Seven Churches—Church Wars I

Fred Coulter—January 8, 2011

I don't know if you've been watching the news or reading the newspaper, but there are a lot of things going on. In the world we're marching down toward the time when the crisis is going to come financially. But let's understand this: what happens in the world and what happens with the people of God is very similar. There's a lot going on politically and in the nations. There's an awful lot going on in what we would call the 'Christian world.' Not only in what we call the Churches of God, but also in every aspect of it.

We've been going back and forth on the cover for the book, Lord, What Should I Do? and we just about have it ready. That book will go right along with Church at Home. So what we're going to do is advertise, Lord, What Should I Do?, because with Church at Home we get people saying, 'Boy, I can understand the Bible!' We get people listening who would not listen before. So we're happy that that is so. I had one man call me and said, 'I've been checking you out for three years.' I said, 'Well, I hope we passed.' And he said, 'You are not a cult.' What is God doing to get everyone's attention—who considers him or herself a Christian-whether they're Sunday-keeping, Sabbath-keeping, Holy Day-keeping? And why is there such turmoil in the Church? And what is going to be the bottom line of it all?

Well, let's come here to 2-Timothy 2:15 and let's see a command here that we all need to follow. This is for everybody. Many times in the Churches of God and those who are Sabbath-keepers, you have those who are in the inside—those who attend the assemblies for those who keep the Sabbath; those who are on the outside—that is for those who are in the world. And then, in the world there's another category of people—Sunday-keepers. Is God aware of all of that? Of course, He is! He's aware of every one of us. He's made us unique, He knows the number of hairs we have on our head and He can know every one of our thoughts and He is a heart knowing God.

Now, before there are crises to take place, God always gives warning. So today we're going to look at some of these. Here's what we need to do with the Word of God, 2-Timonthy 2:15: "Diligently study to show yourself approved unto God..." Not only ministers and elders and teachers, but everyone who has the Word of God today, because never before in the history of the world have we had it so convenient with it. Here we have a lady who is using her laptop. That's terrific. She can do a lot with her

laptop. I suppose one of these days, we'll have a whole Sabbath service with everybody with their laptops out here. But just think of the things that you can do with the computers today, like Albert has done. He's going to show us tomorrow in our class, he's going to show us how you can use a computer to really study the Bible. And also, you have how many translations on it, 15? *More!* So we have to rightly divide the Word of God.

Come to Proverbs 30. So let's apply this today to everyone; this is quite a Proverb here, Proverbs 30:4: "Who has gone up to heaven and has come down? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in His garments? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?.... [Isn't that interesting? A little prophecy involved here!] ... Every Word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (vs 4-5). This is why, when you have troubles and difficulties and you study the Bible and you pray, and with God's Spirit He's able to comfort you and help you and help you overcome the traumas and difficulties that you may be experiencing.

Verse 6—very important: "Do not add to His words, lest He correct you and you be found a liar" Now that's quite a message—isn't it? There are a lot out in the Protestant world and the Catholic world that need to read this, because they add to and they take away from. And what has happened to Christianity? They've turned it into a lie! But that doesn't mean that God endorses it. God won't stop sin! If people want to sin, they go sin. God will preserve His Word, but if someone wants to add to it or take away from it, they're going to suffer the consequences of it. That's why there's so much confusion in the world concerning Christianity today. That's why the book, Lord, What Should I Do?

Then it gets down to a personal thing and I think this is interesting, v 7: "I have asked two things from You; do not deny them before I die: Remove far from me vanity and a lying word; give me neither poverty or riches; feed me my portion of bread, lest I be full and deny You, and say, 'Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor and steal, and violate the name of my God'" (vs 7-9). Isn't that something?

What we're going to do—come back here to 2-Timothy 2—what we're going to do today is we are going to do a study through the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Let's do a little

background first. This is some of the background, because it doesn't necessarily apply to those who are under an umbrella of the Church of God, or Sabbath-keepers, but it applies to everyone in the world as well.

So, with this epistle to Timothy, this is what God has given to the ministers and how they need to guide their lives in the Word of God. Remember what Jesus told Peter. Jesus asked him, 'Do you love Me?' And he said, 'Yes, Lord, I love you.' He said, 'Feed My sheep.' He asked him again, 'Peter, do you love Me?' He said, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love You.' He said, 'Feed My lambs.' Then He said the third time, 'Peter, do you love Me?' And he got exasperated, and says, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love You.' He says, 'Shepherd My sheep.' Peter did learn that lesson. But that's one of the big problems.

Here are some of the words necessary on how to preach and teach and so forth. 2-Timothy 2:16: "But avoid profane and vain babblings because they will only give rise to more ungodliness... [What he's saying here is this: Everything has to be grounded in the Word of God-rightly divided, rightly interpreted—so you understand what God is telling us.] ... And their words will eat away at the body like gangrene; of whom are Hymeneus and Philetus" (vs 16-17). Well, does that not describe the current condition of many of the Churches of God, churches in the world? And that also describes what's going on with other Sabbath-keeping groups, like Church of God Seventh Day and Seventh Day Adventists. So we're going to look at the whole situation as to how it applies.

