

A New Look at the Seven Churches of Revelation

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Many Christians have read the book of Revelation and wondered how the letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three apply to our latter day period. This analysis will offer what I believe is an entirely new perspective on how Jesus Christ's message to the seven churches in ancient Asia Minor (modern Turkey) can be applied to modern Christian believers.

This article will examine the language of Jesus Christ's messages to the seven *latter-day* churches, and apply them to the churches of modern Christianity, based on the clues given in Christ's message to them. Those who are familiar with my books about the history and modern locations of the ten tribes of Israel will recognize my methodology. Even as Genesis 49 gives us Divine clues for locating the ten tribes of Israel *in the latter days*, Revelation 2-3 give us Divine clues for identifying various Christian churches or widespread church ideologies *in the latter days*. I believe God gave these clues because he expects us to locate these various Christian churches and ideologies in the latter days, and act on the commendations and corrections he gives to modern Christian churches.

I believe that all readers will be surprised at some of the information and conclusions presented in this analysis. Some may have their past dogmas about this subject deeply challenged. Jesus Christ inspired his message to the seven latter-day churches as the opening message in his Revelation about the latter days, so we should receive his message to the seven churches with a similar sense of its importance to latter-day believers.

Putting the Seven Church Messages in a Modern Context:

The entire book of Revelation concerns events in the latter-days which culminate in the return of Jesus Christ. The message to the seven churches must be seen in this overriding context. Is it not appropriate that in giving John a revelation about the latter days, the very first part of Jesus' Revelation to John would involve a discussion of the condition of Christ's Church, his own body of believers, in the latter days? What would be more important to Jesus Christ than the condition of his own church in the latter days?

Important facts to keep in mind are that the seven ancient churches in Asia Minor are used as *types* of the churches and attitudes that will be found among latter-day Christian churches, and that all seven of the ancient churches were *contemporaries* of each other. We need to realize that these seven ancient churches were not abstractions, but were *real* congregations of believers. Paul wrote an epistle to the church at Ephesus, and he mentions the church at Laodicea in his epistle to the Colossians (Colossians 2:1, 4:13-16). Colossians 4:16 reveals that Paul wrote an epistle to the church at Laodicea that was not later canonized in the Bible. The fact that the seven ancient churches *were real, contemporary* churches in ancient times should make it evident that Jesus Christ's message to his latter day churches also *addresses real and contemporary* churches or bodies of believers in the latter days.

A Clear Prophecy about Christian Denominationalism:

When you read Christ's message to the seven churches of Revelation, it is glaringly obvious that these seven ancient churches had *already* developed very different doctrines, organizational structures, and attitudes before the 1st century AD

had ended. This confirms that even before the early Apostolic era of the Christian Church concluded, congregations of believers had already taken on *very different* hierarchies of doctrines, practices and spiritual attitudes. What we are seeing in Revelation 2-3 is the beginning of the splitting of the body of believers into what we would now call church "denominations."

Revelation 2-3 is a clear prophecy, in my view, that the body of believers in the latter days will be split into church denominations and organizations with *very different* doctrines, organizational structures, and attitudes. This has certainly come to pass as this is unquestionably the condition of modern Christianity. There are hundreds of different Christian denominations in the modern world, and when one considers all the spin-offs and splits from major denominations and the number of independent fellowships, there are likely thousands of differing denominations and fellowships. Yet is it absolutely crucial to establish at the beginning of this article that in spite of the deep doctrinal and organizational differences that were foretold to be present in the latter-day Christian churches, *Jesus Christ still states that he accepts each of them as part of his latter-day Body of Believers*. I cannot overstate the importance of this fact. Some readers may be very surprised by this fact as we try to locate these prophesied churches and ideologies among modern Christian churches.

That Jesus Christ can accept as his "true" followers people scattered amongst many different Christian churches with very different doctrines, organizational structures and attitudes should force us to start thinking "outside the box" regarding who are our fellow Christians in the modern world. The differences in the seven churches of Revelation are so profound and deep that there is no way that they can be seven splinter groups from any self-declared "one true church." Jesus Christ's statements

confirm that these latter-day churches have *radical* differences amongst them, yet they *all* are still accepted by Jesus Christ as “his” churches.

Some modern Christian denominations tend to have a “we only” approach which regards those in other (and very different) denominations as being “inferior” or “not true” Christians. However, we need to realize that Jesus Christ is telling all of us in Revelation 2-3 that *his* definition regarding who his followers are in the latter days is *far broader* than any narrow denominational perspective! It is also clear in Christ’s messages to the seven churches that he can still regard Christians as part of his flock even if they embrace heresies, accept false prophets, have major doctrinal errors, have wrong attitudes and exhibit organizational structures that are completely unscriptural. He tells some of these churches that they are close to “having their candlestick removed” due to their shortcomings and he calls one of them all but “dead,” but Revelation 2-3 makes it clear that none of these churches have yet had their candlesticks removed because of their flaws. Christ still acknowledges all these diverse denominations as “his” body of believers. *If Jesus Christ still accepts these very different denominations as “his body,” then we must do so as well.*

Revelation is a book about the latter days, and Revelation 2-3 offers specific clues about either Christian denominations or broad attitudes which will be common in the latter-day churches of Christianity. If the book of Revelation is inspired by God (and I have no doubt that it is), then we should be able to identify and link various denominations and ideologies in modern Christendom with the clues about the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. As the reader will see, this is possible to do. Indeed, in some cases it is easy to do so.

This analysis will “name names” of modern Christian denominations and Christian ideologies which I believe exhibit the traits of the seven churches of Revelation. This article may disrupt some people’s comfort zones, but I think it is far more important to wake up the latter-day body of Christ to its condition than be concerned about entrenched denominational dogmas because global events fulfilling biblical prophecies confirm the Lord is soon to return. The Christian churches need to ready themselves for the Lord’s return, and Christ’s messages to them in Revelation 2-3 are intended to help them do so.

To conclude this introduction, Revelation 2-3 accurately foretold that the body of believers in the latter days would be divided into different denominations with diverse doctrines and organizational structures, levels of knowledge and physical circumstances. Because Jesus Christ still regards *each* of these seven churches as part of “his” body of believers in spite of these many differences, it is evident that Jesus Christ neither expects nor requires lock-step uniformity among his believers in the latter days. I believe it is unmistakably clear in Revelation 2-3 that Jesus Christ’s followers will be scattered among *many different church denominations and fellowships in the latter days*. Those who think that there is now a “one true church” whose own denominational members are the only “true believers” accepted by Jesus Christ as his own are mistaken and have not read Revelation 2-3 carefully.

What is the Biblical Requirement to be Part of the Seven Churches?

Obviously, the prophecy of Revelation 2-3 addresses *Christian* believers in the latter days; it does not address members of any other modern world religion. What is the “minimum requirement” that believers must have to be included in one of these seven

latter-day churches of God? I think the sine qua non—the indispensable confession of faith that one must have to be in any of the seven churches—is found in Acts 4:12. Believers *must accept Jesus Christ/Yahshua as the only true savior* and believe that “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (RSV). The name referred to as the *only* portal to salvation is the name of Jesus Christ (Yahshua or Yeshua in Hebrew). All believers in the prophesied latter-day seven churches must have made, at some point in their lives, a confession that Jesus Christ/Yahshua is the Son of God (I John 4:15), and that Jesus Christ is the one and *only* Savior for mankind who was truly raised from the dead (Romans 10:9). Many other scriptures could be cited to confirm this requirement, but the point is clear that Christian believers who are regarded by Jesus Christ as “his” *must* still profess that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and risen Son of God who died for our sins to make it possible for us to be saved (John 3:16).

Christian writer, F.J. Huegel, in his 1963 book, *The Enthroned Christian* (which has been reprinted), makes this succinct, accurate statement concerning Christianity. Huegel wrote: “The cross stands at the entrance to the Christian Life. It is this way or not at all.” This echoes Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 2:2 regarding the paramount importance of “Jesus Christ and him crucified.” If you have accepted Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice *for you* on the cross and you are yielding your life to the transforming power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to be like him, you are a Christian, and you can expect to find yourself somewhere in the seven churches of Revelation 2-3.

In Matthew 24:4, Jesus began a lengthy reply to his disciples’ question about what would be the signs that his return was imminent. Many overlook the fact that Jesus’ reply does not end until Matthew 25:46. In Matthew 25:31-46 is found the parable

of the sheep and goats being judged by Jesus Christ after his return. This parable is a solemn warning to all latter-day Christians that we *must* be willing to accept and serve, as Christian brothers and sisters, those in other denominations who we might regard as “*the least*” of Christ’s brethren (Matthew 25:40). This is a warning that Christians could make the deadly mistake of turning away needy believers in the latter days because they come from denominations that are outside their own particular denominational comfort zone.

If Christians turn away needy believers because they regard them to be “inferior” or “unworthy” Christians, their rejection of people that Christ still accepts as his own will cause the narrow-minded believers to be rejected by Jesus Christ at his coming (Matthew 25:45). *This is an existential warning to modern Christians about whether they will be allowed into the kingdom of God as part of the Bride of Christ.* Given the dire consequences pronounced by Jesus Christ on those who fail to recognize and serve all their brothers and sisters in Christ in the hardships of the latter days, we should all be willing to serve people in need if there is any possibility that they are part of Christ’s body!

Those who have not read my free article, *Christ’s Five Warnings to Latter-Day Believers* (see Articles link at <http://stevenmcollins.com>), will find more information on this specific subject that all-too-many Christians will overlook—to their great sorrow when they come before the Judgment seat of Christ. Matthew 25’s parable of the sheep and goats tells us that it is *especially important* to Jesus Christ that we were willing to help those who were *outside* our denominational comfort zone. Christ made this point in Matthew 5:46-47 that if we only help people inside our own comfort zones, we are not exhibiting the level of Christian love that he requires. We have to be willing to

help “the least” of Christ’s believers to please him, and Matthew 25 and Revelation 2-3 reveal that Jesus Christ is more expansive in who he regards as his followers in the latter days than many have realized.

The Seven Churches of Revelation in the Modern World:

Now let’s examine the seven churches of Revelation to see if we can identify some of the prophesied denominations in the modern world or identify broad ideologies or attitudes found in modern Christianity. This is where the “rubber meets the road” in applying Revelation 2-3 to modern Christian believers and denominations. I expect that my analysis will surprise some readers, but the following is what I believe to be true. Jesus Christ didn’t mince words in Revelation 2-3 in evaluating and describing the strengths and weaknesses of the diverse body of his believers in the latter days, so neither will this analysis. Readers are free to agree or disagree with conclusions found in the remainder of my article, but I very much hope that it will provoke you to seriously consider that Revelation 2-3 is *far* more applicable to modern Christendom (and to you personally) than you may have realized.

