

The Seven Churches of Revelation

Part 1

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Duration	00:54:46
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/jsb017/the-seven-churches-of-revelation

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[00:00:00] The theme for our meetings for these four evenings, if the Lord will, is chapters two and three of the Revelation. But since I have chosen to concentrate more in more detail upon chapters, chapter three, then I will only be able to touch here and there upon chapter two.

Nevertheless, I can only read the whole of it and pray that the very reading of the scripture in itself the Lord may speak to us immediately.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil. [00:01:07] And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for thy name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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. [00:02:06] And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write, these things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich.

And I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 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. 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. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, these things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges. [00:03:06] I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is. And thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith. Even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. [00:04:04] 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, saith he that receiveth it. And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write, these things doth the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass. I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works, and thou last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach, and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not. [00:05:05] Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you, I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, which have not known the depths of Satan as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden, but that which ye have already, hold fast till I come. He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, [00:06:01] as the vessels of a potter shall there be broken to shivers, even as I received my father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. From my earliest readings of this chapter, there was one particular aspect of it which appealed very strongly indeed to me, and it seemed to me that it was the voice of the Lord speaking directly to me from this portion, and that is that we must often say to each other, we must often say to ourselves, when we reflect upon the frightening confusion that surrounds us in Christendom, [00:07:03] and when we reflect how that confusion may sometimes cause us to stop and ponder whether the way that we have found and taken and have been led by the Lord is the right way, how good it would be if over the general course of things that has been so strange in the Christian profession, if we only had some indication of what the Lord thinks about it himself, what's his reaction to it, what advice would he give, what would he say to stir up our consciences to show us our shortcomings, what would he say to bring fuel to the fire of an increased response in love to himself, what would he say to confirm us and strengthen us, and what promises would he give us? Well, this is exactly what we have in these chapters, [00:08:03] and for that reason alone, apart from the intrinsic interest that breeds out of almost every word of them, for that reason alone, every Christian who loves the Lord and wants to do his will must find a very important place in his heart, not only in his knowledge, but in his heart for the words which the Lord Jesus speaks to the angels and through them to the churches in these verses, and it's a very wonderful thing indeed. I am just going a few thoughts ahead in saying it to begin with. It's a very wonderful thing that the Lord Jesus Christ puts in the very forefront what if we had stopped to think we realized that he would put in the forefront, and that is in the fullest possible measure, he'll be satisfied with nothing else than to have the love of the hearts of his people. That's what he wants. A church that has left its first [00:09:03] love is already a fallen church, and a great thing which at the very beginning of the stream of evil that seems to have carried all before it, the Lord Jesus pinpoints it, and he speaks to the hearts of every one of his own, and says thou hast left thy first love. That's spoken to the church, and yet what a wonderful thing that one of the marks, I've already mentioned one of the marks of these chapters, and indeed many parts of the book of the revelation, is that there is never a time, never a time when things are so difficult in the way of persecution and tribulation and death, and never a time when the power or the seductions of the enemy are such that there isn't a wonderful promise and an open door of opportunity for the individual. That individual may very well find [00:10:04] other individuals, but let us never forget that the place that we have taken in the things of God is a place that begins with an individual response to the word of the Lord Jesus, and it's only after that we find that there are others who are willing with us to gather simply and humbly in the name of the Lord, and then we find the fellowship of perhaps two or three. Well, the particular way in which we can see that the Lord Jesus is speaking, presenting

