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**The 7 Letters (Part 2)**

***Letter of Preparations (2:1-3:22)***

**By Rev. Chad Trunkhill**

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**To the Angel of Pergamum (2:12-17)**

*12And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write,*

*“These things says the one who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13’I know where you dwell – where the throne of Satan is. Yet you hold to my name and you have not denied my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was put to death in your presence, where Satan dwells. 14Nevertheless, I have a few things against you because you have there some who are holding to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast an offense before the sons of Israel [so as to cause them] to eat meat offered to idols and to commit sexual immorality. 15In like manner, you also have some who are holding to the teaching of Nicolaitans. 16Repent then! If not, I am coming to you quickly and I will make war with them by the sword of my mouth. 17The one who has as ear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give of the manna which has been hidden, and I will give to him a white stone, and upon that stone a new name written no one knows except the one who receives it.’”*

1. **To:** Pergamum
2. **Local Detail:**
   1. Satan’s throne is there
   2. Satan lives there
   3. Antipas was martyred there
   4. The teachings of the Nicolaitans are there
3. **Image of Christ:** Has a sharp two-edged sword
4. **What Christ Sees:**
   1. **Good:**
      1. Hold on to my name
      2. Did not deny the faith even when Antipas was martyred
   2. **Bad:**
      1. Some hold to the teachings of Balaam (idolatry, immorality)
      2. Some hold to the teachings of Nicolaitans
5. **Call to Repent:** Repent, else I will war with the sword of my mouth (judgement)
6. **Promise to the One Who Conquers:** I will give of:
   1. the hidden manna
   2. a white stone
   3. a secret name

**Notes:**

1. Balak and Balaam (Numbers 22-25)
   1. Sin of Balaam was wanting both God and money (cf. Mat 6:24)
   2. Attempt to serve two masters
2. “meat offered to idols”
   1. meat offered to idol by burning on altar, then a portion was consumed at pagan feasts, what was left was sold in the open market
   2. this caused concern for Christians (cf. 1 Cor 8:1-13, Acts 15:29)
3. Manna – “little grain, granule” (Ex 16)
   1. Pot of manna was placed in Ark of the Covenant
   2. Jewish tradition (no biblical support) claimed that Jeremiah carried ark from Jerusalem at the time of destruction and hid in cave on Mt. Nebo
   3. Tradition also says that it would not be recovered until time of Messiah and restoration of Israel
   4. We have this now, still hidden, in our Foretaste of the Feast to Come (Lord’s Supper), which will be fully revealed in the wedding feast with the Lamb
   5. Jesus is our Bread of Life (Jn 6:31-35)
4. White Stone
   1. Possibly refers to the custom of judges casting a white stone into an urn to signify the verdict of innocence
   2. Could also denote “an old custom of marking every good day by a white stone.”
5. New Name
   1. Suggests Baptism when the name of the Triune God is placed upon the person baptized (Matt 28:19)
   2. Trinitarian Baptism the Baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5; cf. Acts 2:38; 10:48)
   3. Baptism involves the inscribing of one’s name in the book of life

**To the Angel of Thyatira (2:18-29)**

*18And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,*

*“These things says the Son of God, the one who has his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet like burnished brass: 19’I know your works and your love and faith and service and your endurance, and [I know] your last works are more than the first ones. 20However, I have something against you, namely, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives my very own slaves to commit immorality and to eat meat offered o idols. 21And I gave to her time so that she might repent, but she does not wish to repent of her immorality. 22Behold I [am going to] cast her onto a sickbed, and those who have committed adultery with her into a terrible suffering, unless they repent of her works. 23And her children I will kill with death so that all the churches will know that I am the one who searches the innermost thoughts and the hearts, and I will give to you each according to your works. 24But I say to you – the rest who are in Thyatira, as many as do not hold to this teaching, who have not known the depths of Satan (as they say) – I will not put upon you another burden. 25Nevertheless, what you do have, hold firmly until whenever I come. 26And the one who conquers and who keeps my works up to the end, I will give to him authority over the nations, 27and he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as clay vessels are broken in pieces. 28And as I have received from my Father, so also will I give to him the morning star, 29The one who has an ear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