A final thought before we examine the specifics about the prophesied seven churches of Revelation in the latter days. Jesus Christ includes both positive and corrective statements and many calls to repentance in his messages to the latter-day Christian Churches. It is easy to get discouraged when reading the corrective statements, but we should all remember that Jesus Christ inspired these corrective statements and calls to repentance in order to call his believers into a deeper relationship with him and make them ready for his return. Consider these letters of Revelation to be letters from Jesus Christ (“the bridegroom” of Matthew 25:1-13) to his “bride” (the

collective saints in whatever denominations they are located). Be prepared for some surprises as we examine the seven latter-day churches of Revelation.

The Church at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:1-7 lists a whole series of very commendable things about latter-day believers who are in the "Ephesus" camp. These believers have works, patience and labor for God, and they "cannot tolerate them which are evil." They also are able to see through phony apostles and religious leaders, so the Ephesian Christians are well-grounded in many biblical doctrines and possess much biblical knowledge. However, Jesus Christ warns them that they have a great flaw in their spiritual character. They have "left their first love." He tells them to "repent and do the first works" or he will "remove their candlestick out of its place." Jesus Christ then closes his message to this church on another positive note about their doctrinal accuracy by noting that believers in the Ephesian spirit "hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." What do we make of Jesus' comments and warning to this church?

Believers in the Ephesian attitude have much biblical knowledge and understanding, and they know many doctrinal truths. They also genuinely recoil from those who do evil deeds, so their personal lives manifest many righteous traits. In many respects, these believers seem to "have it nailed" on matters of biblical doctrine and personal lifestyles. However, Jesus faults them severely because they have "lost their first love." This statement indicates that they once had a "first love," but they "lost" it somewhere along the way. This statement could indicate that they are among those who have grown "weary of well-doing" (Galatians 6:9), but I believe there is a much deeper meaning to the "first love" that the Ephesians have lost.

This corrective statement is addressed, I believe, to those believers who know a lot *about* the Bible, *about* the laws of God and *about* Christ, but they do not have (or have lost) a personal relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. Some will be surprised to realize that it is possible to know a lot of biblical truth and not even be converted. The high-ranking Pharisees of Jesus' time are classic examples of this. In the observant Jewish society into which Jesus entered the world as a human being, the Pharisees were paragons of Sabbath-Day and Holy-Day observance, rigorous tithing and observance of dietary laws, they fasted often, and had immense biblical knowledge. However, they also were guilty of self-exaltation, greedy exploitation of the people, and were murderers and conspirators in arranging Jesus' death (Matthew 23:2-6, 26:3-4). The Pharisees were nit-picking about observing physical laws and rituals, but they paid no heed to the "weightier matters of the law" such as judgment, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

The Pharisees were classic "legalists," and modern "Ephesian" believers will likely include many legalists because they appear to be focused on amassing biblical knowledge and doctrinal accuracy. The Ephesian believers have fallen "in love" with biblical knowledge and doctrinal accuracy, but they unwittingly have fallen out of love with Jesus Christ himself. In his book, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life* (page 243), Christian writer, Charles Swindoll, has written the following words which I believe apply to "Ephesian" Christians who have gotten their focus off of Jesus Christ himself: "Is there any hope for lost sinners? Yes, Christ. Not Christ and the church. Not Christ and good works. Not Christ and sincerity. Not Christ and giving up your sins. Not Christ and trying real hard. Not Christ and baptism, Christ and Christening, Christ and morality, or Christ and a good family. No! Christ PERIOD!"

I am aware some readers at my website are 7th Day Sabbatarian and/or Messianic/Hebrew Roots believers. If I might paraphrase Charles Swindoll's warning to Christianity in general into Sabbatarian/Messianic terminology, it might read like this: Salvation does not come from Jesus/Yahshua and Sabbath-keeping. Not Jesus/Yahshua and Holy Day keeping. Not Jesus/Yahshua and keeping the biblical meat laws. Not Jesus/Yahshua and proper understanding of the Hebrew calendar, etc. Salvation comes via Jesus/Yahshua PERIOD!

Ephesian Christians see such scriptures as John 14:15, which says: "If you love me keep my commandments," and they launch into a rigorous regimen of obeying and observing every conceivable biblical law or commandment they can find "to be saved." It isn't long until one can transition into a mindset that it is commandment-keeping which saves us. It is not. Jesus Christ's sacrifice alone saves us. Our commandment-keeping needs to be our response to his act of redemption for us. Which commandments did Jesus refer to in John 14:15? In my viewpoint Jesus meant, above all other commandments, the "two great commandments" that he named in Matthew 22:37-40: That we love God with all our heart, soul and mind and that we love our neighbor as our self. Jesus said "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The first great commandment obviously includes loving Jesus Christ with all our heart, soul and mind as he is the risen Son of God. If we focus on these two great commandments, all the rest of the biblical commandments simply "fall into place" as an act of worship on our part. Jesus' own words to the Ephesian Church acknowledge that the Ephesian believers have amassed much biblical truth, but he chides them for loving biblical knowledge and getting their focus off the trunk of the tree—which is loving Jesus Christ/Yahshua himself.

In applying Jesus' warning to the Ephesians to ourselves, we Christians should examine ourselves to see if our motives are to please our coming Savior/King, Jesus Christ/Yahshua, and be molded into his image, or whether we have taken our eyes off Jesus and become "puffed up" because of growing levels of knowledge. Paul warned in I Corinthians 8:1 that those having much knowledge can become "puffed up." I Corinthians 8:1 also notes that "love edifies." In this verse love is contrasted with knowledge, and while both are good, the superiority of love over knowledge is clear. The Ephesian attitude apparently assumes that the more knowledge and understanding one has, the safer one is for the kingdom of God. However, by focusing on biblical knowledge and law-keeping, Ephesians have gotten their eye off of the central purpose of the Christian life, which is love and worship for God and love for our fellow man (the two greatest commandments—Matthew 22:37-39).

Ephesian Christians have relentlessly pursued personal doctrinal accuracies and fixated their minds on *their own* righteousness and *their own* doctrinal understanding instead of *on their relationship with the Savior* himself. If you keep your mind focused on Jesus/Yahshua and his righteousness, you will not get "puffed up" or distracted by your own doctrinal accuracy or biblical knowledge.

It is certainly not wrong to seek knowledge. Indeed, we are told to "grow in grace and knowledge" in II Peter 3:18, but there is a huge difference in attitude in how one pursues knowledge. Knowledge that is pursued in a Christ-centered attitude deepens one's relationship with God. Knowledge that is pursued in a self-focused attitude "puffs one up." I think there will be many Ephesians among the disappointed believers in Matthew 7:23 who are denied entrance into the kingdom of God in spite of the fact that they had great knowledge and did mighty works of faith

in their human lives. I Corinthians 13:1-7 offer the same warning *not* to trust in your level of faith, knowledge or your works to save you.

Subtly, one can begin to trust more and more in one's own biblical knowledge levels or works for salvation instead of trusting in the cross of Christ.

There is another way of looking at this. The union of the saved believers with Jesus Christ at his return is likened to the union of a bridegroom and his bride (Matthew 25:1-6). Like any bridegroom, Jesus wants his bride to be in love *with him*, not in love with the wealth, power or perks that he can give to his bride. The Ephesian believers seem to have fallen in love with the rewards Christ can give, but at the expense of losing their personal "love" for Jesus himself.

After correcting them for the loss of their first love, Jesus closes his message to the Ephesians on a positive note: that they "hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans." What or who are the Nicolaitans? The best explanation I've seen (and one which is also consistent with Jesus' teachings) is that this term combines root words from which we derive the English name "Nicholas" and the English word "laity." "Nicholas" means "victory" and the laity are the non-ordained people of each Christian denomination. If a "Nicolaitan" is one who has "victory" over "the people," it would indicate church leaders who "lord it over the flock" or who have a "top-down," autocratic church organizational structure. Those in the Ephesian attitude recognize this form of autocratic church leadership to be wrong or have disassociated themselves from it. There will be more discussion of the Nicolaitan spirit later in this article.

In conclusion, Ephesian believers excel in doctrinal accuracy and biblical understanding more than any of the other churches of

Revelation, but they have lost sight of (and “love” for) the overriding importance of what Christ did on the cross and in the need to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ himself. They can be found in any modern denomination, but will be mostly found in legalistic churches or denominations which really do have the greatest doctrinal accuracy. Ephesian believers can see that they really do have more biblical understanding and righteous lifestyles than other Christians, and they make the mistake of thinking that others “can’t be saved” unless those “others” also attain the same level of biblical knowledge possessed by the Ephesians. This is an incorrect view. Knowledge is just one of many spiritual gifts that God’s Holy Spirit can give to churches and to individuals (I Corinthians 12:1-11). Some churches will excel in knowledge but not in other gift of the Spirit, while other churches will have other gifts of the Spirit but not all that much knowledge. It is up to God to decide what gifts to give each church and individual. This is a hard point for Ephesian believers to grasp because they wrongly assume that biblical knowledge is the only real measuring stick by which to measure a person’s conversion.

Having “lost their first love” toward Jesus, the Ephesians also are likely to manifest little love or regard for believers in the other churches of latter-day Christianity, whom they regard as “inferior” because they have less knowledge than Ephesian believers. That attitude puts them at risk of becoming the “goats” of Matthew 25’s parable because they will be predisposed to refuse to help those who *they think* are in the “inferior” denominations (i.e. “the least” of Christ’s brethren). This warning in Matthew 25:31-46 is consistent with Christ’s warning that believers with an Ephesian attitude are close to “having their candlestick removed” in spite of their substantial biblical knowledge and doctrinal righteousness.

The Church at Smyrna

I believe it is easy to identify modern believers in the Smyrna church as described in Revelation 2:8-11. These believers have one overall characteristic: they live in tribulation and/or poverty in the physical world but "are rich" (spiritually) in Jesus Christ's eyes. The Smyrna churches suffer imprisonment and persecutions while they hold fast to their belief in Jesus Christ and some are "faithful unto death." In other words, some will suffer martyrdom in the locations in which they live.

