

## Summary of the Letters to the Churches

### **Ephesus** *Revelation 2:1-7*

- **PRAISE:** I know that you do good deeds, and work hard. You are patient and cannot stand evil. You condemn those who do wrong and hold false teachings to the fire.
- **CONDEMNATION:** You have left your first love - the core of the gospel.
- **ADVICE TO LEADERS:** Remember where it is that you have fallen from, repent and go back to the original teachings.
- **CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS:** To him that over cometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.
- **APPLICATION:** Men sometimes abandon the Word of God (their first love) for their own doctrinal interpretations and personal interest. The inference here is the addition of doctrines into the church, placing more importance on them than on the Word of God. This refers to legalistic churches that institute man-imposed salvation requirements, such as specific rituals, or organization membership, and teach that there is no salvation unless these requirements are met. They focus more on dos and don'ts and on who does and doesn't do, than on the core message of scripture and thus they deny salvation by grace through faith. The easiest way to spot a church of Ephesus is their claim of being the only true remnant and their insistence that there is no salvation outside of their organization and without their rituals.

### **Smyrna** *Revelation 2:8-11*

- **PRAISE:** I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich)
- **CONDEMNATION:** Nothing !!
- **ADVICE TO LEADERS:** Don't fear your suffering - Satan will torment you and you will be tried. Be faithful unto death and you will have the crown of life...
- **CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS:** He that over cometh shall not be hurt by the second death (and will have eternal life).
- **APPLICATION:** Throughout the world, Christians are being persecuted in places like China, Russia, the Philippines and the Islamic Nation States. Witnessing is illegal in many of these places and sadly, it is all too common to hear of Christians being jailed, tortured and even beheaded for the crime of attempting to spread the gospel and the testimony of Jesus.

### **Pergamum** *Revelation 2:12-17*

- **PRAISE:** You live where Satan lives, yet you never renounced me.
- **CONDEMNATION:** But I have a few things against you, your teachings pollute your people both spiritually and socially with unacceptable pagan practices.
- **ADVICE TO LEADERS:** Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth!
- **CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS:** To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth [it].
- **APPLICATION:** Those teaching false doctrines, causing people to sin because they think it is OK, based on the interpretations of their leadership. What these leaders are doing is teaching that the Word of God is to be treated as a cafeteria plan where you can pick and choose what you want to believe and disregard that which you don't. Pergamum is not lukewarm to the gospel, they have just chosen to believe that certain things in it don't apply to them.

## Thyratira *Revelation 2:18-29*

- **PRAISE:** I know your deeds, your love, your charity, faith and service. You are doing more of these things than you ever have!
- **CONDEMNATION:** While on the outside, you appear as a model church, you are rife with corruption and corrupt teachings, from deep within. You have committed adultery against me with your idol worship.
- **ADVICE TO LEADERS:** Repent now or I will cast you into great tribulation.
- **Challenge to Believers:** To those who are faithful within, rejecting the false doctrines, hold fast till I come.
- **APPLICATION:** The Lord references Jezebel in his condemnation to this church - referring to the woman who lured people away from Him with idolatry by focusing them on things other than Him. Traits seen today include viewing Mary as the mediator between man and God, the veneration of statues and images, grace being administered through humanly proscribed sacraments, church tradition held as equivalent in authority to the Bible, and the doctrine of confessing to priests as a means of maintaining one's salvation. *The prime example of this is the Roman Catholic church.*

## Sardis *Revelation 3:1-6*

- **PRAISE:** I know your deeds - your name carries much recognition among men ...
- **CONDEMNATION:** But now you are dead.
- **ADVICE TO LEADERS:** Remember your beginnings, return to them and repent. You are not paying attention to my Word and you need to wake up!
- **CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS:** He that over cometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.
- **APPLICATION:** This is referring specifically to name brand denominations with long, well known histories that have fallen from truth and are seeking ecumenical unity without regard to the gospel. The suggestion the Lord is giving here is that these are the Reform churches - once very alive but now dead in their doctrines.

## Philadelphia *Revelation 3:7-13*

- **PRAISE:** You may not be the biggest group, but I know your works and your teachings. Even without strength or power, you have kept My Word and not compromised My name.
- **CONDEMNATION:** Nothing !!
- **ADVICE TO LEADERS:** I am coming quickly. Hold onto what you have.
- **CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS:** Him that over cometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, [which is] new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and [I will write upon him] my new name.
- **APPLICATION:** This is written to those who are on fire for the Lord's return that have kept the winds of false doctrines out of their midst and maintained solid teachings. While everyone wants to think that they are in the church of Philadelphia - it is important to note, that there are true believers in each of the seven churches. The Lord is merely commending the leadership of Philadelphia for their adherence to sound doctrine. Ironically, the letter to the church of Philadelphia is used by many churches to justify their exclusivity (no salvation outside of their organization) under what they perceive to be the "end times remnant church clause". For this reason, these churches are in reality the churches of Ephesus.

## Laodiceans *Revelation 3:14-22*

- **PRAISE:** Absolutely Nothing !!
- **CONDEMNATION:** You are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other but because you have no redeeming qualities whatsoever, I will spit you out of my mouth into the tribulation. You say that you are wealthy and in need of nothing, but what you don't realize is that you are truly wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.
- **ADVICE TO LEADERS:** You need to start concerning yourself with eternal riches and not earthly ones, humble yourself about your sins and open your eyes to My truth before its too late.
- **CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS:** To him that over cometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne
- **APPLICATION:** Unlike the other churches that have let doctrinal interpretations cloud the message of salvation, this group is neither hot nor cold to it - they simply avoid it all together. They teach of wealth and healing but not of salvation and repentance. Rather than instruct people on how to humble themselves to the Lord's will, they teach that He is to conform to our will.

Jesus said in John 18:36 that His kingdom is not of this world. In Matthew 6:19-20, He explains that we are to store up our riches in heaven and not on earth. All of this is seemingly lost on the church of Laodicea, whose complete focus is on the here and now. Some flaunt their opulent lifestyles as proof of the Lord's earthly blessings. They teach that the first step to health and wealth is to give "seed donations" to their ministries and then have the faith that the Lord will bless this gift and multiply it in return. This becomes a vicious cycle when those who are not healed or showered with wealth are told that it is because they lack the faith to give enough to these ministries, thus soliciting even more donations - all the while, using the Lord's name to increase their personal wealth.

## Summary

Doctrines are nothing but man's interpretation of God's Word. They in themselves do not save, but they can and do cloud the issue of salvation more times than not. The Lord cautions over and over in scripture about false teachers in the end days, leading His flock astray. Sadly, His message is getting lost in a sea of pick-and-choose scriptural teachings and rituals.

Now is the time for self-examination --- are you leading someone away from the message of salvation with extraneous teachings rather than to it with the core of the gospel?