

## Paul's Epistles and the Seven Churches

Fred R. Coulter—June 11, 2011

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Sabbath services. This particular Sabbath is the Sabbath before Pentecost and I've already done a video for that ahead of time, but I thought we would record this because I'm going to adjust the sermon substantially from what I gave for Day 49, for the video.

Let's realize this: In Deuteronomy 16 God says there are seven weeks to the harvest. And that's 49 days, and it has to be complete weeks—day one through seven. Then after the harvest then, you have the Holy Day. But it's very interesting, because what did Jesus say on one of the Feast days in John 5 concerning a Holy Day? He says, 'I work and My Father works'—there's a spiritual work. So, on the Feast of Pentecost there is a spiritual work that God is doing and also there is a spiritual harvest that God does Himself. It is the workers of the eleventh hour. Just like there are seven weeks to the harvest, there are also seven churches in the book of Revelation.

Let's understand how the Bible is put together and this will help us in understanding what we're going to cover today. Those patterns of seven, you know the seven divisions of the Bible, and the Gospels and Acts being the middle portion of the Bible. And of course, that connects the Old Testament and the New Testament together with the unity of Scriptures.

Then after that, what do we have? *We have the seven General Epistles!* Why don't we have eight? Why don't we have ten? *We don't!* We see a series of sevens and we also see when we get to Revelation, many sevens that are involved. As a matter of fact, the whole book is based around seven. Then we come to the Epistles of Paul. And he wrote 14 epistles altogether. One of them was a general epistle, the book of Hebrews. Then to the churches he wrote two epistles to the Corinthians and two epistles to the Thessalonians, but he wrote to seven churches all together.

Now these seven churches that Paul wrote to, and the seven churches in Revelation have a connection with the beginning and with the ending, but we will see also that the solution to the problems of the churches in Rev. 2 and 3 are found back in the Epistles of Paul. So again we have a unity of Scripture.

What we're going to do today, is we are going to look at just an overview of Rev. 2 and 3, and then we are going to look at some of the Epistles of Paul and see how the solution to the problems that

were given—identified by Christ to the churches—are actually given in the Epistles of Paul.

These are direct letters from Christ to the churches—*direct letters*—because He tells them right here, Revelation 1:19: "Write the things that you saw, and the things that are, and the things that shall take place hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, is *this*: the seven stars are *the* angels of the seven churches; and the seven lampstands that you saw are *the* seven churches" (vs 19-20).

It's very interesting how these churches were selected. It also has to do with the structure of the Bible. We will notice that the seven churches are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. There's no letter to the churches in Antioch. There's no letter to the churches in Heliopolis. There's no letter to the churches of Rome. But these are all connected on a mail route; this shows a succession of the churches.

Also we can look at it here, because He says, v 19 "...the things that are... [Jesus is looking at the churches as they were then.] (But also He says): ...And the things that shall take place hereafter..." In the Bible we have prophecies of all of Israel—don't we?—and Judah, and many of the leading nations of the world. But what is the most important thing right now to God the Father and Jesus Christ? *His churches!* Do you think that God would not have something in prophecy concerning His churches? Or would He? *Yes!* They're contained right here in these seven churches.

Just like other prophecies that we find in the Bible, when we come to understand them even more, we find out that we have to go back to God's Word to put it together as the Bible says, 'a little here, a little there, and line upon line,' and so forth. What we are going to do is this. If you're taking notes, why don't you write down each one of the churches: Ephesus, and then leave some lines, and then write down Smyrna, leave some more lines; write down: Pergamos; then Thyatira Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

It's very interesting that the first church, Ephesus, we have an epistle to the Ephesians by Paul. And the last church, Laodicea, we have that epistle that was to be read, which was sent to the Colossians. Paul is tied in to the beginning and the ending of the seven churches; I think it's kind of interesting.

What we are going to do is we're going to examine the seven churches and then see the solution to them, and we can see part of the solutions in the Epistles of Paul. Let's save Ephesus till last.

**The Church at Smyrna**

- Revelation 2
- 1-Thessalonians
- 2-Thessalonians

This is a church that had no major outstanding sins. And it's very interesting what He says to them here. Revelation 2:9, He says: "I know your works and tribulation and poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who declare themselves to be Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.... [Then he tells them]: ...Do not fear any of the things that you are about to suffer... [what you're going to go through] ...Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death..." (vs 9-10). Then He gives the promise, 'You overcome, you'll not be hurt of the second death.' So here we have a church that is extremely persecuted.

We find a similar parallel to this in the Epistles of Paul in 1-Thessalonians and also a reference to the Jews. Let's go there and examine the parallels that we have between the Church at Smyrna and the Epistle of 1-Thessalonians. This is quite an epistle, and as a matter of fact, it's interesting, this is the first epistle that Paul wrote. We learn a lot right in the first chapter of what we are to do and how our conduct needs to be. This ties right in with 'be faithful unto death,' regardless of the circumstances.

Always remember how Paul opened his epistles, 1-Thessalonians 1:1: "...Grace and peace *be* to you from God our Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ." Here we see also the unity of Scripture: Revelation and what we have here. Paul mentions that they are continually in his prayers (v 2).

Verse 3: "Without fail, we remember your work of faith... [that ties right in with the Smyrneans.] ...and *your* labor of love, and *your* endurance in *the* hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; knowing your election, brethren, as *you are* beloved by God" (vs 3-4). This is very important for people to know when they are suffering a lot of persecution and they're going through a lot of trouble. That's why in the *Love Series*, the first one that I gave was *Remember, When All Else Fails God Loves You*.

