

The Ministry of Christ to His Church

Scripture: Revelation 2-3

Code: 80-16

I want to draw your attention, if I might, away from 1 Timothy and to a passage of Scripture, which from time to time is important for the church to see. And this, for some of you, is a first. For others, by way of reminder. But for all of us is exceedingly important...I want you to realize...I wanna remind you that someone very powerful wants to take over this church, and that that person is working very hard to do just that. And we know that person to be Satan. He is the adversary of God. He is the enemy of Christ, and, consequently, he is the foe of the church. Beyond those who are delivered to Satan, as we've been seeing in 1 Timothy, he really would like to have the whole church. He would desire that this church literally be ineffective in terms of any significant ministry for Christ. He would desire to destroy its testimony...to cripple its outreach...that it might rather advance his kingdom than the Kingdom of God.

And we've been seeing, I think, in the study over the last four weeks in 1 Timothy that we are, without question, in a spiritual battle. But I want us to see it at this particular point, not so much in the personal dimension, as we see it in the corporate dimension. Nothing is more important for us who are here to affirm our commitment to this church than to understand what the issue really is in terms of why that commitment is necessary. It is necessary that we have a strong commitment to the ministry here, because we have a very strong enemy, and we are on his hit list. In fact, I don't think I would be stretching it to say there...there would be few churches in this area that he would be so aggressively desiring to have as this church. Because, through the years, God has given us such a great heritage. Because God has strengthened us. Because God has and continues to great things in and through us, we definitely make advance on the kingdom of darkness with effect. It is obvious that Satan would want to reverse that. He knows us well. His demons know us well, those who have done his bidding in our midst.

He would desire to discredit this work...to undermine and destroy it. And he would do that, for example, by attacking me, perhaps. I have no question about that, about that the fact that Satan would like to eliminate me from the picture...and if something were to happen to me by way of some spiritual disaster, some fall into sin, there would be a great ripple effect upon our congregation and its credibility and viability. And that would be true of others of the leaders of our church. Satan would no doubt endeavor to tear them down, to destroy them and their ministry. But also the whole church in general, and I believe that he will attack at wherever there is the weakest point.

And so the message today, though it's essential that I listen and understand what God is saying, and our leaders, is also directed at you. The old proverb says that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. And we are knowledgeable enough of the technique of Satan to know that he will attack where he can succeed. And so all of us who are a part must be sufficiently warned.

Now the question is this: how can we know how he will attack us? How can we know where he will attack? He's invisible. We can't always see. We can't always tell. How can we know and understand the invisible supernatural attack of Satan?...Well, I think the answer comes from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and He gave it in a series of letters in Revelation 2 and 3. And I would like to have you turn in your Bible, if you will to Revelation chapter 2 and 3. Here we have the final epistles in the New Testament written to the church. They're not written by Paul. They're not written by Peter or John or James or Jude. They're written by Christ. Given to us by the Lord Jesus Himself, and recorded by John. But they are letters from Christ.

These letters, written to seven actual real historical churches founded in Asia Minor, which would be the geography known today as Turkey, that part of the world. These seven churches received the final letters to the church written by the Lord Himself. Five of the seven contain warnings about Satanic influence. Five of the seven contain warnings for any church and every church. And in those five warning letters, there is a five-step plan of Satan's to destroy the church. And all we have to do is follow the progression of those five letters of the seven, which have warnings, in order to see how Satan attacks the church.

But to begin with, I want you to understand who the writer is. Look at chapter 2 verse 1. "Unto the messenger of the church of Ephesus write: 'These things says He that holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands.'" Who is that? If you look into chapter 1, you'll find that that, in chapter 1 is part of the description of Jesus Christ. He is the One in verse 12, among the seven golden lamp stands, which represent the seven churches, the seven precious churches, the seven churches where the light of the Gospel shines. And in the midst of those lamp stands moves the One who is the Son of Man.

Down in verse 20, it says, "The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches. The seven...or angels...the seven lamp stands are the seven churches." So it is Christ Who moves in His church, Who writes the first letter. In chapter 2 verse 8, the second letter comes, and it says, "Unto the angel or messenger of the church in Smyrna write: 'These things says the First and Last, Who was dead and is alive.'" And we look over at verse 17 and 18, and we find the One who Is First and Last, Who was dead and alive, to be none other than the same Christ moving in the church, in the vision of chapter 1. In chapter 2 verse 12, the third letter to Pergamos is written, "From One Who has the sharp sword with two edges." We look at chapter 1 verse 16, and that also describes Christ. In verse 18 of chapter 2, it is "The Son of God who has His eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine bronze," as described in verses 14 and 15 of chapter 1.

