

# What The Spirit Saith To The Church

## Part One: Revelation 2



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**FOCAL Read Together** Revelation 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

According to those who make and keep up with polls, some 98% of all Americans believe themselves to be Christians. Yet a recent Gallup poll found that:

**"only 46 percent said they have a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in church/organized religion - one percentage point of being the lowest in Gallup's history since 1973."**<sup>1</sup>

People cite many reasons for their loss of confidence in the Church, but one thing stands out above all else: the Lord Jesus Christ is perfect, but the Church is *not perfect*. May I say that the Church was not designed to be perfect. If you or I ever found a perfect Church and joined it, we would immediately ruin that Church - *because neither you nor I are perfect*. The professing *but not possessing* "Christian" - a "Christian in Name Only" or "CINO" - is always looking for fault and picking at Christ's Church. The unbeliever does not want to work for God, and has *never* wanted to work for God. When Jesus Christ came to this earth and took on Himself humanity the Bible says:

**John 1:4-5 In [Christ] was life; and the life was the light of men. (5) And **the light shineth in****

<sup>1</sup> Results from the Gallup poll are based on interviews with 1,007 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted June 11-14.

**darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.**

Why didn't the unbeliever - the person walking apart from God and in darkness - **comprehend it not**. We are told later in the Holy Scripture by Jesus:

**John 3:20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.**

Those who **do evil** - those bound in unbelief and in unbelieving actions - **do not come to the light**. They do not want their lifestyle revealed as evil. They want a covering for what they do, and the best covering they can think of is darkness, ignorance, and avoidance. Sin like a cancer eats away at a person until he or she recognizes that *they are sinners*. Christ came to bless and make well those who recognized they had a problem. He said:

**Mark 2:17 ... They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**

When you go to the doctor, you don't go for your neighbor - you go *for yourself*. You recognize that you have a sickness, a disease, an dullness of spirit that needs attention. You go to the doctor and ask "Doc, what's wrong with *me*? Why do *I* feel this way?" You do not go to the doctor and say "What's wrong with my neighbor?"

Why is he or she the way they are?". No dear friends, we go to the doctor because we are sick. We ask the doctor to treat and make well our sickness.

Those who avoid God's Church, who believe "I can be a Christian and not go to the meetings of the local Church", are deceiving themselves. If you have been saved, you were saved by recognizing yourself to be a sinner and recognizing Christ as your only solution. There was a point of time in your life where you looked unto Him and believed His Word, applying it to your life. On that day you ceased being your own master, and by faith in Jesus became a Child of God. You believed Him when He said "**I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me**" (John 14:6). You trusted Him when He said "**I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.**" (John 10:7-9). Those who are Christians - not just in word but in deed - are people who have bent the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 1:4). Jesus built the Church. He has said "**upon this Rock I will build My Church**" (Matthew 16:18). The Church is **purchased with the Blood of God (Acts 20:28)**. The Bible itself was written to the Church. If God had not written to the local Church at Rome we would never have understood the great truth of justification by faith in Christ. If He had not written to the local Churches at Corinth and Jerusalem we would not have known of the spiritual Gifts, and the necessity of every believer in Christ submitting one to another in the Body of the local

Church for the glory of God. It is in the letter to the local Churches of Ephesus Colossae that we learn Christ is the Head of His Church (**Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18**). To the local Church of Thessalonica was given the great doctrines of Bodily Resurrection and of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Timothy, Titus, and Philemon were all either Church planters or workers within the Church.

God's method has always been His local Church.

When we come to the Book of Revelation we see the Lord addressing - not individual Christians - but *seven local Churches*. Why only seven? Why did the Lord speak to the local Churches of **Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea**, and yet leave out the local Churches of **Jerusalem, Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome, Galatia, Colossae, Philippi**, and others? The Scottish pastor **James S. Stewart** probably hit the nail on the head when he said:

**"John wrote to the seven churches in Asia ... because seven is symbolical - it is the perfect number - so that in writing to these seven he writes to all, to the Church universal, to all congregations of Christian people scattered everywhere throughout the world."**<sup>2</sup>

Whether you agree with this assessment or not is insignificant that seven times we read the phrase **"let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"**. God's method is the local Church. God addresses the local

Church. God's means of evangelizing the world and reaching others is the local Church. In these seven addresses the Lord gives every local Church a warning. If the warning or the promise was given to only the local Church the Spirit addressed the Lord would have said **"let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the church (singular)"**. That's not the case. The address of each local Church is **to the Churches, to the local Churches**. God loves His local Church, and wants only the best for it.

Let's see how we can be the best for God. Let's look at these seven local Churches and realize each of these messages are given to us as well.

### **Ephesus: The Local Church Is To Repent and Love Only Christ**

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

The Church is called of God to be *passionately in love with Jesus*.

