

Laodicea: The Inclusive Church, Part 2

Revelation 3:19-22

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Scripture Passage

Open your Bible to Revelation chapter 3 and we will look again at our text, verses 14 to 22, the final of the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor, namely the letter to the church at Laodicea. This is, as you remember, part 2 in our look since a couple of weeks ago we went through the major portion of the text.

By way of introduction, let me just remind you of a perspective that may help you get a grip on the nature of this letter. One of the most heart-moving passages in Scripture is found in the tenth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans because it gets us in touch with Paul's own heart. In Romans 10:1 it says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them," that is for Israel, "is for their salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge."

Paul is saying that his heart prayer, his deep-felt concern and desire is for the salvation of Israel. He grieves over their lostness to the point where he will even say that he could almost wish himself accursed if he could be damned in their place. He was heart-broken over Israel. He was as heart broken, I suppose, in some way as Jesus was when He wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, "How oft I would have gathered you but you would not."

And what broke the heart of Jesus and what broke the heart of Paul over Israel was the fact that they were the recipients of such great spiritual privilege. They had such tremendous opportunity. The Jews were religious. They had been given the Scriptures and the promises and the covenants and the prophets and the priests. And with all of that privilege they were doomed to hell. They had been given the Scripture but refused to believe it. They had been given the covenants but refused to keep them. They had been given the prophets but killed them.

And what makes the story so sad is the privileged position that they occupied. Because of that their case is more tragic than the case of others. God had, you remember, chosen them out of all the world's peoples. And God had set His love upon them, His affection and then granted them this immense spiritual privilege culminating even in the Messiah. But as they had rejected the Word and as they had stoned the prophets, so they killed the Messiah. And so, says Paul, my heart's desire, my prayer, my deepest concern is for the salvation of Israel because of their tremendous privilege.

They were zealous for God, he says. They were sincere but not according to knowledge. The problem wasn't that they lacked sincerity, the problem wasn't that they lacked a zeal or a religious interest or a pursuit of God, the problem

was they devised their own means to do that and rejected the truth. They were religious and damned.

We look back on the story of Israel and we affirm its great tragic nature. We understand why Jesus felt the way He did. After all, the promises of the Old Testament to this people, the Messiah finally comes and they kill Him. So we look with Paul, I think, and Jesus on the story of Israel as a supreme tragedy. And in fact even today, I think, the evangelical church of Jesus Christ has an unusual compassion for Jewish people in wanting to see them come to the true knowledge of their Messiah.

That great tragedy has a parallel today, another tragedy not unlike that one exists. It is a story of an equal kind of tragedy. It is a cause, I believe, for an equal kind of heartache, an equal kind of concern and an equal kind of prayer. And it is the lostness of the church...the lostness of the church. Today within the church there is a lost population of people. Religious, yes. Having in their hands the New Testament, having in their hands all the information they need about the New Covenant, holding in their hands in the very Scriptures the truth about Christ, the saving truth about Christ, His death, His resurrection. They have the understanding that God has given in the Scripture of saving faith and repentance. They have the truth about sin and eternal destiny. Many of those churches have sincere people, very religious, zealous people but they are doomed just as Israel was.

They have the Scripture. They have the gospel. They have the truth about Christ. They have the source of all necessary teaching for life and eternity. And they are very busy being religious, but they reject the truth. They have Bibles they don't believe or obey.

And may I suggest to you something you probably never thought about? There are more people today doomed in the church than there were doomed in an apostate Israel. The Jewish people were small in number. The apostate church is huge, all over the world, millions of people are in it. And they too deny Christ, deny the Word of God, follow false teachers, follow liars, follow the agents of Satan disguised as angels of light. And our hearts should be as grieved over the lost in the doomed church as was Paul's over the lost in a doomed Israel. For they and the church have had a great heritage. When you stop to realize that anybody today who is in the church in its widest sense, the Christian church, if you take them back to their heritage are a part of an organization founded by Jesus Christ, sustained by faithful men and women, perpetuated by the blood of martyrs, enlightened by the skill of great scholars and so they are among a very elite group that are the spiritually privileged in the world. And yet masses of humanity exist within the framework of the church who are in unbelief, that do not know the truth. Very zealous, religious, religiously active, but like Israel they seek to please God by their works. They go about to establish their own righteousness. Many of them deny the deity of Jesus Christ as the Jews did. Many of them refuse to acknowledge the depth of their sin and iniquity. And many of them will refuse to understand the utter inability they have to meet God's holy standard.

