

Rev 25-11-05b

We pick up our study now, we're looking at the letters to the seven churches. We are looking at now the church in Philadelphia, beginning in chapter three, verse seven. We've looked at Sardis, and it's a little bit easier to analyze these now that we have seen the way the letters work, how important the introduction that the Lord Jesus gives of himself in the case of Sardis.

He is he who has the seven spirits of God. And unlike most interpreters, I do not believe that these represent the Holy Spirit. The spirit is distinctly mentioned in the singular at the end of each of these seven letters.

And it would seem strange to me to switch from singular to plural and back again. These spirits are before the throne. And when we get to chapter four, we will cover this in more detail.

We saw it in chapter one, grace is expressed and peace from him who is and was and is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne. We'll take a fresh look at these, as I say, when we get to chapter four, but these spirits are evidently the highest angels in God's cabinet, if you will. They are those who are the first to hear his commands and ensure that they are implemented.

You see Old Testament allusions to the cherubim, to the seraphim, to those with the four faces and so on. And there are further clues to this as we move forward. But for now, seven spirits that are before the throne, it is sufficient for us to understand that the Lord Jesus has authority over them in the same way that he has authority over the seven stars.

This would imply that in the same way that the seven stars represent the pastoral authority, the messenger authority, the messenger responsibility to the human race in general, and those in the churches in particular, the seven stars that are before the throne fulfill a similar function in the angelic realm. And rather than God broadcasting commands to individual angels willy-nilly, there is a structure, there is a chain of command, there is authority. Just as we saw in chapter one, verses one and two, where this revelation is passed down intentionally from the father to the son, to the angel, to John, to the messengers of the churches, and then to the churches themselves.

You will find this disparaged in some quarters by naysayers and disbelievers, but this is intentional. And it is a reminder to us that God has ordained structure and authority. And these seven spirits represent structure and authority in the angelic realm.

We don't see the throne. We don't see the spirits that are before the throne, but we are going to see instructions emanating from God's throne throughout the rest of this book. And in many cases, these angels are going to act on those words in the same way that the messengers to the seven churches will hear and transmit God's instructions through the Lord Jesus to the churches.

So it is a reminder. One of the first ways to end up being dead, even though you have a name that you're alive, is to disregard God's carefully ordained and structured authority. A marriage will die when the relationship between the husband and wife is corrupted or perverted or otherwise trampled upon distinct from what the Bible commends and commands.

A family will disintegrate if children do not obey their parents in the Lord. A nation will disintegrate if people do not pray for their leadership and those who have the rule over them and the kings and all those in authority are to be supported and prayed for. And when people give up on the government and fail to commend them to God's attention, the nation will disintegrate.

Any area of authority and structure that God has ordained, if you ignore it, if you're not watchful, if you don't remember how you received and heard, these things will die. And it is a reminder from the Lord Jesus that part of the problem in Sardis is complete disregard for God's authority and his authority structure. But there are a few there who have not defiled their garments and we saw them before the break.

Now we come to chapter three, verse seven. To the messenger of the church in Philadelphia, write, these things says he who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one shuts, shuts and no one opens. I know your works.

See, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it. For you have a little strength, you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Indeed, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie.

Indeed, I will make them come and bow, scratch out worship, this is bow, before your feet and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept my command to persevere. Notice, verse eight, you kept my word and not denied my name.

You have a little strength. You have kept my command to persevere. I also will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth.

Behold, I am coming quickly. The better texts don't have the word behold. He just says, I am coming soon.

I am coming quickly. Hold fast what you have. How many times have we seen hold fast? You look back in verse three to Sardis.

Hold fast and repent. Hold fast, hold fast. Verse 25 of chapter two, hold fast what you have until I come.

So important. If you're gonna strengthen the things that remain, you've got to hold fast to what you have received and heard. Here, hold fast what you have that no one may take your crown because of your perseverance.

Because you have kept Christ's word and have not denied his name, there is a crown in the offering. Don't let anyone divert you, pervert you, corrupt you, deflect you, distract you, deceive you, and you fumble away your crown. Don't let anyone take your crown.