Yet in many assemblies, in many local Churches today the center of attention is not the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> from his sermon *What the Spirit is Saying To The Churches*, Classic Sermons series (on Revival and Spiritual Renewal) page 9, ISBN 1-56563-293-1

Sometimes the focus is how ritualistically right we are, or how doctrinally pure. As Baptists we pride ourselves on the fact that we have no *creed but the Bible* - and this is right. Yet we need to be very careful that we do not go the way of the Pharisee **and leave our first Love**. What we do, we do because we love Jesus. What we preach, we preach out of the love of Jesus.

Whether I am right or wrong or you are right or wrong is not the issue. *The issue for us both is that we love Jesus and we should lovingly work together as Christians should do.*

The Church at Ephesus was a working Church. It was doctrinally correct. It despised the false religious system of the Nicolaitans<sup>3</sup>. a sect of idolaters and sin justifiers. The Lord told the local Church:

**FOCAL Revelation 2:2-3 I know thy works, and thy labor, 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: (3) And hast borne, and hast**

<sup>3</sup> Robertson states in his *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*: "Irenaeus and Hippolytus take this sect to be followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the seven deacons (Acts 6:5), a Jewish proselyte, who is said to have apostatized. There was such a sect in the second century (Tertullian), but whether descended from Nicolaus of Antioch is not certain, though possible (Lightfoot). " John Gill states that they were guilty of "filthy and impure practices of some men, who were called "Nicolaitans"; who committed fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness, and had their wives in common, and also ate things offered to idols"

**patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted.**

There are many local Churches today who preach openly against homosexuality, bestiality, and other sexual sins. But many of these Churches begin to preach with hatred rather than with love toward the fallen.

I have heard preachers and people from local Assemblies speak with such hatred that it is no wonder that those they address are seeking so called "hate crime legislation". The Pharisees among us may end up being the death of us all!

We need to remember our first Love. We need to remember that *we ourselves have nothing to be proudful of*. We didn't love Him first. We didn't choose to love Him first. He chose to love us first. The Scripture says:

**1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

and again,

**Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

While we were sinners **Christ died for us**. He gave us a great gift, the greatest gift we will ever receive in our salvation. When we go into the world and come face to face with those who do not know Him we need to tell them of this great Love. If the message is rejected we need to quit taking it personally, and lovingly preach the Cross anyway. We do all that we do because we love Jesus. It's not about us, it's about *Him*. *Be passionately in love with Jesus – because He is passionately in love with you.*

### **Smyrna: The Local Church Should Keep Its Eye On Christ During Trials And Tribulations**

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:10-11 **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. {11} He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**

If the Lord wanted to prevent His children from ever suffering He would have taken us to Heaven the day we were saved. Too many Christians have a poor view of suffering, of trials and tribulations. They look at these things as curses to be avoided, horrors to be alleviated as soon as possible. When our own children suffer we often rush to and fro trying to find a way to cure what ails them. We give them every convenience – cell phones, cars, allowances, I Pods, four wheelers- lest they suffer the slightest bit. I fear, dear friends, that we are doing

our families an injustice.

Suffering builds character.

**Illustrate** The weakest of all birds is the barnyard chicken. It can only fly short distances, lay eggs, and be eaten. The greatest of all birds is the eagle. The Bible speaks the eagle in majestic terms:

**Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.**

The eagle is a powerful bird – but it is powerful because it is pushed out of the nest as soon as possible. The chicken, on the other hand, is nursed and sheltered its whole life. The mother hen clucks over it and tries to stand between the chick and all adversity. Without adversity there will never be growth.

The weakest people are those who will not be tried and tested by life. They are forever crying about this thing or crying about that thing. They want to live on the mountaintop at all times. Dear ones, have you ever noticed the mountaintop is where there is more snow, less oxygen, and less life? Live your life on the mountaintop and you end up with pale skin and weak lungs. It's best to be in the valley at times. The trials of the valley are friends that help us to grow.

Jesus told His local Church at Smyrna:

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:10-11 **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:** behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days

Why are trials inevitable for the Christian?

Do not be afraid – but trial is coming. Jesus promised His Christians that trials were inevitable. If you are living your life for the *Lord trials will come*. Jesus said:

**John 16:33** These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. **In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.**

**Ye shall have tribulation.** If you became a Christian expecting to avoid tribulation, you were deceiving yourselves. The *better* the Christian you are, the *more* you will have tribulation. Too many believers today are trying to *blend with the world* in order to avoid tribulation. They are trying to justify sin. I know of one local Church that we no longer associate with because they are justifying adultery, homosexuality, and lesbianism, saying that such things can be part of the normal Christian life. There are whole groups of Christians who have bought into the world and worldliness, believing that by doing so they can reach

more people for Christ.

Beloved, the Christian is a person who has bowed the knee to Christ.

The Christian is a person who now by faith *belongs to Jesus*. Hear what He said:

**John 15:18-20** **If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. {19} If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. {20} Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.**

Persecution is the normal lot of the Christian. We are Ambassadors for Christ, Lights in the midst of darkness – and often hated for the stance we take. Quit worrying about foolish things like legislation that may imprison you – that's going to happen anyway. All over the world Christians are imprisoned for their faith. All over the world Christians are persecuted for loving the Lord. It will happen, because it comes from the One who hates us all:

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:10-11 **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days**

**The devil shall cast some of you into prison.**

The source of the hatred directed toward us is the devil. Don't worry, just *preach the Word*. God is still in control. The **tribulation shall only be ten days**. It is all limited.

The devil can do no more than what the Lord allows. Trust in Him. Let the trials of life draw you closer to Him. You are **heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17)**. **Count it all joy** when the trials come (**James 1:2**). God will use them to grow you, to bind you tighter to the **Vine that is Christ (John 15:5)**. In the midst of the trials realize your riches, realize Who rules and reigns even in the midst of the trial, and you will be blessed.

### **Pergamos: The Local Church Must Have A Divine World-view**

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:16-17 **Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. {17} He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of**

**the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.**

**World-view** or how someone thinks about the world around them is very important. As we think, so do we do.

If our world-view is focused on the mind of this present generation, if what Dr. Phil, Oprah, Donahue, John White, or David Buffaloe think is more important to us than what God thinks, then it will show in the life that we live. The Bible tells us

**1 Corinthians 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.**

We who are Christians have the mind of Christ. We have in our hands the Word of God. This Word should influence our minds, our thinking, and how we act.

The local Church of Pergamos **dwelt where the seat of Satan was**. They lived in a godless and god hating age, an idolatrous age. We who live today are in the same situation. We live in the midst of godlessness. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah have become so common place in our society that we have developed new ways to commit the old sins. We now hire doctors to do murder and cloak it in law. We rename this murder “abortion”

and “reproductive rights” to make it more acceptable. People live in sexual sin and we call this “making love”. People take God's Name in vain and we call it “expressing oneself”. The local Church of Pergamos lived in the midst of this mess and, unless your local Church is located in the middle of the woods far away from civilization, you are in the same boat.

Get out of the boat!

Jesus warns the Christians at Pergamos that He does not now, nor will He ever tolerate idolatry and its twin, sexual sin. The local Church and its members are to remember that – if we ever follow this path – the Lord promises to **“fight against them with the word of My mouth”**.

The Word of God stands against those who attempt to justify idolatry or sexual sin. We are to have the mind of Christ.

If you are a Christian **you have been given a new Name**. The term that is used to describe you, **CHRISTian**, emphasizes Who should be influencing your world-view. As Christians we are designed by God to be overcomers, not to be overcome of this world. The world constantly puts pressure on its inhabitants *to conform, be like everyone else*. The Lord commands us to **conform to His Word, His command, His unity, His direction, His Way**. The Church dare not absorb worldliness. We can and should go into the world and lead others to Christ. We should be approaching the drug

addict, the prostitute, the destitute, the poor and downtrodden, and we should be leading them to Jesus.

**Let the mind of Christ be in you.** The local *Church must not be mindless*, it must *not mindlessly follow the world and its ways*. God will not honor that. We are to keep our minds on the Lord:

**Romans 15:6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

For years people have said “the Church will grow if it uses the various marketing schemes that are in the business world today. If the Church will market itself better, become more *consumer friendly*, then it will grow.” Has this proved out? The liberal **United Church of Christ** organization has been in decline. Since approving same sex marriages it has lost over 200 congregations, and over 40,000 members last year<sup>4</sup>. The **United Methodist** Church lost 71,518 in 2004, and continues to lose momentum. **Dr. Albert Mohler** writes:<sup>5</sup>

**“The loss of young adults is the trend with the most devastating long-term consequences. Researcher Tom W. Smith told The Chicago Sun-Times: “There is some evidence that a large portion of this problem is that a fair number of marginal Protestants are not really engaged in their faith and therefore didn't pass it on to their kids. The mom and dad would say, for**

4 <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/195943478.html>

5 [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2006-06-23](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-06-23)

example, 'Yeah, we're Methodists,' but they never went to church. They'd baptize their kids, and that's about it." ... Theological liberalism became evident in the mainline Protestant denominations by the early 1920s. Historian William R. Hutchison of the Harvard Divinity School has traced the erosion of mainline Protestant denominations throughout the twentieth century. Hutchison notes that the denominations affiliated with the liberal National Council of Churches have all experienced steady decline. Accommodating themselves to the spirit of the age, these churches embrace theological and moral relativism in an effort to remain "relevant" to a pluralistic culture."

As liberalism – a creeping from the Word of God and toward *humanistic logic and philosophies* – comes into the Church it poisons the Church. The warning of Scripture:

**Romans 12:2 ... And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,** that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Must always be kept foremost in our hearts. We were left on this earth to serve Jesus and to lead others to Him. We can only do this by **adhering to His Word while remaining bound to Him in prayer**. If we depart from the clear teachings of the Word of God we will destroy the local Church. If we add our opinion in place of the clear teaching of the Holy Scripture we will destroy His

local Church.

The Church is built upon the Rock that is Christ, on the sure knowledge that He imparts to us through His Word. We must heed His Word, and live the Way that He has called us to live if we will be victorious and overcomers in the midst of this present darkness.