himself to the church here, is, so far as scripture is concerned, a unique way. We are all very well instructed in those great central figures of speech that are used in holy scripture to present us the [00:11:03] truth of the church, the things we rightly and specially rejoice in, the things which belong to our union with Christ in glory, that we are his body and we are to be his bride, and also the fact that the church is the house of God. These are the great dominant pictures of Bible teaching concerning the nature of the church, but what we have here is a very unusual thing in scripture concerning the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and a very unusual thing, so far as scripture is concerned, in the view of the church, and a view that, without doubt, we too often forget. And the Lord Jesus Christ is presented to us here as we read of him in the first chapter. Now, we haven't had time to read the first chapter, but we find there that the one whose thunders [00:12:09] are going to fall upon the very concentrated essence of evil and destroy it with the breath of his mouth, he'll be coming in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and believe not the gospel. Well, that one who is going to be seen in this book as the judge of the world, the one through whom the wrath of God will fall upon the world, that one turns an eye of discernment, of the most deep and careful examination, and of judgment towards the church. Now, that's very special, but it's true to other parts of scripture. You remember the passage in first Peter where we read that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if judgment begins at the house of God, then where will the ungodly appear? Well, what we have [00:13:07] in this book of the judgments of God, in these two chapters, we have how judgment begins at the house of God. The world entirely ignores the discerning eye of the Lord Jesus upon it.

Oh, how sad if we who form his house, oh, how sad if we who are here to be witnesses for him ignore the voice of the one who is judging, first of all, the house of God. But, of course, just as there is always the most vivid comfort with the sternest word for our consciences, so we have that lovely little verse in the first chapter. In verse 17, so terrible was the sight that John saw when he saw the Lord Jesus like this. He said, I fell at his feet as dead, [00:14:05] and he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, fear not, I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I'm alive forevermore, amen, and have the keys of hell and of death. And so the same person whose hands are the hands of judgment, so far as this particular vision is concerned, yet for his true servant John, there is not only the most tremendous impression of the aspect of the Savior that is here presented to him, but there is immediately the strongest comfort and strength in the Savior's voice to him personally. I am he, I'm alive now, I was dead, dead for you, dead as a sacrifice for sins, I was dead, but I am alive forevermore.

And so we have these two sides to the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the judge, [00:15:08] he's the all-discerning eye, his voice, his words are the sharp-twedged sword, but he's also the one who, risen out of the dead, can put the hand of comfort upon every one of those whose hearts respond to him. Fear not, he says to John, fear not, and all the content of light and instruction that goes into that fear not from the one who has conquered death and is alive from the dead is in these chapters. It says to us, fear not, I, the one concerning whom John had already said unto him who loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins in his own blood and made us kings and priests unto God, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. He's the one who speaks to John and says to him, fear not, and John therefore has all the time [00:16:04] in the knowledge that the risen Savior, who is to be the judge, who is at the right hand of God amongst all the other things that he does, he is here walking amongst the churches. Now, when John saw this vision, we read that he turned to see the voice that had spoken to him, and he saw seven golden candlesticks, and of course this is the aspect of the church that we have presented to us in these chapters, that each individual church, and here is the plainest possible indication, that the local gathering is a church in the eyes of the Lord Jesus

Christ. These churches were, in his eyes, golden lamps.

