

The Time of the End – Part Six
A Series on the Book of Revelation
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Adapted from Arlen Chitwood's book; Presented by Jeanne Alley

1). Unto the angel of the Church of Ephesus... Smyrna... Pergamos... Thyatira... Sardis... Philadelphia... Laodicea write... (Rev. 2:1a, 8a, 12a, 18a; 3:1a, 7a, 14a).

a) As we begin to study the seven epistles directed to seven Churches in Asia in Revelation chapters two and three, we need to remember that we're continuing from all the foundational material that we covered in chapter one. And if this connection between chapter one and chapters two and three is not understood, the main thrust of what is presented in these seven short epistles will be missed.

b) To review, we saw in the first chapter of Revelation that the seven Churches are in heaven in Christ's presence in the Lord's Day, or what we more commonly know of as "the day of the Lord," which is a time yet future.

c) These seven Churches are in Christ's presence when He is exercising a position as Judge (his future role), not a position as High Priest (which is Christ's office and work throughout the present dispensation in the heavenly sanctuary, on behalf of Christians).

d) So the entire scene is future and judicial, with the Church removed from the earth and in the heavens with Christ. Since the complete Church, shown by the number seven ("seven," showing the completeness of that which is in view), is seen *in heaven*, this can only have to do with events following the removal of the Church from the earth at the end of the dispensation. And since the complete Church is seen in Christ's presence at this time (which is just prior to the Millennial Kingdom), with Christ occupying a judicial role, this scene can only be depicting the future appearance of all Christians before the judgment seat of Christ.

e) This is the foundational basis for chapters two and three, where specific information is provided relative to each of the seven Churches.

2). Each epistle is structured exactly the same way, following a brief, descriptive depiction of the Son:

- 1) Beginning with Christ's statement, "I know thy works."
- 2) Then, a call to repentance, or to heed the Lord's command.
- 3) Then, an overcomer's promise.

a) So we can know for certain what will be dealt with at the judgment seat :

i) works, which will show whether those being judged...

ii) did or did not repent, or obey the Lord's command. And this will be with...

iii) a view to realizing or not realizing the overcomer's promises, which have to do with realizing or not realizing an inheritance with Christ during the coming age.

3). The basis for *all judgment* in Scripture is works. God judged sin at Calvary on the basis of His Son's finished work (John 19:30); Christians will be judged at the end of the present dispensation on the basis of their own works (I Cor. 3:12-15; II Cor. 5:10, 11); individuals coming out of the future Tribulation will be judged on the basis of works (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:4-6); Israel will be judged following the Tribulation on the basis of works (Ezek. 20:34-38; 44:9-16); and even the unsaved will be judged following the Millennium on the basis of works (Rev. 20:11-15).

a) Faith though cannot be separated from works in the preceding respect (except for the unsaved, who are in no position to exercise faith), for "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]" (Heb. 11:6a).

b) But, in relation to judgment, God looks at the final analysis. Works emanate out of faith, with works forming that which results from faith (James 2:14-26). And it is these resulting works which are at the forefront when judgment is in view.

c) A saved person can either exercise faithfulness or unfaithfulness, *with works emanating from both*. In I Cor. 3:12, this is set forth in the two types of works presented. One type is depicted by the words "gold, silver, precious stones," and the other type is depicted by the words "wood, hay, stubble." Works will be tried by fire at the judgment seat. That depicted by "gold, silver, precious stones," emanating out of faithfulness, will pass through the fire unscathed; but that depicted by "wood, hay, stubble," resulting from unfaithfulness, will be consumed by the fire.

d) Those individuals shown to have possessed works described by the gold, silver, precious stones will experience the end result of the salvation of their souls, which will allow them to have a part in Christ's coming reign. But those individuals shown to have possessed works described by the latter ("wood, hay, stubble") will, instead, "suffer loss" (the loss of their souls), though they themselves will be "saved [their eternal salvation unaffected]; yet so as by through fire" (I Cor. 3:15).

e) Relative to the unsaved, “faith” is not in the picture. But, still, even though “faith” is absent, all that can remain to come under judgment are works. Thus, the unsaved, as the saved, are judged on the basis of works, for there is nothing else upon which they could be judged.

