

“The Seven Church Harvest” #2

Pentecost – 2000: Smyrna

Fred R. Coulter – May 5, 2000

We are going to look at another false prophet. Let's also understand that false prophets have false writings. Counterfeiters like to get it as close as they can to the real thing, then you find out that it's totally opposite. One of the things that we've encountered, one of the things that we have been doing through the years is that we've kept our noses in the Bible and every time there has been a false doctrine by a false prophet who, supposedly, is in the Church of God, we bring it out and we examine it by the Word of God. That's how you test it:

- by the Word of God
- by their fruits
- by what they preach

Part of what we've done in getting *The Christian Passover* book done is all a result of that very thing, by following the admonition here that you have tested those who say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars. Consequently then, their writings will be lies.

Let's see another example of this. You need to understand that in part of our Church experience in the past, we thought that whoever was a Jew was just like us except they needed Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth! Most of Jewish belief is like we find here:

Acts 13:4: "So then...

[Barnabas and Saul]:

...after being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed away to Cyprus. And when they came to Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they also had John *as* an assistant... [one who is helping] ...And when they had gone through the island as far as Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name *was* Bar-Jesus" (vs 4-6).

What does Bar mean? *Son, the son of Jesus!* Now, was he literally saying he was the son of Jesus? You know what we have in the mythology today about Christ, that Christ supposedly had relations with Mary Magdalene and had children? It just makes you wonder! There's nothing new under the sun.

Verse 7: "He was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus...

[they always get in close proximity of high political power]

...an intelligent man, who called Barnabas and Saul to *him*, desiring to hear the Word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so was his name interpreted) withstood them,

seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith. But Saul, who *was* also *called* Paul, being filled with *the* Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on him, *and* said, 'O full of all guile and all craftiness, *you* son of the devil *and* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the straight ways of *the* Lord?'" (vs 7-10).

What were they perverting? *They were using the Scriptures in perverting it!* That's how they were doing it all along. They really had a tremendous battle going on right from the start. What we're going to see is what confronted the churches there is virtually no different than what's confronting us today. That's what they do, "...pervert the straight [right] ways of *the* Lord..." and as Paul says, 'the Gospel.'

Verse 11: "And now behold, *the* hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.' And immediately a mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking someone to lead *him* by the hand. And after seeing what had happened, the proconsul believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (vs 11-12).

Let's understand something: Doctrine is important. Doctrine does divide because it divides Truth from error. That's very profound and very important to understand, and we will see that's how you test false prophets, false doctrines. He was "...astonished at the teaching [doctrine] of the Lord."

There are many, many different things we could put in here. Obviously, I'm not going to cover all of the Scriptures, but we'll also see something that's a little ironic a little bit later.

Let's come to 2-Cor. 11 because here is a real summary of how these problems grew and grew to such a point that they were misleading those in the Church of Corinth. We have never heard what happened to the different elders that were there in Ephesus. We never heard what happened in the case where Paul brings up Apollos in the book of 1-Corinthians. But in the last part of 2-Cor. he was sort of miffed at Apollos because Apollos didn't want to come back to Corinth while Paul was there.

Remember, Apollos came out of Alexandria so we just have to put a question mark. Did Apollos remain faithful? We can't answer; we have no evidence he didn't; we have no evidence that he did. But nevertheless under whose ever influence it was, in Corinth they were not testing the false apostles like they should have.

2-Corinthians 11:1: "I would *that* you might bear with me in a little nonsense; but indeed, do bear with me. For I am jealous over you with *the* jealousy of God...

[that's why you test these things]

...because I have espoused you to one husband, so that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent **deceived** Eve **by his craftiness** ..." (vs 1-3).

That's the same word that is used when Simon Magus beguiled the people "...by his craftiness..."—*through his subtlety*.

And how does Satan do it? *He always uses the Word of God, but twists it!* What did he say to Eve? 'Yea, has God said you can't eat of any of the trees of the garden?' And then she fell for it hook, line, and sinker. "...so your minds might be corrupted from *the* simplicity that *is* in Christ" (v 3).

I think today the whole thing concerning the Passover is an example of how complicated false doctrine makes things when you have to straighten it out. Look at all the things that I wrote in *The Christian Passover* book, and all of them deal with all of the false doctrines. Understand this: ***the very first thing that Satan the devil goes after is the Passover***, because he knows that that is the covenant with Christ. Very important! That's what he always goes after.

- Did they have trouble with the Passover? *Yes!* (1-Cor. 11).
- Did they misunderstand the Feast of Unleavened Bread? *Yes!* (1-Cor. 5).

Has the influence right there. That's only the start. So, you remove from the simplicity of Christ into the complicated mind-twisting doctrines of Satan the devil.

Notice what happened,

v 4. "For indeed, if someone comes preaching another Jesus..."

They had a different Jesus then; preaching any other doctrine than Christ came in the flesh. When we get to the book of Hebrews we're going to see how so important that is, and the very emphasis on what Christ did.

"...whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel..."

—the gospel of the Gnostics, and there are many versions of this. Paul is doing what he should do in withstanding it, in warning them.

"...which you did not accept, you put up with it as *something* good....