In chapter 3 verse 1, the letter to Sardis comes from "The One Who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." In chapter 3 verse 7, it is the writer "Who is holy and is true, and has the key of David, who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens." Of course, it refers to Christ. Chapter 3 verse 14, "It is the One called the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the most significant of all the creation of God."

Each of these title refers us back in one way or another, either by direct association or by an indirect one, to Christ as described in chapter 1. So clearly all seven letters were written by Christ. They were given by Christ to be put down by the Apostle John and recorded for us. They are letters from the Lord to His church.

Now, as I said, five of the seven speak of sin in the church and warn the church. By virtue of the order that they are in, in chapter 2 and 3, they provide for us a chronological digression or a chronological progression into devastation and destruction in which the church becomes Satan's. It goes from being the Lord's to being Satan's in this five-step progression.

Let's look at the first step, and here is where we begin to put up our guard. Here is why we need people who have covenanted together to stand for the truth. In writing to the church at Ephesus in verse 2, our Lord says, "I know your labor. I know your labor and your patience or your ability to endure and be steadfast and courageous in the midst of hardship. And I know you...you cannot tolerate those that are evil, and you have tried those that say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars. And you have endured and have patience, and for My name's sake, have labored and not fainted." Now, that's all a commendation, and a wonderful one. He commends the church at Ephesus and, in a sense, this is a reflection of the ministry of Timothy, which has been our concern in 1 Timothy.

Now, we've been studying 1 Timothy the last few months. We noted that Paul had put Timothy in Ephesus to set things right. The two main objectives were to deal with false doctrine and ungodliness. To bring to that church a commitment to true doctrine and godliness. And Timothy must have been very successful. By God's Grace, he was able to purge out the false pastors, the false leaders, the false teachers. He was able to turn the people around from error to truth. He was able to bring about true godliness in that church by God's Grace through his ministry. So that about 30 years later, when this letter is written in the Revelation, the 30 years that have passed have seen the church in Ephesus go from being led by false leaders and false pastors and false teachers, and influenced by ungodly men to ungodly living and doctrines of demons and seducing spirits, all the way to true doctrine and godliness and effective service. So we may conclude that this church, which enjoyed the pastorate of Paul, enjoyed the ministry of Aquila, enjoyed the preaching of Apollos, who could mightily expound the Scriptures. This church that had the very best of leadership had also been benefited greatly by the ministry of Timothy.

And though this church was in a very pagan city, dominated by the worship of Diana, of the Ephesians, one of the seven wonders of the world was her temple filled with eunuchs and priestesses and orgy and drunkenness and...and gluttony and all the rest. Though that dominated that city, this church founded by the Spirit of God through Paul, recorded in Acts 19, "Knew great blessing and spiritual growth." They were drawn out of their false doctrine, drawn out of their ungodliness. They knew how to correct lies and heresies. They knew how to discipline evil men. They knew how to confront ungodliness. They recognized demonic doctrine. They were strengthened through all of these things to the place where their ministry was very effective.

Notice in verse 2, He knew their hard work. Kappas, toil to the point of exhaustion. He knew their steadfastness, that they had the courage to endure anything. He knew their intolerance of sinners. They didn't stand those that were evil. He knew they were able to deal with liars who perverted the truth. This is a strong, fundamental, orthodox church...and then out of the blue comes verse 4, a very, very tragic word. "Nevertheless, I have this against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Down in verse 6, He says, "I know you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. I know you hate the right things...the things that you oughta hate, and you love the right things...the things that you oughta love. But the one thing you don't love the way you once loved is the Lord Jesus Christ. You've left your first love."

What is first love? What is first love? It's the love of passion. It's the love of the enthusiasm. It's the love of exhilaration. It's the love of emotion. It's the love of zeal. It's the love of thanksgiving. It's the love of praise. It's the love of adoration. It's the love that pours out of a heart that has just experienced an eternal transformation. But in Ephesus, their hot hearts and passionate love for Christ and zeal for God and deep sense of thankfulness had deteriorated into cold, perfunctory orthodoxy. They were doing the right things, because they were in the habit of doing the right things. They were even doing them for the right reason. They wanted to honor the Lord. Verse 3 says, "You do 'em for My name's sake." It wasn't even a question of their own reputation. It wasn't even a question of their own blessing. It was a question of doing it for the Lord. They even had a right motive. But with a right motive and right activity and right theology and right perspective and right attitude toward Christian living, they still had a warning, and the warning came because they had left their first love. The enthusiasm was gone. The thrill was gone. The joy was gone. The honeymoon was over. And they had settled in to a comfortable, traditional, orthodox routine.

