing they imitate the faithful Abraham who put his faith in God. If one wants to be a real Jew they must imitate Abraham since the child imitates the Father if he is a real son: like father like son. Thus, Christians are the real Jews! It is into this tradition that Jesus taps when he denies that the enemies of the Christians are in fact Jews. They may think they are Jews, but in fact they lie when make such a claim. Such a dispute about who was a "real Jew" is also set forth by Paul in Romans

a. (Rom 2:28-30) *For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith.*

b. Paul goes on in Romans 4 to set forth the example of Abraham who walked by faith in God and argues that the true Jew will show himself to be of the same nature. *The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come*

through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void...That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants -- not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations...he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness."But the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.(Rom 4:13ff)

c. Hence the point about the Jews and Christians is **not** that the Jews were once God's chosen people but were cast aside in favor of a new chosen people: the Christians. Rather the one chosen people remain: Jews who believed in Christ and Gentiles who are grafted on through faith in Jesus minus Jews who refused to believe and were thus pruned away. Note this teach from Rom 11:17ff: *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you...And even the others, if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved...For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.*

6. Again, it is important to note a fact that we have already developed earlier in these notes: the antagonists, the harlot is Jerusalem (unbelieving Jews) not Rome (Roman pagans). The primary persecutor of the Christians is not usually named in the Book of Revelation. When there is any reference to the persecutor, Rome is never directly mentioned but Jews are.
7. ***I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world*** - In one sense, the Christians of the First Century were kept safe from the tribulation brought about by the Jewish war with the Romans.

The First Century historian Eusebius indicates that not one Christian was lost in the seige of Jerusalem since they had a prophecy to flee the city (The Book of Revelation, or perhaps the Mt. Olivet discourses). Likewise, Christians largely stayed out of the other aspects of that war and thus casualties among them were low. Thus if this text refers to that it was fulfilled. However, if the text refers to the tribulation of the end of the world then it also has important meaning. As Christians we do not dread the coming of the Lord in glory. It will be a day of joy and fulfillment for the saints, but a day of wrath for the wicked. Thus, the faithful Christian can expect reward on that day. Thus we pray after the Our Father at mass: "Deliver us O Lord from every evil and grant us peace in our days. In your mercy keep us free from sin and from all anxiety, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ." Does this verse mean however that the faithful Christians, will be kept safe from all tribulation of the last days? There is significant disagreement on this matter and we will deal with it more significantly in future chapters of the Book of Revelation. Let us simply review the camps here:

- a. Pre-tribulation theorists - hold that faithful Christians are "raptured up" prior to the tribulations
 - b. Mid-tribulation theorist - The "rapture" takes place about the mid point of the tribulations
 - c. Post-tribulation theorists - the "rapture" takes place after all the tribulations.
8. ***hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown*** - the promise holds only if one is steadfast and faithful unto the end.
 9. ***He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; -*** The pillars of the temple were among its most permanent and prominent fixtures. We have already seen how precious the concepts of stability and strength were to the Philadelphians. This passage is meant allegorically and it should not be seen in conflict with Rev 21:22: *And I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God, Almighty and the Lamb.* The temple in the kingdom of heaven is God himself and hence, this verse indicates that we are spiritually built into that temple as living stones and members of the body of Christ.
 - a. (1 Pet 2:4-5) *Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and {5} like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*
 - b. (1 Cor 12:27-28) *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. {28} And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.*
 10. ***never shall he go out of it,-*** Again, this phrase of the permanence of the peace and citizenship in heaven must have been precious to the

Philadelphians who frequently had to run out of buildings when earth tremors began.

11. ***and I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God.. and my own new name.,-*** ancient cities were frequently renamed if they were ruined then rebuilt. The Philadelphians are also promised a share in the very name of Jesus. Remember that in the ancient world and especially among the Jews, a name indicated something of the very being of the person who possessed that name. Hence to share in Christ's name was to share in his very being by being a member of the body of Christ, the Church. There is also invoked here another prophecy from Isaiah. and it brings us right back into the heart of covenant language: *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. {2} The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. {3} You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. {4} You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. {5} For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you (Isa 62:1-5).*

C. **The Letter to the Church at Laodicea - *And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. {15} "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! {16} So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. {17} For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. {18} Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. {19} Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent. {20} Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. {21} He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. {22} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."***