1. **To:** Thyatira
2. **Local Detail:**
   1. The so-called prophetess Jezebel is there
   2. Some there have known the depths of Satan
3. **Image of Christ:**
   1. The Son of God who:
      1. Has eyes like fire
      2. Feet like brass
   2. Searches thoughts and hearts
4. **What Christ Sees:**
   1. **Good:**
      1. Have love, faith, service, endurance
      2. Your last works are more than your first works
   2. **Bad:** tolerate the so-called prophetess Jezebel, who teaches people to commit sexual immorality and eat idolatrous food
5. **Call to Repent:**
   1. Repent of adultery with Jezebel
   2. Her children will be killed
   3. The faithful must hold fast to what they have
6. **Promise to the One Who Conquers:** I will give of authority to rule the nations with an iron scepter and will give the morning star

**Notes:**

1. Jezebel
   1. From Sidon, the wife of King Ahab
   2. Introduced the worship of Baal to the Northern Kingdom of Israel
   3. Deadly enemy of Elijah
   4. Jezebel symbolizes some notable woman who was an evil influence on Christians of Thyatira
   5. Jezebel stands for and represents the sin of syncretism, a universalistic belief that all religions are of value and are able to be of benefit before God.
   6. Depths of Satan = teaching of Jezebel
2. Innermost thoughts and the hearts
   1. *Neprous kia kardias* = kidney and heart
   2. Kidneys were considered a seat (organ or center) of emotions
   3. Heart was the seat of thoughts, wisdom, volition, as well as emotions
   4. The two together cover the full range of thoughts and emotions
3. Morning Star
   1. Last star to fade away with the rising sun
   2. Most brilliant of the heavenly stars
   3. Has been interpreted due to Christ as the first resurrection
   4. Others interpret it as Christ who brings light into the darkness
   5. In early church baptism was sometimes referred to as enlightenment because the baptized have been called “out of darkness into his [God’s] glorious light

**To the Angel of Sardis (3:1-6)**

*3:1And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,*

*“These things says the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: ‘I know your works, that you have a reputation that you are alive, and you are dead. 2Be watchful and strengthen the remaining things, which were about to die, for I have not found your works perfected before my God. 3Remember, then, how you have received and heard, and keep [it] so that you repent. If, then, you do not keep watch, I will come as a thief, and you will certainly not recognize in what moment I will come upon you. 4However, you have a few names in Sardis that have not polluted their garments, and they shall walk with me in white [garments] becase they are worthy. 5The one who thus conquers will be clothed in white garments, and I will certainly not remove his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. 6The one who has an ear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

1. **To:** Sardis
2. **Local Detail:** have a reputation of being alive but are dead
3. **Image of Christ:** Has the Seven Spirits of God and the seven stars
4. **What Christ Sees:**
   1. **Good:** a few have not polluted their garments and are worthy to be dressed in while
   2. **Bad:**
      1. I know your works
      2. Have a reputation of being alive but are dead
5. **Call to Repent:**
   1. Repent
   2. Keep what you received
   3. Watch lest I return as a thief
6. **Promise to the One Who Conquers:**
   1. Will be dressed in white
   2. I will not remove his name from the book of life
   3. I will confess his name before my Father and his angels

**Notes:**

1. Be watchful
   1. Warning of the Lord that connects endurance and survival with watchfulness
   2. Those who fail to keep watch on verge of death
   3. Important to the people of Sardis who city was taken captive twice because of their “lack of vigilance on the part of its defenders.”
2. Hour
   1. Can mean a literal hour
   2. Can also mean any period of time (moment)
   3. Here suggest the Lord could come at any moment
3. The one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars
   1. Seven Spirits = the Holy Spirit of God in his sevenfold presence
      1. Close relationship between Jesus and Holy Spirit, but Jesus also sends the Holy Spirit
      2. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is always present with His Church
   2. Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand (1:16)
      1. Represent the seven angels of the seven churches (1:20)
      2. Reminds the church that He is Lord of the angels of the churches
   3. By Him sending the Holy Spirit and being in control of the angels of the churches Jesus communicates His word and prophetic message of Revelation to all the people of God.
4. Most severe condemnation
   1. He knows their works and they are dead works (Is 64:6)
   2. Since they think they are alive they are on the road not only to spiritual death, but the second death of Hades
   3. But not all have lost faith and are following in empty, faithless rituals…time to repent and for those who have faith to be watchful
5. White Garments
   1. Symbolize the blood and righteousness of Christ
      1. Covers all who repent
      2. Are baptized
      3. Believe
   2. The saints of God stand before His heavenly throne because they have been washed their garments in the Blood of the Lamb and thus have made them white (Rev 7:13-17; cf. 1 Jn 1:7; 2:1-2)
      1. 24 elders dressed in white (4:4)
      2. reminds us of wedding garments as the Bride of Christ (Mt 22:11)
      3. these saints have the right to partake from the tree of life (22:14)
   3. P *In Holy Baptism [name] was clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covered all his sin. St. Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”*
   4. C ***We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.***
   5. Book of Life (cf. 21:27)
      1. “new name” to be given them and the baptismal allusion implicit in the theology of God’s naming (see notes on Pergamum)
      2. Book of Life is the register of God which all who belong to Him have their names inscribed
      3. Proof of heavenly citizenship and heir to eternal life
      4. Once God enters your name no one can take it out (it is God’s book)