In fact, it was easy to perpetuate because it was more difficult to do wrong in that church than to do right. Because everybody was doing what was right. And so you just did what everybody did, and you would be doing right, and you got acceptance and credibility, but it was without a warm heart.

I'm reminded of the Puritan whose prayer I read this week, who said, "Oh, God, I know I often do Thy work without Thy power and sin by my dead, heartless, blind service, my lack of inward light, love,

delight. My mind, heart, and tongue moving without Thy help." End quote. We can all identify with that. The church that left its first love. How do you remedy that?

Well, in verse 5, He says, "First of all, remember. Remember, therefore, from where you are fallen. Reach back and remember those precious love-filled days when first you embraced Christ." You see, spiritual defection comes from spiritual forgetting. That's why in the Old Testament God continues to recite over and over to His people, the history of what He had done for them. In order that the fire of gratitude might ever be flamed. I mean we have to go back and remember how it was in the days of the joy and the thrill and the exhilaration when we had just been taken from darkness to light. When we'd just been moved from death to life. When everything was going off around us, as it were. All the excitement of newfound faith in Christ. Remember those days.

Ask yourself a question or two. Do you love the Word now as you did then? Do you have the same hunger to listen to the teaching of the Word of God as you did then? Or have you been hearing it for so long that it's now beginning to have diminishing return? I can tell you right now that one of the things I've endeavored to cultivate in my own heart is a great excitement for this week's study than I've ever had in the past, and the Word of God continues, to me, to be exciting and fresh. How about you? Is the place of prayer as inviting now as it was once? Do you rush to worship? Is being here as important to you as it once was? How about fellowship? Do you long to be with Christians the way you longed to be with Christians the first times you began to meet with them and you were away from the world and it all seemed so wonderful and so new and so fulfilling and so enriching? Or is it...is it activity now? Activity that you enjoy. Let me put it this way. Do you enjoy your Sunday School class more than Christ? Do you enjoy your activity, your service more than the Word of God? If you do, it's probably that first love is gone. Remember how it was.

Secondly, He says repent. And repentance assumes what? Sin. And when on one of those fine, bright, clear, wonderful days when you're searching your soul to find some sin to confess, and you really can't find any...try this one. Having lost your first love. That's a sin. That is a sin. Confess it. Confess your lack of love. Confess your lack of desire for the Word. Confess the lack of enthusiasm and eagerness for the place and the people of worship. Confess your lack of zeal for joyful service to Christ. And, thirdly, he says, do the first works, verse 5. Go back and do what you did the first...times of your experience spiritually. Well, but I have to tell you, this is my greatest fear in the church, and on occasions in years past I've preached through these chapters, and always I say the same thing, and always I mean it. This is my greatest concern.

I really don't think that a heretic can come in and take over here. I think you'd have him for lunch before he ever got halfway through. I really don't think someone could come in here and just spread sin everywhere. That...that's not how it starts. This is how it starts. But I do believe that well-meaning, well-intentioned, good, faithful Christian people can grow very cold. That's step one.

Let's look at step two, chapter 2 verse 12. We skip Smyrna, because there's no warning in that passage, verses 8 to 11. But we come to verse 12, and we get a letter to the church at Pergamum or Pergamos or Pergamos, however you'd like to pronounce it. And the letter goes like this in verse 13, from the Lord. "I know where you dwell. I know what it's like trying to be a church in the town you're in. You dwell where Satan's throne is." In fact, at the end of verse 13, He says, "Where Satan lives." Not only is his throne there, but he lives there. "You live in Satan's hometown." And what does He have in mind here? Well, in the city of Pergamos, there was centered emperor-worship. Pergamos, it is said, was the center of the worship of Caesar in the Roman Empire. Certainly, that would be the throne of Satan, worshipping Caesar as if he were the true God. But it's also interesting to note historically that the leading god in the Pantheon of that culture was the god Zeus. And Zeus had built to his honor the largest, most renowned altar in the world, and that altar was shaped like a throne and was located in Pergamos.