1. The city of Laodicea was one of seven ancient cities so named. In the ancient world this city was called "Laodicea on the Lycus" to distinguish it from other cities. The importance of this city was in the fact that it lay on a strategic trade route. The road from Ephesus out on the coast inland to the east and into Syria ran through here. This trade route was the most important in Asia Minor. The geography of Asia Minor is such that one it has a coastal terrain at or near sea level. There is a central plateau however of 8500 feet up. The climb is quite a steep one therefore! To negotiate this steep path the trade route had to take a detour through the Lycus valley and this put it right in Laodicea's path. One had to pass right through the city's front gates and out the back to go through Asia. Two other roads also passed through Laodicea's gates making it a hub of sorts as well as a great commercial and financial center. It was particularly famous for its clothing industry. The sheep of the area were famous for their violet black, glossy wool. Such wool was used to fashion out-garments and overcoats (tunics). It is in this context that the Lord's indication that they are "naked" is ironically sharp. Laodicea was also a great medical center. The medical school of the area was famous for two ointments: one for the ear and another for the eyes. Here too the Lord is less than impressed and he tells them to buy ointment from Him. One final fact about Laodicea worth mentioning was that it had a very large and affluent Jewish population.
2. ***I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.*** - The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference. Indifference is very hard to combat because it is more subtle. There is not seen here an overt wickedness. So for example, among many today, there is an acceptance of religion, the Church and the Scriptures but such matters are largely irrelevant to them as well. They have adopted an "it's ok if it's your thing" mentality. They are not hostile to the Church as such and they may even go to church on Christmas and Easter. They may send their children to private religious schools. They are probably

considered "nice people" by their neighbors and may in fact have many good qualities. Yet their "niceness" is likely measured by worldly standards not the Gospel's. This means they are probably well accommodated to the world and have justified their comfort with the world. Their Christianity where it exists at all is due more to accident than to explicit choice by the gift of faith. More often than not they take their clues from the world. They are ready to accept Jesus as the Good Shepherd by they will quietly set aside the teaching on the uniqueness of Christ apart from whom no one will be saved. Though Christ spoke of absolute truth and claimed there was a truth, the lukewarm, the indifferent, will speak more of how something that may be true for one person may not necessarily be true for another. Thus the truth is relative and Christianity is irrelevant as a saving truth. For this attitude they will be called "nice," "tolerant" and "inclusive" and will be greatly appreciative of such labels. All this helps to explain why lukewarmness and indifference are so hard to combat. Yet Christ reserves his most graphic rebuke for them: they make him sick and he vomits.

3. The one impossible attitude to Christianity is neutrality. Our faith is a truth claim and the opposite of what Jesus teaches through the Church is false; false, not less meaningful, or just "ok" for some who "feel it's right." Christianity is not just one path to God; faith in Jesus is the only way. *And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16) This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:11-12)* These statements are either true or they are false but a neutral attitude toward them is not possible. Lukewarmness attempts to have Jesus and what he offers but sets aside his unique claims.
4. Hard as it may sound, the teaching here is that it is better to never have had Christian faith at all than to have had it and then drifted into meaningless, conventional Christianity, or to have had it and made it devoid of impact by selectively adhering to it: *And the Lord said And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more. "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law*

and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." (Luke 12:47-53) Easy compromises with the spirit of the age and setting aside the truth of the gospel are unacceptable to Jesus and makes him sick. There are two teams on the field, no sidelines, choose sides.

5. Why is Christ's condemnation of Laodicea so severe? Perhaps again due to the subtlety of the problem. Sometimes severity is necessary to rouse the complacent from their sleep. The stakes are high for evil triumphs when the good remain silent: *Things fall apart, the center cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, the blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned; the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity...*¹⁸
6. ***For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*** Laodicea was an extremely rich city, a banking center. Christ does not deny that fact. But they are devoid of real and lasting wealth. Worldly wealth is elusive and only on loan, it cannot buy a person happiness or give meaning to life. In fact wealth may well blind a man to eternal truth and his actual state which, without God is wretched. Riches are distracting and in the end, worldly riches are pitifully tiny no matter how grand they may seem. They cannot do the one thing necessary, bring a person eternal security or salvation. They always fall short:
 - a. *Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, men who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? Truly no man can ransom himself, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of his life is costly, and can never suffice, that he should continue to live on for ever, and never see the Pit. He shall see that even the wise die, the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes for ever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they named lands their own. In his riches man lacks wisdom, he is like the beasts that are destroyed. This is the fate of those who have foolish confidence, the end of those who are pleased with their portion. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Be not afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him. Though, while he lives, he counts himself happy, and though a man gets praise when he does well for himself, he will go to the generation of his fathers, who will never more see the light. In his riches, man lacks wisdom, he is like the beasts that are destroyed (Psa 49:5ff).*
 - b. *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and*

¹⁸William Butler Yeats, The Second Coming. (1919).

rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, {20} but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. {21} For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. {22} "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; {23} but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! {24} "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Mat 6:19-24)

c. *And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; {17} and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' {18} And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. {19} And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' {20} But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' {21} So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21)*

7. We have seen that calling Laodicea blind and naked were provocative since the city was proud of the eye salve it produced to help cure cataracts and it was also proud of its clothing industry. Nakedness is surely humiliating in any age but in the ancient world it was seen as one of the worst humiliations, especially among the Jews .