Comfortable Christians in America and the western world cannot comprehend the persecutions and privations suffered by believers in nations hostile to Christianity. Nations in which Christians are persecuted (often severely) include China, Pakistan, North Korea, the Sudan, Saudi Arabia and many Islamic nations in Asia and Africa, etc. For example, Christians are named as one of the groups within China from which China's government "harvests" human organs to sell on the world market (*Washington Times National Weekly Edition*, May 3, 2010 issue, "China accused of vast trade in organs," p. 7). Christians in Sudan have faced death and slavery at the hands of the Islamic government of Sudan. Christian villages have been attacked and Christians killed in Islamic Indonesia. Some Islamicist areas execute Christians, especially those who have converted from the Islamic faith to the Christian faith. Bloodshed has erupted between Moslems and Christians in Nigeria. Christians in these nations struggle for the means of survival, and often prize even having a Bible to read (a privilege Americans take utterly for granted). Christians in the Smyrna set of circumstances can be members of any Christian denomination. They do not fight or worry about doctrinal differences or denominational labels because they are simply struggling to survive and keep their faith amidst circumstances of poverty and

persecution. Their common faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior is all they need to recognize each other as brothers and sisters in the faith.

The Smyrna church is the body of believers who practice their faith (and sometimes die for it) in those nations which persecute Christians. While comfortable Christians in America rarely even think about the privations these people suffer, Jesus says the "Smyrna" believers are spiritually "rich" in his eyes and he will give them a "crown of life" at his coming. Jesus' strong commendation of the Smyrna believers affirms that Jesus regards their faithfulness to him in spite of great challenges and trials to be far more valuable in his eyes than any issues involving doctrines and dogmas. Notice that Jesus doesn't regard doctrinal issues in the latter-day Smyrna church as being sufficiently important to even mention in his comments to them in Revelation 2:8-11.

Jesus also refers to the "poverty" of the Smyrna church. There are many Christians who eke out an existence in impoverished circumstances in Third World nations. Their circumstances are so difficult in this world that they focus intensely on the salvation and rewards promised by Jesus Christ in the next life. Many locations in Asia, Africa and Latin America have "Third World" conditions, and the Christians who dwell in these regions of the earth live in "Smyrna" circumstances.

The Smyrna church is the body of persecuted and/or impoverished Christians in third world nations or in nations hostile to Christianity. They hold fast to their faith in spite of tremendous hardships, and Jesus Christ praises them for their steadfastness. Smyrna is one of only two churches in Revelation 2-3 that is not told by Jesus Christ to "repent." Their entire lives

of sacrifices for Jesus Christ exhibit a repentant lifestyle and attitude.

The Church at Pergamos

Pergamos presents an enigma. Although Jesus Christ does say some positive things about this church, he mostly lists criticisms of the Pergamos church in Revelation 3:12-17. Pergamos is virtually an opposite of the Ephesian Church. Jesus has a long list of good things to say about the Ephesian church but warns that their candlestick is about to be "removed" (rejected by Christ altogether). Conversely, Jesus has mostly criticisms of the Pergamos church, but makes no statement about them being in any danger of having their candlestick removed.

I suspect that some readers will disagree with my conclusions presented below about the Pergamos Church, so I will document the biblical reasons for my conclusions about Pergamos in considerable detail. To those who disagree with me, I urge you to keep an open mind and bear with me. As you consider what I write about the Pergamos church, I think you will find it very eye-opening.

In my judgment, the Pergamos Church in the latter days is the Roman Catholic Church. The primary clue offered in Revelation 2:12-16 about the latter-day Pergamos Church is *its location*. Jesus says he knows *where they dwell* which is "where Satan's seat is." The "Pergamos" church's "seat" (or headquarters) is seen by Jesus Christ as a place where "Satan's seat is *or was*" (the word "is" is in italics because it was inserted later by translators). The "seat" of the Roman Catholic Church is the Vatican in Rome. In God's eyes, physical locations on earth have "a history," and God keenly remembers the good or evil that has taken place at specific locations. For example, God remembers each spot where murders were committed as "the blood cries out

to him" from the location of a murder (Genesis 4:10). God remembers vividly those places which were "seats" for the idolatrous worship of false gods, and the Vatican was built on a former "seat" of idolatrous pagan worship and a "seat" where ghastly murders of Christians were perpetrated in the time of the Roman Empire. The following is what the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1943 Edition, Volume 23, "The Vatican," pp. 2-3) says about the ancient activities at the site of the modern Vatican:

"The Vatican Hill...probably took its name from vaticinia which...were in the neighborhood of a famous temple of Apollo. The principal building...at the time of St. Peter was the circus constructed by Caius Caligula...It was here that in AD 64 and 65 the 'great multitude' of Christians mentioned by Tacitus (*Annals* xv., 44,) who were accused by Nero of having caused the burning of Rome, were martyred with cruel tortures, which the Roman historian describes in detail." Ironically, the *Britannica* adds that when the Roman circus was razed to build the Vatican, the obelisk of Caligula's Circus "was moved to the center of the piazza of St. Peter's in 1586 by order of [Pope] Sixtus V."

What do you think God's memories are regarding the Vatican's location from ancient times? What do you think God remembers when he sees the insane and murderous Caligula's obelisk placed in a prominent location on the Vatican grounds? God recalls the unspeakable atrocities that occurred there under the reigns of the insane Roman Emperor Caligula and the also-deranged Roman Emperor Nero. How many slaves, charioteers, gladiators and Christians were killed or tortured to death at Caligula's Circus, *the obelisk of which still stands on the Vatican grounds?* During the Roman Empire, the ancient site of the Vatican was "a seat of Satan." Revelation 2:13 even refers to past Christian martyrdoms at the "seat" of the latter-day Pergamos Church, very accurately descriptive of the history which occurred at the

Vatican's location. The Catholic Church was also responsible for various "inquisitions" in the Middle Ages where Christians of other denominations were tortured and slain (did the "spirit of murder" which was so strong at the Vatican site in Roman times and residual on that location induce the later Roman Catholic Church to adopt a murderous policy of its own in the Middle Ages?). Indeed, the spirit of ancient Rome so pervades the Catholic Church that it calls itself the *Roman* Catholic Church, and its headquarters are still "seated" at Rome. What other Christian Church has its "seat" at a location which was once an identifiable "seat of Satan?"

There is more that points to the Roman Catholic Church as the latter-day Pergamos church. I have included a series of internet links below which document that it was not just the Vatican which was sited on an ancient "seat of Satan." The early Catholic Church had a habit of building cathedrals, basilicas, monasteries, etc. *on ancient pagan sites* so many prominent Catholic structures today were also built over previous "seats of Satan."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianised_sites

http://www.sacredsites.com/europe/france/le_puy.html

http://en.chartressecrets.org/cathedral/background_history.htm

<http://www.notredamedeparis.fr/Building-history>

The early Catholic Church may have made a deliberate decision to site its new buildings on previous pagan sites in order to enable local pagans converting to Christianity to "feel comfortable" at the site itself. However, Revelation 2:13's statement indicates that God would not have approved that policy.

Nevertheless, God says in verse 13 that the latter-day Pergamos church “holds fast my name, and has not denied my faith.” The modern Roman Catholic Church teaches the virgin birth of Jesus Christ (more emphatically than most other Christian churches I’d observe) and teaches that Jesus Christ is the true (and only) Savior for mankind’s sins. In maintaining this confession, the Roman Catholic Church has “not denied the faith.”

The doubled reference to a location where Satan’s seat is or where Satan dwells in verse 13 is sometimes interpreted by those in non-Catholic denominations to mean that the final antichrist in the latter days will come from within the Roman Catholic Church. Since in the eyes of the world, the Roman Catholic Pope is the titular head of the Christian faith (although many non-Catholic Christians would vigorously disagree), it is possible that a final Pope will serve the beast/antichrist power which will arise at the very end of this age. This may or may not occur, but I mention it as a possible future fulfillment of this prophecy as one encounters this viewpoint often in non-Catholic circles. However, the idea that a Catholic Pope “has to be” the antichrist has a major problem. Matthew 24:23-27 warns that *the final antichrist will be so cunningly deceptive in nature that even “the very elect” would be duped into following this individual “if it were possible.”* Since the default position of some non-Catholic Churches is that a pope will be the antichrist, Christ’s warning in Matthew 24 that the identity of the antichrist will *not* be so easily discerned indicates that the antichrist may emerge from a position or location totally unforeseen to them.

In verse 14, Jesus says that he opposes the Pergamos Church’s practice called “the doctrine of Balaam.” Balaam was a wayward Old Testament prophet who taught the enemies of the Israelites how to entrap the Israelites in sins, and Balaam was willing to aid and abet sinful practices *in order to be paid money or*

property in return (Numbers 22:7, 40). Balaam's spirit was historically identified with the medieval Catholic Church's practice of "selling indulgences" where the church "allowed" people to sin in some manner if they gave money to the church. This practice of "selling indulgences" manifested the "doctrine of Balaam" and it seems uniquely linked to the history of the Roman Catholic Church. The selling of indulgences was one of the key corruptions of the medieval Catholic Church which led to the Protestant Reformation.

Jesus Christ has still more criticism for the latter-day Pergamos church. Revelation 2:15 criticizes them for having the "doctrine of the Nicolaitans" which Jesus Christ bluntly says "I hate." What is this doctrine? A Wikipedia link, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaism>, acknowledges a difference of opinion on the subject, but the overall indication is that this term is a Greek expression conveying a "power of the clergy over the laity." With its "top-down" organizational structure of a Pope, Cardinals, Archbishops, etc., the Catholic Church has so emphasized the ecclesiastical authority of the clergy over the laity that it strongly manifests a "Nicolaitan" church structure. Of course, this is not unique to the Catholic Church. There are other Christian denominations and churches which also have a "top-down," Nicolaitan "church government" structure based on a self-exalted leader or authoritarian group of leaders.

In several places in the New Testament, there are accounts of Christ's disciples arguing about "who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." They were focused on the "lordship" that they anticipated receiving under the kingdom of the "Conquering Messiah," which they expected Jesus Christ to be in their lifetimes. One such discourse is in Luke 22:24-30. When they were arguing over which of them would have the greatest

authority in Christ's kingdom, Jesus Christ firmly rebuked them. Jesus referred to the exercising of "lordship" over the governed as an organizational structure *which he forbade in his church*. Indeed, he expressly commanded that the church he built must *not* have a top-down "lordship" organizational structure (where people could seek positions of church power for the pay, perks, and prestige—as did the Pharisees of Jesus' time in Matthew 23:1-12). The New Testament indicates that local congregations functioned independently in the early Apostolic Church although the elders and Apostles clearly exercised spiritual authority in and over their local churches. However, there was no central bureaucratic Christian authority over all elders in all churches (the seven churches of Revelation could not have developed such different characteristics so quickly if there had been a central Christian "headquarters" over them). Among the modern Christian churches, the Roman Catholic Church has long exhibited a "top-down" hierarchy of church authority over their church members, which fits the "Nicolaitan" structure that fulfills the prophecy about Pergamos in the latter days.