He talks about how he came with the Gospel, v 5: "...in power and in *the* Holy Spirit, and with great conviction; even as you know what sort of men we were among you for your sake." In order to know that you're going to be a martyr and die, do you not have to have great conviction? You already

have to have your mind made up—right? *Yes, indeed!* So they did.

Then it says, v 6: "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord..." What's very important to understand here that this connects right with Rev. 2 with the Smyrneans is because we are looking to Christ, we are looking to God and that's what he told them to do.

"...having accepted the Word in much persecution with *the* joy of *the* Holy Spirit" (v 6). And, of course, the Smyrneans were persecuted. Who was the one behind it? *Satan the devil*—a synagogue of Satan. Read in the book of Acts, who was the one who stirred up the trouble for Paul and Barnabas there in Thessalonica? *The Jews!* Paul talks about them here a little bit and their persecutions that they are suffering.

1-Thessalonians 2:1: "For you yourselves, brethren, know that the visit *we had* with you was not without effect. But before *we came*, we had suffered and had been insulted at Philippi, even as you know; *but* we were bold in our God to speak the gospel to you, *even* in much conflict" (vs 1-2).

What we also see with Paul, we see many, many of the things that he encounters and he brings the solution to are the same problems that we find the churches would be confronted with at that time and also prophetically down through history and also at the end-time. Isn't it interesting? Let's talk about the Church at the end-time for just a minute because the pattern of Revelation is what?

- seven churches that are
- seven churches that will be
- then what about if there are seven churches at the end as God looks at the churches

—not in any corporate structure as we do business in the world, but as the heart and mind of the people. So that conforms with what we have in the book of Revelation—seven out of which comes seven, out of which comes seven. We have that also in the pattern with the seals:

- seven seals
- seven trumpet plagues
- seven last plagues

We find seven all the way through. Paul wrote 14 epistles, which is two times seven.

Verse 3: "For our exhortation was not out of error, nor from uncleanness, nor with guile; but even as we were approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, we speak in this manner: as *those* who please not men, but God Who proves our hearts" (vs 3-4). Of course, that's what it is when we go through

severe persecution and things that they went through.

Notice how Paul always emphasizes God and Truth and love and service and the kind of speaking that he did. Also let's understand this, epistles or letters are personal communications, so the whole structure of the epistles in the New Testament is entirely different than how God dealt with people in the Old Testament. Here He's dealing with us personally. That's why we have these personal letters.

Verse 5: "For neither at any time did we use flattering words *with you*, even as you know, nor a cover for covetousness—God *is our* witness... [Boy, they ought to put that up on the Trinity Channel today—don't you think?] ...nor were we seeking glory from men, neither from you nor from others..." (vs 5-6). That's a key. That's a key to the whole preaching of the Gospel and what every minister needs to use as an example.

- Are you serving the brethren?
- Are you teaching them to come to Christ?
- Are you teaching them to have a personal relationship?
- Are you humbling yourself before God to do as Paul did here?
- What is it that you want?

Someone wrote me a letter about a man who claims to be an apostle of Christ today. He summarized the letter, and he said, 'What do you think of it?' I answered back to him, I said, 'Well, it looks like insanity to me and throws of desperation just before terrible calamity's about ready to fall.' So I said, 'You be the judge. I don't know.'

Verse 10: "You *are* witnesses, and *also* God, how holily and righteously and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you who believe; even as you know how we were exhorting and consoling each one of you, as a father *does* his own children, And *earnestly* testifying, that you may walk worthily of God..." (vs 10-12). This gets back to the way that God wants every minister to deal with the brethren.

Today, we are in such a corporate mode in the world. I even get sent the magazine free, I never read it, I just throw it in the trash, it's called *Church Executive*. What is happening, they are managing people's lives like you manage a corporation, rather than teaching people how to manage their lives through the Holy Spirit under Christ. This is what we see with Paul, especially in his first epistle.

Verse 12: "...walk worthily of God, Who is calling you to His own kingdom and glory. Because of this, we give thanks to God without ceasing: that when you received *the* Word of God, which you heard from us, you did not accept it as the word of

men, but even as it is in Truth—*the* Word of God, which is also working in you who believe. For, brethren, you became imitators of the Churches of God in Judea which are in Christ Jesus; because you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they also *suffered* from the Jews... [Boy, they suffered, and Paul was the leading instrument for a long time with that suffering.] ...Who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and drove you out, and do not please God, and *are* contrary to all men" (vs 12-15). Notice the persecution that they had. You don't find this in Corinth; you don't find this in Ephesus; you don't find this in the Churches of Pergamos and Thyatira, you find something entirely different.

Verse 16: "Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles so that they might be saved in order to fill up their sins always...." Here we have the problem of persecution. We have the problem that was exactly the same that the Jews brought upon the Jews in Judea who believed in Christ. And it's the same way today. Any Jew who truly believes in Christ the way he ought to makes himself an enemy of his own countrymen.

1-Thessalonians 4:1<sup>[transcriber's correction]</sup>; here's the exhortation that God gave to them: "Now then, as for the rest, brethren, we are beseeching and exhorting you in *the* Lord Jesus... [I want to emphasize again how often he's pointing them to Christ and to the Father, because this is what's necessary when you're facing death.] ...even as you received from us how you are duty-bound to walk and to please God, that you would abound *still* more."

