

Ezekiel Ministry

By Barry A. Wilson

God's Church

“What is wrong cannot be made right. What is missing cannot be recovered. I said to myself, “Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them.” So, I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind. The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.” (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18)

I feel just like King Solomon at times. The increase in knowledge only increases my sorrow. I have such a burden for our nation, but not just our nation, but the people in our nation that do not know God. I pray at times and ask God, “How can I reach more people with my writings and my devotions.” God’s answer is to just keep enduring and doing what I have commanded you to do. At times I just want to give up, I am weary of fighting. The thing that keeps me going is I know how the story ends. I know that we will end in victory. Here is King Solomon’s conclusion and it is the truth.

“That’s the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone’s duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.” (Ecclesiastes 12:12-14)

Our only hope for America is God. Our nation must turn back to God. We need more than just a revival; we need a revolution, God’s way. Jesus’ last commandment to us before He returned to heaven was, “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20) I have failed to follow this commandment. I feel most of us have failed at this commandment. Most churches have failed also. The seven churches of Revelation are a picture of the churches today. As you read about these churches, see if you can see your church in any of these churches. If so, pray about what God wants you to do about changing your church. Our churches are our hope, but we need some changes in our churches.

The Seven Churches

The Book of Revelation addresses seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) (Revelation 2-3). Each letter, as proclaimed by Jesus and recorded by John the Apostle,

declares the triumphs and failings of the recipient churches and warns each congregation to repent.

The advice in these letters is prophetic, forewarning present-day Christian communities of the snares that can lure us away from our faith.

Revelation's seven churches were among a number of early Christian communities in Asia Minor. These particular seven churches may have been chosen to receive Christ's apocalyptic message because, geographically, the churches were located along an established, circular trade route that brought together the most populous and influential parts of the province. Once the apocalyptic message was given to the churches in these prominent cities, the message would spread to the Christian communities in the rest of the province.

Ephesus – The church has abandoned its love for Christ and His Teachings. (Revelation 2:1-7)

Ephesus was the prominent commercial and cultural center of Asia. Christ's letter to the Ephesian church praises the congregation for its "deeds...hard work...and perseverance," and for its rejection of false apostles (Revelation 2:2-3).

Despite its hard work and doctrinal integrity, Christ faults the community for having "forsaken the love they had at first" (Revelation 2:4). This "forsaken love" can mean that the Ephesians had become less devoted to Christ or that the work they did was no longer motivated by love for one another. The letter to the Ephesian church does offer the community hope, if they repent and rekindle their love for Christian living (Revelation 2:5-7).

The lesson in the letter to Ephesus teaches that truth and love must go hand-in-hand. A church that upholds doctrinal purity at the expense of showing love is just as flawed as a church that upholds congregational harmony at the expense of truthful teachings. Instead, Jesus reveals that a church fashioned in His image must teach God's Truth in love.

Smyrna – The church that remained faithful amidst persecution. (Revelation 2:8-11)

Smyrna was home to a large Jewish community hostile to Christians. The Bible notes that slanderous accusations by Jews against Christians had led to Christian persecution by Roman authorities (Acts 14:2, 19, Acts 17:13).

Christ's revelation to Smyrna commends the community for its material poverty but spiritual wealth and acknowledges its wrongful persecution (Revelation 2:9). Christ does not reprimand this church but warns of impending imprisonment for some of its members, urging them to remain faithful "even to the point of death" and remember the promise of their "victor's crown" (Revelation 2:10).

Like the church in Smyrna, Christians are persecuted worldwide in obvious and insidious ways. This letter warns all Christians that although we may suffer greatly, the length of tribulation will be short compared to the promise of eternal life.

Pergamum – The church that compromises its beliefs. (Revelation 2:12-17)

The city of Pergamum was renowned for its pagan practices. The letter to the church there lauds the congregation for upholding its faith despite the city's pervasive pagan influences (Revelation 2:13). The letter then addresses the church's sin by denouncing some of its members for following false teachings that brought about religious and moral compromise (Revelation 2:14-15).

The Lord calls on the community to repent or risk the judgment that will emanate from the "sword of His mouth" (Revelation 2:16). Those who repent will be given the "hidden manna" that is the grain of Heaven (Psalm 78:24), and a "white stone" or clean slate with a new identity in Christ (Revelation 2:17).