So it may well be that what the Lord had in mind when He said, "You're where Satan's throne is," was this great throne-shaped altar to Zeus. But then, again, on the other hand, there was also at Pergamos a very special god. The god of healing, whose name was Aesculapius. And Aesculapius was called the Pergamese god because of his identification with this city. Aesculapius was represented in a snake. And if you've ever seen a medical symbol, you will see a snake wound around it. You've seen that symbol? That is a reference to the old mythological Aesculapius. In the temple to Aesculapius, there was a large floor covered with slithering snakes to represent him. And if you had an illness or a problem, you went and you would lie down, you lay down on that floor, and...lying there allowed for a period of time those snakes to crawl all around you. And every time you were touched by a snake, it was the touch of the healing of the god Aesculapius. Sounds like representation of that old snake himself, Satan and his demons.

So whether you look at Caesar worship or the...the altar of Zeus or whether you look at the temple of the god Aesculapius, when He says, "You're where Satan lives and has his throne," any of these could be in view. It's not an easy place for a little church huddled in the middle of that kind of pagan idolatry. And He says in verse 13, "You hold fast My name. You're a true church, and you have not denied My faith even in those days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you." They lost one of their own. May well have been killed right in the midst of their worship. But they still didn't abandon the truth. No, for the most part, they were a good church. They held fast. They endured without denying the faith.

But notice verse 14. "I have a few things against you." You see, this always starts subtly. In Ephesus, it wasn't everybody that had left their first love. It was just some. In Pergamos, it isn't everybody who is gonna be warned. It's just some. But, again, I'm back to the thing I said at the very beginning. The chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Wherever the inroads can be made, that's where they're made. I mean it doesn't take a whole lotta leaks to sink a boat. Only one, if you just

give it enough time, will do it, if it isn't properly filled. So He says, "I have a few things against you." Because, and He gives 'em...gives 'em basically two reasons for this warning. "You have them in your midst who hold the teaching of Balaam"...now Balaam was a prophet for hire. You can read about him in Numbers 22 to 25. he was a prophet for hire, and he went out and seduced the people of Israel to intermarry with pagans, thus turning them into idolaters and, ultimately, the intermarriage could've destroyed the Messianic line, destroyed the Covenant people. He taught Balak, the king, to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and commit fornication.

He...He tried to bring the people of Israel into, follow this, idolatry, into idolatry, sexual evil, by getting them, and here's the key, to compromise with the people around them. To compromise with the world. Oh, he didn't want them to deny their God. He just wanted them to intermingle with the world. Then, in verse 15, "You also have some that hold that doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." The best we can ascertain, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was a teaching that found its way into the church, that said Christianity and sinful indulgence are compatible. You can be a Christian and indulge yourself sinfully. You can go to the table of demons to put in 1 Corinthians 10 terminology, and also to the table of the Lord. The two are compatible.

So here is the second step in the progression of the destruction of the church. First, the loss of first love. Second, compromise with the world. Compromise with the world. I wish I had time to speak fully on this issue, but I believe there is a big sellout of the church to the world. It goes on all the time. All the time. And I find myself, the longer I'm here, and the longer I stay firmly committed to the Word of God, the more isolated I am becoming. Because there is a drift going on, even in what we would know as evangelicalism. There...there's a move away from the things that we've always believed to be true. It is a sellout. It is a capitulation to the encroaching mentality of the system. I mean there are people who want to hold onto the Bible only if it doesn't cause them to lose any face with academics or with intellectualism. And wherever the intellectual community comes and says, "Well, that's really not intellectual," they'll opt out to be accepted by those people and deny the Scripture.

I mean this goes on. I...I had a seminary professor say to me, "I'm concerned about my reputation in the academic community. If I have to outwardly take the label of a fundamentalist who is orthodox, I refuse that label. They won't accept me." Well, there's a sellout on that level, of course. Those who are involved in teaching, and those who are involved in any kind of theological environment where there's an interaction among theologians can sense that sellout. You can sell...sense it even in reading things that are being written. People are moving to the occult. All kinds of things, and still tied to Christianity to some degree.

You oughta read the book Psychological Seduction written by a psychologist, in which he says the whole society's been seduced by psychology, which denies the sufficiency of Scripture. In the...the

book by Dave Hunt, Seduction of Christianity, he points this out. By the way, he's gonna speak to us on New Year's Eve for an hour on the seduction of Christianity. So we'll hear firsthand. But, in many ways, there is a consistent sellout and compromise with the world. The church now tolerates things it would never tolerate in the past. I said to the seminary students the other day, speaking to them, it bothers me greatly that the number one voice for Christianity in America today is a rock singer. More people listen to her than any preacher. I am bothered by celebrity mentality. I'm greatly concerned by that.