Again, notice what it is: *walking in God's way*, v 2: "For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus; because this is the will of God—even your sanctification—that you abstain from fornication" (vs 2-3). That was not a big problem here in Thessalonica, but it sure was a big problem in Corinth and we'll get to that later and how that interacts with the churches in Rev. 2 and 3.

Out of all of this, out of all the trouble, out of all the difficulties that we go through, God is calling us to eternal life and to rule with Him. That's why we need the grace of God. It can't be done in any other way.

- we're called by grace
- we're forgiven by grace
- we live through grace
- we operate through grace

All of that's the way that it is.

Let's come to 2-Thessalonians 1:3 and see how he talked even more about that: "We are duty-bound... [There are certain things that we are

obligated to do, brethren.] ...We are duty-bound to thank God always for you, brethren, even as it is fitting, because your faith is increasing abundantly, and the love of each one of you is abounding toward one another." Isn't that how Christ said we are to be identified by people in the world? *Yes, He did!*

Verse 4: "So that we ourselves are boasting about you in the Churches of God because of your endurance and faith in all your persecutions, and in the tribulations that you are bearing.... [Sounds an awful lot like the message to the Smyrneans— doesn't it? ***Be faithful unto death, receive a crown of life!***] ...*Your faith and endurance are visible testimony of the righteous judgment of God, so that you may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. Since it is righteous with God to recompense tribulation to those who are persecuting you*" (vs 4-6).

Always remember this: ***Don't be angry at the person who is causing you trouble.*** That's hard to do. Put them into God's hands; ask God to take care of them. God is faithful and just and He will execute His judgment upon them, but He is interested that you make into the Kingdom of God.

Verse 7: "And to you, who are persecuted, rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven... [His coming] ...with His mighty angels, Dealing out vengeance with flaming fire upon those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs 7-8).

We can make a connection between the Church at Smyrna and the Epistles of Paul, 1-Thess. (certain parts of it) and 2-Thess. (the first part of the first chapter).

### **The Churches at Pergamos and Thyatira**

- Revelation 2
- 1-Corinthians
- 2-Corinthians
- 2-Thessalonians 2

Let's go back and let's come to the Church at Pergamos. That becomes very problematic. Now both of these churches have very similar problems. Both of them have practices that God does not want them to have. I've bunched these two together, because we can learn a lot about the Church at Pergamos and also Thyatira from the Epistles of Paul as well.

The biggest problem that they had in Pergamos, Revelation 2:13: "I know your works and where you dwell, where the throne of Satan *is...*" Are we living in Satan's world? ***Big time! It's everywhere!*** Then it says, 'you held fast,' and so forth. But He had some things against them because they made the mistake of accepting sin as improving upon God. Let's stop and think for just a minute.

- Is God perfect? *Yes!*
- Is His law perfect? *Yes!*
- Is His Word perfect? *Yes!*
- Are His commandments perfect? *Yes!*
- Are His Sabbath and Holy Days perfect? *Yes!*
- Can you improve upon perfection, you being imperfect?

I had an interesting conversation yesterday in the office. We had an appointment with the Pitney-Bowes representative. They come around once a year, because you have to have a Pitney-Bowes machine in order to do the postage. You can get different machines, but they're the best, so she came around and we were talking and she's asking what we did, how we mailed it. She was there to see if we needed better equipment, which then for them that means we pay more in the lease for the equipment we use, and also to see if we need some upgrading or things like that.

So we showed them what we were doing, mailing out the things we mail bi-weekly and mailing out the books. She was interested in the books, so we showed her the books, and so forth. She asked what I did, and I said, 'Well, I'm a writer, speaker, translator, and things like this.' She said, 'Oh, you are, well I go to the Methodist Church up in Menlo Park.' And I said, 'That's interesting.'

She wanted to take a couple books for a sample, so we gave her *Lord, What Should I Do?* and gave her *The Day Jesus the Christ Died*, and since we give the paperback to prisoners, although she wasn't in prison, we gave her a paperback Bible to take with her. I made a comment to her, because she said, 'Well, all the churches are just coming apart.' I said, 'Yeah, that's why the book *Lord, What Should I Do?* That's what it's all about.' And I said, 'The reason they're coming apart is because people want to add on to what God has given.'

I said, 'We're different. We just go by the Scriptures and we don't add anything on.' But that's what Satan always comes along to have you do. I didn't tell her this, but I just left it at that. I don't want to get back into the sermon and you think I'm still talking to her, because she wouldn't have been able to leave in one piece emotionally.

It would be interesting to find out what she does with these books. And I also noticed one thing. Of course, all you women would notice this immediately. She had no makeup. So who knows? The Church at Pergamos and Thyatira *did the additions that were inspired of Satan the devil.* And he comes and makes it sound like a good thing. That's the origin of Sunday and all the holidays.

But notice what He says here, because He says He's got a sharp two-edged sword, v 14: "But I

have a few things against you because you have there *those* who hold the teaching of Balaam... [The teaching of Balaam is to *mix the religions*, and then you get God to correct them when God wouldn't correct them otherwise.] ...who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. Moreover, you also have *those* who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate" (vs 14-15). And that's the *corporate supervision of a hierarchy* over the people of God.

Now notice what He says here in repenting. He says, v 16: "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." This is not the return of Christ, this is the judgment of Christ against His church if you do things that He does not approve of and try and improve upon God's way.