Apostate Israel was Paul's greatest grief. The apostate church is mine. Laodicea is an illustration of the apostate church. The last of the seven churches addressed by the Lord Jesus and the worst. Out of the seven there were two good churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, and the Lord doesn't say anything negative to them. There were five bad churches. Five of them were tainted by sin to one degree or another. And as you go through the five, Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea, they get progressively worse until finally Laodicea is fully apostate.

You remember the church at Ephesus had left its first love. Then the church at Pergamos tolerated sin. Then the church at Thyatira had engaged in full-blown compromise with evil. Then the church at Sardis was dead. And now the Laodicean church, unsaved and doomed. This is the apostate church.

But I believe that our attitude toward the apostate church needs to be the same as the attitude of the Apostle Paul toward apostate Israel, the attitude, if you will, of the Lord Jesus toward apostate Israel. And that is a certain attitude of sadness and sorrow for the letter to the church at Laodicea is the only one of the seven letters in which Christ has absolutely nothing good to say. Apparently there wasn't even a contingent that was significant enough, a contingent of saved people, to make a comment to them. And so like churches all over the world, this was a religious group, positive on religion, sincere in their efforts to please God by their own works, but doomed.

Now what I want you to learn as we look at this letter tonight is the Lord's attitude toward the apostate church because it needs to be our attitude as well. And it is not an attitude of standing back and condemning only, there is an element of compassion here. And we will see that as we look at verses 19 and following.

But before we get to that, you remember that the correspondent is identified, the Lord Jesus, in verse 14 as the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. The amen simply affirms truth. Jesus Christ is the amen who affirms all of God's promises. He is called the faithful and true witness because He is perfectly accurate and completely trustworthy. He is called the beginning of the creation of God, that simply means He is the beginner, the originator, the initiator or the creator Himself.

So the Lord who writes is the amen. That in the Old Testament is a term used for God Himself. He is the one who affirms all that God has promised. He is the faithful true witness. He is the creator of all creation. And He writes to this church.

Now we noted last time the city, the city of Laodicea. This city, we made a couple of key notes about it, had a water supply that was brought in in aqueducts and so the water supply was putrid and dirty, the aqueducts had become clogged. The water was foul and tepid and that comes into play later in the letter.

They also were a center for commercial enterprise. And they had three components to that, as you remember, a banking center, a wool industry in

which they produced black wool, and a medical school which was famous for its eye salve.

The third thing we note in each of these letters is the church. We don't have any record of the founding of the church in Laodicea. We assume that it was hit by the same heresy that hit the church at Colossae. It was one of three churches in the Lycus valley, Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae. And probably had been hit with the same heresy that was denying the deity of Christ. Only Colossae fought it off, apparently Laodicea just bought into it. They were deniers of the person and work of Christ to the degree that they were an unsaved bunch of apostates. We could easily call them the liberal church of the time.

As far as the fourth point, we always look at a commendation but there isn't any here so there's nothing to say. And then comes the condemnation in verses 15 and 16. He says, "I know your deeds, your neither cold nor hot, I wish you were cold or hot. So because you're lukewarm and neither hot or cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth."

In Hierapolis there were hot springs. The hot water of Hierapolis was tremendous as a therapeutic aid. People would go to Hierapolis and sit in the hot water for its healing properties. In Colossae there was a clear, cold, refreshing stream and you could be refreshed wonderfully in the cold water of Colossae. So Hierapolis had hot springs with therapeutic value, Colossae had cold spring water, fresh and clear to quench your thirst. But all they had in Laodicea was tepid, filthy dirty, foul water coming through the aqueduct that couldn't restore you or refresh you. And the church was a lot like that and they made Christ sick.

Some churches make Him angry. This church made Him sick. Cold speaks of spiritual coldness, spiritual indifference. Hot speaks of saved. So you have the spiritually indifferent and the saved. And He says I'd rather deal with either of you. I'd rather deal with those people who are cold and dead and lifeless and spiritually indifferent, or those people who are saved than to deal with sincerely religious people who are content with their own self-made theology. As I said a couple of weeks ago, it's easier to lead an outright, abject pagan to the gospel than a religious person. He says I wish you were hot or cold. If you were hot, obviously I'd prefer that. If you were cold, I'd even prefer that as a second choice. But you make Me sick because you're in the middle. They're not saved but they're religious. And that's a sickening condition.