But I see this as just a part of the encroaching worldliness, and when you try to draw very firm lines, and say, "Well, we stay right where the Word of God is," people think something's wrong with you. I hear every once in a while, someone who says, "Well, we have to pray for John. He's getting narrower and narrower and narrower." Well, the truth of the matter is, I haven't changed one bit. I'm...I mean it's...I'm still where I've always been. And someone said to me not long ago, "Don't tell me where a man is. Tell me what direction he's going." There might be two men here. One's coming this way. One's going that way. I wanna know which way he's going.

And so the compromise can come in so many, many ways. And in this church, it was a compromise with the world. Sad compromise. A compromise of intermarriage with the world. A compromise of a little bit of idolatry and a little bit worship of the Lord. And it curses the church. In verse 16, He says, "Repent, or I'll come against you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth." Now, when the Lord fights His own church, it's in serious trouble. But that's the drift, folks. First, you lose the first love, your orthodoxy is cold. And when you lose your love toward Christ, your love sorta wanders around, and it'll attach itself to something in the world, and the world'll tell you it's all right, and there's a beginning marriage taking place. You get tolerant of sexual things, tolerant of the world's entertainment, tolerant of the world's attitudes, tolerant of the world's viewpoints on things. And pretty soon your heart is gone, and you've found your way back into a compromise with the system.

That leads to a third problem in the digression of the church, and that's in chapter 2 verse 18, as we come to the message of Thyatira just briefly. This city also a church in the midst of a pagan environment. Went one step further than Pergamos. He says in verse 19, "I know your works and your love, service and faith, patience, works." He commends them for their love and their...their service to the Lord and the church, their faith. They were a believing, loving, active group of people. They were on target in terms of serving the Lord, and even had a measure of love, not first love, obviously. And at the end of verse 19, I like this statement, "The last is more than the first." In other words, you're not deteriorating. You're really getting better. I mean your...your love is growing, and your works are growing, and you're doing very well. You're better than you used to be.

But verse 20, "Nevertheless, or in spite of all of that, I have a few things against you. And what I have against you is what you tolerate. It's what you allow. You allow that woman Jezebel...now, I don't

know that that was her real name. She was a Jezebel-type. Maybe she was named Jezebel...She calls herself a prophetess...Obviously, she had usurped the place of teaching and preaching. They had allowed a woman preacher in their church...and not only was she taking a place that belongs to men, as we shall see in our further study of 1 Timothy 2...but she was using it to teach things that ultimately seduced the people to sexual sin and idolatry." Amazing. Absolutely amazing.

There was a sellout there, allowing a woman to preach when 1 Timothy 2, "I permit not a woman to teach nor to take authority." So they had violated that, and here was this woman who got that prominence by claiming to be a prophetess of God and wound up seducing people into sexual evil. So there she was in it, and there were the people, and they allowed it. That's the key word. They allowed it. Here's the progression. Loss of first love. Compromise with the world. Tolerance of sin. Tolerance of sin.

You see, once you've compromised with the world, you just wind up tolerating sin, because your compromise put you in a position where you couldn't even begin to deal with the issues. If the whole church is compromising or if the church advocates that kind of compromise or settles for that compromise, then how can you all of a sudden begin to discipline people? So the church takes the next step, tolerating sin. What kind of sin? Fornication, idolatry, probably again, 1 Corinthians 10, going over to this...the pagan feast and eating the meat offered to idols and having sex with temple prostitutes or whatever. Then going over to the table of the Lord and acting pious and singing hymns and praising God and drinking the cup and eating the bread, and...and it's just abomination. And the church just allowed it. And they let that woman teach and seduce.

Verse 22, He says, "You wanna go to bed? Is that what you want? You want sex? I'll put you in bed. I'll throw you in bed, all right. I'll put you in a bed, and everybody who commits adultery with you in a bed of great tribulation. I'll put you in a bed of judgment. That's the bed I'll put you in unless your repent. And I'll kill her children with death. All of her followers, I'll kill 'em." You think the Lord wouldn't move in and kill people in His church? He will. He did it in Corinth. He would do it here. Thyatira. He said, "I'll take their life." He did it to Ananias and Sapphira. He'd do it. He's done it since, obviously. We don't always know when He's done it, but He does it.