Now, there can be no question at all about what lamps are for. The Lord says in the Gospel of [00:17:07] Matthew, in words that are very familiar, men don't light a lamp to put it under a bushel or hide it in some other way. They light a lamp to put it on a lamp stand so that they give light everywhere in the house, and the churches are judged in this particular aspect that they present to the Lord Jesus Christ as to whether and to what extent they really have fulfilled their responsibility, because responsibility is the point that we have here, fulfilled their prime responsibility of being witnesses. That's what light is, that's what the lamp is for, it's to be witnesses. Now, you and I don't pay much attention to the voices that keep saying to us the church has failed, because we know that they just don't know what they're [00:18:02] talking about. They don't know what the church was charged to do by the Lord Jesus Christ and by Holy Scripture. Most of those who reiterate like parrots the phrase the church has failed, they mean the church has failed to stop war. They mean the church has failed to bring about disarmament. They mean the church has failed to banish hunger and to banish the racial riots that are everywhere in our country and other countries. They never stop to think whether there's the slightest indication that the purpose for which the Lord formed and left the church here in the world was to do these things. It was not to do these things. What was it to do? It was to be, each one was to be a golden lamp with the manifestation of the nature of God showing it forth into the world in the widest possible way. The churches are judged in the degree in which [00:19:04] they have fulfilled their privilege and responsibility to be lamps, and this is something that we all ought to take particular account of, because it goes right through. It's the general character imprinted upon the vision, and the Lord Jesus says, I will remove thy lamp out of its place. In other words, we can easily see. Now, I want to draw very clear attention, although perfectly well known to most of us, that although there is a voice in every case of unchanged encouragement to the individual, as I've said several times and will continue to say several times, nevertheless, the general direction in which these churches develop is a downward direction, a direction of increasing displeasure to the Lord, so that he puts his finger upon the very first step of [00:20:09] departure and declension and failure in being witnesses here in the world when he says thou hast left thy first love. No one but the Lord himself might be able to see this. It's a very wonderful thing to me that he gives full encouragement. He says not a word of condemnation regarding that they had worked for him, but you and I have often heard it said, we've often said it to ourselves, and it's a matter that we frequently are referred to, that there can be a great deal of work without the real inner spring of the heart that responds to the love of Christ. We've said it often, and here it is as plenteous could be. The Lord Jesus speaks well of those works. There's no indication that those works should be given up. He approves of those works, but [00:21:03] beyond and behind it, he puts his finger upon the point, upon the question as to whether behind it there lies first love, so that at the beginning of the series, we have the finger of the Lord Jesus put upon the first step of departure, but it's the all-embracing, and it's the really final step of departure, thou hast left thy first love. In the end, in the last of the letters that we haven't read this evening, then we read these frighteningly final words, one could hardly have thought that the church of God would ever come to be spoken of like this, I will spew thee out of my mouth. The whole thing is rotten in his sight. The whole thing is abhorrent to him. The whole thing is neither luke nor warm. I will spew it out of my mouth. [00:22:03] There can be no question, therefore, that if we don't consider the individuals who, in spite of the run of the stream, have been overcomers, and the church from the beginning has been in a downward path and will end by utter rejection by the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I'm taking it for granted, of course, that we all understand that I'm speaking primarily of these churches as a presentation of the features seen by the Lord in the seven successive, generally successive, periods of church history. Now, I would say to you, especially the few younger persons who are here, don't be distressed if when you read general Christian writings

you read nothing of this. Don't be a bit surprised. It was one of the special insights given to those who have been [00:23:02] our leaders so far as teaching is concerned, have been the instruments in the hand of God to teach things that have been hidden for ages and from generations. It was one of the special sides and marks of that insight that they did see that this succession of seven churches is a picture, in the Lord's eyes, of the seven successive periods. Now, obviously, this is not the whole meaning. It's the one I'm going to concentrate upon, but I can, I have to say very plainly that the first meaning of these seven letters is that they were addressed to seven actual churches in Asia, and these churches are named, and they had special characteristics, and they represented a complete spectrum of the reaction of the church to its responsibility as a lampstand. And they would, let us stop and consider the matter, they would be read in [00:24:06] those churches. With what response? Perhaps it will almost appear that some of them would be read with scorn and with indifference and a careless nonchalance as to what the Lord thought about it, but there were others whose heart would be moved. Individual hearts would be moved at what the Lord Jesus said, and that's what we desire for ourselves. In the second place, these letters to individual churches are messages for local churches or periods in which there is this particular kind of danger or this particular kind of suffering. Who could doubt that the suffering saints behind the iron curtain will be finding comfort tonight, although they're long, long after the Smyrna period, they'll be finding comfort tonight in the voice of the Lord Jesus, [00:25:05] be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. These very things that we read about this church in Smyrna. There will be prison, there will be tribulation, there will be suffering, there will be death, they will find comfort. And that's the second meaning, I believe, of these letters that wherever there are saints of God in the particular trials, the particular sufferings, the particular dangers of either by power or by seduction, and these words will speak to them on behalf of the Savior. But that their prime meaning is a view of these seven generally successive periods seems to me without question.

If we look at the familiar verse in chapter one, we look at the familiar verse 19.