[you count this as a wonderful thing]

...But I consider myself in no way inferior to those highly exalted *so-called* apostles"
(vs 4-5)

—*the false apostles!* This has nothing to do with Peter because Peter was never the chief apostle. You read through the book of Acts, it's Peter and John. Peter, James and John. Peter, John, and the apostle's altogether. Peter did exert some leadership, that is true. But when we get to the story of the Nicolaitans we will see that he never exalted himself in any way to become the chief apostle. As a matter of fact, when you get to 1-Peter 5, he just says 'I am an elder.' That's how he thought of himself.

Verse 6: "For although *I may be* unpolished in speech, yet, *I am* not in knowledge; for in all things I have demonstrated this to you. Now, did I commit sin by humbling

myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the Gospel of God to you freely? I robbed other churches..." (vs 6-8).

That's a whole different thing here concerning tithing. We won't get into it now.

"...receiving wages *from them* for ministering to you. And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone..." (vs 8-9).

Why? *That was Paul's way of fighting these false apostles! That was Paul's way of putting them to the test!* 'Let's see if you false apostles can get along without asking for money like I am not asking for money of the Corinthians.'

"...(for the brethren who came from Macedonia fully supplied my needs); for I kept myself, and will *continue to* keep myself, from being burdensome to you in anything. *As the Truth* of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I don't love you? God knows *I do*. But what I am doing, I will do, so that I may cut off *any* occasion..." (vs 9-12).

Lesson we can learn with this, among many: *False prophets like to come in and have dialogue so they can have an occasion!* Does that smack a little thing of truth concerning the ecumenical movement? *Yes!*

Paul didn't mince words.

"...from those who are desiring an occasion; so that in the things they boast of, they also may be found even as we *are*. For such *are* false apostles...

[there they are being put to the test, being exposed for what they were]

...deceitful workers who are transforming themselves into apostles of Christ" (vs 9-13).

They were not the apostles of Christ. When you read of the early church fathers of the Catholic Church that is the end result of it.

Verse 14: "And *it is* no marvel, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, *it is* no great thing if his servants also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness—whose end shall be according to their works" (vs 14-15).

That's what they were doing.

- They were coming preaching *another Jesus!*
- They were coming preaching *another gospel!*
- They were coming *bringing another spirit!*

—which was satanic and demonic, not of God. Coming right into the congregations of God, here in the Church of Corinth in the days of the Apostle Paul. I mean, when you understand

how fierce this was, and how the battle started early, it's amazing! Let's see what he says about them.

Verse 22. "Are they Hebrews?....

[they weren't Synthians or Barbarians]

...So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I....

[they were going by their genealogy, their pedigree]

...Are they *the* seed of Abraham? So am I."

I've often wondered:

- Where did they come from? *Obviously, from the area of Palestine!*
- How many of them were in the crowds that followed Jesus and saw the miracles?

Where they could go around and later say, 'Well I was there with Jesus...' and then bring in their false doctrines.

- Why else would it say, Hebrews? Israelites? Seed of Abraham?

Verse 23: "Are they servants of Christ? (I am speaking as if I were out of my mind.)...."

In other words, it's insanity to consider that false apostles could possibly bring you the Truth of Christ. Then he goes on showing all that he went through as compared to them in all the travels that he did.

Let's see what they did, 2-Corinthians 2:17:

"For we are not like the many, who for *their own* profit are corrupting the Word of God...

[that's what they were doing: corrupting it, twisting it]

... but we speak with sincerity, as from God, *and* before God, *and* in Christ."

2 Corinthians 4:1: "Therefore, having this ministry, according as we have received mercy, we are not fainthearted. For we have personally renounced the hidden things of dishonest gain, not walking in *cunning* craftiness...

[having a secret agenda]

...nor handling the Word of God deceitfully..." (vs 1-2).

That tells you something very profound. Have you ever sat in a congregation where a minister gets up there and he starts speaking and he's handling the Word of God deceitfully? And the Truth is twisted and turned? If he has an *NIV* Bible, or a *New American Standard*,

that's very easy to do. He has a corrupted version of the Bible. And yes, in our experience that is exactly what happened to Worldwide Church of God. That is exactly what is happening to the Seventh Day Adventist right today, because they are not fighting against the false apostles that have snuck in and are bringing in their teachings.

A lot of these Scriptures we have already covered; we've covered them in different ways. But I want to cover it from the point of view that Christ commended the Church at Ephesus because they withstood the false apostles. As soon as the original apostles died then the onslaught began and it was just almost within just a few years everything was completely upside down.

Galatians 1:6: "I am astonished that you are so quickly being turned away from Him Who called you into *the* grace of Christ, to a different gospel....

[there were many gospels coming around]

...which *in reality* is not another *Gospel*; but there are some who are troubling you and are desiring to pervert the Gospel of Christ" (vs 6-7).

What did we see that Elymas the sorcerer did? *He was perverting the right way of the Lord!* Here we have it now perverting the Gospel of Christ. How do you do that?

Verse 8: "But if we, or even an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel to you *that* is contrary to what we have preached, LET HIM BE ACCURSED!"

