

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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LECTURE THREE

THE SEVEN CHURCHES

(Lecture 2)

WE now turn to the letters addressed to the first four churches, as found in chapter 2.

In the last address I tried to make it clear that the key to the structure of the book is the 19th verse of the first chapter. We have already been occupied with the things which the apostle John had seen - that is, the first vision of the book, where he beheld the glorified Lord in the midst of the candlesticks, as set forth on the chart. The third division is clearly indicated in the opening words of chapter 4, where we read, “**After these things I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven.**” Necessarily then, the second division must take in simply what we have in chapters 2 and 3 - “**the things which are**” (present, continuous tense) - the things which are now in progress; and this is the only part of the Apocalypse that has to do specifically with the present, the church period, though it is all written for our instruction, our warning, and our encouragement.

In fact, I believe that the real value of the Revelation consists in this: that it gives us the full-grown trees which we now see as developing saplings. We need this book in order to judge aright the various movements that are now going on. For myself, I am sure that if I did not know something of the teaching of this book, I would long since have been identified with many movements which I have come absolutely to distrust, because I believe I can see, by a careful study of the Apocalypse, what the end of them will be.

Let me illustrate:

Someone asks concerning the so-called “Church Federation scheme.” Wouldn’t it be a wonderful thing if all the churches united? If we simply had one great organization, wouldn’t it be grand? All could agree to accept a common creed so worded that everyone could subscribe to it, and so the shame of Christendom’s divisions be at an end. Now, why not go in for something like that?

Would not this be the fulfillment of the prayer of our Lord, **“that they all may be one”**?

Well, I might be caught by such a proposal, but I turn to the Book of Revelation and I learn that just such a religious federation is going to arise after the church of God has been caught away to be with the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is designated in the 17th chapter as **“Babylon the Great.”**

This will be the big world-church. The present movement is just a preparation for this, and when I have the light from heaven shining upon it in the Book of the Revelation, I say, that if that is the way it is going to end, the thing to do is to have no part in it now. Separation from evil - not fusion of diverse systems - is the divine order: and so we see that the prophetic book throws the light of the future upon events and movements that are in progress at present, in order that we may take warning and be preserved from that which is contrary to the mind of God.

Before we begin our study of **“The Things which are,”** let me give you this parable.

Sometime ago, rummaging through an old castle, some people came across a very strange-looking old lock which secured a stout door. They shook the door and tried to open it, but to no avail. They tried one way and another to move the lock, but could not turn it. By and by somebody picked up a bunch of old keys from some rubbish on the floor and he said, “Maybe I can unlock it.” He tried one key and it made no impression. He tried another and it gave a little; another and it gave a little more; and so on, but none would open the lock. At last he came to a peculiar old key. He slipped it into the lock, gave a turn, and the lock was open. They said, “Undoubtedly this key was meant for this lock.”

You will understand my parable if I draw your attention to the fact that, in the 20th verse of the 1st chapter, we are told that there was a mystery connected with the seven lampstands. The seven lampstands are said to symbolize the seven churches of Asia, but there was a mystery connected with them. While some have tried one key and some have tried another (and there have been all kinds of efforts made to interpret this mystery), no solution was found until some devout students of Scripture weighing this portion said, “Might it not be that inasmuch as this section of the book presents **‘the things which are,’** God has been pleased to give us here a prophetic history of the church for the entire dispensation?” But would the key fit the lock? They compared the first part of the church’s history with the letter to Ephesus. Here it fitted perfectly. They went on and compared the letter to Smyrna with the second part of the church’s history, and the agreement was most marked. They went on right down to the end, and when they came to Laodicea they found that what is written to the church of Laodicea answers exactly to the condition of the professing church in the days in which we live, and they said: “There, the mystery is all clear. The lock has been opened; therefore we have the right key.”

For myself, I have no question that this was in very truth the mind of the Lord in sending these letters to the seven churches. Seven churches were chosen because seven in Scripture is the number of perfection; and you have only to read these seven letters, then take any good, reliable church history and see for yourself how perfectly the key fits the lock.

The very names are significant. It would be impossible to reverse any of these names. If the order were changed they would not apply.

