

JESUS CHRIST EXAMINES THREE MORE CHURCHES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First, let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter concludes Christ's examination of the seven churches in Asia Minor with a report on the spiritual condition of the last three churches. The church in Sardis had a reputation of being alive, but she was dead spiritually. She represents churches that are active with programs in community affairs, but the light of the Gospel barely shines from her. The church in Philadelphia was commended for her faithful testimony of Jesus Christ. She represents the churches that are telling the good news about salvation in Jesus Christ. Laodicea was condemned for her confidence in the things of the world to satisfy her spiritual needs. She represents the churches that depend on wealth, health and physical goods for security. Christ's report is a clear signal on how He will judge all churches and the members in these churches.

AIM OF THE LESSON:

Learn what Christ expects from and promises to your church by His examination of these seven churches.

He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev 3:22).

OUTLINE OF THE LESSON (use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you):

I. The Christ of Glory: Faithful Sovereign (1:1-20)

Christ addressed each church with a statement about Himself that was taken from chapter one. Each statement that He used fit the condition of that particular church. From these statements a one-word title was given to Christ to summarize His relationship to each church. The first four titles below were stated in the previous lesson; the last three titles are new.

- A. Inspector (1:16, 20; cf. 2:1).** He walks among the churches to examine their activities.
- B. Victor (1:17,18; cf. 2:8).** He is victorious over death and is now alive.
- C. Warrior (1:16; cf. 2:12).** He has the mighty sword of words from His mouth to fight against sin.
- D. Judge (1:14,15; cf. 2:18).** His eyes of fire enable Him to know all things; His feet carry out the judgment.
- E. Leader (1:4, 16; cf. 3:1).** He has the fullness of the Spirit and has the stars (pastors) in His right hand.
- F. Gatekeeper (1:13,14,18; cf 3:7).** He has the girdle of truth; the white hair of holiness; the keys of authority.
- G. Witness (1:5; cf. 3:14).** He is the faithful and true witness of His Father and of the revelation He gave to Him..

APPLICATION: Christ wants you to know and honor Him in all seven of His ministries in the churches. You will be blessed, if you honor Him; but you will be judged, if you dishonor Him. Pay close attention to what He is doing in your church. Learn from His words and actions in His examination of the seven churches of Asia Minor.

II. The Church at Sardis: Faulty Reputation (3:1-6)

Christ declared to the church at Sardis that He had "the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars" (3:1). The reason why He identified Himself to them in this way is not as clear as it is in the first four churches. The "seven Spirits of God" is a reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enable Christ to be a perfect **LEADER**. From Zech 4:1-10 we learn that the Spirit gives Christ the power and knowledge to fulfill His work successfully. Being a perfect Leader, He is able to spot a serious flaw in this church's character and see that their works were not perfect before God (3:2). They had a name that they were a living and thriving church. They looked alive to the human eye, but they were dead to the divine eye. They needed to wake up, repent and revive the little spiritual life that still remained in the church.

The "seven stars" is another reference to the seven pastors of the seven churches in Asia Minor. It seems Christ was reminding the pastor of this church that he was personally responsible to Him as his Leader and he needed to follow Him more carefully. He had been faulty in his duties. He had allowed the church at Sardis to fall into spiritual decline and it was about to die. Christ contrasts this pastor's neglect and carelessness with a few in Sardis that did please Him by not defiling their garments. It was these faithful ones that would walk with Him in white. He would confess their names before His Father and before the angels. He would not blot their names out of the book of life (see Study Notes). Christ sets them up as a pattern for the pastor and this church to follow.

APPLICATION: Do you follow Christ by obeying Him as your perfect Leader? Do you seek to please Him with your works produced by the power of the Spirit rather than works produced by the energy of your flesh (Tit 3:8)? We must learn to

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overcome our bent to sin by the power that Christ gives to us in the Spirit. We must keep in mind that we are children of God and someday we will walk with Him in garments of white.