Verse 12, he who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of my God. Here's another name connection.

And the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God and my new name. With all of the emphasis, you can see the flow of ideas here, all of the emphasis on name in Sardis. This is why these letters have to be taken together.

And he that has an ear needs to hear what all seven churches receive from the lips of the Lord Jesus. Name, name, name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

So how does Jesus introduce himself here? Remember in chapter one, we saw the description where he had the seven lampstands, where he stood in the midst in chapter one, verse 13, head and hair white like wool, eyes like a flame of fire, feet fine brass, a voice sound of many waters. In his right hand, the seven stars out of his mouth, with a sharp two edged sword, countenance like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

Very awesome presentation. The Lord Jesus has referenced the lampstands. He has referenced the stars.

He has referenced the eyes like a flame of fire and the feet like burnished brass. He has referenced the sharp sword. But here, when you get to Philadelphia, notice, he who has the key of David who opens and no one shuts, shuts and no one opens.

That was not in chapter one. But what do we have referenced here just within this letter? I have set before you an open door. Why is this door open? Because the Lord Jesus opened it.

We are going to see not far hence that there is a sealed scroll and no one is found worthy and able to open it, but the Lord Jesus is worthy and he will open the scroll. This is a door that evidently was previously shut and he who opens and no one closes has set before the folks in Philadelphia an open door. Well, this is quite fascinating.

What is this door? Why has he set the open door before them that no one can shut? Because you have a little strength. You have kept my word and not denied my name. Perseverance, holding fast, results in the Lord Jesus setting before us open doors.

Paul the apostle was faithful and he said, there is an open door to communicate with a particular group of Gentiles because he was faithful. To him who has more will be given. If we want opportunities to be even more deeply and fruitfully involved in God's work in the earth, this is how to do it.

To have a little strength, to persevere, to keep the word and not deny my name. Notice once

again, you have not denied my name. He doesn't say you've not denied me.

Jesus tells Peter before the cock crows, you will deny me three times. But you have not denied my name. This is the opposite of those who take the name of the Lord, their God in vain.

These have identified themselves as Christians, as believers in the Lord Jesus, and they have not taken that name in vain. They wear that identification significantly and visibly. I will make those of the synagogue of Satan.

This is one of the links we saw that tells us about the chiasmic structure here because this is the second to the last letter. And the second letter was where we first saw the synagogue of Satan full of those who say they are Jews and are not. They will come and bow before your feet.

They are going to come to recognize the error of their approach, their thinking, their interpretation. And when they bow before your feet, this is an acknowledgement, you were right, I was wrong. The Lord Jesus is going to force them to this position.

How much better is it to admit on our own when we realize that someone is right and we are wrong to have the humility to acknowledge it rather than to be forced. We know from other passages that when the Lord Jesus appears, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. How much of that is willing and celebratory appreciation and how much of it is forced almost unwillingly from the lips of those who oppose and resist and reject.

Every knee will bow, every tongue will confess, but with what attitude? What attitude are these from the synagogue of Satan going to have? This isn't going to be humble repentance. They are going to be forced to acknowledge. Many times you see vindication of your point of view, whether it's economics or politics or world developments or whatever.

And you say, you know, if they keep doing this, this is going to happen. When it does happen, you want to go back to the people who were naysayers and disagreed and say, do you see that I was right when I predicted this? Do you see the cause and effect that we discussed early on has now come to pass? And it is so frustrating when people will go into denial and refuse to acknowledge the plain simple truth of reality. This was a cause and this is the effect.

I told you so. And someone says, no, no, no, that's not it. It's as plain as the nose on your face, but they will not acknowledge it.

Only the Lord Jesus has the power to force someone to acknowledge these unflattering and uncomfortable truths. Even when they do so, they will not repent. We're going to see this later in the book.

When they see the wrath descending from heaven, they will cry out for the rocks to fall on them, but they don't repent. They don't change their mind. Even when they realize, okay, this really is the wrath of God and I really am the recipient of it for good reason, it doesn't change

their mind.