Take the first one. Ephesus means “*desirable*,” such a term as a Greek applied to the maiden of his choice. Ephesus gives us a picture of the Church as it was in the beginning, when the Lord held the stars (His servants) in His hand, and controlled their ministry. He sent them here and there, just as He would, to proclaim the glad gospel of His grace and to minister to His saints. But human systems have largely changed all that. He walked in the midst of His churches. His eyes were upon everything, and He was there to admonish, to correct, and to control. Observe that in the beginning His Name was the only center, and unto Him was the gathering of His saints. Read the second and third verses:

“I know thy works and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.”

The early church was walking in separation from the world. The Greek word *ecclesia*, translated “**church**” in our Bibles, means *a called-out company*. This is God’s ideal, and every effort to amalgamate the church and the world is opposed to His mind and must end in confusion, for the church will never convert the world in the present dispensation.

Someone asked Dr. A. T. Pierson, on one occasion, “Don’t you really think that the world is getting converted already?”

“Well,” he said, “I admit that the world has become a little churchy, but the church has become immensely worldly.”

If it were possible that the church could convert the world, that would be the end of the church. What do I mean? Simply this, that the church is a called-out company, and if the world were converted, there would not be anything else left out of which to call the church.

Believers, in the days of Ephesus, could not bear those who were evil.

In our day, discipline in the church is almost at an end. In many quarters, anyone is welcome to full participation in all church privileges, particularly if they have a good bank account; but in the beginning it was very different. That little Ephesian assembly said, “We don’t want numbers if they are not holy numbers. We don’t want growth at the expense of holiness.” More than that, they were loyal to the truth. They tried those who claimed to be apostles, and if they found they were deceivers they refused them as liars, instead of saying, “Oh well, you know Dr. So-and-so comes with such good recommendations, he is such a lovely man and so cultured, and though he doesn’t happen to believe in the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, or His atonement, etc., still he has so many good qualities that we mustn’t be hard on him.”

The early church would have said, “Are you a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ?” and put a few serious questions to him. If he was not what he professed to be, they soon unmasked him and refused his unholy ministrations.

But in these days teachers can deny almost any truth of Scripture, and the professing church never knows the difference. Oh, for more of the zeal and piety of early days!

In verse three we learn that these saints were suffering for the Name's sake of the Lord Jesus. It was not suffering for the name of any denomination, nor yet for some special theories or usages. It was suffering for Christ's sake. For His Name's sake they bore trial and endured persecution.

And yet, even then, we have the evidence of early decline. Fourth verse: **"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."**

They had left their first love. The heart was drifting away from Christ. The decline that began in these first days of the church has continued. There has been no corporate recovery. That spirit of declension has gone on increasing until the present Laodicean days.

In the next letter we see that the Lord, whose love never changes, permitted something to take place to arouse His people from their lethargy.

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

Smyrna means *myrrh*. It is frequently mentioned in Scripture in connection with the embalming of the dead. Myrrh had to be crushed in order to give out its fragrance. This sets forth the period when the church was crushed beneath the iron heel of pagan Rome, yet it never gave out such sweet fragrance to God as in those two centuries of almost constant martyrdom.

"These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive." What a blessed thing to know that the children of God are linked up with a resurrected Christ! The power of His resurrection works in them. He says, **"I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, (but thou art rich)."**

This was the day when the church was hated, outlawed and persecuted. Instead of worshiping in magnificent buildings, they gathered together in caves, catacombs and other hidden places, with sentries posted to warn them of the approach of their foes. Despised by the world, condemned as enemies of the Empire because of their faith in and loyalty to Christ, their lives were precious to God. They were in His eyes rich. They were poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith.

But even then, all was not perfection; so He says, **"I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan"** - referring to the Judaizing movement that came into the church in the early centuries. It was the leaven of Galatianism which had never been wholly judged, and which made astonishing progress in the second and third centuries.

He says, **"Fear none of those things . . . ye shall have tribulation ten days."**

It is significant that in the two centuries of Roman persecution, which began with Nero and which terminated 312 A. D., there were ten distinct edicts demanding that governors seek out Christians everywhere and put them to death. The last was under Diocletian. He was the tenth persecutor. The early Christians believed he would be the last, and he was.

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” said Augustine.

The testimony of the dying again and again led their very persecutors to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour because of the convincing power of the truth manifested in the martyrs. Satan’s effort to destroy Christianity by persecution was in vain. But those were days when it meant something to be a Christian. When God’s people were being crushed like myrrh, what a sweet odor of devotion, what fragrance of Christian love was wafted up to the very throne of God!