[00:26:09] It has often been said, and it cannot be doubted, that this is the Lord's own analysis of the divisions of the whole book of the Revelation addressed to these seven churches. Right, the things which thou hast seen, one, the things which are, two, and the things which shall be, after these, not hereafter, after these. Well, what John had seen, there can be no question, it was the first chapter, the vision. What were the things after these, there can be no question, because if you turn over to chapter four, you'll find the phrase repeated to help you to understand it. In chapter four, verse one, after the addresses to the churches are being completed, [00:27:01] and John hears a voice like a trumpet saying, come up hither, and he's ruptured to heaven, and sees first of all the throne. The voice says, come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be after these. So we are told very plainly that John was first of all to present the vision of the Lord Jesus that he'd seen. He was then to present the things that are, and after that the things that shall be after these, and therefore the whole of the church period is covered, up to the time when the saints are ruptured to heaven, of which John's being ruptured to heaven was doubtless a picture. Now, the many points that might be said in support of this cannot be said for the sake of time, but that tells us that these seven churches are intended to cover the whole of the period between the first preaching of the gospel, the first [00:28:02] establishment of the candlesticks, to the time when, oh sad to say, the church of Laodicea is spewed out of his mouth. Because, you see, the view taken is not primarily the view of the faithful core that really formed the body of Christ. It's the view of the outwardly seen body, calling itself a church, which was intended to be a witness and has progressively failed to be so. Now, when you look at the details, then it's indisputably obvious that they do speak about the divisions of church history. John, who wrote this, and the others who read it, couldn't have known how true it was going to be to the

successive ages of the history of the church. But we, from the vantage point of the end of that course, we know very well that the [00:29:01] apostolic period was succeeded by the most intense period of persecution that the church has ever known. And don't let us forget that all the matters that are spoken of in Bible prophecy are really for settlement, not in Russia, not in America, but they're settled in Europe and in the Middle East. They're settled in the area, especially, of the Roman Empire. And therefore, what happens in Russia or America is, to a certain extent, to a certain degree, not on the heart of the scene of the prophetic scriptures at all. Now, in that realm that I've spoken of, then this exactly did take place. The first apostolic period was covered by a period of the most terrible persecution. The fact that it set in the last 10 days has got so many possible fulfillments that it couldn't possibly be more plain. Many people, and I, when I was a lad, I was very much impressed by a brother [00:30:04] who would repeat the 10 persecuting emperors. The fact that somebody else said it was six didn't upset me very much. He said it was 10 persecuting emperors. I've always thought it more likely that it referred to the absolute climax of this persecution under the last persecuting emperor, Diocletian, was in fact 10 years, 303 to 313, when the edict of toleration was given and everywhere the persecution stopped instantly. Thou shalt have tribulation 10 days, but be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. We know it's as plain as could be that that period of intense persecution, when Satan, like a roaring lion, was attacking those who were to be forming the candlestick, it was succeeded by a time when the government, [00:31:05] the empire, smiled upon the believers, and there was very quickly a most unholy alliance between the church and the world. Now the word *pergamos*, we don't have to be very well instructed in language matters to see that the word *pergamos* means a spurious marriage. The syllable *per* means spurious. A perjury is a spurious oath, and one could think of quite a number of other examples, and the syllable *gamos* is very obviously marriage. Bigamy is a person who is convicted of two marriages, and polygamy presents that condition of society where there are many marriages by one person. And so the word *pergamos* means a spurious marriage, and everybody can see that there was indeed a period of spurious alliance between the church and the world. But it became deeply [00:32:06] intensified when the pope, the bishop of Rome, began to assert his authority over the kings of the earth, and began in the spiritual way to continue in illicit intercourse with them, and introduced idolatry into the church. All this is so plainly known by everybody, but it's perfectly plain to us, looking at the matter from our standpoint, that these letters were indeed to be this. Now I spend what time I can on a few very special details about these churches.