Not only that, in verse 17 He says you're deceived. You think you're rich, you think you're wealthy, you think you don't need anything, and you have no idea that you're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. You're deluded.

You see how like the Jews the apostate church is? You can take that Scripture and easily impose it on the Pharisees, couldn't you? On the Jewish leaders who thought they were rich and wealthy in spiritual things and didn't need anything and didn't know they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. That is a marvelous description of the religious and lost person. Those people who are caught in these churches that deny gospel truth or deny the deity

of Christ, or deny the veracity, inerrancy and authority of the Word of God who come up with their man-made religion under the name of Christianity, they think they're erudite, they think they're academic, they think they're well trained, they think they're very religious. And they don't know that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. And so they are in the same condition as apostate Israel. They sicken the Lord and they are self-deceived.

Then in verses 18 to 20 we noted the command...the command. In verse 18, "I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may become rich and white garments that you may clothe yourself and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see."

In other words, you need to remedy your situation. And He tells them to do three things. To buy these things, and of course you purchase them by faith, not by works, I want you to buy gold, that's true spiritual wealth because you don't have any. I want you to buy white clothes, the garment of righteousness. And I want you to buy eye salve to anoint your eyes. And there you can see Him playing off the situation that was well known in the city of Laodicea. They had a great banking center, He says I want you to go for spiritual riches. They were famous for black wool, He says I want you to go for white garments of righteousness. And they had a medical center that produced eye salve to give physical healing to the eyes, and He said I want you to put on eye salve that will give you spiritual understanding. He said I want you to purchase faith and righteousness and wisdom...all come to the believing sinner who pays the price of self-denying repentance and faith. And so, He says to them you need to remedy your disastrous situation.

Then in verse 19 we pick it up where we left off. This is a direct appeal and this tells us now what our attitude is to be toward the apostate church. "Those whom I love I reprove and discipline. Be zealous therefore and repent."

This is not an easy verse to interpret. Some people on the surface immediately think He has to be talking to believers because He says "those whom I love." Not necessarily so because if I remember my Bible right, one of the first verses I ever learned was John 3:16 and John 3:16 says, quote it with me, "God so loved the world."

The context here in verse 18 indicates that these people needed the gold of true spiritual riches. They needed the garment of true righteousness. And they needed the sight of true spiritual understanding. That tells me they weren't converted. Verse 20 tells me that Christ is still on the outside trying to get in. So we must assume then in verse 19 that these are not believers, but God loves the world.

And I think there's a sense in which because these people have outwardly identified with the church, outwardly identified with the Kingdom which has grown to be so massive that it includes the true and the false, as some of the parables of Matthew 13 indicate that it would, but the very fact that they go

around naming the name of Christ and outwardly identifying with His church puts them in the unique sphere of His concern.

So, He says those whom I love I reprove and discipline. Could He be here referring to unbelievers? Yes. Reprove is the word that means to treat with contempt. It's used that way in many extrabiblical sources. In Matthew 18:15 it is the word to convict. In Ephesians 5:11 it means to expose. So He is saying I love the world and I love the world enough to expose the sin of the world, to convict, to bring reproof and judgment. Frankly, it's nothing more than a general term for God's action toward sinners. You can compare its use in John 3:20, 1 Corinthians 14:24.

And then the word "discipline" is used also in Luke 23 twice, once in verse 16 and again in verse 22. And there in its uses, it's very important to point out, it means flatly to punish, to punish. And that's how it's translated.

In 2 Timothy 2:25 it is used again of a form of punishment that is wrought against unbelievers. It's translated "correcting those who are in opposition so that they may come to salvation." God will reprove or treat with contempt the unsaved. He will punish the unsaved, even though He loves them. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, but to those who do not believe, He brings condemnation and punishment."