Pergamos has two meanings. It means “*marriage*,” and “*elevation*.” It speaks of the time when the church was elevated to a place of power, and was married to the world. It depicts the time when church and state were united, under Constantine and his successors.

Read the 12th and 13th verses:

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”

The Lord Jesus judges everything by the Word. The word that He spoke will judge men in the last day. If you reject it now it will judge you then. “**I know where thou dwellest**,” He says, even on “**Satan’s throne**.”

What was Satan’s throne? If you had asked any of the Smyrna believers, they would have pointed you to the Emperor’s throne in Rome. In Pergamos you find the very church of God sitting upon the imperial throne. How did that happen? Those of you who are familiar with Roman history and church tradition will recall that after the death of Diocletian and Galerius, Constantine and Maxentius contended for the throne.

Constantine is said to have seen a vision of a cross of fire and to have heard a voice saying, “In this sign, conquer.” He wondered what the vision could mean. He was told that the cross was the sign of the Christian religion, and that it must mean that the God of the Christians was calling him to be the champion of the Christian religion; that if he obeyed the voice he would be victor over the hosts of Maxentius and become emperor of the world.

He called for Christian bishops and asked them to explain their religion to him. He accepted the new doctrine and declared himself to be its God-appointed patron and protector. Some writers make a great deal of this so-called conversion of Constantine, but it is questionable if he ever became a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

He won a great victory over his opponent and thus became emperor of the world, and one of his first acts was to liberate the Christians and to stop all persecution. He bestowed unwonted honors on the bishops; they sat on thrones with the nobles of the empire.

It was at this time that the truth of the second coming of Christ was given up.

Before the days of Constantine the church was looking for Him. That was their expectation and hope. But after the great change in their circumstances, this truth was largely lost sight of. Christian bishops said, "We have been looking for Christ's reign but we have been wrong. Constantine's empire is Christ's kingdom." They thought the church was already reigning; so it went on until the days of the Reformation, when the light began to dawn again.

But now note a most interesting thing: At the very time that the Lord said, "**I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat (or throne) is,**" He goes on to say, "**Thou holdest fast my Name, and hast not denied my faith,**" etc. Here is something very remarkable. At the same time that Christ sees them sitting on Satan's throne, He can yet commend them for holding fast His Name.

It was at that time that the Arian controversy was fought out.

Arius denied the eternity of the Word. John says, "**In the beginning was the Word**" - He always existed. When everything that had a beginning began, the Word was.

Arius declared that the Word was the greatest of all beings that ever emanated from God. His opponents insisted that the Word was one with the Father, in one eternal Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: one God in three Persons. It was the most tremendous issue the church had ever been called to face, and, for over a century, it was the burning question that provoked heated controversy everywhere.

For years the church was almost rent asunder over two words, "homoiosian" and "homoousian." The one word meant "*of like substance,*" the other "*of the same substance.*" The first was the battle-cry of the Arians; the second of the orthodox, headed by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria.

So irreconcilable were the contending parties that Constantine at last decided to take a hand in the matter himself, and he called a great church-council, which convened in the city of Nicaea, and there debated the question as to what the apostolic teaching really had been. Was Jesus truly God, or was He only the greatest being that God had ever brought into existence? Over three hundred bishops met together, and Constantine, sitting on a golden throne, presided as the acknowledged head of the Christian church, at the very time that he still bore the title Pontifex Maximus, or High Priest of the Heathen - the same title that the Pope bears at the present time.

The matter in question was examined from all sides.

Again and again Constantine was called in to quell disturbances; feelings ran so high.

On one occasion it is related that a brilliant Arian seemed to have almost silenced opposition, and the great assemblage appeared to be about to cast its vote in favor of the damnable Unitarian heresy, when a hermit from the deserts of Africa sprang to his feet, clad chiefly in tiger's skin. This latter he tore from his back, disclosing great scars (the result of having been thrown into the arena among the wild beasts, and his hack dreadfully disfigured by their claws), crying dramatically, "These are the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I cannot hear this blasphemy."

Then he proceeded to give so stirring an address, setting forth so clearly the truth as to Christ's eternal deity, that the majority of the council realized in a moment that it was indeed the voice of the Spirit of God.