Verse 19: "Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands firm, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His'... [We all have the Holy Spirit of God and God knows you. Now we have to turn the question around the other way and ask it this way: Since God knows you, do you really know God? We'll just let that question hang there for a while.] (Here's what needs to be done): ...and, 'Let everyone who calls upon the name of Christ depart from unrighteousness.'" This is the message that God has for His people today.

How many have gone through church wars? You need some salve for your wounds! Now there's one minister, elder, who's gone through five church wars. And I hope from it that he learns something, but too many of the ministers follow the payroll. Someone asked me, 'Well, what's happening in the churches today?' And I said, 'Whatever begins with politics, ends with politics.' God gives plenty of space for repentance. There are many kinds of politics:

- doctrinal politics
- monetary politics

- *friendship* politics
- *political* politics

—and so forth: the climbers and pullers. What do you do when you end up in the middle of a contention?

Remember what happened to Paul and Barnabas back in Acts 15. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with him, but Paul didn't. They had a contention that was so bad that Barnabas took John Mark and went his way and Paul took Silas and went his way and both prospered. Sometimes there are contentions that arise, not because it's sin, but because God wants to do something. So in those kinds of things, you need to settle it the best you can and don't get involved in the middle of a church war. Because like it says in the Proverbs: 'If you intervene with a dog fight, you're going to get bit.'

So you need to look to God. Now there are other battles and fights that we need to confront which are realistic. So, let's see one of the most important that we need to understand. Now the book of Jude here tells us that some of the battles that we need to fight are coming from outside in, and yet, the problem is within. There are also problems within the church or within a congregation as a result of this. The New Testament tells us something very important, that the Church of God, the one that Christ founded of Whom is the Head—Christ is the Head of the church—always has those from without trying to get in and even those from within rising up. We will see both combinations here.

What is God doing with these things? Jude 3: "Beloved, when personally exerting all my diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, I was compelled to write to you, exhorting you to fervently fight for the faith, which once for all time has been delivered to the saints." That fight we're all engaged in. That's what we need to stand for.

- stand for Christ
- stand for the Truth
- stand for
 - ✓ the love of God
 - ✓ the faith of God
 - ✓ all the attributes of the Holy Spirit

That is what we are to fight for. Now these fights can be anywhere from mild to quite vicious, depending on who the foe is. But notice how it was even with the apostolic church.

Verse 4: "For certain men have stealthily crept in, those who long ago have been written about, condemning *them* to this judgment. *They are* ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, *turning it* into licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord

Jesus Christ." This is directed to anyone who would add to or take away from within the church and teaching, regardless of where they are. We've also had three Protestant ministers repent of Sundaykeeping and the holidays to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days. We need to understand that as well, because God sends the Spirit of Truth to those who are seeking the Truth to fulfill His promise that it will lead us into all Truth—right? So those who are in the Sunday-keeping churches, they need to understand what they have been doing, and they likewise need to repent to God. You can see some like Charles Stanley, he does a very good job preaching things about personal living; that is good, but we have to—if we name the name of Christ depart from all unrighteousness. God is going to deal with them. Whoever names the name of Christ, God is going to deal with them.

Let's look at some others. Paul said in Acts 20, let's turn here, and we've seen this, too. Have you been in a church organization where a minister seemed faithful for decades, then all of a sudden one day, like a switch turned on, and everything's different. So we have this. In some of the fights that we have to fight we're confronted with this difficulty, too. Everyone who is a minister, elder, teacher, whatever, you need to understand that you have to police yourself before God; this is important.

Acts 20:28, talking to all the elders here, and he says: "Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers... [God has chosen to work through men. Therefore the men have to be faithful. They have to stand for the Truth. They can't come in and years later change their mind to follow after power, prestige, or a paycheck, or whatever it may be.] ...to feed the Church of God..." And how do we feed the Church of God? With the pure Word of God!

Let's understand something about the people of God, wherever they are: They do not belong to any man. They do not belong to any organization. When we assemble together, we are a congregation, but every single one of us belongs to God! This becomes of paramount importance to realize. "...which He purchased with His own blood" (v 28). What do we have here? If we start these things, like we read there in Prov. 30, whom are we fighting against? Jesus Christ!

Let's see how Peter learned the lesson concerning feeding the flock. This is what he writes to the elders that were under his care, close to the end of his life. If you think you've been in the Church a long time and you've had a lot of disappointments, think about the apostles who originally thought that Jesus was going to return

within their lifetimes. Think about how the Church felt when they saw all the apostles die off one after one another, one after another. Remember, a lot of them thought, 'Well, Jesus will probably return before the Apostle John dies.' Remember that? (John 21). And what happened when John died? What we're experiencing and what the Christian world in general is experiencing has been experienced before. So we need to learn from those lessons.