a. *And David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me." So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites. {3} But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" {4} So Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off half the beard of each, and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away. {5} When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return." (2 Sam 10:2-5)*

b. *The LORD said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, {4} so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. {5} Then they shall be dismayed and confounded because of Ethiopia their hope and of Egypt their boast And the inhabitants of*

this coastland will say in that day, 'Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?'" (Isa 20:3-5)

- c. *Behold, I am against you, says the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame. {6} I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a gazingstock. {7} And all who look on you will shrink from you and say, Wasted is Nineveh; who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for her? (Nahum 3:5-7)*
- d. *Plead with your mother [Israel], plead -- for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband -- that she put away her harlotry from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; {3} lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a parched land, and slay her with thirst. {4} Upon her children also I will have no pity, because they are children of harlotry. {5} For their mother has played the harlot; she that conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' {6} Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. {7} She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.' {8} And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal. {9} Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. {10} Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand...And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the LORD. {14} "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. {15} And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. {16} "And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal.' {17} For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. {18} And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the*

bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. {20} I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. (Hosea 2:2-21)

8. Christ counsels three things:

(1) ***Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, ,*** - The gold refined by fire is probably the gift of faith. This conclusion is based on 1 Peter 1:3ff *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you..., though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.*

(2) ***and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen*** - The white garment is the symbol of the victory which comes to those who are faithful. Ultimately this garment alone can hide the shame of faithlessness of which nakedness is the symbol. The word naked taps into the covenant language of Revelation. To be faithless is to be unfaithful. Since we are espoused to God, be unfaithful is equivalent to being adulterous. The adulterer commits adulterous acts by uncovering their nakedness to someone who is not their spouse. God simply makes obvious what is already a fact. We saw some of those texts above. Here it might be helpful to see the White garment as the symbol of faith, fidelity and victory. Likewise, to recall that the heavenly vision is described as the wedding feast of the Lamb and that the white garment is the appropriate attire.

(a) (Rev 4:4) *Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads.*

(b) (Rev 3:5) *He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.*

- (c) (Rev 19:7-8) *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; {8} it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" -- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*
- (d) (Rev 21:2) *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*
- (3) ***and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.*** Faith is vision, and gives the Christian true sight. Likewise a wilful persistence in faithlessness is a damnable blindness -
 - (a) (Mark 10:51-52) *And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight." {52} And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.*
 - (b) (2 Pet 1:2-11) *May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. {3} His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, {4} by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. {5} For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, {6} and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, {7} and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. {8} For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. {9} For whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. {10} Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; {11} so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*
 - (c) (John 9:39-41) *Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see,*

and that those who see may become blind." {40} Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "Are we also blind?" {41} Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

9. ***Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent.*** - Christ is clear that the rebuke, though strong, is issued in love. We too must recall this whenever we experience the call to repentance. God does not command us to make our life difficult or to take away our fun, or to ridicule us. Rather, he reproves us as one who loves us and wants us to see salvation. This is a common theme in scripture:
- a. (Prov 13:24 N) *Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them.*
 - b. (Prov 23:13-14 N) *Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. {14} If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol.*
 - c. (Prov 27:6) *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*
 - d. (Psa 94:12-13 N) *Happy are those whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law, {13} giving them respite from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.*
 - e. (1 Cor 11:32) *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*
 - f. (Heb 12:6-14) *For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." {7} It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? {8} If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. {9} Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? {10} For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. {11} For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. {12} Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, {13} and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. {14} Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*
10. ***Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*** There are several things taught in this verse.
- a. It is a unique truth of our Judeo/Christian heritage that God seeks out man. It is God who takes the initiative. There is no one who can ultimately say, God did call to me. Even when we wander God

seeks us. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) is really a parable about the heavenly Father who, seeing his son from afar ran up to him and embraced him. This is because he was seeking him. In Christ, God himself leaps down from heaven to save his people and he spoke of himself as a Shepherd who sought out his lost sheep. (Luke 15:1-5)

b. It is also taught here that Christ invites, he does not force, the individual to open to him. This too is awesome. The all-powerful God who could use his power in any way he wishes will never "abuse" his power by forcing anyone to love him or even open to him. Let us recall the covenant/marriage language of this book in this context. In sexual terms, we may say that God is no rapist. He will not ravage the soul. He will respectfully woo the soul and respect the decision of each person. Nor does God make use of "shotgun marriage." In the past many were pressured into marriages by families. Here the individual's personal response of faith is elicited and respected.

c. The image of the banquet reminds us of the Eucharist although it is not explicitly distinguished from an ordinary banquet. Yet here too, given the marriage imagery, the connection is appropriate. For in the Eucharist Christ joins himself to the soul in a holy communion. Christ enters the soul, and the soul is taken into Christ. Here too it is Christ who serves.

(1) (Luke 12:37) *Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them.*

(2) (Luke 22:29-30) *and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, {30} that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

11. ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***
This means you.