Quite different from the Corinthians. They said, 'Oh, well let's hear this man out. That sounds interesting. He's a good speaker. He's using the Bible.' Paul says "...LET HIM BE ACCURSED!"

Verse 9: "As we have said before, I also now say again. If anyone is preaching a gospel contrary to what you have received, LET HIM BE ACCURSED! Now then, am I striving to please men, or God?...." (vs 9-10).

That is in their sins and in their corruption and in their perversion of the Gospel and the handling of the Word of God.

"...Or am I motivated to please men? For if I am yet pleasing men, I would not be a servant of Christ." (v 10).

I've experienced that, too. Some people get upset with me because I'm not an ecumenist and I don't go along with all of these weird and strange doctrines that a lot of people have. There's one congregation that I know of down in Texas where they have almost anybody speak. One man gets up there and says, 'I want all of you to know I'm a Trinitarian' and they never bring it up. Another man gets up and says, 'I want all of you to know I'm a 15th Passover keeper,' and they never bring it up. Let's all get along to go along! What are you doing? *You're walking down the broad way!* You're corrupting everything and going to have those problems.

Let's see how Paul handled those things. Do you think we can go wrong if we follow Paul's example? *No!* That's why the Church at Ephesus was commended, because they put them to

the test, found them to be liars and rejected them. How else can you keep the purity of the Truth of the Gospel of Christ?

Speaking of those who were to be elders, Titus 1:9:

"Holding steadfastly to the faithful word, according to the teachings of *Jesus Christ*, so that he may be able both to encourage with sound doctrine..."

We're going to see how much doctrine comes up in this.

"...and to convict those who are gainsayers. For there are **many** rebellious and vain talkers and deceivers, especially those from *the circumcision party*...

[Jews! How could it be Jews that were doing this?]

...whose mouths must be stopped...." (vs 9-11).

That's a command of Paul, which he said these things are the commands of Christ.

When there is false doctrine that comes up it should be addressed, it should be tested and the mouth should be stopped. We may not be able to stop them literally, but at least what we can do is:

- have our knowledge of the Scriptures correct
- have the literature
- have the studies
- have the sermons available

—which then brings the Truth, which when a person hears it, it will stop their mouths.

I got a nice letter from someone who explained their whole odyssey trying to find the Truth. They and several others were keeping a 15th Passover. They got a hold of *The Christian Passover* book and really went through it, and they all kept the 14th Passover and they said it was such a wonderful thing to do, because after doing it on the 15th we did not have the experience on the 15th that we had on the 14th; we now know not only by knowledge, but by experience that the 14th is the Passover.' So, at least we can stop *some* mouths; not all.

"...who are subverting whole households, teaching things which *they* ought not, for the sake of selfish gain" (v 11).

Let's see what Paul did. I got castigated because I named some people in one of my letters that were preaching false doctrine. 'You're divisive, you're judgmental, you're not kind, you're not loving.' Okay, tell that to Christ when He pours out the seven last plagues.

1-Timothy 1:3: "When I was going to Macedonia, I exhorted you to remain in Ephesus ..."

Timothy is at Ephesus. Timothy carried it on until John, and when he had to leave the area of Palestine he came up to Ephesus.

"...in order that you might *solemnly* charge some not to teach other doctrines; nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which lead to empty speculations rather than to edification from God, which *is* in faith" (vs 3-4).

A lot of Protestants take this, which is Gnosticism, v 5:

"Now the purpose of the commandment..."

That means commandments are all done away with. *NO!* This means the end purpose of the commandment.

"...is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and genuine faith; from which some, having missed the mark, have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of *the* law, neither understanding what they are saying, nor what they are strongly affirming" (vs 5-7).

So, you have these false prophets coming along; they don't even understand what they are saying, what they're affirming.

Here's how these things come along, 1-Timothy 4:1:

"Now, the Spirit tells *us* explicitly that in *the* latter times some shall apostatize from the faith, *and* shall **follow deceiving spirits** and doctrines of demons; **speaking lies** in hypocrisy, **their consciences having been cauterized with a hot iron**" (vs 1-2).

Then he goes on to explain about some of the teachings of Gnosticism, which is what they were fighting.

Verse 3: "Forbidding to marry; *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by the faithful, even *by* those who know the Truth"

—commanding vegetarianism, asceticism, all that sort of thing. Boy, I tell you it's something!

1-Timothy 6:3: "If anyone teaches any different doctrine, and does not adhere to sound words, *even those* of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine *that is* according to Godliness, he is proud and knows nothing. Rather, he has a morbid attraction to questions and disputes over words, from which come envy, arguments, blasphemy, wicked suspicions, vain reasoning's of men who have been corrupted in *their* minds and *are* destitute of the Truth—*men* who believe that gain is Godliness...." (vs 3-5).

That's a perfect description of how I felt in Pasadena for quite a few years, seeing all the things that were going on there.

"...From such withdraw *yourself*" (v 5).

You can't associate with that kind of thing. You can't do it; it will backfire on you.

Paul could see this coming. Let's look at the ironic warning that he gave them in Ephesus, which then ties right into the Church of Ephesus and false prophets, false apostles.

Acts 20:28—Paul is talking to the elders:

"Take heed, therefore, to yourselves..."

