Letters to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

By Charles Feinberg

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This is the second study. In the series on The Book of Revelation. Covering the letters to Thyatira, Sardis. Philadelphia. Laodicea. Visions of the throne and the scroll. From Chapter 2:18. To Chapter 5. Verse 14. The one. Speaking is Dr. Charles Lee Feinberg. Professor of Old Testament and dean emeritus of Talbot Theological Seminary in La Mirada California. We come in our studies now to the second chapter and the eighteenth verse. It’s the letter. To the Church of Thyatira. The Eighteenth verse indicates that the Lord Jesus in speaking to the Angel of the church in Thyatira bids him write. These things says the son of God who hath his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like unto burnished or polished brass. I know thy works and thy love and faith and ministry and patience and that thy last works are more than the first. But I have this against thee, that thou Suffers the woman Jezebel who who called herself a prophetess. And she teaches and seduced my servants to commit fornication. And to eat things sacrificed to idols. This friends is the only church of the seven. That has a woman in it. It’s the longest of all the letters to the churches.

It marks the beginning of the second group of letters in which the moral and spiritual history goes on till the second coming of Christ. In this and the following letters the call to hear comes after the promises. The title Son of God is used only here in the book of Revelation. The name Thyatira probably means continual sacrifice. The name is really hard to define clearly. Some suggest that it may mean something from daughter. And. To hold meaning woman’s
oppression. Now the period designated here is that from the seventh century on to the
Reformation period in the 16th century if we take the Ephesus church as the Church of departed
love, or of the apostolic age the Church of Smyrna as the Church of fiery persecution during the
Roman Persecution. The Church of Pergamum as the Church of worldly alliance. Then Thyatira,
it would appear is the Church of clerical domination. The Church of corrupt doctrine. Notice that
in Verse 18 our Lord Jesus is designated as the son of God. Because this corrupt church the
Church of the Middle Ages made so much of Christ as the son of Mary. Here the title is meant to
convey power and authority.

He is seen as such because the Church of the Middle Ages had shut Christ out of his
rightful place in his church. It is not Peter but Christ who is the foundation and the administrator
of the church. Christ is revealed. Here as searching penetrating, judging. His eyes search out evil
for he cannot morally tolerate it. His feet of brass because stamping out the evil with judgment.
The picture here in this church is one of judgment. In verse 19 you'll notice the savior the Risen
Lord said I know thy works, he commends it. The church has much evil in it but Christ looks
first at that which he can commend. Before the rebuke. These are the strongest words of
commendation addressed to any of the churches. There were devotedness and zeal in the Middle
Ages in spite of the apostasy and corruption. And we read her last works are more than the first
because the darker the night the more zealous and ardent were the company of the godly
minority. But the Lord has this against that church that she suffers the woman Jezebel. Jezebel in
the Hebrew language literally means chaste pure. But this was not true of this corrupt church she
belied her name.

Now Belem attacked the people of God from without. Jezebel does so from within.
Notice that she was a stranger in Israel. She was responsible for the worst idolatry in the land of
Israel and for the persecution of the Saints and the servants of God. She calls herself. Notice. She calls herself a prophetess. That's the claim of the corrupt church to infallibility in directing discipline and setting forth doctrine claiming new revelation from God. This Jezebel speaks of the corrupt church which is an abomination unto the Lord. She teaches and seduces. She seduces by her teaching. She leads men astray from worshipping Christ and Him alone. She is given the place of mediator or mediatrix which right fully belongs to Christ alone. The servants referred to were a group of servants a remnant of the faithful even in the midst of the corruption. Then we read in verse 20 of the fornication and idolatry of this church as the counterpart of Jezebel of old. The first is illegal intercourse with the world. What was begun in the Pergamum church reaches its climax here in the corrupt Church of the Middle Ages. Spiritual fornication is the idolatry seen in this church which was really pagan at heart. Customs and ceremonies were brought in which took the place of Christ or obscured his person which is definitely idolatry. First John 5 20 and 21.