4). Let’s explore this judgment of the unsaved for a moment. The unsaved cannot be judged at their future judgment on the basis of prior unbelief in Christ, no more so than can the saved be judged at their future judgment on the basis of prior belief in Christ.

a) Because, according to John 3:18 –

“He that believeth on him is not condemned [‘is not judged’]: but he that believeth not is condemned already [‘has already been judged’], because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God.”

b) The unsaved have already been judged, as the matter pertains to Christ and His finished work at Calvary, for they have not believed.

c) And no judgment awaits the saved, as the matter pertains to Christ and His finished work at Calvary, for they have believed.

d) This remains true of both the saved and the unsaved because God has already judged sin in the person of His Son. So, this is a completed and closed matter, for God has already been satisfied. And, resultingly, there can be no further judgment on this issue.

TO BE READ, AND DISCUSSED, LATER....

e) The second word “condemned [‘judged’]” and the subsequent word “believed” (both used relative to the unsaved) are both in the perfect tense in the Greek text, pointing to action completed in past time with the results of this action existing during present time in a finished state. Consequently, for the unsaved, this will never be an issue in future time. It can’t be an issue in future time. Such would be impossible. Relative to their eternal destiny, the unsaved have already been judged (past) because of unbelief (past). Nothing surrounding judgment, as it pertains to this matter, can be carried beyond this point in past time.

f) And exactly the same future non-judgmental situation exists for the saved relative to their eternal destiny, for the same reason. The saved, exactly as the unsaved, have already been judged. But in their case, belief,

not unbelief, enters into the matter. And, exactly as in the case of the unsaved, nothing surrounding judgment, as it pertains to this entire matter, can be carried beyond this point in past time.

g) For the saved though, unlike the unsaved, judgment has taken place through a Substitute Who has paid sin's penalty (death) on their behalf. And everything surrounding the matter has been taken care of in past time, by Another, with God being satisfied.

(In the preceding respect, as seen in John 3:18, because judgment has taken place for the saved through a Substitute, there can be no past judgment for the individual per se. But, for the unsaved, since a Substitute is not in view, this past judgment would have to pertain to the individual himself. And this is why this same verse refers to a past judgment for the unsaved alone.)

4.5). And so, because the basis for all "judgment" in Scripture is works, and because judgment is centrally in view in Revelation chapters two and three, Christ's words in each of the seven epistles begins with the statement, "I know thy works." With judgment centrally in view – not judgment relative to their eternal salvation but judgment relative to receiving an inheritance in the Millennial Kingdom – these epistles could begin no other way.

5). God's Son, described in Revelation chapter one, Whose eyes were as "a flame of fire," knew exactly what had been and was presently occurring in each of the seven Churches. The Son, with exactly the same full knowledge (omniscience) possessed by the Father – for He was, is, and always will be the Father manifested in the flesh – knew all there was to know about everyone and everything in each of the seven Churches. And after He states to each, "I know thy works," He makes their works known, dealing with those in each Church on the basis of their works.

a) Exactly the same thing will occur yet future relative to us, the Church. All Christians will stand before Christ in judgment, the One Whose eyes are as "a flame of fire," eyes which can and apparently will penetrate into the very soul of each individual (cf. Luke 22:61, 62).

b) I want you to really think about this: because John was moved from the present time into a future time, and was allowed to see different things occurring before they actually occurred, we can know for certain that that which he saw *will occur, because it has already occurred. And, no one can change it.*

c) The first thing which John saw was Christians appearing before Christ in judgment, in order that all Christians throughout the dispensation might have an eye-witness account of that which they will one day experience, leaving them even further without excuse at the judgment seat.

6). So then, the seven letters to seven Churches in Asia which immediately follow are each structured after a manner which continues the thought of judgment from chapter one.

a) And not only is this structure seen in each of these seven epistles, but at least two other things can be seen in these epistles as well, which reflect on events during *this present age*, preceding events surrounding the judgment seat:

i) The order in which these epistles appear depicts a history of the Church throughout the dispensation (from Ephesus, which left its “first love,” to Laodicea, described as “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”).

ii) Dealing with these seven existing Churches in the manner seen not only allowed the Lord to deal directly with all the Churches during the time in which John lived, but also to provide vital information for all the Churches which would exist throughout subsequent time during the complete dispensation. And, as both the text and context clearly show, this would be with a view to future judgment and the Messianic Era.

b) Everything about these epistles – their structure, that stated about each, the order in which they were given, the reason for the call to repent, the reason for the exhortation and commands – points out ahead to the judgment seat and then to the Millennial Kingdom beyond. The deterioration seen within the existing Churches and also seen in the order of their arrangement in chapters two and three necessitates the call to repentance, the exhortations, and the commands, with the Millennial Kingdom in full view.

c) Everything at the end of Scripture remains in complete keeping with that seen at the beginning of Scripture – a seventh day of rest following six days of restorative work. And there is nothing within these seven epistles which moves beyond that point within the scope of their fulfillment (i.e., there is nothing in these epistles which moves beyond the seventh day, the Messianic Era).

d) There is nothing in these epistles about eternal (meaning “forever and ever”) life, the ages beyond the Messianic Era, etc. All of the material in these epistles is about events occurring during the six days, six thousand years, of work (foreshadowed in Genesis

chapter one), progressing to that the seventh day, the seventh 1,000 years period of time (foreshadowed in Genesis chapter two).