**To the Angel of Philadelphia (3:7-13)**

*7And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,*

*“These things says the holy one, the true one, the one who has the key of David, the one who opens and no one can close and closes and no one opens: 8’I know your works – behold, I have placed before you an open door which no one is able to close – namely, that you have a little power and that you have kept my Word and you have not denied my name. 9Behold, I [am going to] hand over those of the synagogue of Satan who call themselves to be Jews and are not, but rather lie. Behold, I am going to force them so that they will come and they will fall down before your feet and shall acknowledge that I have loved you. 10Because you have kept the Word of my endurance, I will also protect you from the hour of trial that will most certainly come upon the whole inhabited earth in order to test those dwelling upon the earth. 11I am coming quickly. Hold what you have so that no one may take your crown. 12The one who conquers, I will place him as a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never again go outside, and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God – the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God – and my own new name. 13The one who has as ear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

1. **To:** Philadelphia
2. **Local Detail:**
   1. Have an open door for evangelism
   2. Jews from the synagogue of Satan will acknowledge that I have loved you
3. **Image of Christ:** The holy and true One, who has the key of David and who opens and closes
4. **What Christ Sees:**
   1. **Good:**
      1. I have placed before you an open door
      2. Have kept my Word and not denied my name
   2. **Bad:** Have but a little power to take advantage of open doors, opportunities to serve
5. **Call to Repent:**
   1. Hold on to what you have
   2. I will protect you during the testing of all the earth
   3. I am coming quickly
6. **Promise to the One Who Conquers:**
   1. I will place him as a pillar in God’s temple
   2. I will write on him God’s name, the name of God’s city, and my new name