First of all, in the first church, Ephesus, I would like to come again to emphasize and to put, seek that the Lord may reach down into the place where we are sitting, and reach down into our [00:33:04] hearts, and put his finger upon this verse, nevertheless I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love. You'll notice that I am emphasizing the fact that the word somewhat is in italics, and it's no small detail of a thing that the Lord has against these, it's the one thing that matters. My son, give me thine heart. We read in the Proverbs, and at the very heart of the matter, the Lord Jesus Christ said, thou hast left thy first love. It would be very well worthwhile, and it would be in itself a sufficient result from our coming together to speak about these things, if we were to go away, and set ourselves down in the secret chamber, and ask the Lord Jesus Christ himself to put his finger [00:34:05] upon this verse, and upon our hearts. Because I maintain, I can't prove it, but it could be that your own heart and mind will respond when I say so. I believe that the overcomer, what the overcomer can do is open in all ages, right to the very end, and quite apart from this book. In the end of the book, we're told that there is a special promise for the overcomer, and therefore, I feel that it is open to us, to be overcomers regarding the particular thing concerning which the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to each church. And it could very well be that in that church, which is called itself brotherly love, there was a real awakening, of a response to the heart of the Lord Jesus. Now, it's very natural for us to think of

this first love, as the love of a person first converted. And almost all that I have heard [00:35:05] about this, has appeared to me to be taking that point of view. That we are referred back to the moment when first the brilliant joy broke upon us, when the darkness was dispelled, and we realized that we turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. But I can hardly think that this is the first and prime intention of the Lord Jesus in sending this message to the angel and to the church. It seems to me far more likely that that aspect of our response to the love of Christ, which we have in the Ephesian epistle, is more likely to be the case. So that these words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to the Ephesian church, were intended to reawaken the touch of the Savior and the Holy Spirit, that had been awakened only a few years before, when they had read to know the love of Christ, [00:36:08] that passeth knowledge. The apostle didn't spring instantly into that prayer, but he bowed his knees to the Father. And that was a very special thing in itself. He bowed his knees to the Father, and he came up to it by degrees, that they might be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that being rooted and founded in love, they might be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length. A little earlier, I passed it by accidentally, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, and then that they might know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. How many times have our hearts thrilled to these words? And is it not so [00:37:02] that it is generally speaking, and very often a matter of being together in community, that these words make the strongest appeal to us, because they're deeply connected with the very heart of Paul's doctrine, and that is what the church is to the love of Christ. I've often said that for 10 people who might know that the church is the body that has a history here upon earth, there might be no more than one for whom the church means that body, which has that very special place in the love of Christ, as well as in the counsels of God, that he loved it, and gave himself for it, that in the end it might be for himself, and more than anything else, he desires that it might be so now. Was there that response, that special response, awakened before and after amongst the Ephesian believers, which was for them their first love? And I think [00:38:03] what I've said is perhaps confirmed by the fact that the word employed first here is slightly different from the word, generally speaking, the first in time. It's the word used for the best role. It's the word used for the chief men, or the chief women, or the chief city in an area, in the narrative parts of holy scripture. And so it seems to me very likely indeed that in these words the Lord Jesus Christ is drawing us back to that which has indeed been the great center of that to which we have been called, and that concerning which the epistle of Timothy has said to us, possess it, make it your own. He had said to us, hold it fast. Well, it's that scheme of divine truth that centers, for your heart and mine, in this prayer to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. Every aspect of the love of Christ is of supreme importance to us in every department [00:39:06] of life. The kind of love that made the Lord Jesus Christ sympathize with the sorrowing sisters.

The kind of love that he had for Lazarus before he died. Every aspect of the fact that the love of Christ is set upon us. The son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. But we might be forgiven if in this church, a letter to the church at Ephesus, we are reminded that above all the Lord Jesus Christ desires that in the way of a community response to him, there might be the knowledge of his love. Well, whatever it may be, the Lord himself can and will speak to us if here and now, and in our secret devotions, we earnestly desire him to speak to our hearts about [00:40:03] this verse. He will indicate to us what he would desire our response to be. But we would really be overcomers if we did this. And I am suggesting that the overcomers has a very wide view indeed.

