

Fire Eyes

Revelation 2 and 3

It is probable, since the Lord directed John to send this book to the seven churches which we'll study, that there was a historical application for each. However, since Christ's warning in the last chapter of the Revelation specifically refers to "the words of the prophecy of this book" we will treat it all as prophecy and as a Revelation.

The words spoken to these churches, handled in that manner, speak to all believers and foretell of seven church eras which comprise the church age or age of grace.

In brief, Ephesus speaks of the first church and is estimated by many scholars to run from the church's inception until about 100 AD. Smyrna is known as the persecuted church period and runs approximately from 100 to 312 AD. Pergamos is the compromising church era and runs from about 312 to about 600 AD. Thyatira is the corrupted church era and runs in strength from about 600 to 1517 but also continues until today. Sardis is the reformed but dead church era which runs in strength from about 1517 until 1750 but continues on in deadness until today. Philadelphia is the feeble but faithful church era that started around 1750 and runs until today. Laodicea is the rich apostate church era whose existence is

contemporary with the last generation of believers. These dates are approximate, but a thorough study of church history shows that indeed the characteristics spoken by the 'One with the flaming eyes' which follow are a snug 'fit'.

We will focus, however, upon what we can glean from the string of elements which when placed in sequence will help us understand the church age as a whole.

Each section contains seven elements:

- An address
- An introduction
- An observation
- A verdict
- A command
- An exhortation
- A promise

Therefore, we will look first at all the addresses, then all the introductions and so forth. Let's begin.

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,
And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,
And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write,
And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,
And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,
And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,
And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

The names of each of these churches have meanings pertinent to the church age but notice first

that all of them are addressed to congregations IN or OF a city except the last one which is addressed to a church of a people group. We'll see how this is significant in a moment.

"Ephesus" means "permitted". It's application to the church age is quite fundamental. You see, the word, by definition, implies a choice. The church exists by God's permission; it exists because of His grace. It is not the 'right' of His creation to have access or a relationship with its Creator. God's hand was never forced to do what He did for us in sending His beloved Son to die for the sins we committed. In addition, entry into the church has always been something God permitted or allowed but never forced on anyone. Unlike the spread of Islam, faith in the true God is always voluntary and a matter of individually accepting God's grace.

"Smyrna" means "myrrh" which is an incense that releases its sweet smell when it is crushed. Like it or not, trials and persecution are realities in this world for every sincere believer. The Bible says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Tim 3:12) But they produce that which is beautiful to God in our hearts. Godliness is not achieved by how well off you can be in this life but how well you come through the 'crushings' God permits to come into your life. Do they produce the sweetness of continued trusting and faith or the

bitterness of offense and wounded pride?

"Pergamos" means "height or elevation". It speaks to the church of where we are headed, where our true home is – heaven. Paul wrote, *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (miserable)*. The return of Christ to take us there is called in the Bible the blessed hope. When we experience the hard things that God allows in this life, it is not this life that is the hope which sustains us but rather the hope of heaven where all things will be right.

"Thyatira" means "odor of affliction". To the world's senses, this odor is either sweet or sour. Paul wrote, *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.* (2 Cor 2:14-16) In "Smyrna", we have the sweet odor that God perceives in our affliction.

"Thyatira" is the world's response.

"Sardis" means "red ones". Red in the Bible speaks of sin and blood. This applies to the church in two ways. We are the "red ones" for we are full of sin. God didn't permit us into His kingdom, nor does He give us a hope in heaven because we're perfect. The reality is that we are as "red" with sin as anyone and in need of

His “red” – His atoning blood, covering our “red”. We, as the church, are the “red ones” because we are sinners and because we are forgiven. The Lord says to us, *Come now, and let us reason together,*” says the LORD, *though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* (Isa 1:18)

In addition, Paul wrote, *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.* (Rom 5:8,9)

“Philadelphia” means “brotherly love”. Most people will immediately recognize the application of this name to the church. But, most people will also confess that is periodically one of the greatest failures of the church. This isn’t agape love which is godly love that compels us to do the right thing and love unconditionally; to love God and our brethren divinely. This is the relational phileo love.

Church is not just about being doctrinally right. It is rooted, as much as in anything, in this kind of love. Paul wrote to the church, *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another,* (Rom 12:10) and, *But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;* (1 Thes 4:9) and

from Hebrews we read, *Let brotherly love continue.* (Heb 13:1) That’s because love undergirds all of our faith. Agape love is the highest form of love, but like Peter on the shores of Galilee after Christ’s resurrection, it may be a ‘stretch’ for us at times. We are called to love – first, to agape, but also to phileo.