Now, that's something all of us need to do, but especially those who are elders and teachers. We need to take heed to ourselves. We don't need to get carried away with the self. We don't need to get carried away with anything and look to any abilities that God has given us as though it's something that we have on our own.

That's why Paul told the Corinthians

'You have nothing you didn't receive.' (1-Cor. 4:7).

If any teacher, if any elder starts relying upon personality, eloquent speaking—speaking techniques to move and generate people's responses—those are all carnal things. If God blesses, thank God for it. Don't get carried away with anything. I tell you, I take this to heart. Believe me, I do!

Verse 28: "Take heed, therefore, to yourselves and to all the flock..."

Be about the business of God, serving and loving the flock of God. As Christ told Peter, 'Do you love Me? *Feed My sheep!* Do you love Me? *Feed My lambs!* Do you love Me? *Feed My sheep!*'

"...among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God..."
(v 28)

—with the Truth of God, the Word of God, that you may grow thereby.

"...which He purchased with His own blood" (v 28).

All of those who are Christ's belong to Him. His blood brought them in. His Spirit—through God the Father and Christ working jointly together:

- has called that individual
- has led them to repentance
- has brought them the Truth

If we can have a part in that, that's fine.

Always remember the attitude of Nebuchadnezzar, and we saw this happen within the Church of God: Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Look at this great Babylon which *I have built.*' When he was warned a year before through the parable, 'Don't do it,' and BAM! As soon as he said that he was struck insane. The lesson was, when you get lifted up in vanity God will set over

you the basest of men. Have we seen that happen within the Church of God? *Yes!* All you need to do is look and see who's leading it today and you've got the same thing. So no one can be lifted up ***Christ is the One Who has done it!***

Verse 29: "For I know this: that after my departure...

[his death]

...grievous wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will rise up speaking **perverse** things ..." (vs 29-30).

That's about the third time we've seen that word— isn't it? *Pervert the Gospel; pervert the way of the Lord!*

"...to draw away disciples after themselves. Watch, therefore, remembering that *for* three years ..." (vs 30-31).

Think of that! This statement of Paul's is not what some people would say is a hyperbole—an exaggerated statement for exclamatory effect.

"...I ceased not to admonish each one night and day with tears" (v 31).

He knew what was going to happen. Let's see that it happened:

2-Timothy 1:13: "Hold *as the standard for doctrine* the sound words that you heard from me, in *the* faith and love that *are* in Christ Jesus. Guard the good thing that was committed *to you* by *the* Holy Spirit that is dwelling in us. You know this, that all those who *are* in Asia have rejected me, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (vs 13-15).

He names them! Now you think about that. How was it that they were able to turn all the churches in Asia away from Paul? That's why when we read Rev. 2 & 3 we look at all of the false doctrine that is there and all the things that have taken place. That's amazing! That is truly an amazing thing. You need to understand this, brethren:

- to really have the Spirit of God, which you do
- to really be of the firstfruits, which you are,

is truly an amazing miracle in itself. You need to think on that! There are a lot of people *playing* church, a lot of people *playing* 'religion,' and that's how all these false prophets got in there, and they quit testing them; so they left. That's incredible!

We said the same statement, too. Where have they all gone? An amazing thing— isn't it? Sometimes you sit back and you think, 'Lord, who will be saved?' But I think there will be more saved if we get the doctrine straight and follow the example of the Church at Ephesus and put all the teachings and teachers and apostles to the test to find out whether they're from God or not. Then we can at least have something to fight with, and it's a spiritual battle.

2 Timothy 2:16, "But avoid profane and vain babblings because they will...

[sounds like the church of 'talking in tongues']

...*only* give rise to more ungodliness, and their words will eat away at the body like gangrene; of whom are Hymeneus and Philetus, who have gone astray from the Truth, **claiming that the resurrection has already taken place**, and are **destroying the faith of some**" (vs 16-18).

What do we have? *We have the teaching of the immortality of the soul, that you're going to heaven!* Straight out of Gnosticism!

I just call your attention to 2-Peter 2. You can read the whole thing, and what these false prophets were doing.

Let's see the admonition in Jude vs 3-4; it's really quite a thing what happened. And this battle, brethren, started then and it's continued right on down to this day. Then we will see when we come to the Church of Smyrna, that other forces enter into it.

Jude was the brother of Christ, Jude 3:

"Beloved, when personally exerting all *my* diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, I was compelled to write to you, exhorting *you* to fervently fight..."

—to really put forth an effort; ***it is a fight!*** That's what the days of Unleavened Bread shows us. We have to fight against:

- self
- Satan
- this world

"...for the faith, which once for all *time* has been delivered to the saints. For certain men have stealthily crept in, those who long ago have been written about, condemning *them* to this judgment. *They are* ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, *turning it* into licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs 3-4).

That was the battle that was there.

Christ commended the Church at Ephesus for trying and testing them who were saying and claiming they were apostles, and found them liars. They worked, they had patience, they labored (Rev. 2:3)

Revelation 2:4: "Nevertheless, I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love."