And so it is not wrong to see this as a verse referring to unbelievers. In fact, it makes very good sense. I love you...He's saying. And there's a note of compassion and tenderness there. "And those whom I love I will convict, I will expose to judgment, I will punish." And He is referring here not only to a convicting work which leads to salvation in some cases, but to an ultimate punishment which leads to damnation. It's just a very general expression. Don't think because I'm a loving God I'm not going to punish you. Don't think that because I'm a loving God I'm not going to treat you with contempt. I will. God does not desire to do that, He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

So there's a note of tenderness in these words, as there is in this whole letter. The Lord is showing tender affection for an unsaved church. The word "love" here, by the way, is not agape, agapao, it's not that supreme word for love, it's the word phileo, and it's the word that translates into affection. I have a tender affection for the unsaved, but I will punish and I will judge. There is affection from God even toward the apostates, those who are caught in heresy, those who are in the false church. But there's no relationship. It's not the relationship of love, it's not the supreme relationship. He says I have an affection for you, but you are on the edge of conviction, exposure and judgment.

So in the light of that He says, "Be zealous therefore and repent." I appreciate your religious zeal, I appreciate your religious activity, but be zealous therefore and repent. Please note that call to salvation is a very familiar one. There is no salvation without repentance. This repentance is to come in one decisive act prompted by the direction of the zeal. Once you understand that even though God has affection for the sinner, the sinner realizes he's on the brink of judgment, he's going to redirect his zeal toward repentance, lest he feel

the judgment of God. If you're going to be zealous and if you're going to be sincere, He says, let it be in the pursuit of repentance.

The salvation call always, always includes repentance. Jesus called for repentance as John the Baptist before Him had. Paul preaches repentance, Acts 11:18, Acts 20. James in chapter 4 verses 6 to 10 demands a repentance, a turning from sin, a cleansing of the life. That is the very essence of a saving zeal, a saving faith. Luke 16:16, the law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Since then the gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached and everyone is forcing his way into it. The point he's making there is it is not easy to come into the Kingdom of God, it is not easy, it is a tremendous struggle, it is a battle and a warfare. Why? Because it demands genuine repentance. Repentance means that you realize you're guilty, you realize you're a vile sinner in the presence of God. You realize that though God has affection for you and He loves you as He loves the whole world, you're on the brief of judgment. You realize that you deserve that judgment, that wrath, that punishment. You're hell bound. You realize the cause of this is your sin. You realize that you can't remedy that. And so you turn from it.

It's not easy to do that. It's a great struggle. But the message to the lukewarm unsaved church is be zealous and repent, turn your zeal and your sincerity in the pursuit of repentance.

There is an invitation here that indicates that the Lord's attitude toward the apostate church is not one of indifference. He says you're part of the world I love but you're part of those I'm going to damn unless you repent.

He goes a step further in a tender invitation in verse 20. He uses the exclamation, "Behold," because this is indeed a startling reality. You'd think He'd say, "Behold, I stand at the door ready to come in and destroy you. I reject you, I offer you nothing, you apostates." That's not His attitude. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door I'll come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me."

Since I was a little boy I've heard this verse used over and over and over again in evangelistic sermons, in tracts. I've even seen pictures painted showing Christ knocking on the door of the heart. May I be so forthright and bold as to stick my neck out a little bit and say to you, I don't believe He's talking about the heart? What door is He knocking on? The door of what? The church. That's obvious. Christ wants in His own church, the church that bears His name. Let Me in. He's outside His church and He wants to come in.

There's so many churches like that. They're up and down Roscoe Boulevard. They're all over the place. And He's outside. These are churches that even Jesus Christ isn't welcome to enter. He says I stand at the door of your church and I'm knocking, I want to come in. You're supposed to be the church, why do you shut Me out? I want you in Laodicea to repent and therefore open the door and let Me in your church.

The knocking is this letter. This letter is the knocking. This command in verses 18, 19 and 20, this essential statement, "Do this, repent, let Me in," that's

the knocking. I stand at the door of your church and I knock. If anyone hears My voice. He's saying is there anybody in the church?

You can imagine the guy reading that letter to the church the day he arrived. Is there anybody here who will open the door? Do you know something? It only takes one Christian in a church and Christ is there. Right? You take an apostate church, one person in that church who believes and I'll be there. What that tells me about the Laodicean church is that there's every reason to conclude there wasn't a Christian in the place. Won't somebody let Me in? It just takes one believer in a church and Christ is there.