Whether this story be actually true or not I cannot say, but it well sets forth the spirit pervading many who were in attendance, most of whom had passed through the terrible persecution of Diocletian. The final result was that the council of Nicaea put itself on record as confessing the true deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Very God of Very God," "Light of Lights," "perfection of perfection" - God and man in one blessed Person, nevermore to be separated.

Thus was settled once and forever, in a public way, the acknowledged faith of the church of God, which held fast His Word, and did not deny His Name.

Did you ever stop to think what would have been the case if the council had decided the other way? It would have meant this: Unitarianism would have henceforth borne the stamp of orthodoxy, and the truth of the deity of Christ would have been branded as heresy.

We have no record as to who the Antipas was referred to in the latter part of the verses above quoted, but it is singular that the word means "*against all*." Many years after the council of Nicaea, when the Arian party were again largely in the ascendancy, Athanasius, that doughty old champion of the truth, was summoned before the Arian emperor Theodosius, who demanded that he cease his opposition to the teaching of Arius - who by the way, was long since dead - and admit the Arians to the table of the Lord. This Athanasius refused. Theodosius reproved him bitterly for what he considered his insubject spirit, and asked sternly, "Do you not realize that all the world is against you?"

The champion of the truth drew himself up and answered the emperor, "Then I am against all the world." He was a true Antipas, a faithful witness to the end of his days, despite banishment and opposition of various kinds.

Oh, my brethren, God wants to-day, just such men, men of God, who, for the truth's sake, are willing to stand, if need be, against all the world!

We now turn to consider another phase of things in the Pergamos period - the introduction of the doctrine of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitanes in the church.

Balaam taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the sons of Israel by leading them to make unholy alliances with the Midianitish women, as recorded in Numbers 25:1-9.

In figure this is the union of the church and the world. During the Smyrna period, Satan sought to destroy the church by persecution. In the next three centuries he tried different tactics: he endeavored to ruin the testimony by worldly patronage from without, and the introduction of false principles from within.

You know it is far more dangerous for the church to be patronized by the world than when the world is openly arrayed against it.

Take any of the different denominations in Christendom. When were they shining most brightly for the Lord? It was in the days of their first love, when they were suffering from the world and were the objects of its bitter persecution. But when those had passed, when the period of persecution ended and the world began to look upon them with complacency, to greet them with the outstretched hand and the smiling face, instead of with the sword and the frown, in every instance decline set in.

So it was in the Pergamos period.

Constantine's patronage did what Diocletian's persecution could not do. It corrupted the church, and she forgot her calling as a chaste virgin espoused to an absent Lord; then she gave her hand in marriage to the world that had crucified Him, thus entering into an unholy alliance of which she has never really repented.

In close connection with this we have the introduction of wrong principles within - the teaching of the Nicolaitanes.

Others have often pointed out that this is an untranslated Greek word meaning, "*Rulers over the people.*" Nicolaitanism is really *clerisy* - the subjugation of those who were contemptuously styled "the laity" by a hierarchical order who lorded it over them as their own possessions, forgetting that it is written, "**One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.**"

In the letter to Ephesus the Lord commended them for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, those who, like Diotrephes, loved to have the preeminence among them. But, in the Pergamos letter, we have Nicolaitanism designated as a distinct system of teaching. It was then that *clerisy* was accepted as of divine origin, and therefore something that must be bowed to.

All this prepared the way for the Thyatira period, according to the letter that follows.

I have already tried to point out that every one of these names seems to be significant. Thyatira is perhaps the most difficult of all to define. Scholars tell us that it comes from two words, *one meaning a sacrifice, or an incense-offering; the other, that which goes on continually.* A suggested interpretation, therefore, is "*continual sacrifice.*" And this is very significant, because Thyatira undoubtedly sets forth the period which was the result of the union of church and State, already noticed.

It was in the 7th century that the Bishop of Rome was first regularly recognized as Christ's vicegerent, and visible head of the church.

This was, properly speaking, the beginning of the papacy.

There was no Roman Catholic church, in the full sense, until the Pope was the acknowledged head of Christendom. It is important for Protestants to keep this in mind. You will often hear papists say, "You know the first church was the Roman Catholic church, and all the different branches of the Protestant church have simply broken off from Rome. There was no Protestant church until the days of Luther." That is an absolute sophistry.