I heard of one person in our church we disciplined a few months ago who had turned over to Satan just recently in the hospital in very, very serious condition. We can only pray if...for repentance. The Lord may take a life. You wanna go to bed? He says, "I'll put you in bed. I'll put you in the bed of judgment, and I'll kill all of your followers, and the churches will know that I'm the one who searches the minds and the hearts, and I'll give to every one of you according to your worth." That's judgment. "I'll give you what you've earned." The bed of sexual sin will be exchanged for a coffin.

But notice in verse 24, "But unto you I say, to the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine and who have not known the depths of Satan, (as they speak), I'll put no other burden on you but that

which you already hold fast till I come."

Hey," He says, "I'm not talking to everybody. I...I'm not gonna put any burden on those of you who are true. I'm just talking about the sinners in the church. Now, would you notice, not everybody in Ephesus had left their first love. Some had. Not everybody in Pergamos had compromised with the world. Some had. Not everybody in Thyatira was tolerant of sin, but some were, and they must've been in leadership to allow this woman that place.

But it seems to me in each of these letters that we've noted, it's the minority that are the problem, not the majority. Until you get to the next letter in chapter 3, and then something changes. He writes to Sardis. Seven hundred years before this letter, by the way, Sardis was one of the great cities of the world. One of its famous kings was a man named Croesus, whose name became synonymous with wealth. We have an expression: he's as rich as Croesus. It degenerated just like the church in it. And He writes and says in verse 1, "I know your works. You have a name that you're alive, but you're...what?...you're dead. You've got a reputation, but you're dead."

Now, look, this is the church content with programs...content with its name. This is the church that's nothing but a name, a place, a building. But no life. It's dead. It's the corpse, dry rot. He doesn't commend them for anything. At the end of verse 2, He says, "I have not found your works perfect before God." This is the dead church. The church over which God writes Ichabod. Socially distinguished, with all of its programs. "Oh, I know your works. I mean you're a busy bunch. You're running around. You've got your meetings and your conclaves and your activities. But you are dead." You're reminiscent of the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner. Corpses man the ship. Dead men pull the oars, and dead men steer the vessel. There's no life. Nothing but form and routine and program, and you love your system more than you love the Scripture. And you love your doctrine more than you love Christ. Lots of activity, but nothing in terms of spiritual life.

See, that's the way it goes. Loss of first love by a few. Compromise with the world by a few more. Tolerance of sin by a few, including leaders who allow things to happen. And pretty soon the church dies, and all it is is a socially distinguished name with no life. No life. I dare say many of you have come to this church from a church like that. You have. You've come out of a dead church. You've come out of a church where there was no life. Where there were activities, but no power. Activities, but no joy. No one was coming to Christ. No one seemed to be growing. Everything was stagnant and stuffy and always the same. Sure.

So He says in verse 3, "Remember again...remember...how you received and heard; and hold fast and repent. Remember the way it was when you first received the truth and repent of such a sin. And if you don't be alert, I'm gonna come like a thief, and you're not gonna know what hour I'm gonna come." And the intent is to come with judgment. So in verse 2, He says, "Take a good look. Strengthen the true things that remain. Remember the other things. Repent of your sin and change, or I'll judge you."

Notice verse 4, "You have a few names even in Sardis that have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy." Did you notice the transition there? Now it's not the few that are the problem. It's the few that are real. Do you get the difference? Now we've really turned a corner. "You have a few names." You know something? There are many of you in this church who represent that few. You were in a dead church, and maybe you said to yourself for months or even years, "You know, we oughta get outta this church. We oughta get outta of this church. Nothing's happening. God isn't at work here. The teaching isn't what it oughta be. They compromise with the world. They tolerate sin. There's no real love for Christ here. Oh, but we...we got our friends here. We've been here a long time. Mom, maybe we can help. Maybe we can change. We...we don't wanna be church hoppers," and, you know, you...you've gone through that. And, finally, you just said, "That's it. We're gonna go." And you went. So you've experienced that.