Lastly, we have the address to “the church of the Laodiceans”. Notice it is to the church of the people rather than the church in the city of Laodicea. The city’s name can be translated as “execution of judgment or punishment of the people”. When the church becomes the property of the people rather than God, it is set up for judgment. In fact, this church is the one that shuts Jesus outside its doors. Man is its center regardless of the Christian-like words and routines it displays. The members of this congregation, along with two others are in danger of experiencing the tribulation.

Next, we’ll consider the introductions and how they pertain to the whole church. Introductions are meant to describe some attribute(s) of the speaker which signify a message that pertains to His relationship with the hearer. To Ephesus: *‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:* Some churches can get pretty heady about their importance in God’s kingdom. It can happen to the mini-church as

much as to the mega. It happens to individuals as well, especially those whose idea of ministerial success hinges upon their own notoriety or ‘resources’. In this intro, Jesus makes it clear that He’s in control of the “seven stars” and walks in the midst of the “seven golden lampstands” – all seven of them, that is the complete church. His kingdom is a big one. It involves more people and ministers and ministries than you can imagine. So, fundamentally, this group is reminded that they are part of a much greater whole and it’s intended to be a humble reminiscence.

To Smyrna: *‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:* This intro focuses on death and life. Jesus was the First to die in that He is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the earth. He was also the Last member of God’s kingdom to die in sin and the Firstborn from the grave. He was dead, but death could not hold Him. For the church, no matter how hard life or death may be, we can rest in the assurance that Christ has been there before us. And because of His victory over the grave, we who believe shall never see death. If you are saved, when you breathe your last in this life, you’ll ‘breathe’ your first in eternity.

To Pergamos: *‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:* Compromise is always birthed in and nurtured by hypocrisy. The compromiser

always has his/her rationale that is fundamentally dishonest, sometimes because he/she doesn’t want to face the truth. God’s Word is unwelcome but desperately needed by the compromiser because it pierces deeply into the heart. (Heb 12:1) It separates the emotional from the spiritual, the joints from the marrow, the thoughts from the thinking process itself. Nothing is too intimate, too closely associated, that it cannot discern the difference. The church has often made idolatry and narcissism intimates with doctrinal truth and selfless ministry. Only God’s Word can sort it out and do the surgery necessary to save the ‘patient’.

To Thyatira: *‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:* False religion has exalted the so-called Mother of God. It’s hideous intent is to set the Son of God on the sidelines when in fact, He is everything to the born again believer. He is the center, the Savior, the King of kings, the Lamb of God – you are running squarely into His wrath and judgment when you exalt any person or angel as holy. “Holy, holy, holy” pertains to God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit and none other. The church has played with this heresy for much of its existence and those flaming eyes see right through it. Feet of brass speak of trampling judgment.

To Sardis: *‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of*

God and the seven stars: Seven as the number of completion is important in this introduction as well, however notice that here it is applied to the Spirits of God rather than the golden candlesticks. The church who leaves out the breath of God's Spirit, though they properly exalt Jesus and proclaim the gospel is dead. The oldest book in the Bible declares, *The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.* (Job 33:4) Jesus told His disciples, *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.* (John 6:63) And Paul wrote, *For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.* (Gal 6:8)

So many hucksters have misrepresented the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit, you can understand why some are hesitant to know Him more. His every intention though is to point you to Christ. He is absolutely selfless in that regard. He never does anything contrary to the Word of God and is absolutely disinterested in giving you toys to play with whether it's 'tingles up the spine' or treasures on earth. But, He is more than willing to give you tools for the purpose of glorifying Christ. The deceived church simply plays games with the things of the spirit. The dead church only gives Him lip service.

To Philadelphia: *'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one*

shuts, and shuts and no one opens': When the Lord has to introduce Himself as holy and true, the church should be concerned. Some churches have gotten so familiar with the Lord that they lose the appreciation of His holiness and truth. Exclusively focusing upon His love and tenderness can lead to a less exalted notion of Who He is and even a fantasy version. He wants His church to keep all His attributes in mind. That makes for a healthy perspective.

The key of David is the right to rule over God's people. It is taken from Isaiah 22:22. As such, it is representative of the kingdom of heaven. Christ says in effect, "When I open the door to heaven, no one shuts it, and when I shut it, no one opens." And since Jesus told us in John 10 that He is the Door, He not only is the way of entry but also the determiner of who gains entry. In the age of grace, the door is open to all who will choose to believe in His sacrifice, death and resurrection – and what they mean. But the day is coming, as will be described in this book, when He will close the door to heaven just as He closed the door on Noah's ark before the flood.

To the Laodecians: *'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:* "Amen" is "firm or trustworthy", "Faithful" is "full of trust" or "fully persuaded". "True" is "the real deal", "the authentic". So, in essence, Jesus says that He is firm and

trustworthy. In addition, His witness is one that shows He is full of trust, fully persuaded of the real and authentic nature of the One to Whom He bears witness.