Then He says, v 17: "The one who has an ear, let him hear..." (v 17). Likewise with the Church of Thyatira. What did they have? Verse 20: "But I have a few things against you, because you allow the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants into committing fornication and eating things sacrificed to idols."

Look at the Christian church of the world today—*filled with idols*. You go visit any Catholic church and what do you have? *Idols, candles, everything!* It's also interesting that in their worship service, the priest has his back to the people. Jezebel in prophetic history can be none other than the Roman Catholic Church.

Verse 21: "And I gave her time to repent of her fornication, but she did not repent." Actually, Thyatira ended up being the most sinful church of all. And I also find it interesting, as we find through *The Israel of the Alps*, that the Seventh Day Adventists look to the Church of Thyatira as their mother church. How many have seen the videos on the *Jesuit Agenda* (produced by the Seventh Day Adventist Church)? They're still at it to take them down.

Verse 22: "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their works. And I will kill her children with death..." (vs 22-23). That's interesting—isn't it? If you kill them, are they dead? Can you kill them and not die? So, what this is saying is that some of those in Thyatira are going to go in the lake of fire, because if you kill them with death, the death has to be the *second death*—does it not? Of course, they're going to die if you kill them.

Verse 23: "...and all the churches... [Here is the central theme that we want to get to and then we'll tie in some of the Epistles of Paul with Pergamos and Thyatira.] ...and all the churches shall

know that I am He Who searches *the* reins and hearts... [everyone individually] ...and I will give to each of you according to your works.... [Then He gives a little relief here and He says]: ...But to you I say, and to *the* rest who *are* in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will not cast upon you any other burden, But hold fast what you have until I come" (vs 23-25).

Those two churches had the greatest sins. 1-Cor. and Pergamos and Thyatira can match up as far as the Epistles of Paul, which go together with what we're talking about there in Rev. 2. Notice the sins that they had. Notice also that they weren't making proper judgments, but let's read what he says here concerning the things that they were doing wrong, concerning the things that they were allowing themselves to go back into.

1-Corinthians 6:9: "Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit *the* Kingdom of God?... [Notice how that ties in directly with both Pergamos and Thyatira.] ...Do not be deceived; neither fornicators..." That is physical and spiritual. And look what we have with fornicators and adulterers today in politics. Look what happened to the Church of God when the leading public figure was actually a whoremonger. It no longer exists. Just like it says there in Rev. 2, kill them with death.

"...neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves as women, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit *the* Kingdom of God. And such were some of you..." (vs 9-11) But they forgot that. And look at the problem that they had in 1-Cor. 5 of incest with his stepmother, and they thought that was an acceptable behavior.

Verse 15: "Don't you know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?... [Ties directly in with Thyatira—right? *Yes, indeed!*] ...MAY IT NEVER BE! WHAT! Don't you know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body?..." (vs 15-16). If you bring those kind of practices from the Roman Catholic Church or from the Protestant church into the Churches of God, you're going to suffer the penalty that is listed there in Rev. 2 toward both of those churches.

1. God is going to come and correct you.
2. Then if you don't receive the correction, He's going to come and correct you again and let you know He's going to judge you individually.
3. If that doesn't work, then you're going to lose salvation.

So he says, here's what has to happen here, v 18: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man may commit is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality... [Whether fornication, adultery, or the other sins mentioned above.] ...is sinning against his own body. WHAT! Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit..." (vs 18-19). These things can't be mixed in with our behavior once we're converted. So that's why when you read there in Rev. 2 and 3, you have to go back into the Epistles of Paul and find the solution, because there is much more in-depth teaching. Whereas Rev. 2 and 3 are a summary.

Verse 19: "WHAT! Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... [Christ in us is the hope of glory.] ...which you have *within you* from God, and you are not your own?... [We're in a covenant baptism, we are in a covenant relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.] ...For you were bought with a price... [That price was the death of Christ and then His resurrection.] ...Therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (vs 19-20).

Now also, just as an aside, if we're going to glorify God in our bodies, this means not only in sexual behavior in marriage, but this also means taking care of our own health. And today we have a lot of health problems out there.

Let's me just, as kind of sidebar, say this: If you live and eat like the world, with the exception that you keep the Sabbath and Holy Days, and you do not eat unclean meats, you're going to suffer the same consequences health wise as the world. That's why it's very important that we take upon ourselves the duty to study and understand about how we need to take care of ourselves today. We need to do that because we don't know how far we have yet to go to the return of Christ. And we don't know what the future is going to hold, so we better take care of ourselves. That's something that God has given us to do.

Then, what Paul says here, 1-Corinthians 7:2: "Rather, to avoid sexual immorality, let each man have her own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." That is God's plan and God's solution.

(go to the next track)

Let's see from 1-2 Corinthians the very problems that we find in Pergamos and Thyatira. How did they end up eating things sacrificed to idols? *It started out by understanding that an idol is nothing*, and that if something was sacrificed to an idol, since the idol itself is nothing, then the idol cannot contaminate the food. So, if you eat food that has been sacrificed to an idol, that's okay, and we find that here in chapter eight.

1-Corinthians 8:1, where he says: "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." What happens with knowledge? *You push it, you push it, you push it!* And that's what they did with the things sacrificed to idols.

Verse 2: "But if anyone think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet to the degree that he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. So then, concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we understand that an idol in *the world is nothing*, and that *there is no other God except one*" (vs 2-4). Then he goes on explaining about that.