But when the church comes to the point where it's worked through the progression to step number four, there's just a few left. Just a few left. And then you come to step five, and the whole church is apostate. The whole church. That's verse 14. The church at Laodicea. "I know your works. You have activity. You have activity. You're into social activities, politics, busyness. Sure. But you're not cold. That is, you're not indifferent to God. You're not just hard soil, totally indifferent. And you're not hot. You're not saved, either. You're not indifferent, and you're not committed to Christ. I wish you were either indifferent or committed to Christ. The thing I can't stand most of all is that you're lukewarm." You know what that is? That's one who really is indifferent but professes to be committed to Christ. That's a hypocrite.

"And I'll vomit you out," He says. No real faith at all. This is a humanistic church, friends. This is the humanistic church. This is the apostate church. They're all over the place. There's no Gospel. There's no teaching of the Bible. Nothing. It's just apostate. It's a religious front. There's nothing there. Satan owns the place. Satan owns the place, and they'll say, "Well, we're rich." And sometimes they are. They own a corner in downtown somewhere. Big, high buildings. You know. "And increased with goods, and we don't have need...need of anything. And you don't know your wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." And he tells 'em to do something about it in verse 18 or in verse 19. He'll judge. He'll judge.

That's the progression. Now, listen for a moment. Listen carefully to what I say. We left two letters out. Those two letters are the church...were to the church at Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia. If there's anything distinct about those two churches, it would be that they endured severe persecution. They endured severe persecution. Lemme tell you something. Outside persecution tends to purify the church. It is inside defection in a tolerant society that tends to destroy the church.

I told you some months back when Joseph Taun from Romania and I were speaking. I said, "We pray for you, Joseph." He said, "Let me tell you my honest feeling. You're praying for the church behind

the Iron Curtain, but I'm telling you I pray for you. It's...it's easy for us to maintain our purity, because the price is high. Our Christians can't figure out how you can do it in this tolerant society."

So the warnings that come to the church come because of the internal defection of those who lose their first love. The messages are all to the people in the church. The church that's persecuted from the outside is often the church that survives and is strong. Both those churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, are said to be under attack from the synagogue of Satan. Maybe that was the key to their success. The price was high for naming the name of Christ, and they knew what it was to live for Him. So we stand warned, beloved, about the progression. And we've gotta be alert to how the enemy comes against us.

Now, in closing, I want you to go back to chapter 1...and I've tried to show you what it is that we need to be aware of. But I also wanna conclude by drawing your attention to chapter 1, and what the Lord does for His church. We're not on our own, and that's such a hopeful truth. We're not at it alone. The Lord will do His Sovereign part as well. And that is our salvation. And I want you to begin with me by looking at chapter 1, verses 5 and 6. And I wanna just name briefly some things the Lord is doing in our midst, or the Lord does for us. It says that, "Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the...the chief of all those begotten from the dead, the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loves us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and made us a kingdom of priests unto God and His Father."

The first thing I want you to know is Jesus loves His church. The Lord Jesus loves His church. You think you love Grace Church? You don't love Grace Church one fraction of the way the Lord Jesus Christ does. He loves this church. I have great hope in that, beloved. While I pray for you to be true and for you to be faithful and to you...for you to maintain your first love for Him, I am also rejoicing in my heart to know that He loves this church more than I do...more than you do...more than anyone does. And, because He loves His church, He holds His church. He preserves His church. And the greatest confidence we have against the enemy is not our strength, but His love for us. That He will not lose us to the enemy. He loves us to the extent that He washed us from our sin in His own blood.

The second thing I want you to see is that He intercedes for His church. In the vision that comes beginning in chapter 1 and verse 12, as he turns around, John hears the voice of the Lord. He turns around. He sees the image of the Lord in the vision. And in verse 12, he sees Him among the seven golden lamp stands, and He's the Son of Man, and He has a garment down to His foot and a golden belt around His waist." And I believe this is most emblematic of the high priest. And here we see Christ in His priestly work, moving among the churches as He moves among the lamp stands, each representing one of the seven churches. And He moves among the churches, trimming the lamp and caring for the church. And this reminds us of His intercessory...cessory work on our behalf. No matter what the battle, no matter what the struggle, He ever and always intercedes for us. Comes to

our rescue before the Father and with His power in our behalf.

The third thing we know, in verse 14, "His head and His hair, white as wool. His hair also noted and His head is white as snow." Emphasizing the whiteness, and, of course, to the Hebrew mind, that had reference to wisdom and purity. Wisdom and holiness. Or even holy wisdom. And then, "His eyes like a flame of fire." Judgment. He can see sin. He can penetrate evil. He can discover anything. And when He discovers evil, His feet are like fine bronze, as if they were fired in a furnace, and He will trample out judgment on that evil. And His voice comes with authority against evil, like the sound of many waters. "And He has...in verse 16...out His mouth coming a sharp two-edged sword. And His face is shining like the sun at the highest point during the day." Here He is in His great power, purifying His church, speaking with authority, judging, cleansing, purging, looking and finding it sin with His own holy vision. The Lord purifies His church. Oh, how wonderful.