III. The Church at Philadelphia: Faithful Testimony (3:7-13)

Christ revealed Himself to the Philadelphian church as the one who is holy and true, who has the key of David; whatever He opens, no one shuts, and whatever He shuts, no one opens (3:7). It is the longest of all the introductions that Christ used with any of the seven churches. When Christ examined this church, He had nothing but words of praise for it. This was only the second church that was fully approved by Christ; the other church was in Smyrna.

Since Christ has the key of David to open and shut doors and no one could stop Him, He is the divine **GATEKEEPER**. He promised to open a door of service for the church at Philadelphia, which no one could shut. Even though her strength was very little, Christ commended her because she had kept His word and had not denied His name (3:8). For keeping His word, He would keep them from the hour of trial (the Tribulation), which would try all those that dwell on the earth (the unbelievers). The believers will be taken to Heaven in the Rapture before the Tribulation where they will be welcomed into the presence of God (see Study Notes for more information on this verse).

Every overcomer would be made a pillar in the temple of God. As the pillar is closely and permanently connected to the temple, so the true believer is intimately and eternally bonded to God. In addition to this promise, Christ will write three names on the overcomer. He will write the name of God on the overcomer to show that the believer belongs to God. He will write the name of the New Jerusalem on the believer to show that he or she is a permanent citizen of this city. He will write His new name on everyone that has received Him to indicate that a child of God will have a new and affectionate relationship with Him when they see each other (1 Jn 3:2).

APPLICATION: If you have received Jesus as your Savior, God has accepted you because He sees Jesus Christ, who is holy and true, living in you. Now let Him produce holiness and truthfulness in your daily life, so He can open a door of service for you that no one can shut. For this to happen, you must give your life fully to Him, so He can use you. When it is time for the Rapture, Christ will open the door to Heaven for you and all believers in the Church age will be with Him in Heaven before the Tribulation. Have you repented of your sins and received Jesus as your Savior so you can serve Him and be ready for the Rapture? If not, do it now and you will receive many blessings that will be yours to enjoy forever.

IV. The Church at Laodicea: Futile Confidence (3:14-22)

Christ presented Himself to the church at Laodicea as the faithful and true **WITNESS** (1:5), who was the Creator of all things in the beginning (3:14; cf Jn 1:1-2). The church at Laodicea was a disgrace to God and Jesus Christ; she was not a faithful and true witness for God. Her members were in direct contrast to the character of her Creator. She felt self-sufficient and said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (3:17). Instead, she was blind to her spiritual poverty and nakedness that only Christ, the Creator, could supply. Even though her members had physical wealth, they needed spiritual gold, tried in the fire that only God could supply. She had the beautiful garments of this world, but she needed the white garments of salvation to be admitted into Heaven. She had eyes for the things of her little kingdom, but she was blind to the great Kingdom of God. The church once was filled with believers that Paul greeted (Col 4:13, 15, 16), but that generation had passed and the new generation that was in the church at that time did not know Christ as their Savior. They had a form of godliness, but denied the power of it (2 Tim 3:5). Christ still loved them, but could not help them until they repented of their sin and received Him as their Savior. Christ was knocking at the door of each member's heart, seeking entrance into their lives but they needed to open the door to Him. He was their Creator, but He also wanted to be **their** Savior. He was the only one who could make them spiritually wealthy, healthy and clothed in Christ's righteousness. They needed these things to be allowed into Heaven.

APPLICATION: Are you rich or poor in spiritual things? If you know Christ as your Savior, you are rich. You are rich because you are a child of God and you are a joint heir with the future King of the whole world (Rom 8:16-17). He has promised everyone that has received Him the privilege of reigning with Him (3:21). If you not know Christ personally, accept His invitation by opening the door of your heart to Him (3:20). He will come into your life and He will give you spiritual riches that will satisfy you for eternity.

LISTEN TO THE LORD AND LET HIM CHANGE YOUR LIFE.