In spite of his many criticisms of Pergamos in Revelation 2:12-16, it is very striking that Jesus Christ doesn't make any statement about the Pergamos church being at risk of "having its lamp stand removed" (like Ephesus) nor does he call it "dead" (like Sardis), and he does not wish to "spew it out of his mouth" (like Laodicea). He does say that when he returns he will "fight against [it] with the *sword* of his mouth" (God's truth, the Bible, is likened to a sharp two-edged *sword* in Hebrews 4:12). This indicates that Jesus will fight against and correct the doctrinal errors and non-biblical practices within the Pergamos church, but he does not state that this church's "candlestick" is in danger of being removed. Now let's consider what is right with the Catholic Church.

Revelation 2:13 states that the Pergamos Church has “works” which are obviously good works (Jesus makes similar statements about the “works” of the other churches as well). Given Jesus’ many criticisms of the Pergamos Church, the good “works” of the Pergamos Church must be very notable for Jesus to make no statement about its candlestick being in any danger of being removed. What are the good “works” of the Pergamos Church, which I link with the Roman Catholic Church? There are several very major good “works” which non-Catholics tend to overlook. To begin with, the Roman Catholic Church is in the leadership of the pro-life movement to ban abortions. *In having a zeal for protecting the lives of the unborn, the Catholic Church is very close to the heart of God on this critical matter.* God repeatedly states in scriptures how he hates infant sacrifice and that this practice is an “abomination” to him (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5, I Kings 11:7, II Kings 23:10, etc.). It is not hard to see that in God’s eyes, abortion is modern society’s “infant sacrifice” ritual. Due to our modern technology, infants can be killed just prior to birth instead of just afterwards, but the Bible indicates it is the same abominable sin in God’s eyes.

I Peter 4:8 declares that “love covers *a multitude* of sins (emphasis added).” That being the case, does it not also follow that the Catholic Church’s zealous love for (and defense of) the unborn can also “cover” many doctrinal or organizational errors in God’s eyes? While many modern Evangelical Churches are commendably allied to the Catholic Church in pro-life efforts and are equally zealous in their love for the unborn, the Roman Catholic Church has been in the vanguard of pro-life efforts. Maybe if all the other churches of Revelation 2-3 got off their collective butts and joined the Catholics and many Evangelicals in organized opposition to abortion, this grievous national sin would have been overturned by now. The practice of partial-birth

abortion is especially gruesome as healthy and viable babies are murdered in the very act of being born. In trying to stop abortion, the Roman Catholic Church is *solidly* aligned with the heart of God on this important matter. Let me ask a question of believers in churches which have a dim view of the Catholic Church. What has your church or denomination done to lead or organize opposition to abortion in your nations and communities? If you have done nothing, then your church or denomination has some self-examination to do.

Also, many poor and needy people are helped by Catholic Family Services and other outreaches the Catholic Church extends to the poor and afflicted. *Having mercy on the poor and afflicted also places the Catholic Church very close to the heart of God.* The book of Proverbs (and many other scriptures) has abundant references to God's desire to see his believers have compassion on the poor and afflicted, and Christ's parable in Matthew 25:31-46 warns believers that if they have not helped hungry, afflicted and needy people during their human lifetimes, they are in danger of being rejected as "goats" in Christ's eyes. Notice that in the final Judgment pictured in this parable, accurate doctrinal/organizational understandings don't even merit a consideration in Christ's eyes [which will stun believers in the Ephesian spirit because they assumed doctrinal accuracy was at the top of Christ's list]! Christ will want to know if you ever helped others *and his parable indicates he especially wants to know if you were willing to step outside your denominational comfort zone and accept and help others who you regarded as weaker or less-worthy Christians* (Matthew 25:45). If I were in dire circumstances and needed help, I think I'd rather knock on the door of a Benedictine Abbey than the doors of some churches that are more interested in enriching themselves or in pursuing

endless twigs of doctrine than doing anything to help fellow human beings in deep personal need.

I will offer a personal testimony on the help provided by Catholic Family Services. Recently, I went through a divorce after 31 years of marriage, and I never knew how excruciating this experience could be until I went through it myself. A close friend recommended a "Divorced, Widowed and Separated" (DWS) program sponsored by Catholic Family Services which offers support and help for people in these circumstances. It is open to Christians of any denomination, and it is administered by lay Christians (some are not Catholics). I enrolled in this program, and it became a lifeline to me at a time when one was badly needed. If it had not been for the DWS program of the Catholic Church, I may have discontinued my website activities altogether due to the personal stress and trauma caused by my divorce process. That Catholic Family Services had a program that selflessly helped me when I, a non-Catholic, needed it has unquestionably altered my perceptions of the Catholic Church in a positive direction. Some of my readers may be surprised at my observations and testimony on this point, but it is very deeply held by me due to personal experience. I also think that God worked through my recent personal experience to teach me this very lesson. If there are widowed and divorced people reading this research report, I recommend that you contact a local Catholic Church and see if this program is available where you live. You will be glad you did.

There is one more point that I will address regarding the Catholic Church which is surely on the minds of many readers so I will discuss it: the issue of pedophilia among Catholic priests which has been widely reported in the media and is a massive spiritual/financial albatross around the Catholic Church's neck. The Catholic Church has a dogma that its priests and nuns must

be sexually celibate. Being celibate is not a sin if a person *voluntarily* chooses this lifestyle. The Apostle Paul apparently chose a celibate lifestyle during his ministry (I Corinthians 7:8), but he also acknowledged that he and the other apostles *had the right to marry if they chose to do so* (I Corinthians 9:5). Indeed, in that verse, Paul states that "other apostles" and Cephas (Peter) were married men. Peter, who the Catholic Church claims as "the first pope," *was a married man* (Mark 1:30). In I Timothy 3:1-13, Paul lists the necessary qualifications of bishops (elders) and deacons and includes in his list that they be "*the husband of one wife.*" Paul never taught the need for a celibate clergy. Indeed, Paul maintained in I Timothy 3 that local priests (elders) *should* be married men. The early Apostolic Church clearly had a married clergy. Indeed, I Timothy 4:1-3 labels a doctrine of enforced celibacy ("forbidding to marry") as a "doctrine of devils." Again, that condemnation is not applicable to those who have freely chosen a celibate lifestyle.

If the Catholic Church had a married priesthood (as did the Apostolic Church), the priest pedophilia scandals would not have occurred and the Catholic Church would have a far better image and would not have lost many millions of dollars in financial settlements to people victimized by priests who had no natural sexual outlet. The pedophilia scandal can be seen as an example of what Jesus Christ meant in Revelation 2:16 when he told the latter-day Pergamos Church to "repent" and pay more attention to his scriptures ("the sword of my mouth") than church traditions. If the Catholic Church had implemented the biblical practice of a married priesthood, it would have saved itself countless problems.

In conclusion, I regard the Roman Catholic Church as the Pergamos church of Revelation 2. Its primary prophesied characteristic involves the physical location of its headquarters

and its “seats,” and that clue applies to the Catholic Church more than any other denomination in Christendom.

The Church at Thyatira

Jesus Christ opens his message to this church with very positive comments: that it has “works, charity, service, faith and patience” and that their latter works are “more than the first” so this indicates spiritual growth. These opening positive comments are then followed by four verses devoted to Jesus’ criticism of this church because it has embraced a “woman...who calls herself a prophetess.” This last statement points to one particular, modern Christian Church: The Seventh Day Adventists.

In the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Ellen G. White is a woman who is widely-accepted as a self-proclaimed prophetess. Can you think of *any* other modern Christian Church which gives such weight to the writings or utterances of a self-proclaimed prophetess? I can’t. Let’s begin with a discussion of Ellen G. White because Jesus Christ’s message to the Thyatira church is dominated by his negative discussion of the teachings of this self-proclaimed prophetess. I think that Christ devotes so many verses to this church’s attachment to a false prophetess because he sees their devotion to a false prophetess as a form of idolatry as it deflects their attention from Jesus Christ himself.

Ellen G. White was a woman who claimed that she received divine revelations, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church has largely accepted her status as a prophetess. Interestingly, Revelation 2:22 cites Jesus Christ as saying of this false prophetess that “he will cast her into a bed.” Ellen G. White had a lifetime which featured many periods of sickness in which she was literally bedridden for weeks or months at a time. Below are three links including commentaries on the extended periods of time in which she was confined to a bed. The first link’s last

paragraph is particularly significant as it was written by Ellen G. White herself. She wrote: "I do not think I went to school a day after I was 12 years old, and did not go but a few days at a time, when sickness would cause me *to take my bed for weeks and sometimes months at a time*" (emphasis added).

<http://www.caic.org.au/biblebase/sda/batesletter.htm>

<http://www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp>

<http://www.ellenwhiteexposed.com/headinjury.htm>

The Thyatira Church will have a prophetess (labeled by Jesus Christ as a false one in Revelation 2:20-24) who will be "cast into a bed" by God. Ellen G. White was a self-proclaimed prophetess who literally spent weeks and months bedridden at times. This matches the prophesied description of a latter-day church with a false prophetess very well. The mention of "fornication" in Revelation 2:20-24 does not need to refer to sexual immorality (I don't think Ellen G. White had any such teachings), but can refer to *spiritual* fornication in which Christians attach themselves to false gods or false religious teachers instead of the scriptures. Revelation 2:21 cites Jesus as saying he "gave her space to repent of her fornication, but she repented not." To my knowledge, Ellen G. White never disavowed her self-proclaimed status as a prophetess, and verse 22 calls on latter day Thyatirans to "repent" of accepting their false prophetess.

Now let's discuss some things that are very good about the Thyatiran church. Verse 19 refers to the "patience" of the Thyatiran Church. The Seventh Day Adventist Church had its roots with the Millerite Adventist movement which expected the return of Jesus Christ in 1844. When Jesus did not then return, it was referred to as "The Great Disappointment," and the Adventist movement had to learn "patience" as it waited for the

actual return of Jesus Christ. Verse 19 refers to the “charity and service” of the Thyatira Church, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church has a sizeable service ministry which it extends to the sick and needy. In the link below, from *Wikipedia*, it is stated that the Seventh Day Adventist Church has a “missionary presence in over 200 countries [and] operates numerous schools [and] hospitals...as well as a prominent humanitarian aid organization known as the Adventists Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).”

