Vison of the Risen Christ and Letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, and
Pergamum Part 2

By Charles Feinberg

These letters have seven exhortations to hear them, yet they are sadly neglected portion
of the Word of God. These messages have a spiritual and historical value both in the first three
letters, the exhortation to hear comes first and the last for the order is reversed. Each has four
parts. The manner in which Christ presents himself. The encouragements and the commendation
he gives them the reward he promises with the exhortation to hear. Now the messages are to
seven distinct literal churches in the Roman province of Asia but they also apply to successive
ages in the history of the church. It can even well be used in any age to indicate seven different
types of believers in the life of a church, doubtless in your church.

There are those who answer to the Ephesus church, certain believers that answer to the
Smyrna church, to the Pergamum church and so on. Now, the word Ephesus in the original
Greek means desired. In church history, it would speak of the apostolic age probably the end of
that age the first period of church of The Body of Christ on Earth. Ephesus itself, the city, was
the main seat and center of Greek culture and of heathen idolatry. It had the great temple of the
Goddess Diana adored by all in Asia, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. It's been
our privilege to be there in Asia Minor and see the city of Ephes and to try to think back on the
tremendous glory in the past of Ephesus. It was here that Aquila and Priscilla labored. Here is
where Apollos worked. Here Paul preached three years at one time and here the apostle John
after leaving his home in Jerusalem worked for about 30 years, in fact they point out at Ephes
what they consider to be the traditional grave of the Apostle John. There's even a place where there is a church which they claim was the home where the Virgin Mary lived, the mother of our Lord.

Christ is seen in verse 1 in his proper place. Let us notice in first verse through the seventh verse the message to Ephesus. Under the church, that's to the angel of the Church of Ephesus right? These things said he that hold of the seven stars in his right hand who walk up in the midst of the seven Golden Lamp stands. I know thy works and thy labor and thy patients and how thou canst not bear them who are evil thou hast tried them who say they are apostles and are not and has found them liars and has borne and has patients. And for my namesake has labored and has not fainted.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left my first love. "Remember therefore, from where thou had fallen and repent and do the first works or else I will come into the quickly and will remove thy lamp stand out of its place except thou repent. But this thou hast that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit said under the churches. To him that overcome it while I give to eat of the Tree of Life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

Christ is seen in verse one in the proper place guiding controlling ruling overall outwardly. You see everything is in its proper order. In verse two the Lord Jesus Christ reveals that he knows certain things concerning his church. This is repeated in each letter showing the absolute knowledge Christ has to what goes on in his church at all times. There may be time in your church when you wonder Is God aware of what's going on here, oh yes he is and he's known of it through all the years. The lamp stand is not the light it was set for the display of the light.
The church isn't a light giver but a light bearer. He says I know your work toil and patients. They're virtues every one of them. They seem not to be complete when we compare them with First Thessalonians 1:1-3. Your work of faith your labor of love and your patients of hope but he knows that which is present in the Ephesian church. Then he says I've tried you. He means I put you to the test. The apostles were all disappearing. Perhaps they were all gone except John. Some were coming in, never claiming that they were apostles. The Ephesians did test them, they tested the ones who call themselves apostles and they weren't apostles and they found them false. And they had patience and adored for Christ's namesake. They didn't grow weary in doing it, but he goes from commendation to condemnation. The Church of Ephesus had left her first love.

Now what does that mean? Since this church has so much going for it as we say. What was the detracting feature? Was it some little shortcoming? Ah, it indicates I have this against you that you've left your first love. Now what does that signify? Their hearts had been drifting away from Jesus Christ the first love that gripped them when they saw Christ as their all in all. You see the first danger sign of a Christian is growing cold toward Christ, never forget it. A church can have great zeal for Christ it can have soundness of doctrine and discipline. Yet have love for Christ on the decline. It's a very very subtle thing. You see meticulous care with doctrine and discipline won't take the place of love. Notice the waning of affection in Paul's time already, some where loving this present world, he says "All day are in Asia have forsaken me." Demus hath forsaken. He's left me having love love this present world.

They were leaving off the things which is so near and dear to the heart of Christ, they left their first love. John's letter proves that evil doctrine and practice came in at this time. The Lord on the other hand is always mindful of love of these people. Christ will have all of our love or
none. First Love was the love of espousal a betrothal. Ephesus means desired as we saw. Her love is desired by Christ. Why the greatest dishonor to heap upon Christ is not to love him. Judas criticized the decision of Mary when she brought the spike in art to Christ. She didn't look at the cost. No love in her gave lavishly unstinting. It wasn't a matter of finances. It was a matter of lack of love long in the heart of Judas. Some look upon lack of zeal as commendable but all how fatal it is. One who woos a bride will not be satisfied with a servant. You remember with the Lord Jesus said? You lost your first love when Christ warned the church of Ephesus to repent and do the first work as they come and move or candlestick or lamp stand out of its place, he did not mean that individuals are going to lose their salvation. He's talking about a corporate testimony, means that the church would lose her place of light bearing and witness and a lot of churches have lost their influence. They've lost their effectiveness in their community, in their city, in their state, in their nation because they have gone from a place of warm love and spirituality to a place of coldness. As a matter of fact, Ephesus you can go there and see it is now wrapped in a mantle of unbelief and error, enough to break your heart.