What does it mean to leave the first love? Some people understand the first love to be when they first come to the knowledge of the Truth and they begin to understand the Truth they

have a love and a zeal for the Truth. They say that is their first love. That is one interpretation of it.

Just like with the ones here at Ephesus, they had the Gospel preached to them, the Truth was there, they loved God, they worked, they strived, and all of this, but something happened. There's another aspect of first love, which is more profound: the Greek word for *first* is 'protos.' The *first* love is ***to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and being!*** That's the first commandment. ***That's what they were losing!*** In other words they were beginning to get themselves into a position where it was more important to be with people than to fellowship with God. So, they began to lose their first love.

Another way of losing your first love, another way that it begins to happen, has to do with the second commandment. When, into the Christian church, did idols and images begin to creep in?

Deuteronomy 5:8. "You shall not make a graven image for yourself of any likeness *of anything...*"

Is that all inclusive? *That sounds very complete to me!*

"...that is in the heavens above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generation* of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments" (vs 8-10).

If you lose your first love, what happens?

- you begin having idolatry of some kind
- you begin slacking off in keeping the rest of the commandments of God
- Where does idolatry begin? *Before you make any kind of idol!*
- If you lose your first love toward God then what happens?
- What do you as an individual do?
- *You begin putting God off!*
- You put God off when you sin and you don't want to repent!

That is the beginning of idolatry, and it begins in the mind!

Later we know they had all kinds of idols: statues, crosses, steeples, churches built and filled with all kinds of mystic idolatry straight out of Egypt and Babylon. I bring this up as another view of losing your first love.

- you may not have a cross
- you may not have a crucifix
- you may not have rosary beads
- you may not have a virgin Mary

But if you have an idol *in your mind* then you are committing idolatry and you have something before God, which then is *taking away your love of God!*

There are a lot of people today who have that. Just the way the world is with all the activities. I mean, just stop and think about all the activities that are done today on the Sabbath Day that keeps people idolized in activities: sports, all kinds, whether you watch it or participate in it; sales, merchandising, whether you are part of it or whether you are buying; all the activities of coming and going. ***All of those are idols that cut people off from God!***

Ezekiel 14:1. "And some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the Word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I at all be inquired of by them? Therefore, speak to them, and say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Every man of the house of Israel...'" (vs 1-4).

Who is spiritual Israel today? *The Church!*

"...who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him according to the multitude of his idols" (v 4).

Does that not sound an awful lot like if you don't repent and do the first works, 'I will come unto you and remove your lampstand, or candlestick.' I think that we could include there: *idolatry began to creep in.*

Verse 5. "So that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart because they have deserted Me for their idols—all of them."

When that began to happen God had to take action, and He did. How many of them in Ephesus really repented? *We don't know!* But the candlestick at Ephesus has been removed, no longer there. When we're dealing in something, which then we're talking about a church, which fought off all of the false prophets, all of the false doctrine; they tried them, they tested them, they worked, they sacrificed. They loved God and then something happened to where they lost their first love. It was so severe that Christ told them to repent. That was totally different from the rest of the other churches.

Let's read what He says in commending them, Revelation 2:6.

"But this you have: that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

We'll answer that when we get to Pergamos, that the deeds of the Nicolaitans have to do with the hierarchical government coming from the top down. So, they hated that.

The other part of it was the 'religious' doctrines that came with the Nicolaitans, which was Gnosticism, coming into the Church. They hated that, but they were so busy fighting it that they wore themselves out, lost their first love, for which then Christ had to tell them to repent.

Verse 7: "The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes I will give *the right* to eat of the tree of life that is in *the* midst of the paradise of God."

The reason that I'm going through the seven churches leading up to Pentecost is because we find, according to what we have in Matt. 13, that ***the whole plan of God is like a harvest***. In counting to Pentecost there are seven complete weeks you are to count to Pentecost. So likewise, we have seven churches here. We could have had many more because there were many more churches. There's a significance to the seven churches that we have.

Church of Smyrna

This is a church that no one wants to belong to today. But it will be re-enacted again. We find in Rev. 6 the fifth seal, that there is going to come a martyrdom today. Very few people know—Carl Franklin brought it to my attention—that there are Sabbath-keepers in the Sudan that are being killed *because* they are Sabbath-keepers. Today there are those who are being killed for keeping the Sabbath.

We got an e-mail from a man who is in Serbia, and he cannot assemble on the Sabbath because his neighbors count the number that come into his house. When they sing hymns they have to virtually whisper. The only contact he has is with his computer. I hope we can serve people like that. We don't know where in the world are those who are being killed and martyred for Christ.

We'll go back and see the martyrdom was also there even beginning with the Church which was called Ephesus. All these things go side-by-side.

Revelation 2:8: "And to the angel...

[the messenger]

...of the Church of *the* Smyrneans write: These things says the First and the Last, Who was dead but is alive. 'I know your works and tribulation and poverty (but you are rich)..." (vs 8-9).

This is just the opposite of the Laodiceans—right? Laodiceans say, 'We're rich and increased in goods, hooray, hooray, hooray! Look at how God is blessing us.' I bet the Laodiceans at that time looked over at the Church at Smyrna and said, 'You know you're not very clever; you're getting killed. Why don't you just tone it down a little bit? Save your life! Why don't you do like we do? We'll just get along and go along.'