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day Adventist Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_Church)

In its emphasis on putting substantial resources into ministering to others in many nations, the Thyatira Church mirrors the compassion of Catholic Family Services to the needy. In what will be a surprise to many readers, the Wikipedia link reports that the Seventh Day Adventist Church is “the 12th largest religious body in the world.”

The Seventh Day Adventist Church is known for teaching and practicing healthy lifestyles which promote remarkable longevity among its members. A 12-year scientific study confirmed this to be a fact, and a *National Geographic* article examined the fact that one of the few identifiable groups which had unusually long lifespans was the Seventh-Day Adventists. The following two links discuss these surveys and offer some of the lifestyle teachings of the Seventh-Day Adventists which cause their long lifespans. It would appear that all of us could learn something from the Seventh Day Adventists if we wish to live longer, given their scientifically-documented longevity.

<http://lifetwo.com/production/node/20070107-longevity-seventh-day-adventists-life-expectancy>

<http://health.drgily.com/american-longevity-adventist.php>

If the identifications in this report are correct, then the Seven Churches of Revelation include both 7th Day Sabbatarians and Sunday-keeping believers in the latter days. That should also give us an awareness that Jesus Christ's/ Yahshua's perceptions of who his followers are in the latter days is considerably more expansive than some members of either the Sabbatarian or Sunday-keeping groups would have thought. God looks "on the heart" of his followers as he judges and evaluates them (I Samuel 16:7), and Christians should not judge each other's standing with Jesus Christ as that right belongs only to Jesus Christ (John 5:22, Romans 14:4).

The Church at Sardis

Jesus Christ has almost nothing good to say about churches in the Sardis spirit. He says they "have a name that they live" (i.e. they still call themselves "Christians"), but Jesus says they "are dead" (spiritually). He warns them to "strengthen" what little remains of the true faith in them because what little faith or biblical truth they have left is "ready to die." Jesus warns them to repent, and he warns that his second coming will occur at a time they don't expect it because they refuse to "watch" for the signs of his return. In other words, these churches have no interest in biblical prophecy or in watching world events for prophetic fulfillments that Jesus' return is drawing near. Indeed, Jesus' message strongly infers that "Sardis" churches don't even believe or take seriously the Bible's latter-day prophecies so they are blind to the fact that Jesus' second coming is nearing. Ominously, Jesus says only a "few" people in the Sardis churches or spirit will be saved. This indicates that most Sardis Christians are too spiritually dead to even grasp that they are in a terminal spiritual condition.

Unfortunately, I think it is easy to identify the churches of Sardis in the modern world. I believe they can mostly be found among the “mainline Protestant churches” which have become empty shells of their former selves. Their church life now consists mostly of repetitive liturgies and politically-correct sermons. Various mainline Protestant churches (Anglicans/Episcopalians, Lutherans, United Methodists, Presbyterians, etc.) either have accepted practicing homosexuals as members or are considering doing so according to one internet link I examined. Some of these churches have drifted so far from biblical teachings that they even *ordain* openly-homosexual clergy (an “abomination” in God’s eyes in *both* the Old and New Testaments—Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-28), and many large Protestant denominations are seemingly unbothered by the sin of abortion in our modern societies (slaying the unborn or recently born is an “abomination” in God’s eyes—Leviticus 18:21, Jeremiah 32:34-35, etc.). Whenever professing Christian denominations ordain practicing homosexuals as clergy and also refuse to oppose or condemn abortion (the “infant sacrifice” rite of our modern society), these denominations proclaim in these actions and inactions that they care little for God and his Word. No wonder God calls them “dead.” Nevertheless, Jesus acknowledges that there will be a “few” in the Sardis churches who will be saved, but not many.

Interestingly, the media reported that when the Evangelical Lutheran Church was in the very act of approving its policy of ordaining homosexuals to the clergy in a meeting in Minneapolis, a “tornado came out of nowhere” and bent down a cross on a Lutheran Church across the street from where the Lutheran vote was being taken. It is my firm view that God intervened via the weather to show his disgust at the Lutherans’ vote that was

going on inside their convention center. This link has the story about this event:

<http://www.argusleader.com/article/20100829/NEWS/8290321/Church-split-follows-years-of-infighting>

How many of the seminaries of old, mainline Protestant Churches even teach such core biblical doctrines as the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the reality of a Creator God, the infallibility of the Bible or the imminent return of Jesus Christ? Many Evangelical Churches fervently embrace and teach all these core doctrines so they are not in a Sardis spirit. However, all too many mainline Protestant churches have "gone secular," and while they call themselves "Christian" churches, they are spiritually "dead" in the eyes of Jesus Christ.

I do not mean at all to imply that all Protestant Churches are "dead," as some still have signs of life. It is my understanding that Baptists confess the "inerrancy" of scripture and do not accept the "abominations" discussed above. Missouri Synod Lutherans, as far as I know, reject the "abominations" now accepted by the largest Lutheran denomination. Both the Lutherans and the Episcopalians have groups of congregations which are splitting from their main bodies to protest the ordination of homosexuals. The congregations splitting from the mainline denominations in order to be faithful to scriptural teachings on the subject of homosexuality are showing a pulse of spiritual life.

Surely, there are other Protestant denominations and congregations who resist the abandonment of scripture and the secularization of their church life. However, I believe that the overall description of the Sardis churches in Revelation 3:1-6 fits many of the mainline Protestant churches more than any other group in modern Christendom, and they need to heed Christ's

strong warning to them to “*remember*” what they once knew, “*repent*” of their spiritual condition and start “*watching*” (i.e. paying attention to biblical prophecies) for the signs that his Second Coming is near.

In my discussion of the Smyrna church, I identified it as those believers who live in impoverished and/or persecuted nations in both the third world and Islamic nations. If we attempt to identify a general region where the Sardis spirit is most prevalent, I would select Europe. It was the redoubt of Christianity for many centuries, but it is now living in what has been called the secularized, “post-Christian era.” There seems to be little life left in the Christian churches and once-Christian nations of Europe. However, the spirit of Sardis can be present in Christian churches throughout the world.

The Church at Philadelphia

Only two of the seven latter-day “churches” are not told by Jesus Christ to “repent” of anything. Those two churches are Smyrna and Philadelphia. Indeed, Christ has no criticisms or corrective comments about anyone in these two “spirits.” The Smyrna Church was identified above. In my view, the “Philadelphian” church is not so easily identified. One of the reasons is Jesus’ statement that this church only has “a little strength.” That argues that believers in this church (or attitude) do not have large numbers, large financial resources or personal strengths. This infers that Philadelphians will be scattered widely across the Christian landscape.

Revelation 3:8 includes Jesus’ statement that Philadelphian believers have “works” and have “kept my word and not denied my name,” so believers in this spirit have actively been using what “little strength” they have to do God’s Word and proclaim Jesus Christ to the world as they are able. This is attested to by

Christ's words that "I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." Jesus has seen these believers' willingness to use what little strength or resources they have in his service so he sets before them an "open door" so their works and efforts can impact and reach others.

I find it interesting that this "open door" to promote Jesus Christ, the gospel and biblical truths is mentioned *in the latter-day context of the book of Revelation*. While this "open door" could be God "opening doors" for Philadelphians to serve him and advance his truth in many different ways, there is a tool which is unique to the time of the latter day Seven Churches which can serve as an "open door" for those who are willing to walk through it. That "open door" is the internet and all forms of electronic media. These "latter day" tools are truly an "open door" through which many believers in many denominations have created a wide variety of Christian ministries and outreaches which edify fellow believers and convert the unsaved into believers. Believers (or churches) with "little strength" can actively serve God by doing so via the internet, TV or other electronic means. Philadelphians don't sit around lamenting that they do not have much in the way of numbers, strengths or riches. They look at what they have and they do something for God with it. It is my view that there are "Philadelphian" believers in many denominations. Indeed, Philadelphians may also be found in individual churches, small fellowships or even as individuals who are using the "little strength" God gives them to serve God and his kingdom.

The previous paragraph describes the "open door" concept in a western perspective. What about believers in poor nations? Can they be Philadelphians too? Of course! For example, consider a poor African believer who walks many miles to distribute Christian tracts or Bibles to a neighboring village. That is a

Philadelphian spirit of doing something for the Lord with just the “little strength” available to him. If he walks to a Moslem village and distributes Bibles or Christian tracts, he is taking his life in his hands and displaying a level of commitment to the Lord that few Americans have ever displayed.

There are many ways that a Philadelphian spirit may be manifested. Christ’s classic parable about the Good Samaritan very graphically displays the difference between an “Ephesian” and a “Philadelphian” spirit. This parable, found in Luke 10:25-37, describes a situation wherein a priest and a Levite walked by a severely injured man without assisting him while a Samaritan (scorned in Jesus’ time by Jews due to their poor doctrinal understanding) rescued him and made provision for his recovery. Jesus asked the hearers of the parable who was the one who “loved his neighbor as himself?” They answered correctly that it was the Samaritan who showed mercy, and Jesus told them “Go and do you likewise.” This parable has gripping relevance in contrasting the attitudes of the latter-day Ephesian and Philadelphian spirits. The Levite and the Priest, paragons of doctrinal/biblical knowledge and ranking high in their religious community in Jesus’ time, were likely too engrossed in a discussion about the nuances of some point of the law to care about an injured stranger. The Samaritan, who had a distorted view of biblical doctrine and knowledge and who would have been looked down upon as “inferior” by the Levite and Priest, nevertheless showed love and compassion toward the injured man. Jesus’ comments indicates that, in Jesus’ eyes, *doing deeds of mercy and compassion are far more important to him than mastering biblical knowledge and doctrine* (a concept which eludes Ephesian believers). The Samaritan who saw an opportunity to serve a fellow human being in deep need displayed a Philadelphian spirit which pleased God. The

Samaritan did not care what doctrines the injured man might have believed, and the lesson for us is that we should show compassion to the needy without regard to their denominational membership. In Jesus' eyes, this parable shows that the simple act of showing love to others trumps biblical knowledge and one's religious standing in a community. Jesus made this same point in Matthew 25:40.

There is another way that a Philadelphian spirit can be manifested, in my judgment. It may be controversial, but I believe it to be true. We are commanded in James 4:7 to "resist the devil," and in Romans 12:9 to "abhor that which is evil." Proverbs 14:34 states: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." What Christian would not want to have a "righteous nation" to live in? If you want you and your family to live in a Christian nation, are you willing to do something to make it happen?