1-Corinthians 10—we see the extreme of it, because what happens? *You start crossing over satanic practices into the Churches of God!* And that's exactly what happened with Pergamos and Thyatira.

1-Corinthians 10:19: "What then am I saying? That an idol is anything, or that which is sacrificed to an idol is anything? But that which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons... [That's how it came in. What is the central point of Catholicism today? *The Eucharist or the sacrifice of the mass—to idols!* They offer it to idols, people bow down to idols, but notice what he says here:] ...but that which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not wish you to have fellowship with demons" (vs 19-20).

Then he gives a strong warning, sounds very similar to what was given to Pergamos and Thyatira, v 21: "You cannot drink *the cup of the Lord*, and *the cup of demons*. You cannot partake of *the table of the Lord*, and *the table of demons*. Now do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?... [anger] ...Are we stronger than He?" (vs 21-22). That tells us lot—doesn't it? Instead of relying on God for everything, instead of relying on the Word of God—when we come to the compromising mode together with the different pagan practices, or the worldly Christianity practices, with the Truth of God—you're declaring yourselves stronger than God. Many people don't even think of it that way.

2-Corinthians has a lot to do with false prophets, and so forth. Has a lot to do with Satan. And here's how it takes place and this is what happened with Pergamos and Thyatira.

2-Corinthians 4:1: "Therefore, having this ministry, according as we have received mercy, we are not fainthearted. For we have personally renounced the hidden things..." (vs 1-2). That's what needs to happen in every life. That's what repentance is all about. Just they've understood now in being able to solve the problem of alcohol and

addiction, every individual has to face the truth of their fears and their sins in their lives and they have to renounce them and walk away from them in order to be cured; same thing here.

“...not walking in *cunning* craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully... [What happens when that takes place? *You fall right into the pit of Pergamos and Thyatira.*] ...but by manifestation of the Truth, we are commending ourselves to every man's conscience before God. But if our Gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are perishing.... [Notice what happens when you combine and mix satanic doctrines with the Truth]: ...In whom the god of this [age] world... [That's Satan the devil.] ...has blinded the minds of those who do not believe...” (vs 2-4). Is there a progressive blindness? *Yes, there is!* That's noted how? ‘*A little leaven leavens the whole lump*’—correct? And where does that blindness come?

“...blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is *the* image of God, should shine unto them” (v 4). This goes right back to where Jesus said there in John 3, that if you come to the Light, then you have forgiveness and mercy. If you do not come to the Light, that's because your deeds are evil. What is it when you combine these things together—God's way and Satan's way? And that's exactly what Pergamos and Thyatira did.

Verse 5: “For we do not preach our own selves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.” Let's see how this came about. Paul is bringing out how the subtleties of Satan were seeping into the Church at Corinth and that's what happened to the Thyatirans, and they got completely consumed in it.

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. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness... [Satan is the one who always inspires improvement on God's way. ‘We have a better way. Oh, this works. Oh, this is nice. Just think how we can just do so much good with this.’] ...so your minds might be corrupted from *the* simplicity that *is* in Christ. For indeed, if someone comes preaching another Jesus...” (vs 1-4).

And that's what the pagans brought. Who was the other Jesus? Well, it turned out to be Mithras—didn't it? And that's what blossomed into the full-blown Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox.

Verse 4: “For indeed, if someone comes preaching another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not

receive...” That is, through your baptism. Remember what Jesus told the Apostle Peter: ‘You don't know of what spirit you are; another spirit comes along. Remember when Jesus rebuked Peter, He told him what? ‘Get you behind Me, Satan.’ Because Satan inspired that thought.

“...or a different gospel...” (v 4). ‘Let's change it a little bit. Let's make it more acceptable to people. Let's have the ‘Lord's day’ on Sunday. Isn't that nice? Just think how many more people we will get to attend church.’ Is that what God wants? Numbers? *No!* What does God want? *He wants conversion of the few!*

“...which you did not accept, you put up with it as *something* good.... [They were so down-grading Paul that he had to defend himself by saying]: ...But I consider myself in no way inferior to those highly exalted *so-called* apostles” (vs 4-5). That's what they were calling themselves.

Now then, he summarizes that and come down here to v 13: “For such *are* false apostles—deceitful workers who are transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And *it is* no marvel, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (vs 13-14). But his lightness is dark and that's exactly what happens when you start incorporating things of the world—ways of the world, ways of Satan—into the Churches of God. God is going to correct them for it. That's why we have the seven letters to the seven churches.

Verse 15: “Therefore, *it is* no great thing if his servants also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness—whose end shall be according to their works.” Then he lists out all the things that he went through. Man, that's something.

2-Corinthians 13:5—does this not sound a lot like Thyatira? where He says to them, ‘I try the reins and the heart.’ “Examine yourselves *to see* whether you are in the faith...” That's a tough question to someone who is supposed to be converted—right? But if you're incorporating all of these satanic doctrines into the teachings of Christ, what are you doing? *You're changing everything—right?*

So he says, v 5: “...prove your own selves. Don't you of your own selves know that Jesus Christ is in you? Otherwise, you are reprobates.” That's exactly what Jesus meant when He said there, ‘I will kill their children with death.’

One last thing that takes place, and since we've gone there in several sermons recently, I won't go through any of the chapter except to say it's about the man of sin, the son of perdition, who is doing the works of Satan the devil. What happens when you reach a certain point?