The light of ethicist has been removed. They lost, not their salvation, they lost their testimony. The savior loves to go on to commendation and it takes up commendation again. He commends them for hating the work of the Nicolaitans. Now who are the Nicolaitans. Well we don't know exactly who they were. The word Nicolaitans comes from two Greek words from the cartel and LAUS, conquerors are Domini ers. Those who were dominating domineering of the people. Perhaps, we can't be certain, but perhaps a clerical class. Those that were lording it over the rest bringing in fleshly practices arrogating certain powers to themselves that they had no right to.
There were bishops, overseers in the early church but no rulers. We shall see them later in the moral history of the church. And then there's a call here. We've read it. We have the reward indicated for the overcoming. Ephesus was trying to make her paradise here on earth so, she allow her love to grow cold. Remember the overcoming is found in First John 5:4. Does this mean a special special type of believer to him that overcome? That only those who are of the deepest spiritual stage? Oh not really. First John 5:4 indicates who the overcoming is. This is the victory that overcoming the world, even our fate. The victory we have in us is faith. God given faith. Faith is the victory that overcome the world. Adam was forbidden to eat of the tree of life but we have access to this tree of life. All believers are overcomers and to such will be given to eat of the tree of life. They will be in the paradise of God.

What does that mean? Well, it expresses the blessedness of heaven. Don't allow anything friend to come between you and your love for the Lord Jesus Christ. If this message is going to mean anything to you let it mean that your love will be quickened, that it will be more fervent, more natural, more outgoing. Do you love Christ less now than when you first believed in him? There is a barometer. There is a spiritual barometer and thermometer to test your spiritual state. Not comparing yourself with someone else, not how many works you're doing a church. Do you love him less now than when you first believed in him? Let nothing come into more or nothing between your soul and the savior. You don't have to lose that first love. Ask God right now to make that love real to you again and I can assure you he certainly will.

Now in the book of the revelation we come to chapter 2 verse 8. From verse 8 through verse eleven we have the message to Smyrna. Here is a church of Roman province of Asia and under the angel of the church's Smyrna write these things. "So the first and the last who is dead and is alive, I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, but tough art rich and I know the
blasphemy of them who say they are Jews and are not but at the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of these things, none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison that you may be tried and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death. And I would give thee a crown of life. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said under the churches. He that overcome this shall not be heard of the second death."

Beginning then with verse eight of chapter two we have the letter to the church the Smyrna. The church, I call it the Church of fiery persecutions. Ephesus was the church of departed love of the apostolic age. Smyrna is the Church of fiery persecution. The time of the persecutions of the Roman Empire. Smyrna is in the Turkish name of Izmir the city of Izmir. Very beautiful city there which we have visited in Asia Minor. Smyrna itself means myrrh M Y R R H. Myrrh was used in Scripture in the embalming of the dead. It had to be crushed to give out its fragrance.

The martyr age saw the early church crushed under the heel of pagan Rome. In those days when Christians were crushed they gave forth a sweet fragrance unto God. Christ reveals himself here to John the Apostle as the first and the last. It expresses in the most absolute terms his deity. How could anyone deny it? The thought is that he is the supreme one before all things and before all time he is also the last the end and the goal of all thing, he was dead and lived again. Speaking of his great triumph over death, never forget that he has the keys of death and of Hades. He has destroyed death, He has the authority over Hades that should not plague you. Christ has been more than a match for that one who had the authority over death before who kept mankind terrorized before Christ wonderful work on Calvary. Hebrews two tells us about that versus 14 and 15 how important it is that Christ should be revealed in this light to the suffering tribe persecuted church harassed church.
The Lord says I know thy tribulation. Now this is the great tribulation, he says "I know thy tribulation, your trouble, your vicissitudes, the many sufferings of privation." Sometimes the Lord allows trials in our lives in order to rekindle love, the first love that has been lost. Yes. It tries to reawaken that lost first love. He knows not only the tribulation, but he knows the poverty. Christ knew real poverty himself. He had no place to lay his head when on earth he said he had not where to lay his head though the foxes had holes and the birds had nests and the Smyrna believers had suffered like the Hebrew believers of a former Time.

Yes the Hebrews ten thirty four had suffered the loss of everything, they were reduced to bigotry, and confiscation of goods attended followed the persecution of them in a pagan world. He says, "I know a lot of poverty but thou art rich or blessed word of commendation" is the estimate of the risen Christ, how rich they were. They were given all things in Christ, they had nothing yet all things. They were poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith.