Now when you come to the overcomer in Ephesus, is it not wonderful what tremendous streams of thought and truth come before us when the Lord Jesus says in verse 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. One of the more brief of the promises to the

overcomers. And I'd like to make a suggestion here. I'm quite sure that many of you, young, serious students of holy scripture, desiring to have divine light upon it, often wrestled with the question, how does it come about [00:41:06] that the things promised to the overcomer are things that every true believer will have? How can we understand that this is so? You and I, if we are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, will not be hurt of the second death. And I believe it's true of all the promises to the overcomers. They are things that every believer is going to have. Well, perhaps it is, it has sometimes appealed to me like this. That if we think of the verse in particular, that we are speaking now of verse 7, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Then the Spirit saith to the churches, the Spirit saith to him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life. I don't know whether in a few words I make plain what I mean, but it's that the Spirit saith to the overcomer these things. In other [00:42:03] words, these truths that are in fact the portion of every heart that truly trusts in the Savior.

Yet it is the special realization of them now that is brought before the person who is an overcomer, so that now in them he might conquer. He might more and more conquer. It's to those who do not succumb to the general failure, but to those who overcome in the strength of the Lord that these wonderful promises are given to be their strength in the pathway of the overcomer. He will eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Since we read of it on the first page of Scripture, and since we read of it in the last page of Scripture, even if there's not a great deal about it in between, it must be something very sweet and very precious and very important to consider the tree of life. [00:43:06] When we first read about the tree of life, it is in a mysterious way, to me it's very difficult to understand exactly the narrative that you have at the beginning of Genesis, but in a mysterious way it is connected with the other tree which speaks of responsibility. They were both open, but when, regarding the tree which dealt with the responsibility, thou shalt not, when they broke down, then the way to the tree of life was closed to them, and the flaming swords of the cherubim closed the way to the tree of life when man fell and sinned and in responsibility broke down altogether. And therefore, you see, to put the matter very briefly indeed, one of the most marvelous outcomes and evidences of the way that Christ, the Son of God, has done away with the [00:44:05] works of the devil is that the way is open to the tree of life, not in the midst of man's paradise prepared for man by God where Satan entered, but in the paradise of God where the deceiver's feet shall never enter, nor the defiler shall ever enter there. In the paradise of God, the believer, the saint, the overcomer has access to eat of the tree of life. Everything that life means, everything that life means, it means light, it means joy, and it means love. In associations with the person with whom that life is shared, the believer is going to eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. That's a very wonderful promise to the overcomer, and I'm sure that it's intended to be available to us. For the time being, I will have to pass [00:45:07] by because I only want to have to speak for two or three minutes more what might have been said about the, in more detail, about the sufferings of the saints in the Smyrna period. But there's a very important point, it seems to me, in the Pergamos period in verse 13. They were in a desperate plight in Pergamos. There was this spurious marriage with the world, which is the Spirit's way of saying that the church and the world entered into an illicit association with each other which never should have taken place. And of course, the idea of the establishment of the church is alive today, as just alive as it was then. The Church of England is by the law established. The whole principle of establishment came in with the Emperor [00:46:02] Constantine, and it made it when the world was seen to be so wicked a world, but it's just as true today. They lived where Satan's seat was because he's the prince of this world. But in spite of the corruption with which the church at Pergamos was associated, yet it says here in the middle of verse 13, thou holdest fast my name and hast not denied my faith. Now it's not at all unknown to you that the very period of the Emperor Constantine was the period when the great heresies first arose, and