"Beginning of the creation of God" is a very poor translation and has led to some people thinking Jesus was the first created being. Jesus was not created. He is the Creator. He is One with Father God and God the Spirit. "Beginning" here is the Greek word transliterated "arche" and means "the person or thing that commences" or "that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause". Jesus is saying here the same thing the Holy Spirit told us in John's gospel - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.* (John 1:1-3)

This intro clearly tells us that He knows He's addressing a group that doesn't see Him as these things. This is a church that has lost its faith in this Jesus and has replaced it with what feels good emotionally (which is anything but firm), any type of 'christ' that they perceive as being in vogue or contemporary with their needs, and perhaps in harmony with the fantasies of false science to explain our origin.

Next, we'll consider the Lord's observation of each church. This

is where those 'fire eyes' come into play. Nothing is hidden from Him.

To Ephesus: *I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.* This all looks good initially – patient, tenacious labor mentioned 'on both sides' of examining and exposing false ministers. However, the emphasis in this observation on their labors (the fact that it is repeated) is an indication that they are in excess, perhaps to the detriment of other important things. When the church is out of balance, something has to give; something is left out or sidelined.

To Smyrna: *I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.* To all seven churches the Lord's observation begins with the fact that He knows their accomplishments – what they are engaged in doing. Smyrna's activities led to three things: the pressure of affliction, material poverty and denegation from the false religious elite. Nothing changes. Even today, if a church was suffering afflictions and poverty, the vast majority of the contemporary church would look down their noses at them. The prevailing opinion would be that,

'they must be doing something very wrong. Obviously, God's not with them.' But Jesus says they are rich and that the ones dissing them are Satan's. No church should believe the name calling and lies of the 'health and wealth' elitists.

To Pergamos: *I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.* Satan does have a throne, a literal base of operations so to speak, and for a time, it was indeed in Pergamos. We'll deal more with that in chapter seventeen. Again, He repeats something in His observation – the residence of Satan. In between that, He commends them for holding on to their faith even in the face of martyrdom.

The fact that Satan is nearby and that he is not succeeding in undermining their faith by persecution begs the question, "What will he try next?" He cannot defeat the faith of the church from the outside. So what do you think he'll try as recourse? He'll join it.

To Thyatira: *I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.* Jesus notes that this church is just full of activity – their latter works are even more than the first. Their activities seem to be characterized by love, service, faith and patience – good things, don't you think?

But the impression you get is that they must consider their works as the key to pleasing the Lord. There's no mention of God's Word or of worship or of enduring trials, but more and more works. It's not that the nature of what they are doing is wrong but that the emphasis upon works and service is creating a dangerous void – the truth.

To Sardis: *I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.* Ka-boom! This observation is thunderous. There's no sidestepping it. Jesus doesn't say this church is in danger of dying or that they are in critical care. They are DOA! This, in spite of their reputation, their name, which says they are or were at one point, alive. He also says that their activities are in fact all associated with their reputation – it seems to imply the politics of PR – possibly hospitals and universities that bear their name. But in reality, there's no life left inside. The shell is hollow. The life of Christ is absent from this 'in name only' congregation. This mindset of being focused upon a name -- that is, a reputation -- is of course not simply that of the whole congregation but of the individuals within it as well. It is worldly and rooted in pride.

To Philadelphia: *I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.* As with the other churches, Christ knows their activities and

accomplishments – characterized by "little strength", keeping His Word and not denying His name or nature (that is, Who He is). As a consequence, the "open door" is set before them. Some say this is an opening to missionary endeavors. That's possible and historically, it can play well. But it is not an interpretation derived from scripture. It is a retrospective, extra-biblical perspective. "Open door" and the "keys of David" are associated with the kingdom of heaven in the Bible, not missions.

For that reason, this group is more likely to enter that door in a unique way. Of course, this is also a prophetic characterization for all believers, in that the door to heaven is open to all who place their faith in Jesus.

Now, little strength means just that. This "strength", however, is that which is inherent to the individual. When you realize that you don't have much strength, you look more and more to God for your sufficiency. When you do that, you cannot help but hold dear His Word and the promises therein. The fruit of that is a closer, truer perspective of the nature (name) of our God and Savior. When others try to tell you He's something that He's not, you know it to be false, you cannot deny His name.

To the people of Laodicea: *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.* These people do not hunger or thirst. They are room temperature and

comfortable. If they were cold, God would send a fire; if they were hot, God would use that fire. But as a result they are 'sensory deprived'. They are loved by God but absolutely useless to Him. Prophetically, this is the last days church, but this observation is valid for any congregation or individual believer who has become "at ease in Zion" – so 'comfortable' that the motivation which springs from need is gone. In this desperately wicked world, that state is like a 'fantasy island'. It is a blind lethargy that only a proverbial 'slap on the cheek' can stir. But God is faithful – that 'slap' will come.