2-Thessalonians 2:9: “*Even* the one whose coming is according to *the* inner working of Satan... [Doesn't Thyatira talk about the depths of Satan? *Yes, indeed!*] ...with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the Truth, so that they might be saved” (vs 9-10). There is the key: ***the love of the Truth!*** Even in the Churches of God, there are those today who don't want the Truth. They want the corporate fairy tale that sounds good.

Now notice what happens, v 10: “...did not receive the love of the Truth, so that they might be saved. And for this cause, God will send upon them a powerful deception that will cause them to believe *the* lie, So that all may be judged who did not believe the Truth, but who took pleasure in unrighteousness” (vs 10-12).

The churches of Pergamos and Thyatira had to take pleasure in unrighteousness for Jesus to give such correction to them in Rev. 2.

### **The Church at Sardis**

- Revelation 3
- Romans (chapters 1-8)
- Hebrews

Revelation 3:1 Christ says: “And to the angel of the church in Sardis, write: These things says He Who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works, *and* that you have a name as if you are alive, but are dead.”

We can summarize it in just a few sentences. If you have the Sabbath and the Passover, you only have part of the story, because Sabbath and Passover, as do many of the Churches of God, especially Churches of God Seventh Day—howbeit some of them do keep the Holy Days—you just have the basic things. Your works are not complete.

“...you have a name as if you are alive, but are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die.... [Unless you're continually growing and changing and overcoming and renewing and repenting, the things then will begin to die.] ...For I have not found your works complete before God. Therefore, remember what you have received and heard, and hold on to this, and repent....” (vs 2-3).

Then notice, He says, v 5: “...I will not blot out his name from the book of Life...” What it shows is if you allow things to go so bad that you get dead, you can lose salvation as well—right? What do we have? What are the basics? What Epistles of Paul can we equate with Sardis? The book of Romans, especially the first eight chapters, because that talks about repentance and baptism and being led of the

Spirit of God. That's the main thrust of the first eight chapters. That's the basics. That's the starting. Also chapter six talks about baptism, too.

Let's also put in there, parts of the book of Hebrews. Let's go to Hebrews 2 and let's see how this warning ties in very closely to what Jesus warned the Church at Sardis.

Hebrews 2:1: “For this reason, it is imperative that we give much greater attention to the things *which* we have heard, lest at any time **we** should slip away.” If you let the things that you have heard slip away, you're going to slip away with it. And isn't that what He was talking about to those in Sardis, who 'had a name that they were alive, but they were dead.'

“For if the word spoken by angels was *enforced* without fail, and every transgression and disobedience received just recompense, How shall we escape, *if we* have neglected so great a salvation; which was first received when it was spoken by the Lord, *and* was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*” (vs 2-3). That ties right in with Sardis.

Let's see something else that fits Sardis. Now, you can probably go through and add more of the book of Hebrews to Sardis, that they 'have a name that they live, but are dead,' and so forth.

Hebrews 5:11, concerning Christ: “Concerning Whom we *have* much to say and hard to explain, since you have become dull of in hearing.” Exactly what it is. Let me give you an example of how I saw this take place. When I wrote the first edition of *The Christian Passover* book in 1994-95, at that time Carl Franklin had close connection with the Church of God Seventh Day out of Denver. He was able to send me a list of all four hundred of their elders worldwide.

So we worked up a nice brochure, mailed it out to all of them at no cost. Guess how many responses we had? *Zero!* 'Had a name that they lived, yet they were dead.' So it says here, v 11: “...dull of hearing. For truly, by this time you ought to be teachers, *but instead* you need to have *someone* teach you again what *are* the beginning principles of the oracles of God, and have become those in need of milk, and not of solid food. For everyone who is partaking of milk is unskilled in *the* word of righteousness because he is an infant.... [Boy, that fits Sardis.] ...But solid food is for those who are fully grown, who through repeated practice have had their senses trained to discern between good and evil” (vs 11-14).

### **The Church at Philadelphia**

- Revelation 3
- Philippians

Everyone wants to become a Philadelphian. Now we can distinguish who is a Philadelphian. And the general rule of thumb is this: *If you profess that you are a Philadelphian, chances are you are not!* Because Philadelphia means 'loving the brethren.' And the one Church of God that is called Philadelphian will not allow their members to even talk to members of their own family, who belong to other Churches of God. Now, how's that for brotherly love? And so restrictive is the authoritarian government that we know of at least three people who have committed suicide.

Revelation 3:7: "And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, write: These things says the Holy One, the one Who is true; the one Who has the key of David... [The key of David then, is the right relationship with God and the understanding of the purpose that we will become as God. Now that takes another whole sermon in itself.] ...Who opens and no one shuts, and Who shuts and no one opens."

Constantly looking to Christ to lead the way. "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no one has the power to shut it because you have a little strength, and have kept My Word..." (v 8). Now let's examine *having kept My Word*. That actually means:

- to guard
- to protect
- to watch over the Word of God

"...and have not denied My name" (v 8). How do you deny the name of Christ? *In works that are reprobate* (Titus 1).

Notice they also had to fight against the synagogue of Satan, v 9: "Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who proclaim themselves to be Jews and are not, but do lie—behold, I will cause them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept... [Here it is again.] ...the word of My patience... [Or endurance, and that means guard it, stand for the Truth.] ...I also will keep you from the time of temptation which *is* about to come upon the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth" (vs 9-10)

The Church at Philadelphia can be matched up with Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Let's go there. The comment was made that there have been a number of Churches of God who have done the same thing in controlling the brethren, not allow them to talk to even their own relatives, mothers and fathers, and things like that. They do that for control, and to control the money and keep the money coming in.