when men of God, like Antipas, the faithful martyr, so stood for and searched the Holy Scriptures to find the truth that they were unable to preserve the faith of Christ, and they're able to remain faithful to all that's [00:47:05] contained in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was said of them that in spite of all this, they held fast his name and did not deny his faith. There was the greatest possible temptation to let philosophical thought take all the heart and core out of Christian truth. The things that they wrote, the creeds which came out of the great councils of those days, they don't contain the throbbing loving heart of our faith, but they do delineate its frontiers. Outside the frontiers marked by those creeds, though no one has the right to be called a Christian. It's been, it was true from that time, and it's true today. The first two great heresies were first of all Arianism, which is as alive as it possibly could be because Jehovah's witnesses are all Arians, which means that they believed by a misapplication of scripture that the Son of God [00:48:06] was the first being to be created, and by him all the rest was created. In other words, he was a great person. He was divine, but he was not God. Now then, this was after a great deal of difficulty and many martyrdoms. It was clearly decided at that time, not that they themselves knew what the truth was, but they inquired of holy scripture. They inquired of what the holy apostles of the Lamb had taught, and they realized that the faith that was to be maintained is that the Son of God was the Son of God and God without a beginning, and he was therefore fully God. The second of the great heresies was taught by a person called Apollinarius, and it's been called Apollinarianism, and it was exposed there and then, and it is a heresy that in our circles we've always [00:49:05] been slightly prone to, and it has cropped up again and again in certain circles, and that is that the Lord Jesus Christ had the body and the soul of a man, but not the spirit of a man. He wasn't completely a man. The place of the spirit in spirit, soul, and body was taken by God, who is a spirit. Therefore, he was neither fully God, nor was he fully man, and this was exposed. If he wasn't fully a man, he could not redeem us men. If he wasn't fully God, he couldn't declare God. If he wasn't fully man, he couldn't make a sacrifice for our sins, and from those days, you see, the truth, not, I repeat, the throbbing, loving heart and center of the truth, but the boundaries outside which a person has no right to be called a Christian, was delineated in those days, and the brethren have always recognized, and when they used the word heresy, they didn't say so, but when they [00:50:04] used the word heresy, this is what they meant. They meant that a person was an addict to one of the false doctrines, most of which arose in those early days. Of course, they use it for other, more refined attempts to take away from the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the word heresy was used in the sense that I'm using it now, and we should understand it, and therefore, it's a very important thing for us all to understand, that we have a separate path. We believe the Lord has called us to a separate path from the whole of the professing church, which has the marks of iniquity, which we've been taught to recognize, but many of them, we know and rejoice in the fact that our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, when we meet them in the street, when we meet them in the home, we can enjoy sweet fellowship [00:51:02] together in the things of God. They don't share our separate position, which we believe the Lord rejoices in, but they are our fellow children of God, and we rejoice in it. But those sects that fall down on these truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, they have no right to the name of Christianity at all, and we ought to be very clear indeed about this, the oldest of us and the youngest of us. There is to be no truck, there is to be no merciful fellowship with them, there is only to be a witness against their errors, and then not the right hand of fellowship unless they renounce them. Well, I have no time. You possibly feel that I've already exceeded my time, but the church at Thyatira is the great period of the dominance of the Bishop of Rome.

Perhaps from the 6th century to the 16th century, and the events introducing the Sardis period, [00:52:06] we had that woman Jezebel who taught. You see, it wasn't only that the thing was brought in under the guise of a liberation from persecution, it wasn't only that it was brought in by a kind of power, beginning to smile instead of frowning and killing, but inside the church there was a woman

who taught my servants to commit fornication and to introduce idolatry. It's the sea of Rome, it's the Bishop of Rome that is that woman, and the three times in the New Testament when a woman is said to destroy the inner heart of what is of God, this is one of them. There's the woman who hid leaven in the meal, the three measures of meal. Many times in scripture, being the food for God and his people, there was a woman [00:53:07] who introduced evil into the doctrine which is the food of the church. In the end, there is to be a woman, a scarlet woman, who is given over to this illicit intercourse with the world and will be destroyed first of all when the day of judgment comes, and that's the woman of which we speak here. It's a very wonderful thing indeed that in the Thyatira period, the Lord speaks with such love and such approval and such compassion of that small remnant, and yet the fact that it says that their works were better at the end than at the beginning, I'm sure that represents the growing voice of those who witnessed to the true salvation by faith in the precious blood of Christ. It began with a few. It began with a witness that was almost inarticulate [00:54:07] until in the end it really broke out in the reformers raised by God, and therefore there was in every case those who were overcomers, and there was wonderful encouragement for them. When they were delivered altogether from the power that had an illicit intercourse with the world, they really would be with Christ. They would be given real reigning power. They would be with the one who would dash the world in pieces like a puss vessel and rule and shepherd with a rod of iron, and it is to them that first of all is given that they should have the morning star.