No! They had a real zeal for God. They were deprived of their property, of their lands, of their wealth. But they were faithful unto death.

Jesus says,

"...(but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who declare themselves to be Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan" (v 9).

Now we come into an organized movement against the Church of God. Who is always against the Church? *Satan!* A synagogue means *a gathering together* of those who serve Satan. And to say that they are a Jew does not mean that they are saying that they are literally of the line of Judah. That's one interpretation of it.

A greater interpretation—which applies and includes more than just Jews—because we have the Edomite Jews, we have the Ashkenazi Jews and things like this—but as you look out on the world scene today the synagogue of Satan includes also a lot of pagans and a lot of those who don't believe in Christianity in any form. So likewise, was it then that because every Gnostic religion—whether pagan, whether Jewish, whether Christian—all claimed to be the ones who had the keys of salvation. They were the ones then, the organized ones.

These were the ones who left the Church of Ephesus. They were tried, they were tested, they left, and now when they organized they came back against the Church of God. They did what the synagogue of Satan always does: *they get the civil authorities involved!*

1-John 2:18: "Little children, it is *the* last time; and just as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now **many antichrists** have risen up...

[who all got organized into the synagogue of Satan]

...by which we know that it is *the* last time. They went out from among us, but they were not of us..." (vs 18-19).

Why? *Because we tested them, we tried them and we found them to be false apostles!*

"...because if they were of us, they would have remained with us; nevertheless, *they left* that they might be exposed *to show* that *they* all **were not of us**" (v 19).

Let's see some of the things that they were preaching, 1-John 4:1:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this *test* you *can* know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus **Christ has come in *the* flesh is from God**" (vs 1-2).

That's the first thing that they began to change. Remember, whenever these false prophets come along, they begin to tinker with the Passover and then the nature of God, and that's what they were doing.

Verse 3: "And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. And this is the *spirit* of antichrist, which you heard *was* to come, and even now it is already in the world."

By time we come to Smyrna, it's organized.

Verse 4: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them because greater is He Who *is* in you than the one who *is* in the world. They are of the world; because of this, they speak of the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God; the one who knows God listens to us; the one who is not of God does not listen to us. By this *means* we know the Spirit of the Truth and the spirit of the deception" (vs 4-6).

Here we have the organized synagogue of Satan coming after the Church of God, Revelation 2:10:

"Do not fear any of the things that you are about to suffer....

[don't worry about a martyrdom]

...Behold, the devil is about to cast *some* of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days..."

Now there are two ways of looking at this: Ten years or ten different occasions of acute persecution.

"...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death" (vs 10-11).

Let's look at the first martyr. There is a power that God gives to those who are in circumstances like that: a great power to preach, a great power to convict. Let's just pick up the last part of Stephen's sermon (Acts 7), because this is what they had to do. Brethren, the time is going to come—I don't know if it's going to fall upon any of us or not; it may or may not, we don't know—that I think God will spare a lot of those who are in advanced age. God is certainly not going to put upon anyone more than he can bear. But this is why we really have to know the Word of God. Look at what Stephen did here:

Acts 7:51

—this is not an ecumenical statement:

"O stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so also *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, of Whom you have become the betrayers and murderers; Who received the law by *the* disposition of angels, but have not kept *it*.' And when they heard these things, they were cut to their hearts, and they gnashed their teeth at him. But he, being filled with *the* Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven *and* saw *the* glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right *hand* of God'" (vs 51-56).

God gave him that last minute strength and inspiration because he knew what was going to happen. They took him out and stoned him. And his attitude was:

Verse 60: "...Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge."

There's a perfect example of loving your enemies right while they're killing you. That would be hard for me; I know that would be hard for me. But if God would give me the strength I'm sure He would do the same thing. We don't know what it's going to be for the situation coming down the road here, but let's read some things here.

This is out of a book *Revelation Illustrated & Made Plain* by Tim LaHaye. But let me assure you that I'm going to bring you just some interesting informational things that he has historically. Some of his interpretations are really way off base, but he's got something here concerning the 'persecuted' churches:

Smyrna: This church age saw eight of the ten periods of persecution under Roman emperors.

You need to understand: We are living in an age where knowledge will increase. There is a full-blown meeting of the United Nations to develop it into a world government, and it will lead to the same thing that these religionists did against the Christians in organizing the government to persecute and kill the true Christians. Here are the persecutions that are listed:

Nero—54-68 A.D.

Domitian—81-96 A.D.

That's when John was exiled, then he wrote the book of Revelation.

Trajan—98-117 A.D.

Marcus Aurelius—161-180 A.D.

Severus—193-211 A.D.

Maximus—235-238 A.D.

Decius—249-251 A.D.

Valerian—253-260 A.D.

Aurelian—270-275 A.D.

Diocletian—284-305 A.D.

All of this persecution wore them out, and then Satan brought in his subversion of the Church and we will see what happened with Pergamos when we get there, because Pergamos is the key fulcrum in all of this concerning the doctrine in the Church.

