

Ephesus: The Apostolic Church [30-100 AD]

Compliment: Works, labour, patience, cannot bear evil, tried false apostles and found them liars, hates Nicolaitanes

Condemnation: Thou hast left thy first love

Challenge: Remember where you fell from, repent, and do the first works

Reward: Eat of the tree of life

Smyrna: The Church Under Roman Persecution [100-313 AD]

Compliment: Works, tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich)

Condemnation: None

Challenge: Do not fear suffering, tribulation, be faithful unto death

Reward: I will give you a crown of life, you will not be hurt of the second death

Pergamon: The Church During Early Catholicism [313-533 AD]

Compliment: Works, thou holdest fast my name, hast not denied my faith

Condemnation: Hast there them that hold doctrines of Balaam and Nicolaitanes

Challenge: Repent

Reward: Eat the hidden manna, give him white stone with a new name written

Thyatira: Papal Power Expands [533-1517 AD]

Compliment: Works, charity, service, faith, patience, and works

Condemnation: Sufferest the false prophetess Jezebel to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, eat things sacrificed to idols

Challenge: Have not the doctrine of Jezebel, hold fast till I come

Reward: No other burden, power over nations, will give him the morning star

Sardis: The Protestant Reformation Church [1517-1730 AD]

Compliment: Hast a few names which have not defiled their garments

Condemnation: Works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead

Challenge: Be watchful, strengthen things which remain

Reward: Clothed in white, will not blot out his name from Book of Life

Philadelphia: The Missionary and Revival Church [1730-1930 AD]

Compliment: Works, a little strength, kept my word, has not denied my name

Condemnation: None

Challenge: Hold that fast which thou hast

Reward: Make a pillar in the temple of God, write upon him the name of God

Laodicea: The Modern Lukewarm Church [1930 AD-Present]

Compliment: None

Condemnation: Works, thou art neither cold nor hot

Challenge: Buy me gold tried in fire and white raiment, anoint thine eyes

Reward: Sit with me in my throne

What Should We Learn from the Seven Churches of Revelation?

The answer lies in Jesus' messages to the only two churches with no criticism—Smyrna and Philadelphia. The members of the Smyrna church age suffered greatly for their beliefs. Yet, throughout their persecution, they continued serving God and remained "faithful unto death." Because of their devotion, Jesus said he would give them a "crown of life" and promised they would not be "hurt of the second death."

The Philadelphia church represents the era most on fire for Jesus. During this age, the Roman Catholic Church lost its power to persecute Christians and suppress Bible ownership. As a result, Bible Societies spread worldwide, missionaries were dispatched, Protestant church membership grew, and new denominations were founded. Jesus was proud of Philadelphia, as evidenced by his profuse praise of their works, his open declaration of love for them, and his lack of a condemnation.

Each of us can personally benefit from Jesus' advice in these chapters. Mimic the things he says the churches are doing well and avoid their spiritual failures. Read your Bible regularly, especially the New Testament. Emulate the Smyrnaean and Philadelphian Christians. Do not fear bigotry, ridicule, or persecution. Keep God's Word, and do not deny his name. Vigorously share your faith with others, and avoid being the type of person Paul warned us to turn away from in II Timothy 3:1-5.

It is also critical that we do not succumb to the many temptations that Jesus warned would come during the Laodicean period. Recent technological advances have led to new enticements and distractions. Movies, television, music, social media, and the internet are some of the ways we prioritize our entertainment when we should be sharing God with others. Our desire for wealth and luxury has caused us to lose sight of what is important: spreading the gospel and living the Christian life that would make Jesus proud.