Philippians 1:3: "I thank my God on every remembrance of you, Always making supplication

with joy in my every prayer for you all, for your fellowship in the Gospel from *the* first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will complete it until *the* day of Jesus Christ" (vs 3-6). He has virtually no correction here for those in Philippi. Notice his admonishment here; notice how this fits in with the Church at Philadelphia.

Philippians 2:1: "Now then, if *there be* any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, of any fellowship of *the* Spirit, if any *deep* inner affections and compassions... [Loving the brethren, yes.] ...fulfill my joy, that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being joined together in soul, minding the one thing" (vs 1-2). Which is what? *Attaining to the Kingdom of God!*

Verse 4: "Let each one look not *only* after his own things, but let each one also *consider* the things of others.... [loving the brethren] ...Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (vs 4-5). Then it describes what Jesus did, divesting Himself of His glory. So this shows the humble attitude.

Verse 12: "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed... [Faithfully keeping the Word of God. Not only keeping it, but guarding it.] ...not as in my presence only... [Not needing someone to supervise you, meaning that they obeyed all the time.] ...but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God Who works in you both to will and to do according to *His* good pleasure" (vs 12-13).

Then we'll read a couple more verses here to show their attitude and what they were doing and how this fits right in with the Philadelphians there in Rev. 3.

Verse 14: "Do all things without complaints and disputes.... [Isn't it nice to come to church and not having fights and arguments and quarrels, disputes—right?] ...So that you may be blameless and without offense, innocent children of God in *the* midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as lights in *the* world.... [Isn't that true?] ...Holding forth the Word of life... [Keeping the patience of His Word, patiently enduring.] ...that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, nor labored in vain" (vs 14-16).

What do we have in Philip. 3? *We have an encounter that he's talking about, the circumcision party of the synagogue of Satan!* So that fits in with the Church at Philadelphia.

Notice how he ends this Philippians 4:6. The thing that is important is that there is no correction here for the brethren in Philippi: "Do not be anxious about anything; but by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God in everything; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus” (vs 6-7).

And we could put there, just as it says in Rev. 3 that we guard the Word of God. Where are we going to guard it the most? *Right up here in our mind!* It's exactly like it says here. Notice how he ends this and this is really tremendous. So he says, v 8: “Finally, brethren, whatever *things* are true, whatever *things* are honorable, whatever *things* are just, whatever *things* are pure, whatever *things* are lovely, whatever *things* are of good report; if *there be* any virtue and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.” That's the result of love, love for one another and love for God.

### The Church at Laodicea

- Revelation 3
- Colossians

We've covered the Laodiceans a lot lately, so I'm just going to refer to it and cover it this way. That Jesus says, ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. You're rich and increased with goods, and claim you have need of nothing.’ Everything's fine—cool. Isn't that the word? *Cool!* What is cool? *That's lukewarm, neither hot or cold!* Everything's cool, man.

So He says, Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in...” Which tells you that many of those who are Laodiceans are *marginally* converted, perhaps most of them may not be. But He says if you repent and ‘buy of Me gold tried in the fire and use eye salve to open your eyes, then I will come into you and sup with you. And if you overcome then you can sit down with Me in judgment.’

Let's come to the book of Colossians here. Let's first of all come to Colossians 4:16: “After you have read the epistle, see that it also is read in the church of *the* Laodiceans, and that you also read the one from Laodicea.” I've often wondered, what would that one have been like. The point we need to make here is the connection to Paul. The first church: Ephesus; the last church: Laodicea. We'll get to Ephesus here in just a minute.

Let's look at a couple of things here that apply to the Laodiceans, Colossians 1:21: “For you *were* once alienated and enemies in *your* minds by wicked works; but now He has reconciled you In the body of His flesh through death, to present you Holy and unblameable and unimpeachable before Him; **IF**... [Notice the warning here, very similar to what we have from Christ.] ...**IF** indeed you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast... [Which Laodicea was not.] ...and are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which you have heard, *and* which was

proclaimed in all the creation that is under heaven...” (vs 21-23).

So, they were neglecting the Gospel. So then he goes on and tells them a little bit more about it and what they need to do. What were they being subverted by in Col. 2? *Philosophy!* Taken away from Christ, leaving Christ, forgetting that in Christ all the fullness of the Godhead dwells and you are complete in Him. I'm just summarizing some of these things, because I want to take some time and get to the Church at Ephesus; talks about the Word of God.

Verse 26: “*Even* the mystery that has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has not been revealed to His saints; to whom God did will to make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (vs 26-27).

The true riches are Christ in you, the hope of glory, whereas they were rich and increased with goods. Okay, well you can do some more study on these and add some things to them, but now let's go to the Church of the Ephesians, or Ephesus.

### The Church at Ephesus

- Revelation 2
- Ephesians

Let's see some of the things that did, what they did that was right, and what they did was really is the first major step of anyone beginning to leave God. First of all, they started out really good.

Revelation 2:2: “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.... [We will see this in the book of Ephesians.] ...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 2-4). Then He tells them ‘Repent!’ They also hated the things of the Nicolaitanes, which God also hates.