She was given time to repent before the Reformation. This corrupt Church of Rome was called upon to repent by many men of God. As John Huss and others but they refused to do so. There is here therefore no call to repentance because she refused to do that very thing. Only judgment remains for this church. She's fixed in a corruption so her doom is sure. She will incorporate in herself all the evil systems of the world. Under the heading of Mystery Babylon the Great the mother of harlots mentioned in Revelation. Chapter 17 and 18. We read that the Lord will cast her into a bed of judgment. The three groups here now are Jezebel, those who dabble with her system supposedly from the spirit of tolerance and unity. And then her children who are her followers and her adherents. A lesson in verse 23 is both general and individual. But who are the rest spoken of in Verse 24 Verse 24 tells us. I say. To you to the rest that are in
Thyatira as many as have not this teaching to have not the deep things of God as they are want or
accustomed to say I cast upon you none other burden. Who are these rest? The Wall Dencies, the
Albigenses of those days and others we would think those who denounce the corruption since
there's no hope in the corrupt church that she may repent the godly remnant in her can only look
for the coming of the Lord as we find clearly in verse twenty five.

The fact that Thyatira overcomers are seen to go on till the time of Christ return reveals
that the church as such goes on beyond its period in the Middle Ages. And then we have the
wonderful promise I will give authority to the one who overcomes. Authority over the nations. If
we endure, we shall also reign within him Paul writes Timothy. Those who reject the advantages
of the world which Jezebel and her followers enjoy will yet enjoy other blessed privileges, the
privileges of the Lord. Jezebel sought worldwide dominion over soul and body. Those who come
to Christ and overcome by faith will be given what Jezebel so eagerly sought after they share in
Christ's Kingdom. Thank God and they are given the bright and Morning Star you'll notice the
morning star mentioned in verse 28. That's the promise of being with Christ before the Day
breaks the promise of the Rapture you can find in Revelation 22 16 Israel awaits the son of
righteousness.

The church awaits the Morning Star. This message as all the rest has an application to all
believers of all time. Notice the letter to Sardis in the third chapter. The first six verses in Sardis
we have the general condition of the church during and after the Reformation time. In the letter
to Thyatira we have it before the Reformation. Both conditions go on until the end of the age.
Sardis represents the Church of empty profession whereas Thyatira represents the Church of
clerical domination. Sardis means remnant. This church deals with the Church of the
Reformation. It is those who have escaped the moral corruption of the corrupt Church of the
middle Ages the flagrant violations of all decency on the part of the corrupt church their exploitation of the people and the evangelical teachings of the Church of God brought matters to a head. In the first verse we read to the Angel of the church in Sardis write these said he that hath the seven spirits of God and the Seven Stars. Paul speaks of the unity of the person of the spirit. John emphasizes the diversities of his attributes and actions and the fullness and the completeness of his power and person.

The Holy Spirit was not given the prominent place he deserved as can be seen in the different creeds of Christendom. The seven stars of Verse 1 are an allusion of the way in which Christ was revealed in the Ephesus church. But there is a difference. In the Ephesus Church he held the stars. Here he has the stars. There it was precise order here it is by way of testimony and not proper order. In the reformation time friends churches were formed according to the will and choice of certain leaders such as Luther Zwingli Calvin, [inaudible] and others. The Reformation was God's work. The resulting churches were man made systems. Man is prone to error and the result of the Reformation period is the revelation of the presence of error and shortcoming. Said Christ to this church. Thou hast a name that thou lives. The Lord commends nothing in this church. The measure of its profession and privileges is the measure of its responsibilities. It was full of empty profession. It has all the forms but not Christ himself. And so it is dead. The state churches set up by Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin included many that were not saved. The church started well but soon had more profession than life.