The invitation is a personal one. So He says if anyone hears My voice, hears Me knocking and the knock says repent, repent, repent, repent from your unbelief and your self-righteousness and your sin, if just anyone hears My voice and assesses their true spiritual condition and opens the door, repents, exercises saving faith that rejects works righteousness, that recognizes bankruptcy, nakedness, blindness, that abandons self-effort and turns from sin to Christ, if just one person does that I'll be in that church and then it will be like the church at Sardis where there were only a few. If just anybody will open the door, He says I'll come into him. I'll enter My church in that individual. Save that individual, take up residency in that individual and I'll be there in that church.

That spells hope for that church, doesn't it? And He says I'll come into him, will dine with him and he with Me. Dine, interesting. Dining was always the point of fellowship. It's just another way of saying I'll have communion, I'll have fellowship, we'll sit down, we'll be friends, we'll talk, we'll share life, we'll share joy. We'll be close, we'll have affection and love and intimacy. See a shared meal in ancient times in the east, a shared meal was a symbol of union in loving fellowship. The word here, dine, is *deipnon* and it refers to the evening meal, the last meal of the day before night falls. And Jesus is saying...Look, if just somebody will repent I'll come in and I'll save you and I'll have fellowship with you before the night of judgment falls.

What does He mean when He says I'll dine with you? I think He's talking about fellowship. I think He may also be anticipating the Marriage Supper of the Lamb to follow, indicated in Revelation 19:9. He may also be indicating the future Kingdom where we will eat with Him, Luke 22 lays that beautiful picture out. We're going to dine with Him at the Marriage Supper, we're going to dine with Him in the Kingdom, we're even going to eat with Him in eternity as Revelation describes heaven as having trees which bear fruit.

But I think it starts with fellowship now. He says I'll come in and we'll start having fellowship and it will go on forever in different forms. But let Me in for the last meal before the night falls. That's His invitation. And I just remind you that you're going to face a lot of folks in churches like this, as I do, and the Lord is still knocking on the door of sickening, lukewarm, unsaved, apostate, heretical churches and He just wants somebody to let Him in.

I've been mentioning to you that I was at Southeastern Seminary in Raleigh, North Carolina, the most liberal of all Southern Baptist Seminaries up until

about four years ago. They would have denied, of course, the inerrancy of Scripture. They're still a number of faculty there that do. They would have rejected and been considered as apostates.

On the faculty was a woman by the name of Lindeman(?). She had written a number of books. These books were critical books that denied the authorship of Scripture. They attacked the Scripture. She was a formidable writer of liberal persuasion and her books led many people astray. They were books that denied the Scriptures, all in the name of academic Christianity.

Then something amazing happened. Just a few years ago she got saved. She was delivered from scholastic night into biblical day. And a reporter came to her and said, "We understand you've become an evangelical Christian and been born again."

She said, "That is right."

The reporter said, "Well what would you suggest we do with all your books?"

To which she replied, "The same thing I've done with them. Throw them away, they're worthless."

Transformation. The Lord was knocking at an apostate church and one who espoused that apostasy prolifically who taught in a seminary and wrote books was saved and the door was open and the Lord came in.

We can become so hostile toward liberalism and neoorthodoxy and apostasy and false teachers whatever they're in, wherever churches are that are filled with error and illusion and deception. We can become so hostile that we lose our perspective. And so the Lord says, "I know the condition of the church is wretched. It makes me sick, so sick I want to vomit but still My heart cries out for their salvation, even as it did over the city of Jerusalem and the apostasy of Israel." Even as Paul who had his heart's desire for the salvation of an apostate Israel.

We take a strong stand on the truth but we don't ever want to be lacking in compassion, do we? Because God in His wonderful mercy and grace can save some of these deceived people. As long as they are not those who with a full understanding have totally rejected and become those unredeemable apostates that are described in Matthew chapter 12 and Hebrews chapter 6. These churches that are steeped in error are filled with people who are still redeemable. And so we come against that church, on the one hand, exposing its heresy. And on the other hand, knocking, as it were, in the behalf of Christ in calling those people to salvation.

And so, the Lord shows us in this command to this church how we are to regard those who are in error in the church. Not just to attack, but to invite, to call them to repentance because God loves them and they stand on the brink of His judgment to plead with them to let Christ in.