Let's see how some of the things that Paul wrote fits exactly right into that. Eph. 4 is talking about those things, how they tested by the Word of God. He's showing here, Ephesians 4:13, of the teaching and edifying: “Until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto *the* measure of *the* stature of the fullness of Christ; so that you no longer be children, tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men in *cunning* craftiness, with a view to the systematizing of the error” (vs 13-14). They were having those coming along and teaching wrong things, but they

were testing them, and found them liars, and didn't let them have any foothold in the Church.

Verse 15: "But holding the Truth in love, may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even* Christ." There we have being commended for being able to resist those false apostles that came along. But the biggest thing they did was that they forgot their first love. And what is the first love? How do you lose the first love? Well, the first love is what? Jesus defined it—didn't He? ***Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your being***—correct? *Yes!*

How do you lose that? *By getting involved in activities that don't build you up in loving God!* What activities would those be? 'Oh, well, let's go in the community and do good works.' 'Oh, let's go down and let's do the same thing as the Salvation Army. Well, God says take care of the poor—doesn't He?' *Yes!* What happens? *Sooner or later that activity replaces the love of God!*

And the love of God relates directly to your own personal relationship with God. What they did, they lost what Paul commended them for. Paul talks about that, how they were predestined, how they were made known the mystery of God, the secret of His will, and they didn't follow Paul's admonition.

Ephesians 1:15: "For this cause, I also, after hearing of the faith in the Lord Jesus that is among you, and the love toward all the saints, Do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers... [This is what we need to keep the love of God. We'll see two things that Paul put in here to keep the love of God.] ...That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you *the* Spirit of wisdom and revelation *in the* knowledge of Him. *And* may the eyes of your mind be enlightened... [What happens when you lose your first love? *You lose part of that light! You lose part of the focus of the plan of God!*] ...your mind be enlightened in order that you may comprehend what is the hope of His calling... [which is what Pentecost is all about] ...and what *are* the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the inner working of His mighty power" (vs 15-19). That's what we need to do. Come to God and claim this promise.

Eph. 3 is one of the most exalted, inspiring chapters, talking about the plan of God and what God is doing, of everything in the New Testament. Here's how you retain your first love of God. We'll finish here with the connection between the seven churches of Rev. 2 and 3 and the Epistles of Paul

Ephesians 3:14: "For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of

Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power by His Spirit in the inner man... [You retain the first love if you keep this in mind. If you let this wane and wax, you lose it.] ...that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; *and* that being rooted and grounded in love... [Not losing it; keeping it, and understanding that first love of God ***gives us greater insight and understanding of God's Word!***] ...you may be fully able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the breadth and length and depth and height" (vs 14-18). Understand the plan of God.

The people in the world and, yes, even some within the Churches of God, have not passed through the veil to come to understand God's way. And there are many people out there, not only who have become lukewarm, but they've lost their first love. Here's how to keep it.

Verse 19: "And to know the love of Christ, which surpasses *human* knowledge; so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." ***To understand the plan of God, the purpose of God, and the meaning of the resurrection, and to enter into eternal life,*** that's how you maintain your first love. You won't lose it like they did at Ephesus. Now notice how he closes this.

- never short change God
- never doubt God
- never give up on God

Verse 20: "Now to Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above **all**... [That means each and everything:] ...that we ask or think... [If we have this kind of relationship with God, God will even answer the thoughts of our heart.] ...according to the power that is working in us. To Him *be* glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, *even* into the ages of eternity. Amen" (vs 20-21).

This is how the epistles that Paul wrote to the seven churches and the letters from Christ in the book of Rev. 2 and 3 to the seven churches connect from Paul's time down to our time and also down through all history.

#### Scriptural References:

- 1) Revelation 1:19-20, 19
- 2) Revelation 2:9-10
- 3) 1-Thessalonians 1:1, 3-6
- 4) 1-Thessalonians 2:1-6, 10-16
- 5) 1-Thessalonians 4:1-3
- 6) 2-Thessalonians 1:3-8
- 7) Revelation 2:13-17, 20-25
- 8) 1-Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-16, 18-20
- 9) 1-Corinthians 7:2
- 10) 1-Corinthians 8:1-4

- 11) 1-Corinthians 10:19-22
- 12) 2-Corinthians 4:1-5
- 13) 2-Corinthians 11:1-5, 13-15
- 14) 2-Corinthians 13:5
- 15) 2-Thessalonians 2:9-12
- 16) Revelation 3:1-3, 5
- 17) Hebrews 2:1-3
- 18) Hebrews 5:11-14
- 19) Revelation 3:7-10
- 20) Philippians 1:3-6
- 21) Philippians 2:1-2, 4-5, 12-16
- 22) Philippians 4:6-8
- 23) Revelation 3:20
- 24) Colossians 4:16
- 25) Colossians 1:21-23, 26-27
- 26) Revelation 2:2-4
- 27) Ephesians 4:13-15
- 28) Ephesians 1:15-19
- 29) Ephesians 3:14-21

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- John 5
- 1 Thessalonians 1:2
- 1 Corinthians 5
- Deuteronomy 16
- John 5; 3
- Romans 1-8
- Titus 1
- Philippians 3
- Colossians 2

Also referenced:

Sermon Series: *Love Series* (specifically *Remember, When All Else Fails God Loves You*)

Books:

- *Lord, What Should I Do?* by Fred R. Coulter
- *The Day Jesus the Christ Died* by Fred R. Coulter
- *The Christian Passover* by Fred R. Coulter

DVDs:

- *Israel of the Alps* (produced by Seventh Day Adventist Church)
- *The Jesuit Agenda* (produce by the Seventh Day Adventist Church)