Diocletian is considered the worst emperor in Rome's history and the greatest antagonist of the Christian faith. He led a violent attempt to destroy the Bible from the face of the earth. Under his leadership many Roman cities had public burnings of the sacred Scriptures.

I want you to understand what a tremendous blessing it is that we have the whole Bible.

- Is God able to preserve His Word? *Yes!*
- Even in spite of burnings and corruptions? *Yes!*
- So that He can give it to His true people that He calls? *Yes!*

All the way down through history.

During the second and third centuries this persecution age saw hundreds of Christians brought into the amphitheater of Rome to be fed to hungry lions while thousands of spectators cheered.

How many have seen the *movie The Robe* with Victor Mature? Remember when it came down to being thrown to the lions? I think that the producers of it did something that was very reflective of human nature. It gave in the background those who were praying saying, 'Oh no, why are we here being thrown to the lions?' Someone blurted out in their prayer, 'Lord, You didn't tell us it would be this way.' That has always stood out in my mind. Now listen, be guaranteed of one thing: *It is never going to turn out like you figure, so that's why you have to have faith!*

Many were crucified; others were covered with animal skins and tortured to death by wild dogs.

Think of that the next time you watch a documentary where it shows the wild dogs of Africa going after their prey. Just think of Christians under animal skins.

They were covered with tar and set on fire to serve as torches. They were boiled in oil and burned at the stake...

Now it is said of the Apostle John that the reason that he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos was because he was to be killed by being boiled in oil and they threw him in and he didn't burn. So, they took him out and sent him to the Isle of Patmos.

...as was Polycarp in the city of Smyrna itself in A.D. 156. One church historian has estimated that during this period five million Christians were martyred for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

If it be that many, that's marvelous! But it just shows you that when you start adding up all of those who were killed at the reformation time. Anyone who believes that only 144,000 are going to be in the first resurrection you better get off your vanity kick and believe in God and the Word of God, because that's nothing but selfish vanity to be used to manipulate people to keep them under your control so that you can make sure that they feel they're one of the 144,000. In spite of all this it was a thriving church.

Evidence of the supernatural nature of the Church can be seen in the fact that the Church reached its greatest numbers in proportion to world population during this period of persecution.

Because something happens when—and I'm sure it's God's Spirit that does it—other people would see them burned at the stake and killed and crucified, and slaughtered then God's Spirit would be with some of those who were spectators and convert them. That's something to see all the innocent people lined up and slaughtered.

In addition to the establishment of churches in many parts of the world, this church age distinguished itself by its production of many hand-copied manuscripts of the sacred Scriptures and the translation of Scripture into many languages. Early in this period, the

Bible was translated into Syriac, in what is known as the Peshito manuscripts, which became the official Scriptures of the Eastern churches and from which translations were made into Arabic, Persian, and Armenian. In the second century the Bible was translated into Latin in what is called the Old Latin Version." And this Old Latin Version went all the way to Ireland and to Britain. I mean it's amazing. "This became the Bible of the Western churches for more than a thousand years and has been translated into many different languages."

The more the Scriptures were disseminated and used by the people, even in the face of persecution, the more the Church advanced in numbers until it was such a dominant factor in the Roman Empire that Christianity was established as the state church by Emperor Constantine in A.D. 312.

Well, that's where he starts getting off. At that time the Church was sent off into a place in the wilderness. This is a profound lesson for us. We need to understand what this really is here.

Now let's go back and look at this and understand something that is very important, Revelation 2:9:

"I know your works and tribulation..."

—even though they were killed, even though they were slaughtered and burned. Realize that they overcame. Realize that whatever means of death they were executed by—or in the future will happen, too—***they were victors! They overcame!***

So, the thing to learn from this is if you are in tribulation Christ is *with* you and *in* you. Did He suffer tribulation and trial? *Yes!* Paul said that he wanted to be counted worthy to share in the same sufferings as Christ, *and he did!* That's what these people did, too.

"...and poverty..." (v 9).

Learn the lesson: ***Never set your heart on riches or physical goods!*** When you are the *poorest materially* you have an opportunity to be the *richest spiritually*. This is why when we are living in the age that we are now. If we're all repenting Laodiceans, which I hope we all are, then we need to take the same lesson from the Church of Smyrna and learn it and apply it to ourselves. You better be rich in Christ and poor in this world, rather than rich in this world and poor in Christ. Christ knows the poverty. Was Christ a rich man when He was on the earth? *No, He wasn't!* If you're in poverty, Christ is there *with* you and *in* you.

"...(but you are rich)..." (v 9).

That is if you die for Christ, if you're martyred because of the Truth, if you give your life in however it may be, ***then you are rich indeed!***

Let's see the time of martyrdom that is going to be, Revelation 6:9:

"And when He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony that they held..."

[this is in vision]

...and they cried out with a loud voice, saying ..." (vs 9-10).

This is the only way that God could show John that at the end-time there was going to be another martyrdom of saints.

"...'How long, O Lord, Holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And white robes were given to each of them; and they were told that they should rest a short time..." (vs 10-11)

—remain in the grave, that's what it's talking about here.

"...yet, until *it* be fulfilled *that* both their fellow servants and their brethren also would be killed, just as they had been" (v 11).