Then the final promise, we call it the counsel. Verse 21, "He who overcomes," who is that? The believer, right? First

John 5:5, we have said that in every case. He who overcomes is the believer. "I'll grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

What is He saying? If you let Me in I'll not only have fellowship with you now, and at the Marriage Supper, and in the Kingdom, and throughout eternity, but here's another thing, I'll grant you a place with Me on My throne as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. I tell you, that's getting elevated. I'll lift you up to sit with Me in the heavenlies. That's absolutely amazing and frankly astounding statement. He doesn't say I'll let you in My heaven and you can run around on the fringes. He says I'll take you to the throne and I'll seat you there. Jesus said in Matthew 19:28, "Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you shall also sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." He says to the disciples, some day you're going to have your thrones.

In Luke 22 verses 29 and 30, "Just as My Father granted Me a Kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Again He says to the disciples, you're going to be up there, you're going to be at My table, you're going to be sitting on thrones. And now He even goes beyond that, you're not only going to have thrones but I'm going to lift you up, you who believe, and I'm going to put you down on My throne and My throne is the same as the Father's throne.

Now what does that mean? I mean, is He just talking about a literal seat where we're all piled up? No, He's saying you're going to judge the world, you're going to sit with Me and have authority and rule and reign. The Lord has a throne. And we're going to be with Him in it. We're going to sit there, kings, chapter 1 verse 6, and priests and we're going to reign with Him on His own throne. What a tremendous promise.

The supreme dignity imaginable that I, this humble worthless sinner, would sit with Christ in His throne which is the Father's throne. Absolutely unbelievable. When God says He will exalt you, that's exactly what He means.

And then in verse 22, He closes as He always does. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." And all I can say is who wouldn't want to listen to this?

Here's an apostate church, easy to damn, condemn. You see some people caught in heresy and you can have an attitude of animosity, hostility. Not right. We confront their error, we preach the truth, we warn them about judgment, but we have the heart of God toward them, we love them, we have an affection for them, we warn them about coming judgment, we plead with them to repent. We stand at the door of that church and we knock and we plead in behalf of Christ that they would open and let the Savior in and fellowship with Him. And if they'll do that, He will identify Himself with them, not only in time but in eternity. And there He will take them to His Father's throne.

So we are called then to be compassionate toward the Laodicean church because of their immense need. We're right back where we started. Paul

confronted an apostate Israel. He hated their apostasy. And he, more than any other New Testament writer except Jesus Christ Himself, blasts an apostate Israel. If you want to get in touch with that, just read Romans 2 and then read Romans 3 and see how he condemns that. Read the book of Galatians and see how he condemns their self-righteous works system. No one was more powerful, more confrontive, more condemning of false teaching than Paul, particularly in the church. And the letters that he wrote directed themselves so often at false teaching in the church, heresy, misrepresentations of Christ in Scripture. But Paul's heart was also broken over Israel and grieved over the church because they both had had such immense spiritual privilege.

And here we see the Lord Jesus Himself who has every right to damn and condemn the apostate church, still graciously, tenderly knocking and calling to repentance. And that should be our attitude as well.

Well in our day, all seven of these churches are represented. And each of them poses its own challenge. There are pure churches like Smyrna and Philadelphia. There are churches that have left their first love and need the fire of devotion back. There are churches like Pergamos that have tolerated sin and won't deal with it. They are beginning to escalate and to grow in our day...they don't want to deal with sin. They don't want to confront iniquity. There are churches like Thyatira that are in full-blown compromise with the world. There are churches like Sardis that are mostly dead and only a few believers left. And there are the apostate churches. But in every case, the Lord says to these churches with all their defects, "Please repent, please take the steps necessary to make it right."

The Lord loves to that level and continually calls His church to purity, to holiness. That should be our challenge as well.

Father, thank You for our time in Your Word tonight. We ask that You would confirm to our hearts the role that we might play as individuals in bringing to pass the application of this truth. Help us while hating error to love those that are trapped in it and to compassionately call them to repentance. I thank You, Lord, that You're still knocking on churches we might give up on and asking if there isn't someone who would let You in. Use us, Lord, to reach people in those churches so they'll open the door and who knows how Your grace may spread? To that end we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen.