

The Letters to the Seven Churches

Bible Class: The seven letters written to the churches in Turkey

Dear Bre. & Srs.,

We intend to look at the seven letters written to the churches in Turkey.

As you see on the map, there were other ecclesias in the area but seven – the number of perfection – were chosen as representative of ecclesias everywhere. They passed the messages on to each other then and, down the centuries, to us, so that we may be ready for Christ's coming.

The ecclesias were presented as lamps, which were made of clay – a symbol of human nature – and each of us are, as it were, bits of clay being moulded together. If we become hard and unmalleable, always wanting our own way and not adhering to one another, we can cause a fracture in the lamp. If we do not get involved and work together, we can cause a crack, thus making the ecclesia a leaking vessel.

The letters are introduced by a vision, and so let us read from ch. 1 vs. 13-16:

“And among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

This sketch helps us get the picture in mind. The man standing in the midst of the ecclesial lamps is, v. 13, “like a son of man”, which is, of course, Jesus, and is a term also applied to the multitudinous Christ.

The garment down to the feet refers to the priestly garment of our righteous High Priest. The golden girdle speaks of tried faith.

V. 14: his head and hair white like wool. The head speaks of intelligence and white of purity and righteousness – the unblemished Lamb of God. The eyes were “like blazing fire”, the penetrating, discerning part of intelligence. Jesus sees right through us, penetrating the thoughts and intents of the heart. The fire indicates infallible judgment.

V. 15: feet of glowing brass. Ordinary brass is a symbol of the flesh, but once purified by fire symbolises strength (Jer. 15:20).

V. 16: “In his right hand he held seven stars”. The right hand is the position of favour. In v. 20 these stars are referred to as the angels. In New Testament times a group of stars was sometimes referred to as a single star, and perhaps this is the idea here. The ecclesia consists of a group of light-bearers which collectively produce a bright light. It seems to me the seven stars and seven angels refer to the ecclesia collectively and not just to the elders – An Ecclesia is the group of called out ones and all members are part of.. The sharp double-edged sword speaks of the conquering of the nations (Rev. 19:15).

The things referred to in this vision are all used in the seven letters.

CHART

The structure of the seven letters are similar – all start with an introduction, then something

Christ approves of (except Smyrna and Laodicea). Then there is disapproval of certain things (except Philadelphia). All have a warning and finally an encouragement to all, and conclude with the phrase, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches". The emphasis is on hearing. All have ears, but not all hear with understanding and discernment. We once lived in Putney High Street, which is very noisy, but we became so used to it that we took no notice of it, it just didn't register. Likewise familiarity with God's sword can mean its real importance does not register. The Scribes and Pharisees had a good knowledge of the scriptures, but failed to apply it – they had ears but did not hear.

The first letter was to Ephesus. The artist's impression is impressive, with its magnificent theatre and buildings. It was a great centre of trade and there was the worship of Diana in its great temple. The silver replicas of Diana brought much money into the city, but the people's turning to Christ meant the traders were losing business.

Let us read Rev. 2 vs. 1-7: NIV (SOMEONE read). The word "holds" in v. 1 is a strong word indicating to hold tightly, never letting go. The tense indicates to hold in the entire hand. The body of Christ is firmly held in Christ's hand. Jesus assures the believers, "no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27). So once we are in Christ he will never let us go unless we ourselves decide to be released. This is quite incredible as, in spite of all the problems in these ecclesias, Jesus still held them firmly in his hand.

In v. 2 Ephesus was highly commended for their hard work, perseverance and sound doctrine; – the underlying meaning is of working under stress, so hard that they were sweating. What a tremendous commendation! – a zealous, active, hard-working ecclesia. But its not all the Truth is about. They were reproved, v. 4, "You have forsaken your first love". What harsh words for this zealous, hard-working ecclesia. Their first love had gone; they were enthusiastic for the work of the Truth as they once were. But had lost real love.

The word for love here is 'agape'. This is the Divine love, describing the love of a perfect being towards an entirely unworthy one. Naturally speaking, there are some in the Truth we may feel we just cannot love, yet we have just got to, because God loves them. We cannot love God without loving those whom He loves. The spirit of true love for each other had gone; they were serving the Truth mechanically.

We can look at love in three way: upwards – loving God, inward – loving the household of faith, and outward – loving our neighbour.

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Each of the ecclesias had different local customs or historical events, and lessons are based on them.

This map shows the changing nature of Ephesus. Originally there were mountains on either side of the valley, with the main city with the harbour in the right hand corner of the gulf.

This map shows that later the gulf had silted up and they had to move the harbour further along the coast, hence in v. 5 of Rev. 2, Christ's threat to "remove your lampstand from its place". They well knew what that meant from their city's history of having to move the city. Why was this? Well, they had not taken steps to prevent the river from silting up and on a spiritual level efforts are needed to prevent ourselves from getting clogged up with useless mud, else we will cease to function properly and could be moved.

The gigantic temple of Diana was built of solid marble; it was asserted that the image of Diana originally fell down from heaven.

A sculpture so intricately designed would not just appear as we well know, but required a designer and a maker, and therefore this image was nothing more than a fraud, but the people believed the story of its origin – that it fell from heaven. In contrast, the things of the Truth and God's commands have, indeed, originated from heaven, hence Jesus exhortation in v. 5, "Remember therefore from whence THOU art fallen." The many breasts of the image are supposed to represent fertility and prosperity, which the goddess gave those who worshipped her.

At the Council of Ephesus in AD 431, the Catholics proclaimed the doctrine of the worship of Mary as the mother of God. The idea was copied from the goddess Diana, whose many breasts also denoted that she was the mother of all gods, and you will note on the head she has a three-tiered head attire. The Pope copied this, hence the tiara he wears

In Ephesus one of the items they sell to tourists is a carpet showing a tree with birds perched in its branches, with the quotation, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life." Such trees go way back into Ephesian history. Within the temple of Artemis was a tree-shrine, and criminals who took refuge in this temple could not be punished as long as they stayed there. Believers in Christ not only receive protection from punishment, but complete forgiveness of sins through Christ, who has brought, freedom, life and immortality to light through the gospel. Jesus therefore says in ch. 2 v 7: "To him that overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God."

The next letter is that to Smyrna, and so we read from ch. 2 vs. 8-11 (quoting from the NIV):

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death".

The word 'Smyrna' means 'myrrh' which is a fragrant, cleansing and preserving ointment. It was often used in association with anointing the dead, and so speaks of death Mary anointed the body of Jesus with it and Nicodemus used it in the burial of Jesus (John 19:39), so we could picture Smyrna as the city of death and weeping.

Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only ecclesias that are not personally rebuked in any way.

The description of the author is given in verse 8, the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. Jesus was the first that should suffer, die and rise again; he is the "firstfruits" of the dead. At harvest time there is always something that is first ripe, and it tells us that the main harvest is to follow. This was very encouraging to the persecuted ecclesia at Smyrna, who were being killed for their faith.

Jesus had experienced the worst possible death; no matter what happened to them at Smyrna, or what happens to us, Jesus has suffered even more, but it was only for a while that he slept the sleep of death; he then rose from the dead and now has not just life, but ETERNAL life because of being faithful unto death.

The Smyrnians would understand this as something like that had happened to their city. It was a flourishing city and then, , was totally destroyed by an earthquake and later was rebuilt. In other words it was a resurrected city, so Jesus addressed himself to them as having been dead but now alive again.

In verse 9 of ch. 2 Jesus shows that he knows all things. “I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich”.

The Greek word for affliction means ‘pressure’. It has been likened to trying to get a big foot into a small shoe – one gets pressure from all sides of the foot. This tribulation, or heavy pressure, was the result of their belief in Jesus.

The next word in this verse is “poverty”. Smyrna was a very rich city, like Ephesus, yet the brethren suffered poverty, a Greek word meaning one without worldly possessions. This poverty was caused because of the Truth, because they would not offer incense to Caesar, and so the law allowed people to rob them without fear of persecution.

Paul refers to such in Hebrews (10:34), “For ye...took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance”.

Although because of the Truth we may suffer the loss of goods, we will be more than compensated for them in the Kingdom, hence the “enduring substance”, and Jesus’ comment was that in spite of their poverty, in God’s sight they were really rich

In verse 10, taking the ten days’ tribulation on the ‘day-for-a-year’ basis, we have ten years. They had just experienced ten years of persecution — under Domitian. Eusebius mentions that four 10-year periods of tribulation, each of which affected Smyrna. However, the ten days may also have been literal days. We understand their imprisonment and death for refusing to worship Caesar was all over in about ten days, so they knew that, once imprisoned, they would have to suffer up to ten days before their execution.

The reward for endurance was “a crown of life”. The crown at Smyrna was the victor’s crown of olive such as was awarded to athletes in the games. Then, too, on some of the coins Smyrnian magistrates were depicted wearing laurel crowns which were given to them upon the completion of faithful service.

Christians have to be “faithful unto death” and they will receive not a crown of olive leaves, but an incorruptible crown of life,

Smyrna was on the top of a steep hill and the buildings erected in a row round the top. The city was known as “The Crown of Asia” because of the way in which the buildings were round the hill. Again we see a personalised aptness of the message to Smyrna

There are many lessons we can learn from Smyrna – the ecclesia that was not reproved in any way. One does not have to be rich in this world” goods to be rich in God” sight. The difficulties we experience in life are known by Christ down to the minutest detail; he has experienced and endured far worse than we shall ever have to, and so is well able to appreciate our distresses, but he is guiding us through all our difficulties so that we may be prepared to wear the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

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PERGAMOS – Read Chapter 2 vs. 12-17 (someone??)

We will now look at Pergamos which was very different to the other cities. For 250 years it had

been the administrative capital of the region; it was on a prominent hill 1000ft. high, with a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. The houses were on the lower part of the hill and on top were erected, on terraces, the public buildings and temples. Verse 13 says it was “where Satan has his throne.”

There was at Pergamos a colossal altar-throne; it was a fantastic building. All the Greek gods were ornately carved on it, many of them terminating in thick snake or serpent-like tails, which mythology associates with Satan. It was here that many of the decisions affecting the saints were made. Prof. Blomfield says (Xdel. 1909, p. 114), “The early Christians regarded it as the special throne of the devil”, hence the historical application of these symbols to Pergamos.

Satan was the Roman authorities, hence the reference to “Satan’s seat”. The Romans reserved the right of executions throughout the Empire to themselves, and so they were the ones who used the sword to execute justice. Because Pergamos was the administrative capital, we see how appropriate it was for Jesus to remind them that he, too, bore a sword, and absolute power had been entrusted to him.

Pergamos was full of temples to numerous gods. It was situated on a very defensible hill, and from this hill magnificent views of the surrounding hilly countryside could be seen. Imagine sitting in this theatre with these breathtaking views.

The theatre was notorious for its gladiator fights. Here, Christians were forced to try and fight the lions or else be consumed. Christians were bound, tarred and set alight as torches, or executed while the despicable spectators revelled in the so-called ‘sport’. But our dear brethren and sisters held fast to the Truth to the end.

In spite of our brethren at Pergamos withstanding persecution, it seems that, probably from within the ecclesia, the influence of the Balaamites and Nicolaitanes were weakening their position. The sin of Balaam was to allure people away from God by providing them with pleasures for personal satisfaction. This is the subtle influence of the world that can also influence us.

The reward for faithfulness, v 17, was a “white stone”. A white stone with their name on, was a token given to the victors of the various contests, and entitled them to free food in the temples. Obviously this food was associated with idolatrous worship, and so unsuitable for Christ’s servants. However, those who are victorious in the conquest for Life Eternal will receive the white pebble, entitling them to “eat of the hidden manna”, the bread of life, and to live for ever. Such could not be attained by ordinary human conquests.

Judges had two stones, one white the other black. The white was for acquittal, and the black for condemnation. Alas, the black stone of condemnation had been given to Antipas, by the Roman authorities. but Jesus offers us all - all with ears to hear- the white stone of acquittal, of approval, even that eternal place, with Antipas, in the Kingdom we are all seeking.

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THYATIRA (ch. 2 vs. 18-19).

This is the longest letter, but probably the smallest ecclesia and that established by Lydia. – (SOMEONE READ VS 18-19????)

In v. 18 Jesus is mentioned as having “feet like burnished bronze” and the word for “bronze” indicates bright bronze, it was a special hardened form of bright brass peculiar to Thyatira. The god of the brass makers was Hephaestas, depicted on this Thyatiran coin seated at an anvil

hammering a helmet in the presence of the goddess of war. Hephaestas appears in the bronze statues with sun-like, blazing eyes.

Eyes of fire indicate eyes of judgment; all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Jesus (v. 18). The eyes of Jesus are often referred to, and Jesus' eyes indicated how he felt. For example, he looked with anger on the Pharisees (Mark 3:5), but looked with love upon the rich young man (Mark 10:21).. Jesus' eyes could convey love, but to Thyatira they were in a judgment mood, being like a flame of fire.

Verse 19 is one of commendation, "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first." Now, if anyone could say all of this of us, I am sure we would be most encouraged, and especially the last phrase, "you are now doing more than you did at first."

It is very difficult to obtain a right balance between a zeal for purity, which can result in much strife and bitterness, and the loss of real agape love. On the other hand, we could be so kind, diligent and loyal to the Truth that we could overlook any wrong doctrine in our midst. This seems to have been the problem at Thyatira. Many of them were really excellent brethren and sisters, but they tolerated some who had let the Truth seriously slip, hence from verses 20-24 we have the longest condemnation of all these letters to the seven churches – they are likened to Jezebel. Let us read from ch. 2 vs. 20-23 (WHO'S TURN TO READ??):

"Nevertheless, I have this against you. You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."

Temple prostitution was common and this could well have been a literal situation.

A marriage of political convenience took place between Ahab, king of Israel, and Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. She worshipped Baal, which resulted in Baal being worshipped in Jerusalem as well the worship of Yahweh.

The tribulation upon this Jezebel class, who were trying to be both in the the Truth and the world., was inflicted by God. It was God who cast them out and not the Ecclesia. They spoke smooth, appealing words which influenced some; hence, v. 24 speaks of them as "Satan" – the adversary. The salvation of the faithful in this ecclesia was not impaired, however, provided they held fast, v. 25: "Only hold on to what you have until I come."

Thyatira was the home of Sambatha, who had a temple and she sought to unite Christians, Jews and pagans into one form of worship. It could be this was the beginning of the Jezebel referred to in v. 20.

It seems that every trade had a Guild and members were compelled to attend the Guild meetings held in the temple of the particular trade's 'god'; unless they were members they were not allowed to pursue the particular trade. One of the trade Guilds was the 'Dyers' Guild' and Lydia, certainly before her baptism, would have been a member. They had a chemical which produced a brilliant scarlet, which was a trade secret of the Guild. One wonders if Lydia ceased to be a member and would have been included in Jesus' words in v. 1, "you are now doing more than you did at first."

Let us look on to vs. 26 “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. As humble as we are we must never forget our future destiny – to rule the world with Christ for God. We will then have the Divine energy and knowledge to do this, and dissolve the governments of men, and replace them with God’s Kingdom. This will be the privilege of all who have ears to hear and who hold fast until Jesus comes.

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Each ecclesia is told, “I know thy works”. Let us try and understand a little more about God’s and Christ’s powers of penetration. Man can take pictures of the earth from outer space. A space picture of London reveals its general outlines; it can be magnified to show a single street with the people in it. Then one of the people can be enlarged; then a single button can be enlarged to show its markings. Man’s space pictures can show minute details. How much greater is the vision of God who made the seeing eye!

With the use of x-rays pictures can be taken of the functions inside our bodies. God’s penetration of us goes far deeper– the Spirit says in ch. 3 v 1, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead”. We shudder at the import of these words. Just how far are they applicable to us?. To be spiritually dead means the Truth fails to really motivate our lives.

(Now for a look at Sardis. The hill before us is where Sardis was built; its commanding view and steep sides made it an easily defendable city.

The Sardians were expert goldsmiths and discovered electrum, an alloy of 80% gold and 20% silver. Pure gold wears and is easily rubbed away, but this hardened alloy was wear-resistant and so it was possible to use thinner layers for plating, giving the appearance of pure gold when it wasn’t.

The Spirit’s analysis of them in this v. 1 was, “you are dead”. Yes, they gave an outward appearance of being of high value – that they were alive and well in the Truth – when, in fact, it was only a veneer, as was the electrum covering the goldsmiths were so expert at.

Sardis was an easily defendable city; from the east it was protected by steep rocks. Likewise from the west; the only way to enter the city was via the steep hills from the south, therefore the watchman’s job was relatively easy. Let us read (SOMEONE??) vs. 2 and 3 of chapter 3 “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”

The city had a history of UNWATCHFULNESS and UNPREPAREDNESS. It When Cyrus besieged it, one of his soldiers was looking at the city trying to think of a way up to it. From a distance he saw a soldier whose helmet fell off and rolled down the cliff. To his amazement, the soldier went down the cliff to retrieve it and unwittingly revealed the way to reach the city.

That night the soldier took some fellow-soldiers and went by the route which was unguarded and captured the city. The lesson being, of course, that in spite of having impregnable defences, they are useless without an attentive watchman. The Sardians did not heed the lesson.

Some 320 years later the city was again besieged and was captured in a similar way. The lesson is, if we do not constantly watch we could be destroyed.

Verse 2 says they were to “Wake up” and “strengthen what remains.”

“Remain” could again refer to an event they were familiar with. In AD17 an earthquake destroyed much of the city and Tiberius gave them a considerable sum of money to rebuild the remains. Earthquakes do more damage, of course, when the foundations of buildings are weak, and in order to avert another disaster they had to strengthen the foundations of the buildings which remained. The spiritual lessons are obvious; one must dig down and fix themselves firmly on the bed-rock of Truth, else they will collapse when adversity comes.

We are living in very exciting times, and Jesus warns later on in Rev (16:15), “Behold, I come like a thief; blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

If the ancient temple guards were caught sleeping they were stripped naked, beaten and sent away with all the shame that that brought with it. Hence Jesus commendation”Blessed is he who stays awake”.

Not all had fallen away Rev. 3 v 4 tells us, “You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.” In spite of the laxity, there were some who really held fast to the Truth.

At baptism we are figuratively clothed with a white garment of righteousness; every time we sin it is a blot on the garment, but by prayer, through Christ, we can be forgiven, and our garment cleansed hence the promise in v 5 of being dressed in white and being in the book of life.

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PHILADELPHIA

Rev. 3:7-13 (2 PEOPLE READ??)

The word ‘Philadelphia’ is derived from two Greek words meaning ‘Brotherly love’. In verse 7 the words “holy”, “true” and “keys of David” all refer to Jesus – Jesus was the real thing, the “true bread”, the “true vine”, the “true tabernacle” In him all the types become realities.

Concerning the key, Jesus was quoting from Isa 22 v 22, “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder To show his authority, the “key of the house of David” is laid upon his shoulder. Elsewhere in Isaiah (9:6) we read that the government shall be upon his shoulder Jesus has the key to open and shut the Kingdom to whomsoever he wills. Jesus is the one who gives entry to the Kingdom because he is the very door of the Kingdom, he said, “I am the door” (John 10:7).

In v. 8 of Rev. 3, the phrase “a little strength” seems to imply ‘you are few in number’.

Philadelphia was not a large, strong ecclesia capable of achieving great things, but they were a small, faithful ecclesia who kept God’s word in contrast to the larger ecclesias at Sardis and Ephesus, and they did not receive any condemnation. Surely that’s an encouragement for small Ecclesias!

From v. 7 we consider the Philadelphian ecclesia. An open door is mentioned in v. 7 and also in v. 8, , “I have placed before you an open door”. This association of a door, or gateway, with Philadelphia is interesting as Herodotus referred to Philadelphia as “the gateway to the East”. It was built where two countries met.

Let us read Rev. 3 v 10 (someone??), “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth”. The word “patiently” means a patient endurance. If we patiently accept

God's will, this verse assures us we will be delivered from the hour of trial. It seems that this promise is yet to be realised. God has promised that, in the tribulation to come, we will be given some special deliverance.

In v. 12 terms of the reward are significant, "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God."

(FIG 33). This is a robust church pillar. There was a custom of rewarding those who had given special service to the town by having a statue of them placed in one of the temples, describing what the person had done.

But Jesus said that his faithful ones would be pillars in God's living temple which no earthquake or anything else would be able to destroy.

The reference to the name, v12, being placed upon the believer may refer to the ancient custom of branding a slave with the initials of his owner so that all could see to whom he belonged. We are told in Acts 15 v 4, "God did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name". This, of course, referring to God being manifested in a host of mighty ones, of which we are privileged to be potential members.