But here concerning feeding the flock, 1-Peter 5:1: "The elders who are among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder..." He didn't say 'an overruling apostle.' Need to understand that. All those who have been associated with Worldwide Church of God, I need to ask all the ministers—wherever they are, whoever may hear this—why, if it's your desire, do you want to remodel it according it to WCG? Did you not get the message that God punished the church and took it all away, because of the problems that we're going to cover today? Why would you want to remodel what you're doing after that model, and then to have the audacity to say that only one man, the apostle on earth, was the only one who understood the Bible. That's not true! And for all of those who have been involved in that, that's why you've been through repeated church wars. God wants the model to be Christ, not a man. God wants all of us to learn how we need to serve the people of God in humility and in truth.

1-Peter 5:1: "The elders who are among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder, and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed: Feed the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight not by compulsion, but willingly; not in fondness of dishonest gain, but with an eager attitude... [this applies right today as we are studying]: ...not as exercising lordship over your possessions... Remember, Jesus purchased the Church with His blood.] ...but by being examples to the flock of God" (vs 1-3). In other words, you are to live the way God wants you to live as found in the Scriptures, and led by the Holy Spirit of God, not going after any of these things, no politicking, but in purity of heart, in love and in service.

Harry just passed on a little booklet to me showing manmade government, top down. God's government—like we say to every elder we ordain, this is a demotion, not a promotion. You're to serve the people of God. And you do that through teaching, through the way you live, with your personal life.

Peter learned that lesson, now here's the reason, v 4: "And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you shall receive an unfading, *eternal* crown of glory? (v 4). So we have those fights.

Let's see where the brethren also have to be on the ball. All the brethren need to know the Word of God as well. So let's come to 2-Corinthians 11 and let's see that many of the brethren also have their own faults mixed in with it.

Whenever you hear someone who's a minister of God speaking, what is it that you are to hear? You are to hear the words of God—right? What did Jesus say in John 10? 'My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me.' So, that's what should be taught. 'And a stranger they will not follow.' Now that's also part of the some of the church wars—correct? Let's also understand that the most important people that Satan wants to get at are not the ones he's already got cornered, but the ones who have the Spirit of God. This is why we need to have some diligence here.

Now think of this with the Apostle Paul, 2-Corinthians 11:1: "I would *that* you might bear with me in a little nonsense; but indeed, do bear with me. For I am jealous over you with *the* jealousy of God because I have espoused you to one husband, so that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ" (vs 1-2). And that means

- pure spiritually
- pure with the Word of God
- no spiritual fornication
- no adding to the words of God
- no taking away from the words of God
- no traditions of men

—all of that. Verse 3: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds might be corrupted from *the* simplicity that *is* in Christ.... [When we get to Rev. 2 we will see that, and we will see how that comes about.] ...For indeed, if someone comes preaching another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept, you put up with it as *something* good" (vs 3-4).

Just like on Mars Hill when Paul went up to Mars Hill and here were the stoics and epicureans and those all arguing about different philosophies, and so forth. They wanted to hear different things so that they could compare it. But what was happening here was the same thing that Paul ran into there, was the philosophies of men. So here comes someone in preaching and people say, 'Oh, that's interesting.'

We can go back and we can apply this to anything, but I'll apply it to what we understand. Remember the man who was the 'Greek philosopher' within the WCG? And remember when he came in and started preaching all the philosophies of men and mixing it in with the Truth? What

happened? Most people came away and said, 'I can't understand that.' Others came away and said, 'Hallelujah, this is great stuff!'

- What do we have?
- Doesn't that happen in every church?
- How do you think the Protestants got where they are?
- How do you think the Catholics got where they are?
- How do you think there are troubles within the Churches of God, Seventh Day Adventists, Church of God Seventh Day?

—all because of that. That is also another thing.

In reading any Scripture, you can have a right application of Scripture and you have a wrong application of Scripture. And where does a wrong application of Scripture start but where a minister is teaching, *presumes to take to himself* prerogatives that are not his. And *presumes to say* that he is something special from God when he is to be just a servant of God. That's happened over and over and over again down through the history of the Church.

Here we find what was happening in Galatia, and Galatians is one of the hardest books to understand because they don't understand Judaism. And that's why we have book, *Judaism: A Revelation of Moses or a Religion of Men?* This has caused great confusion because people want to do away with the law of God or add to it the traditions of men, whether they're Judaism or whether they're paganism. We have both branches of that—don't we? Out there? *Yes!*

So Paul said here, Galatians 1:6: "I am astonished that you are so quickly being turned away from Him..." How would people be turned away from Christ? By presenting something slightly contrary to the Scriptures! And always remember this: Satan comes as an angel of light and what does he bring with him? A package of benefits—right?

Look at it this way: We just went through the Christmas season—right? Here is a Christmas tree, pictures the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The draping going around it, that's the serpent; the star on top is Satan, and beneath it are all the presents. The presents are benefits from Satan. Now he calls what he traps people into *benefits*, instead of sin. For example, misreading Galatians, people say, 'Oh, the law's a curse; we don't have to keep it anymore. Oh, that's a benefit; I can do whatever I want.' Or like they translated the *NIV* in Mark 7, 'Jesus declared all meats clean', so 'therefore, I can eat anything. Isn't that wonderful?' Sin results in death, but Satan says it's a benefit.

So when Adam and Eve decided to choose for themselves what was good and evil and right and

wrong, Satan said, 'I'll give you a benefit.' And it cut them off from God. That's why today we need to go to God, let Him through Jesus Christ define for us what is right and wrong, good and evil, and so forth, rather than taking that prerogative to ourselves. Because just like Proverbs 30 said, 'if you add to it and you be found a liar'—isn't that what happened? Yes, indeed!

Verse 6 again: "I am astonished that you are so quickly being turned away from Him Who called you into *the* grace of Christ, to a different gospel, Which *in reality* is not another *gospel*; but there are some who are troubling you and are desiring to pervert the Gospel of Christ" (vs 6-7). And this has happened over and over again—hasn't it? *Yes!* That's why we need to stick with the Scriptures; we need to stick with the Truth.

Now notice, here's a warning. So everyone who teaches, everyone who's a minister, all those out there in Christianity of the world, if you're an evangelist, if you're a pastor, if you're a priest in the Catholic Church, yea, even if you are the pope, you better read this, v 8: "But if we, or even an angel from heaven should preach a gospel to you *that is* contrary to what we have preached, LET HIM BE ACCURSED!" The sentence is already out there for all of those who want to do that, but God has set before us the choices of good and evil, right and wrong. But today we have the whole Bible.

Verse 9: "As we have said before, I also now say again. If anyone is preaching a gospel contrary to what you have received, LET HIM BE ACCURSED!.... [Here's where we all have to make a stand. And here's where we need to examine the fruits of those who are doing what they're doing, even today right now while we're speaking]: ...Now then, am I striving to please men, or God?.... [You get a lot of back-patting if you please men. But what is going to be said to you when the time of the resurrection comes? 'I don't know you!'] ...Or am I motivated to please men? For if I am yet pleasing men, I would not be a servant of Christ.... [We'll talk about how you can please the brethren of God, and you can. We'll get to that in a little bit.] ...But I certify to you, brethren, that the gospel that was preached by me is not according to man" (vs 9-11). It came from Christ!

Let's come to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. This becomes a very important understanding of the people of God. Why are there seven churches? Why is this the only place in all of the New Testament that contains the prophetic history of the Church? And just as an aside, for all who are struggling with Roman Catholicism, why is Rome not mentioned? If it was the center of

Christianity, it should have been mentioned first—correct? So keep that in mind.

What we are going to see is this: There were seven churches to whom this letter was dictated by Christ to send to the seven churches in Asia, which existed back then. But also within this, is contained a prophetic history of the Church of God, the people of God, and all the difficulties that they would experience in the world, both from within and from without.

We'll also find this pattern in the book of Revelation, which is very interesting: There are lot of things that have seven to them—right? The first one we come across, seven churches. What do we have? We have the seven seals, out of which come the seven trumpet plagues, out of which come the seven last plagues—correct? Yes! Then there are the seven thunders that thundered and it was so awful that the angel told John, 'Don't write that down.' So I'll give you one clue. If anyone says, 'I know what the seven thunders are,' avoid them, because it wasn't written down. We will see the very first thing that begins to cause problems with the people of God.

(go to the next track)

Now let's begin right here in Revelation 2 and 3, and the first thing that I want to cover is this, this phrase, since it has to do with the Churches of God: Do they have God's Spirit with them and in them? Yes! Does God know us? Yes, indeed! Let's just do a little overarching survey of two things that Jesus says to five of the seven churches:

- 1. I know your works
- 2. repent

Revelation 2:

- v 2—to the Church at Ephesus: "I know your works..." God knows all the works that we do.
- v 9—to the Church at Smyrna: "I know your works..."
- v 13—to the Church at Pergamos: "I know your works..."
- v 19—to the Church at Thyatira: "I know your works... and your works; and the last *are* more than the first."

Revelation 3:

- v 1—to the Church at Sardis: "I know your works..."
- v 2—"...I have not found your works complete before God."

Revelation 2:26, this is very interesting: "And to the one who overcomes... [If you're overcoming, that means there are difficulties, there are problems, and

those difficulties and problems can be from without the Church, from within the Church, and from within your own self, and even among other brethren. So you have to overcome.] ...and keeps My works unto the end..." Very interesting statement—isn't it? Yes, indeed!