Christians tend to take the scriptural directives to "resist the devil" in only a personal sense (i.e. rebuking the devil when he tempts or opposes someone—Matthew 4:10, Jude 9, etc.). However, if we are to steadfastly oppose the devil in a personal sense, *should we not also resist him in a societal and national context as well?* Applying this to the USA, Christians have a God-given Constitutional right to participate in the political process and resist the encroachment of evil into our society and national government. Christians who remain passive observers while sin is "on the march" in our nation are unwitting spiritual "Quislings" in my view. Christians who truly want a righteous nation should use every right God gave us in our Constitution and laws to resist the devil's efforts to corrupt our nation. Christians who resist evil and advance the values of God in a society via the political process are applying *on a local or national scale* the very same principle given in Matthew 4:10, Romans 12:9 and Jude 9.

Christians who refuse to exercise their God-given Constitutional rights to resist evil via the political process are making a decision to co-exist with evil. I do not think God will be pleased with that decision in the Judgment.

Evangelical Christian Churches are a potent political force that is actively resisting the evil that is permeating our nation and political leadership. In resisting the advance of evil into our nation, these churches are applying the "love thy neighbor as thyself" principle in a national context. The Roman Catholic Church has often been allied to Evangelical Christians in resisting the evil of abortion. The Evangelicals and Catholics are willing to "get in the arena" and resist evil in our nation at the polls and in political activities. However, all too many Christians have passively watched from the grandstands as sin gradually takes over the nation in which they live. Amazingly, some Christians think that the Bible forbids them to resist the advance of evil in their nation by being active in civic and political affairs. They ignore the fact that Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22-29, 25:11) and we should assert whatever rights we have as citizens of our modern nations!

It is time all Christians join together and fight the advance of evil in our nations while we still have free nations in which to practice our Christian faith! It is my view that God regards as Philadelphians his followers who are willing to actively fight for Him and for biblical values in their nations' political processes. Those Christians who refuse to use their political rights to fight for righteousness in their nations are "burying" some of their God-given "talent" and opportunity (Matthew 25:25-30). Our Constitutional right to participate in the political process for Godly values is an "open door" that is available to every Christian. This "open door" is available to Christians in most democracies. Philadelphians march through the "open doors"

that are available to them (Revelation 3:7). Sadly, many believers in the remaining latter-day seven churches don't even realize this "open door" is available to them, so they neglect it.

Jesus says very little about the doctrinal knowledge of the Philadelphians. He does state in verse 8 that "you...have kept (obeyed) my word" which at the very least indicates that they are faithful to whatever level of biblical understanding that God has given each of them. There are two ways that Jesus' words that they "have not denied my name" can be applied. My Messianic friends would affirm that this means that Philadelphians understand the True (or Given) Hebrew Divine Names and use the terms Yahweh, Yahshua and the Ruach Ha' Kodesh instead of the English Divine Names (God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit). Personally, I have had prayers powerfully answered that were offered in the name of "Jesus Christ" so I know God's power flows through that name as well as through Jesus' Hebrew name, "Yahshua." All believers must use those Divine Names that their conscience leads them to use. If some readers believe that God requires them to use the Hebrew Divine Names, then they should act according to that belief (Romans 14:23).

There is a second possible application of the phrase "you have not denied my name" that is based on Luke 12:8-9. In this passage, Jesus tells his followers that if they "confess me before men" that Jesus will "confess [them] before the angels of God." The reverse is also true: if believers decline to confess Jesus before men, Jesus will not confess them as his followers in the heavenly realm. This application fits with Jesus' comment that the Philadelphians have an "open door" for their works even though they only have "little strength." There is no doubt that the Philadelphians are known as Jesus Christ's followers in the eyes of men as they are professing and serving Jesus Christ and

his message *openly before men*. Their commitment to Jesus Christ is public and real. They do not hide in society as passive or anonymous Christians.

I do not know who originated a particular saying, but I've heard it expressed as "If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Philadelphians would easily be "convicted" of being Christians; however, there are many believers whose conduct is so passive and inconspicuous in Christ's service that their neighbors, friends and community don't even know that they are Christians.

The Philadelphians are given a special blessing by God. In Revelation 3:10, Jesus says to them: "because you have kept the word of my patience (or "endurance"), I also will keep you from the hour of temptation (or "trial") which shall come upon all the world, to try (or "test") them that dwell upon the earth." The words in parenthesis in that statement are from the marginal reference in my *King James Bible*, and I think they capture the meaning of this verse. The Philadelphian believers have borne fruit for God, marched through the "open doors" given to them and served Jesus Christ even though they only had a "little strength" and the word "patience" or "endurance" implies that they bore fruit for God in spite of personal challenges or sufferings that they had to endure. This viewpoint is supported by Jesus' promise to them that they will not need to experience the trials and tests of the tribulation period which will occur on the earth because the Philadelphian believers have already served God and been faithful to him during times of trials and tests. Jesus already has tested them, so they do not need the trials of the tribulation period for God to know what is in their hearts.

The Church at Laodicea

I think this church "spirit" is very easy to identify in modern Christendom, and it is found in many modern Christian churches in prosperous western nations. Jesus Christ first tells them in Revelation 3:14-22 that their works are "neither hot nor cold," and that he feels like "spewing them out of his mouth." The reason for their lukewarm attitude toward God is clearly stated by the Savior. Jesus notes that people in this spirit say "I am rich and increased with goods, *and have need of nothing*" (emphasis added)." That last phrase strongly infers that the Laodiceans don't really feel much of a need for the Savior either. That Laodiceans feel "they have need of nothing" clearly indicates a very complacent body of latter-day believers who are quite comfortable in their respective "comfort zones." These believers feel they are in no particular danger of anything bad happening to them, and they mostly live in prosperous nations where a history of prosperity and peace makes them think that "nothing bad can happen to us here." That belief leads easily to Christian complacency.

Laodicean believers, by Jesus' own acknowledgment, possess many of this world's riches and goods (or "the good life" in general), but they are in love with their riches and comfortable lives at least as much as with the Savior. They are trying to "serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24) at the same time; an attitude the Bible says is incompatible with true Christianity. By mixing a hot and a cold attitude together, they end up being "lukewarm" in Christ's eyes. Indeed, some in the Laodicean attitude believe that the degree of their personal abundance in matters of worldly riches indicates how much God approves of them. They couldn't possibly be more wrong.

One genre within the Laodicean group of churches is likely to be found among the Christian leaders and churches who teach what is called "The Prosperity Gospel" which expects God must make everyone prosperous in material things if believers simply recite scriptural mantras of talisman-like words to just "name it and claim it." Their church leaders seem to think that their mansions, private jets, luxury cars, etc. indicate that they are the "most blessed" of God because they truly are "rich and increased with goods" while they enjoy their lavish, self-indulgent lifestyles. The leaders of this teaching mistakenly think that "gain is godliness" (I Timothy 6:5). They (and their followers) "give" to God in order to "get" even more worldly goods or other physical blessings from God.

Some mega-churches preach a very Laodicean-sounding "gospel" (of serving God to obtain worldly blessings) to large audiences. People in the worldly-rich Laodicean spirit exude a smug confidence that their material wealth means they are in a great spiritual condition, but they could hardly be more wrong. Contrast Jesus Christ's deep disgust at the materialistically-rich Laodiceans with Jesus' love of the impoverished, suffering believers in the Smyrna condition who have none of the wealth of the Laodiceans but are spiritually "rich." *Jesus' messages to the latter-day churches of Smyrna and Laodicea prove that material possessions and personal blessings are no barometer of one's standing with God.* The Smyrna believers are in excellent standing with Jesus Christ, but they are impoverished and persecuted. Laodicean believers live a life with many blessings and riches, but Jesus Christ wants to "spew them out of his mouth." I believe Christ's words to the Laodiceans implicitly indicate that they selfishly want to "get" more and more riches and blessings for themselves, but they seem to be little moved for the sufferings of less-fortunate believers. If they "loved their

neighbors as themselves” (the second great commandment), they would be more interested in giving some of their wealth to less-fortunate believers than in amassing more and more money and material blessings for themselves.

Laodiceans do not want trials and tribulations from God; they want an endless stream of goodies and freedom from suffering. Laodiceans ignore Luke 12:15 which warns that “a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.” Laodiceans have no room in their theology for the severe sufferings imposed on Job or for the statement in Acts 14:22 that “we *must* through *much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God.” Laodiceans ignore such scriptures. They don’t want sufferings; they want an “easy street” life. Laodiceans do not have their hearts in “the treasures of heaven;” their hearts are focused on the treasures and comforts of this human life.

Expect many Laodiceans to be found among the “goats” in the Judgment pictured in Matthew 25:31-46 because they were preoccupied with accumulating personal wealth *for themselves*, and they had little or no interest in helping less-fortunate believers who were in dire need of financial or material help. The Pergamos and Thyatiran Churches (as I identify them) devote much money and effort into helping the poor, and Christ doesn’t tell the problem-laden Pergamos Church that he wants to “spew them out of his mouth.” Nor does he say that to the Thyatirans who accept a false prophetess in their denomination. However, he does say that to the worldly-rich Laodiceans who are in love with mammon and the “good life” of this world.

God tells believers in the seriously-flawed Laodicean mindset that while they think they are God’s favored ones because of their extensive worldly blessings, Jesus Christ sees their spiritual condition as being “wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind

and naked." I recall seeing a media photo of "Prosperity Gospel" leaders posing in front of their opulent mansions and next to their luxury automobiles. They think their flaunted wealth is a sign of God's special favor, but they do not realize that, in light of Jesus' words in Revelation 3:17, they are actually flaunting their own spiritual wretchedness.

Jesus sees believers in the complacent, materialistic Laodicean attitude as being in dire need of a "wake up call" so they can see their wretched spiritual condition, and his message to them states that he is going to arrange a painful "wake-up call" for them in the latter days. In verse 18, Jesus tells the Laodiceans "to buy of me gold *tried in the fire* that you may be rich [spiritually]." Being "tried in the fire" is a reference to the furnace of severe hardship and affliction (I Peter 1:7, 4:12-13). This statement implies that the pathway into the kingdom of God for Laodicean believers will be through the hardship and trials which Jesus Christ will cause to befall them in the latter days. Only through sufferings and afflictions will such people wake up to their "naked" spiritual condition and find the repentance Jesus demands from them.

