

Introduction

- The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of those individuals who are trusting in Him for the forgiveness of sin and eternal life.
- Local churches are gatherings or local assemblies of believers in Christ who choose to meet together to express corporate worship and for edification.
- Although believers in Christ have been declared "not guilty" with regard to the penalty of sin (Christ paid the penalty), while still in the world, they nonetheless continue to commit acts of sin.
- In the context before us our Lord is dictating letters to seven local churches located in Asia Minor, the characteristics of which are typical of the Church (individually and collectively) during its sojourn on the earth.

1A. The Letter to the Church at Smyrna (2:8-11).

Smyrna is some 30 to 35 miles north of Ephesus. This church and the one at Philadelphia do not receive any negative criticism from the Lord.

1B. Their commendable qualities (9-10a).

- 1C. The works of a Christian are the result of his relationship with Christ. Works do not save us, but works vindicate the reality of our faith before men (see James 2:14-24; Eph. 2:8-10).
- 2C. The issue of tribulation.
 - 1D. Peace in Christ is not tranquility (see John 16:33; 14:1, 27).
 - 2D. Suffering for Christ is a grace gift from God (see Phil. 1:29).
 - 3D. Persecution does not refer to the Christian who is the proverbial "bull in a china shop." It refers to the Christian who suffers because of his relationship with Christ (see 2 Tim. 3:10-13).
 - 4D. The Scriptures are totally sufficient to equip us to live life in this world system (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- 3C. The issue of poverty (but you are rich). Wealth is not a necessary indicator of success in life. One is successful to the extent that they live in obedience to God's Word. It has nothing to do with one's wealth or station in life (see Joshua 1:1-9; 2 Corin. 8:1-5; 9:1-5 – the Corinthians were rich, but were not successful before God).
- 4C. "I know the blasphemy of those who say . . . but are not." This is most likely a reference to the Jewish religious crowd in the area – those who claim a relationship with God, but do not (see John 8:39-59).
- 5C. "Do not fear . . ." This statement refers to contextual persecution. The purpose is "that you may be tested" (Gr. *peirasmos*). God permits the trial -- and it is in their best interests! For our application see James 1:2-3; and John 14:1, 27 (note: fearful is Gr. *deilos*, which means cowardice!)

2B. Reward: "the crown of life" (2:10b).

3B. Promise: "will not be hurt by the second death" (2:11).

2A. The letter to the Church at Pergamum (2:12-17).

About 35 miles north of Smyrna we find the church at Pergamum. Pergamum was a great center of learning. It was here that parchment was first used. It would have been the center of humanism of that day.

- 1B. The positive (12-13):
 - 1C. "I know where you dwell" i.e., among the earth dwellers.
We, as they, live in the midst of philosophies, moral standards, etc. that are contrary to the mind and character of Christ.
 - 2C. They were faithful (most of them).
 - 3C. Antipas -- tradition states that he was roasted alive in a red-hot brazen ox during the reign of Domitian. Domitian took the throne of Rome in 81 AD at the age of thirty following the untimely death of his brother, the popular Titus, who died at the age of forty-two. He was enthusiastic for the Caesar-cult, and persecuted Christians unmercifully (he, like Nero and Titus, connected Christians with the Jews). He was murdered in 96 AD. It was during his reign that John was exiled to Patmos.
- 2B. The negative (2:14-15):

Their problem was compromise with the world via *idolatry and immorality*. That is, they honored the things of the world more than God. They were trading their inheritance for the pleasures and "things" of this world. They lived to gratify the flesh because of the "benefits" they believed such conduct would bring them (see James 4:4-6; Col. 3:1-8; Luke 15:11-32).
- 3B. The remedy (2:16).
 - 1C. Repent -- "Change your thinking!"
 - 2C. The practical solution: Galatians 5:16-17.
- 4B. A promise (2:17).

Faithfulness in time results in depth of relationship with Christ in eternity!
- 3A. The Letter to the Church at Thyatira (2:18-29).

We are coming now to the fourth letter and for the third &me He is going to address a major problem -- one that apparently impacts the Church like no other: compromise with the world via *idolatry and immorality*. They were lived to gratify the flesh because of the "benefits" that they believed it would bring them.

 - 1B. "Eyes like a flame, . . . feet of burnished bronze" indicate judgment (2:18b).
 - 2B. A positive evaluation (2:19).

"Deeds of late are greater than at first" indicates growth. What do you look for in your own life to evaluate how you are growing?
 - 3B. A major problem (2:20-23).
 - 1C. The problem of a "Jezebel."
JEZEBEL Daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon ([1 Kings 16:31](#)). She became the wife of Ahab, king of the northern kingdom of Israel. The marriage was probably a continuation of the friendly relations between Israel and Phoenicia begun by Omri; it confirmed a political alliance between the two nations. Jezebel exerted strong influence over the life of Israel, as she insisted on establishing the worship of Baal and demanded the absolute rights of the monarchy. So strong was her pagan influence that Scripture attributes the apostasy of Ahab directly to Jezebel (vv [30–33](#)).

Jezebel's efforts to establish Baal worship in Israel began with Ahab's acceptance of Baal following the marriage ([1 Kings 16:31](#)). Ahab followed

Jezebel's practices by building a house of worship and altar for Baal in Samaria, and by setting up a pole for worship of the Ashterah. A campaign was then conducted to exterminate the prophets of God (18:4), while Jezebel organized and supported large groups of Baal prophets, housing and feeding large numbers of them in the royal palace (v 19). To meet this challenge, God sent Elijah to prophesy a drought that lasted three years (17:1; 18:1).¹

- 2C. She puts herself forth as a "prophetess" -- she claimed to speak for God. Her teachings caused the servants of Christ to depart from the moral will of God (the Bible). Additionally, they were departing from true worship (which goes along with immorality).

Over the centuries women have started many religious cults. An example in the United States The Church of Christ, Scientist or Christian Science was founded by Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy Frey in 1879 (also, the Christian Science Monitor). Perhaps the female's propensity to deception is why the Scriptures do not allow women to teach the Scriptures to men (see 1 Tim. 2:11-14).

- 4B. A final exhortation and promise (2:24-29).
 - 1C. Persevere (2:24-25).
 - 2C. To those who overcome: rule and reign with Christ (2:26-29).

¹Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley. Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 709.