There was no such thing as the papacy until the 7th century of the Christian era. For six centuries before that, the church was becoming more and more corrupt - had been drifting further away from the Word of God until, in the 7th century, men professing themselves to be servants of God were ready to acknowledge the Pope as head of all Christendom.

A Roman Catholic once asked a bright Protestant school-girl, "Where was your church before the days of Henry the VIII?"

"Why, sir, where yours never was, in the Bible," was her sensible and correct reply.

It is a far cry from the simplicity of early Christianity, when in the 7th century they were ready to own the pretensions of the bishop of Rome.

I said that Thyatira seemed to imply a continual sacrifice. You will see the significance of this in the great fundamental error of the church of Rome - the sacrifice of the mass.

The Roman Catholic priests declare that, in the mass, they offer a continual sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead. Other errors of the church of Rome spring from that. There are many things that Protestants might be able to condone. This is the central, the root blasphemy - the denial of the finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross - the one, only and all-sufficient offering for the sins of a guilty world.

Every time the priest stands at Rome's altar to offer the sacrifice of the mass, he denies the unchanging efficacy of the work wrought by the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross.

I have often pressed this question home to Catholic priests: "What is your function as a sacrificing priest?"

They say, "It is my privilege to offer up the Lord Jesus from time to time - a continual sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead."

I generally put it like this: "Well, Christ has to be slain that He may be offered up; doesn't He?"

"Yes."

"You claim then that every time you offer the sacrifice of the mass, every time you pronounce the blessing, you are sacrificing Christ for the sins of the living and the dead?"

"Yes."

“Well then, you kill Christ afresh every time you offer that sacrifice!”

Then they begin to hedge. But there is no escape from this horrible conclusion. The Roman priest says that when he offers the sacrifice of the mass he is presenting Christ again for the sins of the living and the dead. And the only way that Christ can be a sacrifice is to be put to death; therefore, the priest kills Him afresh every time he offers. They cannot get away from it. The apostle Peter said at Pentecost, **“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up. etc.”**

If Christ has to be offered continually, then every priest is guilty of murdering the Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God.

God is going to judge Rome in a little while: so Christ’s letter to Thyatira properly speaks of this central blasphemy of the church of Rome. Continual sacrifice? Never! No other sacrifice is needed. The dignity of the Lord is so great, the value of His blood is so absolutely infinite, that it is vain for you or any other man to speak about a new sacrifice.

You may say, “I agree with you, sir.”

Well; now let me ask, Have you a personal interest in that one offering made once upon the cross? Can you say, “Thank God, He gave Himself a propitiation for my sins, and He is my Saviour. I need no other sacrifice. My soul is resting on the finished work of Christ. I require nothing more on which to enter the presence of God.”

But let us turn to the Lord’s address to Thyatira:

“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.”

It is very significant the way the Lord presents Himself in each one of these letters, so as to meet the special condition in which the church is found. When He addresses Himself to the church of Thyatira, He speaks solemnly as **“the Son of God.”** Why does the Lord Jesus Christ emphasize the fact of His deity here? Because Rome everywhere has accustomed people to think of Him as the Son of Mary.

I once talked with a woman who told me she would sooner go to Mary than to Christ or the Father. She said, “There is nobody that has so much influence with a son as his mother, and if Jesus Christ is inclined to be a bit hard-hearted, I just go to His good, kind mother, and I ask her to please say a good word to Him for me.” What a caricature of our Lord Jesus Christ! Think of having to go to anybody else to win His favor. Who else could be compared with Him? Thus Christ is degraded into the position of the Son of Mary, rather than the Son of God, who came in infinite grace to save poor sinners.

But, observe, He has **“eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.”** This speaks of His holiness and righteousness. He must judge all that is evil. And yet He never overlooks what can be commended. He goes on to say,

“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works: and the last to be more than the first.”

The Lord gives Rome credit for a great deal that is good. Remember from the 7th century on to the present time there has been a great deal in the way of good works in the Roman Catholic church that cannot be overlooked. There have been Roman Catholic nuns and monks who have been ready to lay down their lives for the needy and the sick. There were centuries before Luther when every hospital in Western Europe was simply a Roman Catholic monastery or convent. The Lord does not forget all that. Where there is a bit of faith, His love takes note of it all. If there are hearts in the Church of Rome that, amid the superstition, reach out to the blessed Lord Himself, He meets them in grace and manifests His love to them. But having done this, He then puts His finger on the sore spot:

“Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”

To understand this well, we need to go back to Israel’s history in the days of King Ahab. Jezebel was an adept in the art of mixing. She undertook to unite in one the religion of Israel and the religion of Phoenicia. That is just what Romanism is - a mixture of Heathenism and Christianity and Judaism.