There are things in the church of sinful nature that we can't know about, and we can't get to them, and we can't solve them. We say, "Well, Satan's making inroads. Satan's coming upon us, and we...we have to know all of this." And then we're reminded that the Lord knows it all. That what we never know about sin in the lives of people or about what Satan is doing, He knows. His searching eyes can see, and He can bring about judgment and action and discipline and purging in His church, whether we ever find out about it or not. Yes, He purifies this church.

There's another wonderful thing, too, in verse 17. John fell dead, as if he were dead at His feet. I mean he saw the vision. It was overwhelming. He saw the Christ, the Son of God in His glory, and he had the same reaction Isaiah did. He just collapsed like a dead man. Why? Well, he was afraid. Why was he afraid? Because when you see the Lord in holy glory, moving with a sword out of his mouth and speaking like roaring waters, and dealing with sin and all of that, you know you're in trouble. And the church might be fearful and say, "If the Lord is in our midst, will we not be consumed? Will we not die?" And I love in verse 17 where it says, "He laid His right hand on me." The touch of forgiveness. "And He said, 'Don't be afraid. Remember, I'm the First and the Last. I'm the One that lives and was dead. I'm the One that died for your sin. I'm the One that rose again. I'm now alive for evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of hell and death. And I'm not gonna put you there.'"

And we will say then that the Lord forgives His church. He has forgiven His church. There's nothing we can do that'll cause us to be cast into hell. He reaches out and touches us when we fall on our faces as dead men, fearing our own just retribution, and He says, "Don't be afraid. I died for you. I live again for you. I control death and hell." The implication being you have no fear. He forgives His church. Aren't you glad for that? If...if we were expecting only to be blessed if we were perfect, we'd never be blessed. But we are blessed because we are what? Forgiven. He forgives His church.

And then in chapters 2 and 3, He rewards His church. Yes, He will bring us all to glory. He will bring us all to a reward. And in every single letter, He gives an element of that reward. In the letter to Ephesus, verse 7, "I'll give them the Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God." In verse 11, "He that overcomes will never be hurt by the second death." In verse 17, "The one that overcomes...and that's overcoming faith in Christ...the one who has faith that overcomes the world...as John put it...I will give him hidden manna, a white stone, a name which no man knows except the one that receives it." I love that, because people always say to me, "What is that name?" And I say, "It says there, it's a name which no man knows. How can I know what name it is?" I don't know what name it is. Whatever name it is, it'll only be for me and only for you and only for everybody, which is to speak of our intimate relationship with Christ, that there's a name for us that only the two of us will know.

Great. And in future glory, verse 28, we will receive the morning star. That's Christ Himself will belong to us. Chapter 3 verse 5, we'll "be clothed in white raiment. Our names will never be blotted out of the Book of Life, but confessed before the Father and His angels." In verse 12, We'll "be made pillars in the temple of our God. He'll write on us the name of My God, the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem coming down from Heaven from My God and a new name." And then in verse 21, He will "allow us the privilege of sitting with Him on the His throne as he also sits on the Father's throne." He'll glorify His church.

Yes, He'll reward His church, forgive His church, purify His church, and receive for His church, because He loves His church. And the hope in that is that, no matter what happens, the Lord is on our side, working in our behalf.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You for the privilege we have had today to be reminded of what the church means to us. We thank You for what You do in Your church, that You love us, You intercede for us. You purify us and purge us and cleanse us. You...You forgive us when we fail in sin. You reward us. And someday You'll bring us to glory. We thank You, Father. And we desire to maintain that first love and not slip into compromise with the world and tolerance of sin and...and become a dead church, and then Satan's church...apostate, departed from the faith. Preserve us, Lord, by keeping us strong as a people and as pastors that we might do your work in a way that brings honor to Your Holy Name. May this day be a day filled with blessing, and we look forward to our fellowship tonight as we meet again around Your Word and with Your people. We pray that You'll even now bring to the prayer room those that You would draw to our fellowship, and that You would continue to add to the church daily, such as should be saved. For Your own glory, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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