Revelation 3:

- v 8—to the Church at Philadelphia: "I know your works..."
- v 15—to the Laodiceans: "I know your works..."

So all seven of the churches have works, but notice something else because *conversion is a process*. So therefore, in the process of being perfected, we have to get rid of the things that are imperfect—correct? You would agree to that? *Yes!*

Now let's see what He says to the churches here. Come back to Revelation 2:5: "Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent..." There has to be repentance. Christ is the One Who is saying repent and He is the One Who will help you correct yourself. It's one thing to see a fault and you change. Well, then, that means you have repented. It's another thing for someone to see a fault that you have and come to you and say, 'Well, did you know this?' You say, 'Yeah, you're right.' You change. That's repentance. It's another thing for a minister or teacher to see a fault, and the biggest mistake that they make—which should never be done—is to correct from the pulpit when it only involves one or two people. Ministers are bound by Matt. 18 to go to the individual first—wouldn't you say? Yes, indeed! What God wants, He wants correction from within by your repentance and by your choice.

Now notice what He says here: v 16: "Repent!...." vs 21-22: "And I gave her [Jezebel.] time to repent of her fornication, but she did not repent. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their works." *So repentance is important*. That's what we need to understand.

Revelation 3:3 we find the same thing. He says: "Therefore, remember what you have received and heard, and hold on *to this*, and repent...." v 19: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent." Those follow all the way through.

The error that is made is when someone pits group against group and minister against minister, and justify it politically so they can do what they want to do. Like I said in the beginning: *that which begins in politics, ends in politics*. So, Christ is the

Head of the Church and we are to listen to Him, and we are to get all the correction that comes from Him.

Church at Ephesus

We will see the very first problem that comes along that opens the door for other things. Revelation 2:1: "To the angel of the Ephesian church, write: These things says He Who holds the seven stars in His right hand... [those are the seven angels] ...Who walks in *the* midst of the seven golden lampstands."

You have seen what is called the menorah and there are the seven lights before the Holy of Holies before you enter into it. A lot of people think these seven lamps are a fulfillment of the type of the menorah. But they are not! Those are the seven spirits of God as you read in Rev. 4 & 5. These are lampstands that are in a circle and He is in the midst of them.

Verse 2: "I know your works, and your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot bear those who are evil; and *that* you did test those who proclaim *themselves* to be apostles, but are not, and did find them liars." This is why we're to 'prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.' I would have to say this, that I think it's far better for whatever we do in the way of teaching to say, 'I'm an elder and a teacher,' rather than some other exalted title.

"And that you have borne much and have endured, and for My name's sake have labored and have not grown weary; nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (vs 3-4). Now what does that mean? A lot of people think, 'Well, that's the zeal that you started out with when you first came into the Church.' That could be part of it, but is there more to it than that? What is the first love, and can people in the Church get so busy doing church things that they leave their first love? Need to think of it that way.

Let's see what the first love is. because this is what Jesus said is the first love, Mark 12. Of course, there was a scribe who came to Him and he said, 'Master, which is the first commandment of all?' And the Greek there is 'protos'—meaning the first or the primary.

Mark 12:29: "Then Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is, "Hear, O Israel.... [Why don't you put your name there, because this is a personal message to you from Christ. And the Church is what? The Israel of God—right? Yes!] ...Our one God is the Lord, the Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment" (vs 29-30).

So the losing the first love is: not loving God this way. What is the goal? 'Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness'—correct? Yes! What is that to result in? Jesus said, 'Become perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.' And the first major thing to do, that which you always have to have, is this: To love God with all your heart and mind and soul and being! That's what it is. We know this, that if we do that and keep that as the foremost thing, this will help us to stay out of church wars, help us stay out of trouble, help us to understand to see when trouble is coming and avoid it. This will also do something else for us that we need to see always.

This we find in John 15. This will help us so we do not fall. Because remember He said to the Church at Ephesus, 'Remember from where you have fallen.' John 15:1. Jesus said: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman.... [We have the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ in us. That's the combination of the power of the Holy Spirit within us.] ...He takes away every branch in Me that does not bear fruit... [Just like Jesus said back there to every one of the seven churches, 'I know your works. I know what you're doing. I know your heart, I know your mind, I know your attitude. I know your thoughts.'] ...He takes away every branch in Me that does not bear fruit; but He cleanses each one that bears fruit, in order that it may bear more fruit" (vs 1-2).

That's the purpose of tests and trials. I like what William Tyndale said. He said, 'If everything just went so perfectly smooth'—after we understand about Christ and are converted—'we would of all people be most presumptuous.' So that's why, as Tyndale says, 'if He bids you to go on a journey on the sea, He will send a tempest to see whether you trust Him or believe Him or not.' So we're going to have tests. We're going to have trials, but look at all of those as an opportunity to prune away the things that interfere with our conversion process. Don't look at it and say, 'I haven't quite yet come to the point yet where I count it all joy for every trial that comes.' But we need to look at it this way: It is an opportunity to change and to grow and to overcome.