It is not Christianity - yet there is in it quite a little that is Christian. Where did its superstition and image worship come from? It was all taken bodily over from heathenism, under the plea that it would help to convert the pagans. The church became very accommodating. In the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries you find the church compromising with heathen rites and heathen ceremonies to such a degree that, by the 7th century, one could hardly tell heathen from Christian temples. The amalgamation is such that it is almost impossible to separate the one from the other. Go to a Roman Catholic church, and, after sitting through the whole ceremony, take your Bible and search it from one end to the other, and ask yourself, “Is there anything like that in the Book?” You will say, “No.” Where does it come from then? Go from there to a heathen temple. Observe its ritual, and you will say, “Yes, they are the same.”

Romanism is Christianity, Judaism, and Heathenism joined together; and the Lord abhors the vile combination. Note two things that He holds against Rome - spiritual fornication and idolatry - The first is the union of the church and the world: and **“the friendship of the world is enmity against God.”** Idolatry is the worship of images, strictly forbidden in the second commandment (Exodus 20:4, 5). God gave her space to repent and she repented not. Go back to the days of Savonarola in Italy, Wickliffe and Cranmer of England, John Knox in Scotland, Martin Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Switzerland, Calvin in France - all those mighty reformers whom God raised up throughout the world to call Rome to repent of her iniquity, but **“she repented not.”**

Mark this, you could not transpose these churches. You could not put Thyatira in the place of Smyrna. It could not be said to the church in that early day, **“I gave her space to repent, and she repented not;”** but it is fully applicable to the Church of Rome. And, in our day, we have a lot of foolish Protestants who believe that the old Rome is now a harmless old pussy-cat sitting on the banks of the Tiber: she purrs so contentedly. They say, “We never understood Rome. What a pity we ever had that Reformation at all.” And so efforts are being made to re-unite the various great bodies of Christendom in one vast society headed by the Pope. This is the avowed purpose of many leaders in the larger Protestant bodies. What foolish people these Protestants are! - Protestants who have long ceased to protest against evil doctrine, forgetting the millions of lives that were sacrificed for the precious truth. Depend upon it, if the day ever comes that the Pope gets into the saddle again, and gets control of the proposed union, it will only be at the expense of life if people will worship scripturally at all. But Protestant leaders are dazzled with the thought of a great united church, and are hurrying us on to a union with Rome which Scripture shows clearly enough will yet take place. But, thank God, not until the church of Christ has been caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds, to be with Himself, according to His promise (John 14:2, 3). God gave Rome space to repent. If she had had any desire to get right with Him, she would have repented in the 16th century.

Since the 16th century she has added to her blasphemies and errors the declaration of the absolute sinlessness of the Virgin Mary, lifting her to the position of a female God, and declared that she was caught up to heaven without dying and crowned queen of heaven.

At the Council of the Vatican less than 7.1 years ago, the Church of Rome produced another of her wretched dogmas - the infallibility of her Popes. This dogma was so utterly without reason that many bishops said, “This is going too far. We know that Popes have reversed each other over and over again.” But Rome never repented; she has added sin upon sin to the heavy list God had against her in the middle ages, and will remain the same to the end. It behooves Protestants to keep clear of it all. God says He is going to cast her into the great tribulation. Ephesus is at an end; Smyrna at an end about 312 A. D.; Pergamos at an end; Thyatira begins in the 7th century, and goes right on into the Great Tribulation, and manifests herself at last as Babylon the Great. Her children are to be judged; but wherever there is a remnant found who **“have not known the depths of Satan,”** the Lord owns them as His, and exhorts them to hold fast what they have until He come. To the overcomer He promises what Rome has always sought - power over the nations. They will rule with Him when He comes again. Thus the hope of the Second Coming of Christ is put before them, and henceforth has a large place in each of these church-letters.

Time has not permitted so full an exposition as I would have liked, but I trust enough has been brought before us to stir our hearts to search the Scriptures for ourselves, and to study as never before this marvelous portion of God’s holy Word.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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