They were ambitious as the medieval church was and still is for numbers and wanted to accomplish that end as soon as possible. Oh what a reproach to have a name that you live and to be dead. Dr. Hall tells the story of a Scotchman. Who sang most piously the hymn where the whole realm of nature mine that were a present far too small. And all through the Scotsmen
singing he was fumbling in his pocket for the smallest silver coin for the collection plate. All in
the Sardis church may have seen the light but the scrutinizing eyes of the risen Christ who was in
possession of the sevenfold spirit can discern the difference between the possessors and the
professors. The Lord indicates that this church is to be watchful, be thou watchful. The church's
spiritual leaders are to assume and carry out their responsibilities. What there is of truth is to be
maintained and to be carried on. They're to strengthen the things and to establish the things that
remain. They have the testimony of God's word more fully than the ones who had sunk in the
ecclesiastical formalism of the Middle Ages but sadly enough none of her works was perfected.

Some people feel that all truth was recovered by the Reformation and that if a doctrine
cannot stand in the light of the Reformation confessions it is unscriptural. My dear friends the
Reformation is not the standard of divine truth. It was not a complete return. To the Church of
apostolic times individual godliness was absent. The truths of the Ephesians and Colossians were
unknown or unemphasized they were occupied largely with a doctrine of justification by faith.
The gospel was not fully expounded. The Bible sometimes left out of account and the teachings
were added to, liberty of conscience was denied to others. There was no emphasis on the Holy
Spirit none on life truth none on prophetic truth. Remember in verse three we're told to
remember therefore how thou hast received interest here and keep it and repent. She's told to
repent in view of all they had to repent in view of the recovered truth they're to keep what good
they had. Repent he says of the inadequate use you have made and were making of it the truth
and watch for if Protestantism unites with the world.

It will also have to bear the world's doom as the corrupt church did and the Roman
Church and Protestantism have run along side by side. Their differences are decreasing and they
will unite. The church here is threatened with the world's judgment and the Lord will come as a
thief. When we do not expect him. But he has a few names that godly remnant in Sardis. In verse four we note that they did not defile themselves their blameless innocent holiness publicly manifested. They are worthy. This is a reckoning of grace. They have been made so by His grace. Now notice the three promises. First white garments they'd been made white in the blood of the lamb. Secondly there will not be wiped out of the book those whose names were placed there by the authority of God. God will not blot the mouth. Never will their names be removed from the book of life. They will be there for all eternity. The Church at Sardis is then the Church of dead orthodoxy. It has more professors than possessors. So what appears to be alive is dead. They may have activity in abundance but no progress or growth because there is no life. This is true of rocking horse Christians. There are a lot of Christians who have much motion but no progress claiming saving grace without possession is worse than no profession at all. These are twice dead as Jude said in his epistle. They are dead in sins and dead in their profession. May God grant that we shall be kept from such a situation as this?

Now the study of the book of revelation comes to the third chapter. And the seventh verse. It is the letter to the church in Philadelphia found in the seventh verse through the thirteenth verse. Just as Sardis came out of Thyatira so Philadelphia comes out of Sardis. It's a faithful few. The reference seems to be to no definite church period since after Sardis Protestantism and Romanism go on together to the end. It speaks of a group out of professing Christendom. There are no words of censure for them. Philadelphia means brotherly love. This is the period of Revival's and missions that began in the 18th and 19th centuries after the deadening effect of doctrinal controversy and State Church Union in the midst of professing Protestantism. the letter is manifestly to faithful individuals in all groups of professing believers in all assemblies. Ephesus is the Church of departed love. Smyrna, the Church of fiery persecutions.
Pergamum the Church of worldly alliance. Thyatira the Church of papal domination. Sardis the Church of empty profession. Now Philadelphia is the Church of the faithful remnant the one who speaks to this church is he who is holy and true holy in life and true in doctrine holy in character and true in action. Christ is not revealed in this character in the first chapter. He is revealed here not in his judicial character but in his personal character. He has the key of David the treasury of David's house is mentioned in Isaiah 22 verse 22 Christ opens by His Spirit the truths of his word and no man can shut to the heart and spirit he shuts and then can open. Christ is the key to the word of God. To know the Bible we must know Christ first. This reveals also his administrative authority his right to enter and to exercise all needed authority. He's here in his messianic and kingly character. You'll notice that he indicates that he opened. He speaks of doors of service too. He opens as one of as closes. Then he says he has placed before this church. A door opened which none can shut. He opens the doors of witness and testimony particularly we believe on the mission field. Notice how God has entered so-called closed doors and that has shut doors so-called.