Verse 3: "You are already clean through the word that I have spoken to you.... [What is the washing of the water by the Word? That becomes important, too, because that is a continual cleansing. God cleanses with His Word and how does it work? God's Spirit in us revealing the sin within so we can repent!] ...Dwell in Me... [rather than fall away] ...and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, but only if it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you are dwelling in Me.... [Christ in us, we in Christ] ...I am the vine, and you

are the branches. The one who is dwelling in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; because apart from Me you can do nothing" (vs 3-5).

Isn't it interesting, you can cut a branch from a tree or you can cut some flowers and you can put it in a pot of water. It'll stay fresh for a while—but what happens? It begins to diminish—doesn't it? So, if you were separated from Christ, you don't lose everything all at once, but gradually, gradually, gradually, and then Satan will come along with new enlightenment. We've seen it over and over again. We have to dwell in Christ! That's what happened to the Church at Ephesus; they lost their first love, so they weren't dwelling fully in Christ. You might say that they substituted the works that we should be doing, that God wants us to do, for works of things to people which are not wrong to do, but when that becomes so overwhelming that you forget to do what God wants you to do, then you have busyness within the Church: this committee, that committee, this work, that work, the other work. Not that those are wrong, but those should never become primary.

Verse 6: "If anyone does not dwell in Me, he is cast out as a branch, and is dried up; and men gather them and cast them into a fire, and they are burned." This is part of the church wars. Christ is getting rid of that which does not produce fruit. Our part in some of that is this: If we know someone who is drifting that way, please go to them and encourage them to pray and to see what they're doing and how they can return to God. But nevertheless, God is the One Who is doing what is going on in all of Christianity out there in the Sunday world and in the Sabbath world and everyone who names the name of Christ—so that we can do what? *Be righteous!*

Now here's a promise, v 7: "If you dwell in Me... [we've covered a lot of the if statements] ...and My words dwell in you... [that also ties in with the washing of the water of the Word.] ...My words dwell in you... [What does that mean? That means written in your heart and written in your mind so that the words of Christ, with the Spirit of God in you, direct your paths, direct your thoughts. That's the process of conversion.] ...you shall ask whatever you desire, and it shall come to pass for you." If that is happening, you're not asking selfish things for yourself—are you? What is the first thing you ask for?

- Oh, God, help me to love you
- Oh, God, help me to be faithful to you
- Oh, God, give me understanding of your Word

All of those are spiritual things. It's not like, 'Oh, God, bless this winning lotto ticket.' Remember where we started in Prov. 30, 'Don't give me too

much lest I forget You and don't make too poor lest I steal and get caught.'

Through your spiritual life as you're growing and overcoming, you will see that God answers prayer over and over and over again. Sometimes you have to be praying continuously concerning it. Now let me just mention this concerning repetition. There are *needed* repetitions and there are *vain* repetitions.

- *vain* repetitions are just rote prayers
- *needed* repetitions are prayers that need to be prayed until you receive the answer

Those are not vain repetitions. You ask a blessing on your food. You think that's a vain repetition, you do it for every meal? Of course not, it's needed! You pray for help and strength and guidance everyday. That's not a vain repetition; that's needed! Knowing our human nature, we need that everyday—don't we? Yes, indeed!

Verse 8: "In this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be My disciples." What happens when you love God first? Here's how it comes back around to you and then to the brethren. The second commandment is 'love your neighbor as yourself,' and the third commandment is 'love each other as I have loved you'—right?

So, if you have the primary commandment and you don't let that slip like the Ephesians did, then it's going to come back where then there is love among the brethren. Instead of church wars, instead of church fighting, instead of the little huddles over in the corner and say, 'Well, where do you stand on this? and do you know who did this?...' Remember those things? Remember all the dark days and all the lies from the hierarchy, and then all the underground truth that was spreading the knowledge of what was going on. 'That was dirty gossip, you should never indulge in.' There was no other way to get the truth at the time—right? How did you feel? *Miserable! Yes!*

Notice what happens, v 9: "As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; live in My love." Remember Jesus said, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' Now if you get discouraged and you're having a trial and things are difficult for you, we'll change what Zig Ziglar said. How many have heard of Zig Ziglar? He says, 'Well, the way to success is get up every morning, look in the mirror and say how great you are.' Well, if you don't have any straps on your boots, it's not going to do too much good. You look in the mirror and remember God loves you! God loves you! The most important Being in the universe has

called you

- given you His Spirit
- He loves you
- He sent His Son, Christ, to die for you

Christ is the Head of the Church. He wants you to attain to the resurrection and be born into the Kingdom of God, the family of God and He loves you! So if you're having a bad day, remember that—He loves you! And remember this, with Christ in you, He is likewise going through the problems and difficulties with you. So keep that in mind.