7). There are a few places in Scripture which deal with events outside the scope of the seven-day structure in Gen. 1:1-2:3 [i.e., events both preceding Man's Day and events following the Messianic Era]. But when Scripture does move outside the septenary structure set forth at the beginning [e.g., Ezek. 28:14-19; Rev. 21, 22], it is always quite evident that this is being done. And this has apparently been done at times so that man can better tie the whole thing together, understanding why things existed as they did preceding the 6,000 years on the one hand, and understanding the goal toward which everything moves following the Messianic Era on the other hand, when the Son delivers the kingdom up to His Father [I Cor. 15:24-28].)

8). Unfortunately, most churches today interpret the seven overcomer's promises in chapters two and three to be relating to one's eternal salvation. Most erroneously interpret these promises as either

i) a call to unsaved individuals within the seven Churches to be saved and realize these different promises, or

ii) as statements to saved individuals in these Churches, showing that they will realize these different promises simply on the basis of the fact that they have been saved.

iii) I John 5:1-5 is usually referenced in an effort to substantiate this –

1John 5:1

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. 5 And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

a) This line of erroneous teaching emanates mainly from man's failure to see anything in Scripture except salvation by grace, i.e., saved-unsaved issues. Practically everything is made to relate to this one subject. And this type teaching, brought over into the seven

epistles in Revelation chapters two and three, results in not only the Church often being viewed from an incorrect perspective (usually seeing the Church comprised of both saved and unsaved individuals) but it also leaves little room for the overcomer's promises to be viewed from a correct perspective.

b) However, contrariwise, within the New Testament usage of the word "Church," as it is used relating to the one new man "in Christ," there is no such thing as a Church comprised of both saved and unsaved individuals. A person is either within or without the Church, depending on his saved or unsaved state. He is either a Jew, a Gentile (both without the Church), or a Christian (within the Church [I Cor. 10:32]).

c) Nor can unsaved individuals be thought of as professors instead of possessors and find themselves within the Church after the manner in which the word "Church" is used in the New Testament. Scripture knows nothing about professors as opposed to possessors. Scripture knows only possessors (the saved) and non-possessors (the unsaved).

9). The key to correctly interpreting I John 5:1-5 is to understand the thought of "a bringing forth from above," used three times in these verses.

a) The expression, "born of God" or "begotten of him," referring to a bringing forth from above, is used ten times in I John (2:29; 3:9 [twice]; 4:7; 5:1 [three times], 4, 18 [twice]). The expression also appears in two other New Testament books – four times in John's gospel (1:13; 3:3, 5, 7), and two times in I Peter (1:3, 23). And every time the expression is used in John, I Peter, and I John, both textually and contextually, the saved, not the unsaved, are in view.

b) I John 5:1-5 is actually a companion passage to John 20:30, 31 –

John 20:30

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

c) These two verses in John's gospel have to do solely with Israel during the time of the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel, providing the reason for the eight signs in John's gospel. And I John 5:1-5 (apparently written at or about the same time as John's gospel) would seemingly have to do with Israel during this time as well. But, unlike John 20:30, 31, it would also have to do with Christians throughout the dispensation since the epistle was written centrally to Christians and signs are not in view in the passage.

In this respect, I John 5:1-5 has to do with instructions concerning how Christians can overcome the world – “by faith” (v. 4), with instructions given elsewhere concerning how Christians can overcome the flesh by mortification (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5) and the Devil by resistance (James 4:7; I Peter 5:9).

d) And, as in all of the other passages pertaining to being brought forth from above, the unsaved are not in view at all in any of these passages having to do with overcoming.

e) The overcomer’s promises in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 relate to *Christians alone*. Further, these promises are worded after a fashion which clearly reveals that Christians can go in either of two directions relative to the promises. They can either overcome and realize the promises or they can be overcome [by the world, the flesh, and/or the Devil] and fail to realize the promises.

f) And this is extremely important to understand before anyone even begins to look at the specifics contained within the seven letters to the churches.