Like the Christians in Pergamum, it's easy to normalize the non-Christian behavior of those around us and allow that behavior to dilute our values (1 Corinthians 15:33). But the Bible urges us to "not conform to the pattern of this world" but be transformed by the renewal of our mind in accordance with God's Word (Romans 12:2).

Thyatira – The church that follows false prophets (Revelation 2:18-29)

Thyatira was a wealthy commercial city. Jesus' letter to Thyatira praises the church for having grown in faith and service (Revelation 2:19). The church's downfall was its devotion to a false prophet that led some members to commit idolatry and immorality (Revelation 2:20). Although the false prophet remained unrepentant, Jesus affirms that the congregation can still repent by turning away from the prophet's ways (Revelation 2:21-22).

The Lord reminds us in this revelation that He will repay each of us according to our deeds (Revelation 2:23). The payment for sin is death. Those who persevere in faith, however, will receive a share of Christ's messianic authority over all nations and triumph over death (Revelation 2:26-28).

Just as some in Thyatira's church were led astray by a false prophet, Christians today fall prey to cult leaders, occult practices, and other false teachings. To share in Christ's victory, we are to avoid these "so-called deep secrets" of Satan (Revelation 2:24) and hold firm to Christ's teachings.

Sardis – The church that is spiritually dead (Revelation 3:1-6)

Sardis was a city that had endured two surprise attacks despite its fortifications. Our Lord faults the church in Sardis for maintaining an outward appearance of being "alive," while actually being spiritually dead (Revelation 3:1). Alluding to the city's history of prior surprise attacks, Jesus warns the congregation to "wake up" and repent, lest he "come like a thief" to bestow His judgment (Revelation 3:2-3).

Those in Sardis who heed Christ's warning will be "dressed in white," a symbol of purity and victory, and will be acknowledged in Heaven's Book of Life (Revelation 3:5).

Today, Christians can fall into the trap that ensnared the church in Sardis if we merely go through the motions of practicing our faith without really feeding our spirit. We can avoid becoming “the living dead” by engaging in our faith through Bible study, prayer, and fellowship.

Philadelphia – The church that patiently endured despite weakness. (Revelation 3:7-13)

Philadelphia was home to a synagogue community hostile to Christians. Christ praises the Philadelphians for remaining faithful in the face of trials despite their limited strength (Rev. 3:8).

Jesus does not reproach this congregation but condemns its persecutors. (Revelation 3:9). Christ promises that if Philadelphia’s congregants remain faithful to Him, He will protect them from the “hour of trial” and make them pillars in God’s heavenly temple (Revelation 3:10-12).

The message to Philadelphia shows us the blessings that come when we maintain our faith despite life’s tribulations. In fact, those who persevere despite weaknesses will stand strong as pillars in Heaven.

Laodicea – The church with lukewarm faith. (Revelation 3:14-22)

Laodicea was a prosperous industrial and commercial center. Jesus’ letter to this church wastes no time denouncing the congregation for its lukewarm faith, threatening to “spit” the congregation out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16).

Christ scolds this church for allowing its economic prosperity to cause it spiritual bankruptcy and reveals that, despite its economic wealth, only He can provide spiritual wealth (Revelation 3:17-18). Those in Laodicea’s church who open the door to Christ will share in His Heavenly banquet and have the right to sit with Him on His throne (Revelation 3:20-21).

Like the church in Laodicea, it’s easy to become complacent in our faith during times of abundance. Christ warns us in this revelation that he will “spit out” lukewarm disciples. Instead, Jesus urges us to keep seeking the Lord’s face even after His hand has bestowed riches in our lives.

What does God’s Church look like?

“But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God’s love. And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.” Jude 20-23

This scripture is a good picture of what God’s church should look like. Our churches should be houses of worship. Worship is the adoration, the lifting up of the redeemed spirit toward God in contemplation of His holy perfection.

God’s houses of worship are places where we can come and escape the world. His houses of worship must be a place of love, a place where people can come and feel that they are loved unconditionally. His house of worship can be anything from a mighty cathedral to some one’s

home and all in between. Any place where we find God's presence and His Spirit is a house of worship.

It is a place of true worship, when you enter the door you will feel the Spirit of God in the place. You will know that His Spirit is there.

God is the only answer for our nation and we must obey Jesus' commandment to go out and make disciples.

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