"...live in My love. If you keep My commandments, you shall live in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and live in His love. These things I have spoken to you, in order that My joy may dwell in you, and *that* your joy may be full.... [that's from the inside out; not entertainment from the outside in] ...This is My commandment: that you **love one another, as I have loved you**" (vs 10-12). And He said that at least three times.

There is the blessing that comes. If you keep the first love of loving God with all your heart and mind and soul and being, then you will also love the brethren. And where there is love, then what do you have? You also have a desire to overcome! Isn't that correct? Yes! Where there is love, then you inspire people to change and you don't have to judge them and condemn them thinking that you are going to institute change because of what you say.

What happened when Galileo was dragged before the pope? The pope said, 'Say the earth is flat.' Okay, the earth is flat. As he is walking out the door, he said, 'Nevertheless, it's round.' A good example that correction from outside/in does not take; it has to come from God from the inside.

We have to test the apostles. Whatever work we do, God knows it. Revelation 2:5: "Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works... [Have you ever thought of that? Loving God is a work? What kind of work is it? A spiritual work, motivated from the Spirit! And that's between you and God.] ...for if you do not, I will come to you quickly; and I will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent."

Let's learn a lesson here. What happens when you have a church that has left its first love, that has quit doing what they should be doing, and all of a sudden they have problems and church wars within it? Who is behind it? *God is!*—right? He wants to wake them up so they return to Him—is that not correct? *Yes, indeed!* So in this church war, you don't choose sides. Remember: in every church war you never choose sides, you choose

• God the Father

- Jesus Christ
- the Word of God
- the Truth of God

That's what you always choose. Now sometimes that may leave you standing alone! But don't worry, there are others somewhere else standing alone.

So what I want to do with this in going through is say, okay, wherever the problem is in your life, in the life of those that you know, in the church that you may be attending, then handle it in a Christian and mature way. Don't get in the middle of the fight because it may not be your fight. It may be Christ's fight; let Him handle it, and we draw close to God spiritually so that we can have

- eyes to see
- wisdom to help
- understanding to keep out of trouble

Nevertheless, we stand for the Truth regardless of what happens.

Verse 6: "But this you have: that you hate the works of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.... [We'll talk about that when we come to Pergamos, a little bit more. But the Nicolaitanes is basically hierarchy from the top down. That's the main thing. The other one about Nicolaitanes is this: You're already so righteous that you cannot sin. That you are so converted that you can be in the midst of sin and never be tempted. However, the one that we've come across mostly is the hierarchy from the top down. We've all experienced that-right?] ...The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches..." (vs 6-7). So it's all the churches. Remember where we started: 'Let everyone who the name of Christ depart unrighteousness'—correct?

"...To the one who overcomes I will give *the* right to eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God" (v 7).

Let me just say this: Everyone wants to be a Philadelphian. Mostly those who profess themselves to be Philadelphian generally end up not being Philadelphian. I remember one time when I was doing my loan brokering, I was driving down the street in San Francisco and I saw this sign, Seventh Day Adventist, Philadelphia Church. I thought, 'Everyone wants to be a Philadelphian —why?' Because God found no fault with them!

Church of Smyrna

The Church at Smyrna and the Smyrneans, God didn't find fault with them, but I haven't seen very many church signs saying the Church of Smyrna, because they're all martyred, thrown in jail.

Verse 8: "And to the angel of the Church of the Smyrneans write: These things says the First and the Last, Who was dead but is alive, I know your works and tribulation and poverty... [at the end we're dealing with riches—right? Yes!] ...(but you are rich)... [Don't look at physical blessings as a sign that you are spiritually right with God. They're rich because they're spiritually right.] ...and the blasphemy of those who declare themselves to be Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.... [organized movement to come and take away the Truth of God] ...Do not fear any of the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison... [How many have been in prison because you keep the Sabbath? Not yet! The next time you have a problem and you think, 'Oh, I can hardly bear this. How can I get through the day?' Just remember, you weren't arrested and carried off to be killed.] ...that you may be tried... [our trial today is different] ...and you shall have tribulation ten days...." (vs 8-10).

Remember what Jesus said? He said, 'Have courage. In the world you'll have tribulation, but in Me you'll have peace'—Which means this: Regardless of the tribulation you are going through with Christ in you, you can have peace of mind and understanding knowing that this is part of something that God will work out for good. Now while you're going through it, it doesn't seem like it, but when you get to the other side, you'll understand.

So He says, v 10: "...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death" (vs 10-11).

Now we have a very interesting thing that takes place, and this is a different kind of church war than just men against men, church against church. This is Christ against His own church. Not many people think of it that way, but that's what Jesus says.