Biblical prophecy states that there will be persecutions against believers and also a great tribulation at the end of this age (Matthew 24:9-13, 21-22). People in the Laodicean spirit are uniquely unprepared to cope with these prophesied trials and afflictions because they feel God "owes" them prosperity and they take for granted their "comfort zone" lives (an attitude absent amongst Smyrna believers). Jesus isn't sure about the loyalties of believers in the Laodicean camp. Is their primary loyalty to him or is it to the material wealth of this world? Will they only love Jesus Christ if he gives them a steady diet of "goodies," or will they go on serving God if God takes away their material blessings; and privation and hardship become their lot?

I believe Jesus' decree that he will send the latter-day Laodiceans into "the fire" to try them is a strong inference that he will allow them to go through the tribulation and the persecutions that will occur at the end of this age. In doing so, Jesus will be able to determine where their loyalties truly lie. Laodiceans may have to go through martyrdom to prove to Jesus Christ that their loyalty is to him, not to the riches and comforts of this world. However, Jesus says he is rebuking and chastening them *because he loves them* enough to send them into "the fire" in order for them to be in the Kingdom of God with him.

Many Laodiceans likely also have a false sense of security that God will waft them to heaven in a "pre-trib" rapture so they can avoid all discomforts and enjoy a seamless transition from their "comfort zone" lives in the physical realm to a "comfort zone" life featuring five-star service in heaven from attending angels while they watch the sufferings of everyone else on earth. Christ's warnings to them in Revelation 3:14-22 strongly indicate that any "taking up" of the Bride of Christ or whatever protections are afforded to a portion of believers who remain on the earth (Revelation 12:14-17) in the latter days will not include them. Revelation 12:14-17 prophesies that some believers will be protected in the latter days from tribulations and others will not be protected. Jesus Christ's statement strongly indicates that the Laodiceans will be in the latter group.

Now for some balance lest many believers in wealthy western nations feel that they are all Laodiceans! It is very important to state that being wealthy does *not* automatically make a person a Laodicean! Laodiceans have a certain *attitude* about their wealth. Money is not evil, it is the "*love of money*" that is the root of all evil (I Timothy 6:20). Laodiceans, knowingly or unknowingly, have developed a sense of entitlement that God owes them a life of material abundance and freedom from suffering. The

Laodiceans *love and trust in their material riches* (not Christ) and they think riches are a sign that they are in great spiritual shape. They have developed an attitude that they *"have need of nothing"* (Revelation 3:17) as a result of their prosperity and material blessings. This statement by Jesus Christ indicates that Laodicean believers have lost a personal realization of their deep need for a Savior. Many biblical heroes were wealthy, so being wealthy is neither a sin nor proof that someone is a Laodicean.

It is also true that many biblical scriptures urge believers to claim the promises of the Bible for their lives (John 14:13-14, 16:23-24, Matthew 7:7, Mark 11:23-24, Hebrews 11:6 and many more), so it is not at all sinful or wrong to claim God's promises for our healing and his promised benefits applicable to our human lives! Indeed, the Bible tells us to "boldly" go the throne of God and claim God's biblical promises (Hebrews 4:16).

Receiving blessings and answered prayers from God does not at all make a person a Laodicean. What makes a person a Laodicean is when the blessings they receive from God (whatever those blessings are) cause them to think they are "just fine the way they are" and they lose their sense of personal need for the Savior or for additional spiritual growth. Jesus Christ's very first statement in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3) is translated in many Biblical translations as "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I think this wording obscures Christ's meaning a bit for modern readers. I believe the *Modern Language* version of the Bible captures the meaning well when it renders this text as: "Blessed are they who know their spiritual poverty, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Jesus' opening statement in the beatitudes stresses that believers must have a deep sense of their own personal need for a Savior and for God to change us inwardly and spiritually. Anyone with such an attitude of personal spiritual

need is *not* a Laodicean, regardless of what their material status is.

One final comment on the Laodiceans: Jesus' message to them does not deny that the Laodiceans *really are* "rich and increased with goods." This means that the Laodiceans have to be concentrated in the wealthy regions of this world. Laodiceans will be very scarce in impoverished nations and regions of the world where the Smyrna church is located. Expect the materialistic Laodiceans to be concentrated in the world's rich and comfortable nations, like the United States of America and other modern western nations. North America is especially likely to be a place where the Laodicean spirit pervades believers in many Christian denominations because Americans and Canadians live in prosperous comfort zones where their nations have not experienced warfare or the hardships and dislocations caused by wars in a very long time.

Americans and Canadians live in a continent which has not seen local warfare and invasions in so many generations that they have developed a complacent attitude that "nothing really bad can happen here" as they watch the wars, famines and disasters that befall people in other locations of the earth. Americans and Canadians think that horrific events happen in other nations where they can watch them on *FOX News*, *CNN* or other media. It is the North American churches that also have many who believe in a "pre-trib" rapture that will make it possible for them to be wafted away from the hardships that will be experienced in "all those other nations" they watch on TV. North Americans do not realize that it is their continent which is in the bulls-eye of the age-ending World War III that is prophesied in Ezekiel 38-39. That prophecy does not address a latter-day invasion of the Jewish nation in the Mideast (the Jews/Israelis are called "Judah" in biblical prophecies and Judah is not mentioned in Ezekiel 38-

39). Ezekiel 38-39 speaks of a great latter-day invasion of the nations of the ten tribes of "Israel" in the latter days, and the latter-day nations of Israel are prophesied to be prosperous, large nations in the latter-days. For more about the locations of the modern nations of the tribes of Israel and the prophesied Ezekiel 38-39 war, I invite you to read my articles *What Ezekiel 38-39 Reveals About a Future World War III, The USA in Prophecy* or the free audio message at the speeches link of this website which give outlines of the material presented in my books about the history and modern locations of the ten tribes of Israel.

Jesus Christ has a strongly corrective message for latter-day believers in the Laodicean mindset, but Jesus Christ directs this message to them in love. If any readers see a Laodicean attitude within themselves, they may want to sell a significant portion of their wealth and give it away to the poor. That is the advice Jesus once gave to a wealthy man whose heart was in his wealth (he was "rich and increased with goods") more than in a relationship with Jesus Christ (Matthew 19:22-23). The wealthy man in those verses couldn't bring himself to act on Jesus' advice in ancient times, and neither will the Laodiceans do it today. When the great tribulation occurs, they will wish they had done so. The Laodiceans who are ensconced in the complacent Christian spirit also need to recognize the spiritual condition Jesus states they are in and awaken themselves to repent and seek the Savior with a sense of deep spiritual need.

Let's Visit the Seven Ancient Churches

So far, we have examined various characteristics of the seven latter-day churches, but the Bible primarily discusses their differences in order to give us information about the characteristics of latter-day believers. The Bible does not

mention what the seven ancient churches had in common. Would you like a peek into seeing what they were like in their true historical context? Let's climb aboard a theoretical time machine and go back in time to visit their congregations to see what they were actually like. Prepare to encounter some major culture shock because their lifestyles and practices differed greatly from much of modern Christianity. If you are overly comfortable in your traditional American (or western) Christian comfort zone, you may want to skip this section, because you may find it very jarring. However, it will reinforce the point made above that as long as one has a faith in Jesus Christ/Yahshua as the only Savior, He is responsive to people in whatever cultural and doctrinal "camp" from which they approach him.

For context, the seven ancient churches in Asia Minor were in the Pauline tradition. Paul wrote Apostolic letters to them and mentioned them in his letters to other churches. They would have followed the teachings of the Apostle Paul, which were sometimes considerably different than what modern Christianity has assumed (this should not be surprising because the Apostle Peter wrote that Paul was often misunderstood even in his own time—II Peter 3:15-16). Many Christians may want to sit down before they read what follows.

To begin with, it is obvious in the scriptures that Paul was a Seventh-day Sabbath keeper his entire Christian ministry (Acts 13:14, 16:13 and 17:2), so we can expect to find all the ancient churches of Asia Minor meeting on the seventh-day Sabbath. Paul was a Jewish Pharisee, raised as protégé of Gamaliel and well-instructed in Torah law (Acts 22:3, 26:5), and he had no qualms about participating in Jewish Temple purification rituals even *after* he was a Christian Apostle (Acts 22:23-27). There are references to the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost (which was the Feast of Weeks) and the Day of

Atonement in the book of Acts and Paul's epistles (Acts 12:3-4, I Corinthians 5:7-8 and 16:8, Acts 27:9). The *King James Version* reads "Easter" in Acts 12:4, but this is an overt mistranslation. The *Revised Standard Version* and other versions of the Bible correctly translate the original Greek word as "Passover." Acts 27:9's reference to "the fast" being past in terms of dating the seasonal dangers of sailing refers to the Day of Atonement (a fast day) which always occurred in the Autumn, after which sailing became riskier due to seasonal weather factors. These references indicate that the ancient churches of Revelation would have all kept the biblical Holy Days in Leviticus 23 which God gave to *all* the tribes of Israel (not just the Jews of the tribe of Judah) and which Paul kept throughout his ministry and taught to his Gentile churches.

Paul also taught his churches that (are you ready for this?) only meats permitted in the Torah should be eaten by early Christian believers. I Timothy 4:3-5 are often taken out of context, but they actually reveal that Paul affirmed the meat laws of the Torah. In verse 3, it is clear that *Paul is addressing the issue of vegetarianism* and whether believers could eat *any* animal flesh at all. Eating "unclean meats" is not what Paul was addressing in this scripture. He was defending the right of believers to eat animal flesh and not be vegetarians. Paul writes that "every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving. *For it is sanctified by the word of God...* (emphasis added)." Modern Christianity reads over the part where Paul states that animal flesh had to be *sanctified by the word of God* to be eaten by New Testament believers.

Remember that none of the New Testament books existed in Paul's time or during the time of the early churches of Revelation. References to the "word of God" or "the Holy Scriptures" in Paul's writings *always* meant the Old Testament

(i.e. The Tanakh), which Paul wrote was “profitable for doctrine” (for New Testament believers) in II Timothy 3:15-16. Paul was referencing the Old Testament scriptures in his comments in I Timothy 4:3-5 about which kinds of animal flesh were “sanctified by the word of God” for human consumption, and the scriptures Paul referred to are found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, as anyone in the seven ancient churches of Revelation would have instantly understood. As a learned Jew, Paul would have known these chapters by memory since his childhood.

If we were to go back in our theoretical time-machine to visit the ancient churches of Revelation, all of them would seem very “Jewish” to modern Christians. Some modern Christians would feel uncomfortable in the ancient churches of Revelation. Some of their members may have danced around a Torah scroll as part of the services. Those who would be most “at home” in those early churches would be the Messianic/Hebrew Roots believers of today because they already practice many of the Torah-observant lifestyle choices that would have commonly been practiced in the seven ancient churches. Acts 24:5 records that the early Christian churches were seen by others as being so “Jewish” in their lifestyles that they were seen as a *sect of the Jews* called the Nazarenes when the Christian Church was founded. That statement confirms that the original Christian churches were at first seen as simply being a new sect that had emerged within the overall Jewish tradition. It morphed into a non-Jewish entity centuries later.