It does not convert them. And this is scary. The stubbornness of the human heart and the blindness and the unwillingness to acknowledge where we are wrong.

Humility, teachability is to hear and heed, to remember how we received and heard and let the word of God come in like a fire and like a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces so that we can be transformed into soil that will nurture the seed that falls in it and produce hundredfold. So they call this the faithful church in my New King James here as a heading. I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie.

They say they are Jews and are not. There are two different ways to take this. Are these people not really hereditary Jews? Are they Gentiles who somehow want to claim to be Jews? And there are those who take it to mean this in the sense that there is a strong strand of theological understanding and it is quite present in the world today that says when Israel rejected the Messiah, God is off the hook in fulfilling any of his Old Testament promises to Israel itself.

Now he's going to fulfill those promises in, through, and to the Gentiles. And so don't expect a millennial kingdom. Don't expect a millennial temple.

Don't expect the rule of Christ on the throne of David or the rule of David's sons. Don't expect that church age believers will sit with Christ on a literal throne. All of this now is spiritually fulfilled because the promises to Israel have been abrogated due to their rejection.

And we are now spiritual Israel. There are some who think when Jesus says they say they are Jews and are not, that this is what is in view. I don't think so for a couple of reasons.

First of all, this is something of a later development. And in the days when Jesus is giving this information to John, this wasn't a prevalent idea that the Gentiles have replaced Israel. You read Paul talking about branches being broken out and grafted in and so on.

Nobody says the tree has been uprooted and thrown away and there's a new Gentile tree. Secondly, the fact that they say they are Jews. The Old Testament promises are not to the Jews.

They are to Israel, to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Jews is a later name that is in use during the life of Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. The Jews plotted to kill him and so on.

You have this throughout the gospels. And to say you are a Jew and you're not is different than to say, I am a son of Abraham or I am of the lineage and stock of Israel. Paul doesn't say, I am a Jew of the Jews when he's giving his history as a Pharisee.

He says, I'm a Hebrew of the Hebrews. So this to me doesn't fit. I think these who are of the synagogue of Satan.

Remember, synagogues were not an Old Testament phenomenon either. They come about in

the intertestamental period and Jews go to synagogues. And the Jews who attended synagogue opposed the apostle Paul when he would begin preaching there and presenting the truth of Jesus Christ.

The Jews at the synagogue resisted and kicked him out and rejected the gospel of Christ. So association with a synagogue and calling it the synagogue of Satan and those who say they are Jews and are not, I think is something else. But we have that in this.

And this is an affiliation with something that is supposedly holy. I would say today, someone who claims a denominational affiliation and says, I'm a Baptist, I'm a Methodist, I'm a Calvinist, I'm an Arminian, I'm an evangelical, I am this, I am that. And you claim something that is supposed to confer a name on you.

You say you are a Jew, that's a name, but you're not. It's like having a name that you're alive, but you're dead. You have a name that you are somehow religiously affiliated in a way that connects you to God and righteousness and significance, and you're not.

The Jews thought they were closer to God than anybody else in the world, and they weren't. We can do this if we say, well, I know more doctrine than anybody. I've studied so much biblical truth under guys that did categories and isagogics and exegesis.

And my guy knows Hebrew, and I can tell you back some Greek. And we've had in-depth Bible study. So I have a name, so to speak, as a really diligent Bible student.

Believe me, there's nothing wrong with isagogic categories, exegesis, Hebrew and Greek, and being diligent in study. But if you rely on the name, I go to a church that does this or I did it 20 or 30 years ago or whatever, and we are not actually alive in the present, remembering how we received and heard, being watchful and diligent to interpret and apply, have the humility to confess where we have fouled up and ask for wisdom when we need it. If we're not actively endeavoring in a watchful and diligent fashion to please God, it's all about the name.

And the name is the problem. They say they are Jews and they're not. They say they're in the synagogue.

Well, I'll put a name on their synagogue, and it's not a synagogue of Israel. It's not a synagogue of the creator God. It's a synagogue of Satan.

You want a name? I'll give you a name. It's Satan. I'll give you a name.