Test yourself on that friend. How does your balance stand? Does your balance in the bank stand higher than your balance in the treasury of high heaven? A mother was once told by a son. "Oh my brother John is getting along beautifully in the world." The mother says, "Which world my child?" which world, yes. These Smyrna believers were poor in this world is good, but rich in faith but Christ indicates he knows the blasphemy of those who claim they are Jews and are not. This does not refer to the Jewish nation in general, no. What's meant is the legalizing movement of the early Christian era. It was Galatiansism in the apostolic age and immediately after because men's mine would in spite of everything dilute the Word of God with legalism and ceremonialism. Now Satan’s synagogue here, is seen as opposed to the Church of God.

Notice the many contrasts in the book of the revelation. Satan’s synagogue over against the Church of God. What is Satan’s synagogue? It's a gathering together regardless of whom,
that's the synagogue of Satan. The Church of God is a called out body from the world with
regard to faith in Christ. The enemy Satan attacked this church from without with persecution
and from within by perversion of doctrine. The evil had evidently not made inroads into this
group. For there is no center, no command to repent. You see a church in affliction is like a child
in affliction or bodily weakness. It is spared words of censure. There is no word given them
concerning repentance. The interesting thing in this letter is that there is no word that they would
escape their suffering.

More than that they are told that the trials would be more grievous. Isn't that interesting?
But they're not to fear. Christ reveals that he knows not only past trials but those that are hidden
by the veil of the future. We know how they were tortured, exposed to wild bulls and lions that
tore them to pieces. They would be they were to be cast into prison. In the Roman Empire,
imprisonment wasn't a form of punishment as it is with us. Oh no. They tried to make sure that
they get all the cranberries and the best turkeys and all the dressing and all of the mince pie and
so on and during the times of our celebrations of Thanksgiving and Christmas and so on. Oh yes
we have to furnish that in prisons.

It wasn't that way in the Roman Empire. Imprisonment wasn't just a form of punishment
as with us sort of a free hotel service, but there it was because the government wasn't willing to
support a multitude of prisons. A man in prison was waiting his trial or death and he mentions
ten days. These have been likened to the ten persecutions from Nero to Diocletian. You see the
trial has a limit. It's all under the seeing eye of God. They're told to be faithful and to death. Not
unto death. It didn't save faithful until death.

Watch, there's a difference. The prepositions in the Bible are tremendously important.
They're told to be faithful unto death not until death. Faithful unto death not just as long as you
live. That would be faithful until death. But unto death, even to the point if it cost you your life. It speaks not of extensiveness but of intensity. In the Old Testament saints were saved from death. Has the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, as Daniel in the lion's den, but in the New Testament saints triumph over death. The Lord's word for them was not what they should strengthen themselves for the coming trial, but that they should go on trusting and depending upon him just the determined effort of self alone will not. It will never suffice. It's looking to him through the trials to the very end and he says I will give you a crown of life.

Now some folk think. It's very vulgar, very common, it's unbecoming of us, it's below our dignity to think of rewards. But that's not biblical to talk in that fashion. Christ himself suffered under the spur of rewards. In Hebrews twelve two we read, "Who for the joy that was set before him." The reward who for the joy that was set before him and do the cross despising the shame and he's now sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high. The overcomer will not be heard of the second death. Notice how well this is suited to those who were threatened with the first death. They will not know eternal separation from the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout this letter than Christ identifies himself with a suffering church. The epistle reveals where there can be found real riches, true riches and true comfort.

With verse twelve we get the message to Pergamum and to the angel of the church in Pergamum write. "These things said he who have the sharp sword with two edges, I know thy works and without dwellings even where Satan’s throne is and our hold is fast my name has not denied my faith even in those days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr who was slain among you were Satan dweller. But I have a few things against thee because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel. To eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them
that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which things I, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come under the quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit said under the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manner and will give him a white stone and stone a new name written which no man knoweth except he that received with it."

We come to the 12th verse of chapter 2. We have a letter to Pergamum. Pergamum means marriage or elevation. Pergamum thoroughly married are thoroughly elevated. This was the period in the history of the church when she was elevated to the place of power and carried on as one married to the world. The church settled down in the world. Church and state came together under the reign of Constantine in 313 A.D. Christ in speaking to the Church of Pergamum says he is the one who has the sharp two edged sword. That's the word of God seen in judgment in Hebrews 4:12.

Since this church was beginning to tolerate error it needed the measuring stick it, needed the yardstick of God's word brought into action. Satan is spoken of as the prince of this world because of his usurped power. In Smyrna age, Satan tried to destroy the church by persecution. In the next century, he tried to ruin that testimony by patronage without and false principles within. Constantine's attitude to the church brought many into the church who were really pagan at heart and beloved there are still many things in our churches that come from that period of time, the fourth century A.D..