**Notes:**

1. You have little power
   1. Like the church in Smyrna, this is not a harsh or explicit criticism
   2. Though they recognized the “open door” before them, the believers were not taking full advantage of the missional opportunities
   3. Their neglect would hinder their mission and witness in Philadelphia – therefore this letter has to do with the mission of the Church
2. “the holy one, the true one”
   1. Prologue (1:1-8) Jesus calls himself “the witness, the faithful one” (1:5)
   2. Jesus is the true witness of God to the human race (Jn 3:31-36; 8:13-18; Rev 1:2)
3. Key of David
   1. Takes hears back to 1:18 where Jesus says he has the “keys of death and the grave”
   2. The expression “key of David” (Is 22:22) also used with the same words “what he opens no one can close, and what he closes no one opens”
      1. In Isaiah, Lord speaks words to chief steward of Hezekiah
      2. Jesus uses the words to proclaim that he is over the household of God and that he alone has earned the authority to control entrance into it.
   3. Symbolize Jesus’ victory over the grave
4. “Open Door” represents opportunities for bringing the message of Christ’s victory to others
   1. Paul plans to stay longer in Ephesus before going to Corinth because “a great door has been opened to me” (1 Cor 16:5-9; cf. 2 Cor 2:12-13; Col 4:3)
   2. When God opens doors for people (like he did in Philadelphia) he expects people to enter and exploit these opportune seasons
   3. We are to carry out his mission at all times, whether convenient or not (2 Tim 4:2)
   4. Though they had kept the his Word and not denied their Lord’s name, they were weak in their mission activities, to the extent that the Lord’s desire for all to hear of God’s grace was hindered
   5. Eternal well-being depends hearing the Word and reception of faith (Rom 10:13-14)
5. Rift and conflict
   1. Between Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah and forfeited their membership in the covenant of Abraham (Gal 3:6-14)
   2. And the Jews and Gentiles who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and believed in him as the fulfillment of the covenant of Abraham
6. Defend them
   1. Since they kept true to Christ in the trials of this time and showed endurance, Christ promised to defend them when the great tribulation came
   2. Allusion to the terrible times preceding the second coming (the Parousia) of Jesus Christ at the End
   3. “abomination of desolation” (Mk 13:14; Mt 24:15-28; Dan 9:27; 11:31-32; 12:11)
7. I am coming quickly
   1. Prologue states “the time is near” (1:3)
   2. Revelation ends with the same promise
   3. “The fact that this promise of the imminent coming of Christ at his Parousia is given in this letter to the Christians of Philadelphia – a letter that deals with the mission of the church and the end of this world – indicates the close relationship between the church’s mission and nearness of the End.”
   4. When God decides the mission is complete, he will return
   5. This is the urgency in the church not to waste the open doors and squander the opportunities to share his message
8. Hold what you have so no one may take your crown (3:11)
   1. See church of Smyrna (2:10) and crown of life
   2. Christians hold onto their faith in the midst of suffering as they go about the mission of the church
   3. They also pray, “Amen, come now, Lord Jesus” that their suffering might be ended and they may obtain the crown which they can never lose in glory
9. Pillar in the temple of my God
   1. As the apostles are pillars (Gal 2:9), so are all Christians who holds fast to what he has in the Lord until the end (3:11)
   2. The New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven (3:12) and is described later (21:1-27), is a perfect place, everlasting life with God in the new heaven and new earth. It will be like the Garden of Eden before the Fall (21:1-22:5)

**To the Angel of Laodicea (3:14-22)**

*14And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write,*

*“These things says the Amen, the witness, the faithful and the true one, the source of the creation of God: 15’I know your works, namely, that you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! 16Because you are thus lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth. 17For you are saying, “I am wealthy and I have acquired riches and I have need of nothing more,” but you do not know that you are the wretched one and pitiful and poor and blind and naked. 18I advise you to purchase from me gold which has been refined by fire so that you may be wealthy, and white garments so that you may be clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and eye salve to rub on your eyes so that you may see. 19All whom I love I myself reprove and discipline. Be zealous, then, and repent! 20Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone should hear my voice and should open the door, then I will enter to be with him, and I will dine with him and he with me. 21The one who conquers, I will grant to him to sit with me on my throne, even as I myself have conquered and have sat down with my Father on his throne. 22The one who has an ear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

1. **To:** Laodicea
2. **Local Detail:** Are worldly wealthy, but spiritually poor, naked, blind
3. **Image of Christ:**
   1. The Amen
   2. the faithful and true witness
   3. the source of the creation of God
4. **What Christ Sees:**
   1. **Good:**
   2. **Bad:**
      1. Lukewarm
      2. Do not know own wretchedness
5. **Call to Repent:**
   1. I am about to spit you out
   2. Repent and receive purification and healing from me
   3. I knock at the door
   4. If anyone opens, I will enter and eat with him
6. **Promise to the One Who Conquers:** I will grant to sit with me on my throne

Notes:

1. Laodicca
   1. Became one of the wealthiest cities in the region
      1. Wealth from flocks of sheep which produced fine black wool
      2. Production of woven garments
   2. Also known for their medical school
      1. They were well known for their ointments
      2. Most popular were ointments for eyes and ears
2. Amen
   1. Transliteration of OT Hebrew
   2. Confirm the acceptance of something, attest to the truthfulness of a statement or action
   3. Acknowledging that a proclaimed word or message is valid, true, in force
   4. In NT it is also used as a liturgical acclamation in worship (1 Cor 14:16), and in prayers and doxologies (Mt 6:13; Rom 1:25; 11:36; Eph 3:21)
   5. Usually comes last…what has been said is most certainly true but Jesus speaks it first. He is the Amen. The True One. He does this in the Gospels too at the beginning of his teaching. It is the Amen who is speaking with authority.
   6. 8 times in Revelation – all acclamation in doxologies and prayers – *except here*
3. Necessity of the Law
   1. Of all the letters this one is the harshest…by far
   2. It is understandable that Jesus would speak this way to his enemies (Mt 23:13-36), it is distressing to think of him speaking this way to his followers
   3. Jesus did call Peter Satan (Mk 8:33)
   4. Harsh speech must be interpreted as those whom the Lord loves he reproves and disciplines
      1. Disciplines means through instruction and compulsion
      2. This can include punishment, even corporal punishment
      3. In the Greek historical context, it deals with upbringing of children which included training the children instruction that was “backed up with a constraining restrictive action or experience”
4. “the Amen, the witness, the faithful and true one”
   1. points back to prologue
   2. “the witness, the faithful one” (1:5)
   3. vouches for not only the words of God but also his own witness to them
   4. the prophetic message comes from “the One who is…” (God the Father), the seven Spirits (Holy Spirit) and Jesus Christ (1:4-5)
   5. each person of the Trinity plays a role
5. “the source” of God’s creation
   1. this is the only time in the NT that Jesus is called the source, the (first) cause, beginning of God’s creation
   2. Gospel of John he is called “the Word” (logos) by which all things were created and who was there in the beginning (Jn 1:1-3
      1. but not called *the* beginning
      2. presented more as the mediating Word through whom God’s creation came about
   3. In the final vision of Revelation of Christ’s Second Coming he is called the Word – because he was the agent of God’s original creation, he is now coming as its judge (19:11-16)
   4. See also Prov 8:22-23 (wisdom, not all things); Col 1:18 (the church, not creation)
   5. “creation” refers not chiefly to God’s original creation, but rather the *new* creation, the new heaven and earth (21:1-22:5)
6. No Praise, only judgment
   1. Works neither hot nor cold (sin of apathy)
   2. “The church was living primarily for earthly wealth and selfish desires. The works the Christians were producing from such an attitude demonstrated neither anger nor enthusiasm toward God.”
   3. Life, plan, hopes…all self-centered
   4. Faith and love toward God were secondary at best
   5. While God forgives the repentant sinner even seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven times)(Mt 18:21-22)…the Lord does not tolerate a life of imagined self-sufficiency which needs no repentance and no forgiveness (cf. Lk 12:16-21)
7. Law and Gospel
   1. Christ urges church to heed warning but also hear his gracious counsel and invitation
   2. Speaks stinging word of Law, anger, and judgment (strongest of all seven letters) to prepare his church to hear his Gospel invitation
   3. All words of Law and Gospel are motivated by LOVE
      1. “So necessary and so salutary is the Lord’s chastening for all Christians.” (LW 42:139, Martin Luther)
      2. Lord serious about calling people to repentance – he seeks the lost, he leaves the 99 to find the one
8. Gold refined by fire
   1. Has an eternal value (Mal 3:2-3)
   2. Like God’s gracious call to Israel of bread and wine without cost (Is 55:1-3)
9. The one who knocks
   1. He comes to *our* door and knocks
   2. This picture is used in Matthew to reference the nearness of the end (Mt 24:33)
   3. The Lord who stands at the door is the judge (James 5:9; cf. Lk 12:36)
   4. Yet, in Revelation, the one standing at the door is a friend who wishes to enter in order to dine with his people (cf. Jn 6:53-58)
   5. The one who hears and knows the voice of their Savior will open and welcome him in (Jn 10:1-5; 14:23)
   6. This is a work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 12:3)
   7. Once the door is shut…the knocking has stopped…it will not be reopened or come back again – in reference to the Second Coming of Christ
10. The Promise
    1. To the victor goes the crown and the right to sit on the Lord’s throne
    2. Promised disciples they would sit on thrones (Mt 19:28)
       1. 24 Elders sit on thrones (Rev 4:4; cf. 20:4)
       2. Throne is a metaphor for reigning with Jesus Christ and the Father forever in the new age (2:10; 3:11)
       3. Jesus and Father appear on throne (7:17; 22:3)
11. ***The last of the seven letters reinforces the message of them all: the Lord Christ reigns as the Son of Man and will come again soon to judge and to save. Repent and trust in his promise!***