It's Jezebel. I'll give you a name. It's Balaam teaching Balak to put a stumbling block in front of Israel.

We have to be so careful that we're not dealing in superficialities. You can get any number of examples of calling something one name when it is actually something else. I collected a few of these just to have by way of illustration.

If you accidentally get shot by your own guys, they call it friendly fire. There's nothing friendly about getting shot. They talk about prisons as correctional facilities.

They're not really there to correct. They are there to incarcerate and punish and hopefully serve as a deterrent. We used to talk about used cars.

I'm gonna go get used cars or used books or used anything anymore, but now they call it pre-owned. It's a pre-owned vehicle. It's a pre-owned book.

In the same way that an illegal alien is called an undocumented visitor and an undocumented immigrant. Changing the name, you even have this biblical examples. Remember Ish Baal, and Baal means Lord in Canaanite and Old Hebrew, and the Israelites rightfully recognized that Baal was bad news, and so they would change that aspect of a name into Bosheth, which means foolishness.

So Ish Baal, man of the Lord or the Lord of the Canaanites now becomes man of foolishness, Ish Bosheth. Jeremiah talks about peace when there is no peace in chapter six and chapter eight. And saying there's peace when there's not, you've seen clips where they say riots are mostly peaceful, demonstrations are mostly peaceful, and the guy is standing in front of flaming buildings and family businesses burning to the ground and so on.

The abortion industry is referred to in our day as reproductive health services or I'm in favor of a woman's right to choose instead of the fatal actions to an unborn child. They don't like to talk about torturing captive prisoners, so they call it enhanced interrogation. Trying to change a name or make it sound like the opposite of what it is.

They're laying people off at a company, but they don't call it layoffs, they call it RIF. It's a reduction in force, or it's downsizing or right-sizing. No, they're firing people, they're laying them off.

You're trying to gloss it over by changing the name and so on. You can think of these, and it can take a number of different forms for a number of different reasons. But the Pharisees claimed insight and understanding of the scriptures, and Jesus said, you're blind.

We're going to see this coming up in Laodicea. You say, I'm wealthy and I have need of nothing, and it is the exact opposite. So we see this, especially in Sardis.

You have a name that you're alive, you're deader than a mackerel. That what little life is left, you'd better try to preserve it and leverage it and get back to what you need to be. The history is replete with examples of this.

I saw somewhere an example, Abraham Lincoln. I don't know if this is apocryphal or not, but I like the story, so I'm going to tell it anyway. When Abraham Lincoln was president, a committee came to him and they said, we want you to take this particular course of action.

And he was skeptical that they were really communicating the truth to him. And he said, tell me something. If you look at a sheep and you say, I'm going to call its tail a leg, how many legs does the sheep have? If you call a sheep's tail a leg, how many legs does the sheep have? And they came back and they said, well, five.

And he said, no, sheep has four legs. Calling its tail a leg doesn't make it one. And this is the problem when we misname things, we don't get at reality by shading, twisting, perverting things with different names.

And calling something minor when it's major, calling something unimportant when it's important, calling something one thing when it is the opposite, saying we are alive when we are dead or in danger of dying. So, do you know what they had in Russia? It was the Committee for State Security. You know what that was in Russia? The abbreviation for the Committee for State Security in Russia is KGB.

It's supposedly protecting the people, but it's actually doing surveillance and creating fear and control. You look at North Korea, you know what their official name is? The Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is not democratic, it is not of the people, it suppresses the people.

And it's not a republic, it's a hereditary dictatorship. Calling it the Democratic People's Republic is the opposite of the truth. Do you remember what the word Pharisee means in Hebrew slash Aramaic? The meaning of the term Pharisee, the label Pharisee is the pure ones.

The pure ones. What did Jesus say about the pure ones? You are whitewashed tombstones, you're full of dead men's bones, you're clean on the outside and filthy on the inside, you're hypocrites, and you get very close to what's going on in Sardis. You have a name that you're alive when you're dead.