Now let's see how to overcome in circumstances like that. Revelation 12 shows that the martyrdom is coming again when Satan is cast down from the battle in heaven.

Revelation 12:9: "And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, who is deceiving the whole world..."

[and boy, is it set up today; it is unreal]

...he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him. And I heard a great voice in heaven say, 'Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ because the accuser of our brethren has been cast down, who accuses them day and night before our God' (vs 9-10).

That's what they had there in the organized movement of the synagogue of Satan:

- Satan leading it
- Satan inspiring it
- Satan giving it power
- Satan giving it strength

Verse 11: "But they overcame him through the blood of the Lamb, and through the word of their testimony..."

God is going to require a testimony from us. We're going to be brought up. There's going to come a time when it's going to be illegal to say the name of Jesus Christ. It's going to be illegal to use the Scriptures. Matt. 10 shows that we're going to be brought before councils and judges.

"...the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death" (v 11).

Why? *Because they trusted in Christ! Christ was with them through this, in everything!*

Verse 12: "Therefore, rejoice you heavens and those who dwell in them. Woe to those who inhabit the earth and the sea! For the Devil has come down to you, having great wrath *because* he knows that he has *only* a short time."

That's when the persecution begins.

Verse 13: "And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who had brought forth the man-child."

Coming after the Church in no uncertain terms. And listen, you can trust me on this, if not trust your government, they know all about you, whether you answered the census form or not. They can monitor every phone call, every fax, every business transaction. They have the global positioning satellites that can find every human being on earth within a 100 square foot area. So, when the persecution comes that's why God has to intervene.

Now, everyone wants to go to a place of safety. I do! You do! But let's be realistic, not everyone is going to get there. Those that go are carried by, v 14:

"And two wings of a great eagle were given to the woman, so that she might fly to her place in the wilderness, where she is nourished *for* a time, and times, and half a time, from *the* face of the serpent."

I want to tell you something: There are going to be a lot of Protestants who expect that they're just going to be just miraculously whisked off in a rapture, but they're going to be standing there when the Tribulation begins. And they're the ones—if they have anything to do with Christ, as well as with the Church of God—that are going to suffer the martyrdom. They are going to be killed. Why? *Because the Bible says*, 'He who seeks to save His life shall lose it.' That's what they're doing. And so have a lot of people in the Church of God.

Verse 17: "Then the dragon was furious with the woman and went to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Quite a battle! So, it's going to happen again.

Don't worry about the doctrinal battles we go through today. Aren't those mild compared to blood, guts, gore, lopping of heads, stabbing in the stomach, crucifying and burning? *Yes!* So, don't disparage of the doctrinal wars.

Matthew 10:16: "Behold, I am sending you forth as sheep in *the* midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall also be brought before governors and kings...

[could also mean judges]

...for My sake, for a witness to them and to the Gentiles. Now, when they deliver you up, do not be anxious *about* how or what you should speak; for in that hour it shall be

given to you what you shall speak. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you" (vs 16-20).

Here's how desperate it's going to get, v 21:

"Then brother will deliver up brother to death; and *the* father, the child; and children will rise up against *their* parents and *have* them put to death. And you shall be hated by all for My name's sake; but the one who endures to *the* end, that one shall be saved" (vs 21-22).

Very profound! When that happens, when we have to understand this is what happened to the Church at Smyrna.

Verse 32: "Now then, whoever shall confess Me before men, that one will I also confess before My Father Who *is* in heaven."

Doctrinally they don't have to be pure. As a matter of fact many of the things that the martyrs go through, they just have a love and zeal for God, and God inspires them to give the conviction and warning to those that arrest them.

Verse 33: "But whoever shall deny Me before men, that one will I also deny before My Father, Who *is* in heaven..."

[you don't want that to happen]

...Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

And at the end it is going to be coming down tremendously with all of the events of the book of Revelation. The end-time fulfillment of the Church in Smyrna is going to be just gigantic.

Verse 35: "For I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies *shall be those of* his own household. **The one who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And the one who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life shall lose it; and the one who has lost his life for My sake shall find it**" (vs 35-39).

That's why it was said to the Church at Smyrna, '***Fear none of the things which come upon you,***' because you will live, indeed. That was quite an age at that time.

All Scriptures from *The Holy Bible in Its Original Order, A Faithful Version* by Fred R. Coulter

Scriptural References:

- Acts 13:4-12
- 2 Corinthians 11:1-15, 22-23

- 2 Corinthians 2:17
- 2 Corinthians 4:1-2
- Galatians 1:6-10
- Titus 1:9-11
- 1 Timothy 1:3-7
- 1 Timothy 4:1-3
- 1 Timothy 6:3-5
- Acts 20:28-31
- 2 Timothy 1:13-15
- 2 Timothy 2:16
- Jude 3-4
- Revelation 2:4
- Deuteronomy 5:8-10
- Ezekiel 14:1-5
- Revelation 2:6-9
- 1 John 2:18-19
- 1 John 4:1-6
- Revelation 2:10-11
- Acts 7:51-60
- Revelation 2:9
- Revelation 6:9-11
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- Matthew 10:16-22, 32-39

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- 1 Corinthians 11; 5
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- Revelation 3
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