Open countries have been closed. And God opens the door it stays open for the accomplishment of his purposes. This church has had a little power no individual or association can have and does have power enough to hinder or frustrate the service of those linked to Christ. Our defense is our weakness. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only two churches without reproof. The one is a suffering church the other a weak church there is little power and that there is not much show not much display. the power it had. It was using in the service of God and they kept Christ's word. This speaks of submission of obedience to the word of God says he you did not deny my name. There's first the positive description. Kept his words. Then we have the
negative they did not deny his name. There is obedience and there is no apostasy for which we thank God.

But we read in verse 9. Of the synagogue of Satan. What group is this? Since those are turned to first principles Satan again brings in his old attacks and snares he brings in legalism. Smyrna's struggle was with pagan powers mostly but Philadelphia's is with religious power. It is the legalizing system and its opposition to the truths of God the Risen Lord tells them that they have been patient because they kept his word God will be keeping them in the hour of trial the time of the Great Tribulation is described from the 6th chapter of the revelation onto the nineteenth chapter. Believers will not be in that hour along with those who dwell on the earth. Those who have made their full settlement on the earth. They are world bound world minded not as the church which is heaven minded which is on a pilgrimage in this earthly sphere. Recall how Lot was kept from the trial while Noah was kept through it. Abraham and Enoch were safe from many such awful trials as the flood. Or. From captivity.

Certain ones then are kept from hours of trial. The Godly of Israel will be in the tribulation and be kept in it. But the Godly in the church are going to be saved from it or out of it. They are going to be away from it. The Lord Jesus Christ directly indicates the imminence of his return. They are not to surrender one iota of the words he has given them. If the truth is relinquished the crown is going to be lost. Do not let anyone take that crown from your friend. It doesn't state thy salvation or thy light but thy crown being a faithful servant one may lose. I mean being a faithless servant one may lose his crown faithfulness on the other hand in the truth and in the doors that are open will bring that crown. But lost opportunity will result in lost crowns notice verse 12 of this third chapter. We read. My God. Then the name of my God. The city of my God and from my God emphasis is again and again on my God.
This is identification with us the Lord Jesus Christ identifies himself with us just as he did in Psalm 22 1 My God my God why hast thou forsaken me. Moreover. He gives his own new name that is adoption and appropriation it's the name of Jesus. In a more wonderful sense than ever before because at the name of Jesus. Every knee shall bow every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is lord to the glory of God the Father. He offers the wonderful promise that this one is going to be a pillar in the temple of his God. Those who have been with Christ in the days of his rejection will realize the glory of the day of his enthralment. You remember the story of David in the cave of adellum and his following that he had in the day of his rejection. When David was crowned it said these all came to Hebron of one heart to make David King. Someone has beautifully said Our Lord is now rejected and by the world disowned by the many still neglected and by the few and thrown only those friend who have known Christ by faith who have been faithful to him can realize the blessings of the overcomer that are noted here. We come now to the fourteenth verse.

It's the message of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Angel of the church in Laodicea. Laodicea is the church that had only censure and counsel. Luke in the book of Acts revealed the history of the Church on earth for thirty years from Pentecost to Paul's imprisonment in Rome. The Apostle John in these two wonderful chapters Revelation Chapter 2 and 3 gives us the spiritual history from the end of the age of the apostles to live visible church's rejection by the Lord Jesus Christ. Laodicea comes from two Greek words meaning the rights of the people. This church speaks of the close of the church period. If Philadelphia meant the Church of the faithful remnant Laodicea means the church of incipit lukewarmness at the end of her earthly career she will be characterized by what is spoken here concerning the church. At this stage of Church history is the one in which we find ourselves today. It is democracy and almost anarchy.