They are not from the very heart of the faith. They have certain pagan origins. Gibbon, the great historian who wrote that on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire said the Salvation of the common people was purchased at an easy rate. In one year, twelve thousand people were baptized in Rome besides a proportionate number of women and children. A white garment with
twenty pieces of gold was promised by the Emperor to every convert. In many cases he were
won over then by adoption of pagan rites and festivals as parts of Christian worship.

Someone has said that God has put the church in the world and the devil has put the
world in the church. In our own day, we see the mixing of the church and the world. Thank God
that our country still stands for the separation of church and state and may it ever be so. In those
early days gorgeous heathen temples, sumptuous costly vestments of pagan priests were used for
Christian service. Pagan rights and ceremonies were introduced to satisfy the rich pagans of
Constantine's day who came into the church, but Christ said the holiest fast my name.

There was controversy over the things concerning Christ in that age over whether Christ
was real deity, actually God Himself, God the son, the truth of the central deity of Christ prevail.
We do not know who the Antipas of verse thirteen was, his name means against all aunty and
past. He may be unknown to us but God remembers all his faithful witnesses and martyrs. And
ever since there was one cause of censure, but here Christ said there were things that needed
censure. Notice the decline, you have the deeds of the Nicolaitans, hated in the Ephesian Age of
the church, and Pergamum, it's the doctrine of the Nicolaitans that was tolerated in hell. The
Teaching of Balaam and that of the Nicolaitans are are distinct, although they have the same
disastrous results. Balaam was the destroyer and devourer of the people. He taught Balak, how to
draw Israel away from their place of separation. This teaching of the Nicolaitans is clericalism. It
came rapidly into the church. For the overcomer, there is the hidden manna.

Now what is the hidden manna? It's feasting upon Christ in the heart, he is the hidden
manna and a white stone is to be given. A white stone was used to cast a vote of approval. We
have that expression today. Even do we not we say, so and so it was blackballed from such and
such a group or such a club or such an organization. A white stone meant a casting of a vote of
approval. You and I also have to cast a vote. What is it? If you've never trusted Christ as your savior. You've never cast a vote for him. If you are a believer who have cast a vote for him then you do have the victory that overcomes the world. But what are you doing about it? We want to make these taped messages just as practical and as effective as possible.

These are letters to the churches and since we belong to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have a right to understand these things and notice in each case he that has an ear, he that have an ear. That's a very interesting expression friends that clause points out, he that hath an ear. It points out this that God gave all of us ears which are ears of the heart and the primary purpose is that we may hear God's word and obey it. Do what he would have us do so if you are a believer if you have trusted Christ, then you have the victory that overcomes the world. But are you spreading it abroad? Are you telling it to others? It is needful that we realize that now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation, there is nothing in the word of God that indicates that there may be a better time, a later time after this life for folk who do not receive Christ at this present time. No that's wrong. That is not in the scripture. The Scripture does teach that if Christ is not received now then that individual is lost, lost for time and for eternity.

Now, just to recapitulate at this point to get our bearings we have seen in Chapter 1 the messages of the Lord to John in the matter of the glorified risen Christ coming in high priestly attire in judgment. The things which thou has seen as enroll in Revelation 1:19, the first chapter. Then chapters two and three, the things which are, which presently obtained in John's age the same age in which we live. And the first message was to Ephesus, the Church of departed love. Then the church of Smyrna is given a message. The church a fiery persecution and then Pergamum, the Church of worldly alliance. We have then three distinct churches, three distinct messages for each one and there is a an unfolding as the church lost its first love, Christ would
rekindle it. He wants that initial warm throbbing intimate love and so he brings fiery persecutions, he allows that in the life of the church in order that they may be won back to his love for them to fly again to his bosom for protection and for fellowship and for communion. But the church, morally, spiritually in the world instead of fleeing to him fled to become wedded to the world. The very world that had persecuted it. Yes and we find in Pergamum that here is a cementing of an alliance with a church totally apart from the will of God, what a sad decline. And it can happen, not only in the history of the church corporate, but the sad thing is it can happen in the history of any individual believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. May God spare us this sad condition of being wedded to the world because when we had departed from our first love and he brought things into our life trials and the like in order that we might be more closely drawn to him we went the other way.

May it not be so of us that we departed and became wedded and joined to the world? All we remember back in Hosanna. How Ephraim had so gone into idolatry where God says Ephraim is joined to idols let him alone. Sometimes a believer gets so wedded to the world that he no longer here is the voice of the Spirit, the Spirit of God keeps speaking to him trying to draw him back. But if that one goes on then his works will receive no reward, he will suffer Los Angeles saves so as by fire.

May God grant that you and I will be characterized by that first love.