Acts 15 discusses an early apostolic conference concerning the subject of gentile Christians. Readers of that chapter tend to forget that we have a “Cliff Notes” version of that discussion. We are only told the outcome of the issues which were controversial *at that time* (i.e. circumcision, meats sacrificed to idols, etc.) There was a great deal which was not mentioned by the writer of

Acts because it was neither controversial nor disputed at that time. James the apostle, after giving his verdict on the controversial items in verse 20, references the non-controversial items briefly by saying in verse 21: "For Moses of old time has in every city them that preach him, *being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.*" James was stating that there was no need for the apostles to list everything *that the gentile Christians needed to know* about serving God because they could hear it "read in the synagogues every Sabbath day" from the books of "Moses." This speaks volumes that modern Christians don't generally notice. The Apostle James' statement assumed that gentile Christians would be attending church in their local Jewish synagogue every Sabbath day and hearing "Moses" (the Pentateuch or Torah) "read" to them weekly. This reinforces the fact that the early Christians were "Torah-observant" in their lifestyles and beliefs, and James assumed they always would be. James' statement was given before Christians were expelled from Jewish synagogues, and James could not have foreseen at the time he made his statement how history would later unfold.

You may really want to brace yourself for the next portion. I'm going to talk about sexual practices in the early Christian churches. In I Timothy 3:1-13, Paul listed the requirements for being ordained as elders or deacons in the churches he founded. He mentions both elders and deacons had to be men who were "married to *one* wife (emphasis added)." Paul was not addressing the issue of celibacy vs. marriage (as modern readers might assume). *Paul was addressing the issue of polygamy vs. monogamy.* Interestingly, the Christian laity in Paul's churches were not required by Paul to be monogamous. Polygamy and/or concubinage had been a longtime, totally-accepted custom in Semitic cultures throughout biblical times, and God had long permitted it. Many biblical heroes were polygamous. Abraham

had a harem of concubines (Genesis 25:6), Jacob had 4 wives (or perhaps two wives and two concubines as Zilpah and Bilhah were servant girls to Leah and Rachel—see Genesis 30:1-9), David had many wives plus a harem of concubines (II Samuel 16:21-22). Solomon had an unimaginable 1,000 “wives and concubines” (I Kings 11:3). Samuel was born to a bigamist father (I Samuel 1:2), and even though David had many wives already, God himself offered to give David even more wives in II Samuel 12:8. I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

When Paul wrote to his churches that elders and deacons *had to have [only] one wife*, Paul was making a revolutionary departure from at least 1800 years of Hebrew, biblical tradition that polygamy was an acceptable lifestyle. This teaching was not as revolutionary as Paul and the other apostles teaching that circumcision was no longer necessary to serve God, but it would have been jarring to believers at that ancient time. Given that Paul did not mandate the laity to be limited to one wife, it is highly likely that if we could visit the seven ancient churches of Revelation in our time machine, we would very likely find ourselves sitting amongst at least polygamous families in attendance.

Don't get me wrong! I'm not advocating polygamy today. I Peter 2:13 states that believers are to be subject to the “ordinances” (laws) of men, and polygamy is outlawed in our modern western societies so believers should not be polygamous. Also, polygamy was *not* the ideal state of marriage that God created in the Garden of Eden when he made one man and one woman to live in a marital union. However, our modern western cultures have banned polygamy for so long that we tend to read into the Bible our long-established western cultural practices. However, the seven churches of Asia Minor were not western in their culture;

they were eastern (Oriental) in their tradition and culture and their traditions had long included and accepted polygamy.

Now let's exit our time machine and come back to the present. A visit to the seven ancient churches would be a huge culture shock for the vast majority of modern Christians. Now reconsider what I wrote earlier in this research report in identifying the seven churches of Revelation in the latter days. If you had any lingering doubts that Jesus Christ can tolerate "diversity" in doctrines and organizational structure among *modern* Christian denominations and churches, our "time machine" trip to the seven ancient churches should make that fact very apparent. Jesus Christ can tolerate a lot of differences in doctrines, cultural lifestyles, organizational structures, etc. among his believers in this (or previous) time periods, but the one thing they must all have in common to be part of "his" churches is a faith that Jesus Christ (Yahshua) is the one and only Savior for mankind.

Summary Comments about the Seven Churches

I'll offer some summary comments about the seven churches as this analysis draws to a close. Consider the surprises inherent in which of the latter-day churches are most warned by Jesus Christ and which ones are most commended.

The Sardis church, which has largely abandoned the scriptures and refuses to "watch" for the Lord's return by heeding biblical prophecies is the most heavily criticized because it is already "dead" in the eyes of Christ. Surprisingly, the Ephesus church, with its very strong doctrinal knowledge and personal righteousness, is warned that its "candlestick" is about to be removed because it has "lost its first love" (its love for a relationship with Jesus Christ himself). The Laodicean Church is also severely warned that their love of (and trust in) the worldly riches and mammon of this world is so offensive to Christ that he

is ready to “spew them out of his mouth,” and that he apparently intends to send them into the great tribulation to test them in the fires of affliction. Interestingly, the Ephesus believers have much knowledge and understanding, and apparently have drifted into an attitude of trusting their knowledge and understanding to save them. Laodiceans have received many material blessings and are trusting in those material blessings to save them. Both groups are at risk of losing it all due to those attitudes of trusting in something other than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ himself.

Conversely, it is the persecuted and impoverished Smyrna church, on the other hand, which has little but trusts in the Savior for everything. It is they who Christ declares to be safe for the kingdom of God. The Smyrna and Philadelphian Churches are most commended by God. Neither one is told that they have a need to “repent” in the eyes of Jesus Christ. The Smyrna church is faithful to the Savior in spite of tremendous personal poverty and persecutions, and the Philadelphian church produces a remarkable amount of works for the Savior in spite of their having only a “little strength.” Smyrna is spiritually “rich” in Christ’s eyes, and the Philadelphians are promised protection during the severe trials and persecutions at the end of this age.

Thyatira and Pergamos are somewhere in the middle between the criticized and commended categories of churches with Thyatira being closer to the commended group and Pergamos closer to the warned group. Jesus has many good things to say about Thyatira and he promises them a “rod of iron” to rule over the nations when he returns, but Jesus devotes much of his message to them warning about their acceptance of a false prophetess. Jesus’ words to Thyatira that he “will put upon you none other burden” may mean a similar promise of protection during the tribulation that is promised to the Philadelphians. Jesus has many criticisms of the Pergamos church, but he makes

no statements that they are “dead,” that they are about to have their candlestick removed or that he feels like “spewing them out of his mouth.” He does say that he will “fight against them with the sword of his mouth” (i.e. he will fight against them with scriptural truths) if they do not repent.

Consider the rewards promised to the faithful in each of the seven churches. The Philadelphian church is promised “crowns” (symbolic of kingship) in Christ’s kingdom and the Thyatiran Church is told their members will “rule the nations” (another sign of kingship during the millennium after Jesus returns). The Smyrna church is promised a “crown” of life. Ephesus is told that their members will be allowed to “eat of the tree of life” (inherit eternal life) if they repent. Pergamos is promised hidden manna and a new stone with a new name on it for them (symbolic language that those who repent in Pergamos will be given eternal life). Laodiceans that repent (and perhaps choose martyrdom over riches in the tribulation) are promised to sit with Jesus Christ himself in his throne (an honored position in the kingdom). Those “few” who repent in Sardis are told that they will not have their names blotted out of the book of life (they apparently will barely be saved). Your personal choices in the remainder of your life will determine which reward is yours in the kingdom of God.

Did you realize that the book of Revelation not only begins with messages to the seven latter-day churches, it also ends with a comment to them? Revelation 22:16 cites Jesus as saying: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things *in the churches* (emphasis added).” This statement means that the entire book of Revelation was given by Christ to the “seven churches” of latter-day believers as an advance warning about what would happen in the latter days. Obviously, some of the

latter-day churches are listening to Christ's warning and others are paying no attention.

"What the Spirit Says to the Churches"

There is one message that is given to all the latter-day churches addressed by Jesus Christ in Revelation 2-3. At the conclusion of each message given to each church by Jesus Christ is found this statement: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches." This is a very important part of the seven messages that can easily be overlooked. What Christ is saying is that everyone in the latter day churches who reads these messages should carefully consider what is said to *each* of the seven churches.

Few modern believers will fall entirely into just one of the latter-day attitudes or spirits that will be present among the seven latter-day churches. Most believers will have strengths, weaknesses and characteristics that are addressed in a number of the messages to the seven churches [I know I do]. Jesus Christ tells us to carefully pay attention to each of his messages to the seven latter-day churches in order to determine whether we have areas in our lives where we need to heed his warnings and "repent" in our personal lives. If we see ourselves in some of the attitudes or practices rebuked by Jesus Christ in the latter days, we can repent and change how Jesus Christ deals with us the rest of our lives. Conversely, if we can see we have things right in our lives that are commended by Jesus Christ, we can take encouragement at the words in his messages to the seven churches.

Latter-day believers are living in the climactic end of our age. Our Lord and Savior will be coming in the not-too-distant future even though we do not know the specific time of his arrival. Prophetic fulfillments confirm his return is drawing near, and we

need to prepare ourselves spiritually for his return (which Jesus himself warned will occur *sooner* than his latter-day believers expect, according to his parable in Matthew 25:1-13). I hope that this research report has been informative and stimulating to your personal faith and growth.

Finally, I do not know how expansively or narrowly your personal definition of the body of Christ is in the modern world, but I think I have made my viewpoint very clear. If you are in the attitudes or denominations of *any* of the seven churches of Revelation, I regard you as my brother or sister in the faith. The parable of Matthew 25:31-46 affirms that having a narrow-minded attitude concerning which believers are “worthy” of your help in the latter days will be punished by Jesus Christ at his return while an expansive willingness to accept and help even “the least” of Christ’s brethren is greatly blessed by Jesus Christ at his return. That forewarning of us by Jesus Christ should encourage all of us to be expansive in whom we accept as our brothers and sisters in the faith.

At the beginning of this research report, I promised readers some surprises in its content. I hope that this report has lived up to that expectation. I also hope that you have found it to be personally challenging and that it will stimulate you to draw closer to your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ/Yahshua as his coming draws nearer.