So we want to avoid fooling ourselves, much less endeavoring to fool others by thinking and telling ourselves that we are okay, putting a name to ourselves that we are alive and productive if we're not. If we are going to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Now think about this.

Think about the chain of custody. Let's count them. God the Father originates this message, that's one.

He gives this revelation to the Lord Jesus Christ, that's two. Who gave it to his messenger, that's three. Who transmits it to John, that is four.

Who writes it to the messengers of the churches, that is five. And it is spoken to our hearts by the Spirit, that's six. This message passes through six tried and true, trustworthy, faithful messengers.

Beginning with the author, God our Father, the Lord Jesus our Savior, the messenger who brings it to John. If the Lord Jesus trusts him, I'm pretty sure he didn't mess up the message. He

didn't corrupt it or pervert it or twist it in any way.

John got it. John writes it down faithfully and sends it to the messengers of these churches who under the inspiration and ministry of God's Holy Spirit communicate it to the individuals. We are number seven in the chain.

From God the Father to us, there are a total of seven parties involved in originating and receiving this message. How many sevens are there in the revelation? This is one that I think is oft overlooked, but you and I are number seven. What are we going to do with this message? Do we have an ear? Will we hear? Will we receive? Will we be watchful? Will we evaluate ourselves as each of these letters emphasizes? Each letter addresses a different area.

How are we doing in maintaining love for God and love for one another? That's Ephesus. How well are we holding up under pressure? That's Smyrna. How well are we doing when it comes to identifying false teaching and not being seduced by it into bad behavior? Doctrine of Balaam.

The Nicolaitans mentioned both in Ephesus and in Pergamos. And that's that mini chiasm. It's consciously, Nicolaitans mentioned twice in the same way Synagogue of Satan links across the larger chiasm.

So what is the solution? Change your mind. Repent. When you get to Ephesus, remember in verse five, you've got to remember, pay attention to what you know and apply it.

We're just people out here trying to stay afloat, make a living, pay our bills, redeem our time, represent the Lord Jesus as believers. We need help. We need guidance.

We need enablement and empowerment. And these letters in each of these different areas, what is our love for God and for one another? How do we do under pressure as in Smyrna? How do we do when false teaching is at our periphery and knocking at our gates as in Pergamos and in Thyatira? And it gets worse. In Pergamos, they recognize it.

In Thyatira, they listen to it and they're seduced by it. In Sardis, evidently that process has resulted in killing off their spiritual vitality. They have a name that they're alive, but they're essentially dead.

They've got to find what remains and recover. If they will recover, you come to Philadelphia. You've got a little strength.

You're recovering. You're coming back here. And he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one shuts, shuts and no one's open.

This needs its own session. This is fascinating. We've got Old Testament roots here that explode this wide open.

It makes so much sense why it is spoken in Philadelphia in their particular situation, why there is an open door that no one can shut. And if the Lord Jesus shuts a door, nobody can open it.

Why is the key of David mentioned? Why are doors in view here? And we're going to see this idea of the door extend to Laodicea.

You remember Revelation 3.20, second to John 3.16, one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens the door, Jesus is a door opener and sets before Philadelphia an open door.

In Laodicea, they have to open the door so that the Lord Jesus can come in. Fascinating interaction. And we'll explore this more next time.

But these letters are so important and you can't even approach the rest of the Revelation. Seals, trumpets, thunders, bowls, women, dragons, scarlet harlot, riding the beast. None of this will make any sense if we haven't grasped what the Spirit says to the churches through these words of the Lord Jesus.

So we're spending time on it. We're getting a foundation beneath us. This is going to give us a wonderful excursion through the remaining chapters in the days ahead.

But we'll stop for tonight and close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for this wonderful and so timely message for us that hits us where we live, that illuminates both where we can be strong and where we might be weak. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will speak these truths in our hearts in such a way that we will be aware and that we can respond with repentance, we can respond with paying attention and strengthening what remains and moving forward in a way that puts us in the position of commendation and not condemnation.

We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified in our lives, in our group, in our pursuits, in our goals and values and priorities so that we will be ready when the Lord Jesus comes to take us to himself and present us before your throne. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.