Church at Pergamos

Verse 12: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos, write: These things says He Who has the sharp two-edged sword." Which is what? *The Word of God!* Remember what it says there in Heb. 4? That 'nothing is hidden from Him, but all is naked and laid bare and that the Word of God is a sharp two-edged sword dividing asunder the soul and spirit and the joints and the marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart'—correct? *Yes!*

Verse 13: "I know your works and where you dwell, where the throne of Satan *is...* [They had a big temple there dedicated to Zeus. If you ever get a chance, do a little Google search online, look it up. That was a tremendous thing. But did you know that the king of Pergamos legally sold the whole system to the Roman Empire. The staircase is still there.] ...but you are holding fast My name... [here they were keeping the bare minimum] ...and did not deny My faith... [we'll see the period of time in which they didn't deny it] ...even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells" (v 13).

What happens when you are close to the world and you're not really close to God? You look at what the world is doing and how successful they are in doing it and you begin adopting their ways of doing things. That's what happened with the hierarchical government. You adopt the ways that the pagan religions run their religions. And it's always been with the pope at the top, regardless of what his name is called. And it comes down.

"But I have a few things against you because you have there those who hold the teaching of Balaam..." (v 14). Twisting the Word of God! You can't get them to sin directly, so you do it indirectly and what was his advice? Just set up shop over there with all these nice looking women and have a feast and invite them over. Now these people have been travelling in the wilderness, thirty-eight and a half years and they're about ready to go in the 'promised land.' They haven't had any bread, because they couldn't eat any bread. All they had was manna and they hadn't had very much meat, so if you have a big feast over here and some nice sounding music and good looking women and you invite over the princes, you know, the ones who are in charge. And they partake of this (Num. 25). 'It's okay to go out and do things on the Sabbath. It's okay to mix in with the world and their activities. It's okay if you participate in their religious activities.' That's the whole lesson of Balaam!

"...who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrifices to idols and to commit fornication" (v 14). That comes right down to the central basic thing that is in the Bible. What is the most central important thing that we do every year? The Passover! We've got a big thick book on it, The Christian Passover, over 500 pages. One man said, 'Well, why couldn't you do it in a simple pamphlet?' Because it ain't simple! What is the one central thing that renews the covenant with Christ? The Passover! What then would be the first doctrine and teaching to attack and destroy? The Passover! That's why that book is over 500 pages thick, because there are attacks from

Judaism, there are attacks from Catholicism, there are attacks from Protestantism. If Satan can get the people to not take the Passover, it takes them away from Christ!

So we have two things going here, v 15: "Moreover, you also have *those* who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.... [Here's a war you don't want to get in the middle of. This is where you step aside and stand alone with God.]: ...**Repent!** For if *you* do not *repent*, I will come to you quickly, and will make war against them with the sword of My mouth" (vs 15-16).

God is going to punish them with the judgments that He said would come upon those who would pervert the Word of God, those who would rule cruelly over the brethren in a dictatorial way. That's what Ezek. 34 is all about. They rule them with cruelty! People would come into the Church and be beaten down, abused verbally. People would ask, 'Well, where's the love of God?' Oh, you better have the fear. You better fear the hierarchy. No! You better love God. Jesus Christ does not like those tactics which take away the love of God and take people away from the renewing of the New Covenant with Him. That's the whole covenant of eternal life. This is a war, don't get in the middle of this, because Christ is the One Who is doing the fighting.

So not all church wars are what they seem to be. And after there is a church war and after there is a separation, stand back and look at the fruits and see what's going to happen, because unless a person takes drastic action to love God, keep His commandments and hold fast to the Truth. Your church war may be in vain and you may be yet headed for another downfall. It's all right here in Rev. 2 & 3. Isn't that amazing? We're going to see that some of the church battles are not just disagreements between men, but the hand of Christ is there to correct and to guide and to bring His church back to Him.

Scriptural References:

- 1) 2-Timothy 2:15
- 2) Proverbs 30:4-9
- 3) 2-Timothy 2:16-17, 19
- 4) Jude 3-4
- 5) Acts 20:28
- 6) 1-Peter 5:1-4
- 7) 2-Corinthians 11:1-4
- 8) Galatians 1:6-11
- 9) Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19
- 10) Revelation 3:1-2
- 11) Revelation 2:26
- 12) Revelation 3:8, 15
- 13) Revelation 2:5, 16, 21-22

- 14) Revelation 3:3, 19
- 15) Revelation 2:1-4
- 16) Mark 12:29-30
- 17) John 15:1-12
- 18) Revelation 2:5-16

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Acts 15
- John 21; 10
- Mark 7
- Matthew 18
- Revelation 4, 5
- Hebrews 4
- Numbers 25
- Ezekiel 34

Also referenced:

- Sermon Series: IF Statements of the Bible
- Books:
 - ✓ Lord, What Should I Do? (coming soon)
 - ✓ Judaism: A Revelation of Moses or Religion of Men? by Philip Neal
 - ✓ The Christian Passover by Fred Coulter