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LAODICEA

Reading Ch. 3 vs. 14-21.

(FIG 34). We now focus our attention on Laodicea, the last of the seven ecclesias and frequently taken as being the most lax, yet, materially, the most prosperous city of them all.

They had traders dealing in general commodities and in a special soft black wool. (FIG 35) from their extensive flocks in the surrounding fertile valleys. The softness of the wool was caused by the minerals in the local water. They were so rich and prosperous that they boasted that they had need of nothing and needed no help from others.

So we see how their proud claims were based on their natural material prosperity, but in God's sight that was nothing; He wanted to see spiritual riches, but He saw none, instead, v. 17, they were "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

(FIG 36) This again was a play upon Laodicea's proud boasts. They wore big warm woollen garments, which means they were well clothed and warm. In God's sight they spiritually naked.

Laodicea was famous for an eye powder sold throughout the world as a remedy for weak eyes, yet those at Laodicea were spiritually blind and were counselled by the Spirit to buy and anoint their eyes with spiritual eyesalve that they might see.

In v. 15 we read that they were "neither hot nor cold". The word "hot" indicates "boiling hot".

(FIG 37). The area was famous for its hot springs; the water contained some mineral salts which were renowned for their beneficial qualities (FIG 38) and those salts formed a kind of wall in which the hot water was contained (FIG 39) and sometimes formed beautiful coral-like formations.

(FIG 40). It was felt that this hot water should be available 'on tap', as it were, throughout the city, so a vast overhead aquaduct was built to convey it from the springs into the city, but during its journey, of course, it cooled and became tepid – too warm and useless for drinking and too cool for other uses.

(FIG 41). The salts furred up the pipes, as you see in the layer of salts inside the pipe. It was useless and only fit to be spued out onto the land which the salts made infertile. And this is just what the Laodiceans were like – neither one thing nor the other and therefore useless to God. Of course, the lessons for us are plain. If we do not keep our warmth for the Truth so that we bubble over with enthusiasm, we will get lukewarm and become useless to God. It was because they were luke-warm that they were spued out – rejected

(FIG 42). The answers to their failures in God's sight are applicable to ourselves today. Instead of feeling self-sufficient, they needed, v. 18, to buy "gold refined in the fire". Instead of their black garments they needed to change them for the white raiment of righteousness. Instead of their eye powder they needed to anoint their eyes with the eye-salve of God's word so that they could discern things clearly and with the right perspective.

Verse 18 counsels, "buy from me". This was no commercial purchase; it does not require literal money to buy the unsearchable riches of Christ.

They were also counselled to get gold, and white raiment. Gold refined by fire is the symbol of tried faith; fire is the severe circumstances and trials we all face from time to time; and when our faith has come through that process successfully we shall, indeed, be pleasing to God.

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We now come to summarise.

We have seen that Jesus knows everything about us – he sees where we fail, yet as long as we repent, we as it were, clasp his hand; he will hold us and never let us go. Whatever wrong has happened in the past is of no consequence; through prayer and faith that has been totally blotted out and we can go forward with a degree of confidence. In the armour of faith there was no provision for the covering of the back and the reason is that a Christian does not go back but constantly forward.

I think all the various states are co-existent. We may visit one ecclesia and feel they are lukewarm and increased with goods, like Laodicea; visit another and we could think they were lax on doctrine, or another and we may feel they had lost their first love. But visit those same ecclesias another time and we may have the reverse feelings. And that is also true of us individually: we have our spiritual peaks and troughs. These letters force home to us some of our weaknesses, but in spite of that they encourage us to press on regardless, and when we combine all the promises together we see what a tremendous Hope we have set before us.

When we look at the bad things mentioned about some of the ecclesias we may have a smug feeling that we are not as bad. For example, they worshipped idols. We today do not fall down and worship literal idols, but Paul tells us that covetousness is as idolatry and people worship materialism more than God. The love of material wealth was not just characteristic of Laodicea; we ourselves can also be caught up in it.

Paul specifically warned of a falling away in the last days, and in spite of all Christadelphia's achievements, many feel that the Truth's standards are slipping.

Such reprovals make us all feel uncomfortable, and so they should, because none of us will ever earn salvation, indeed, we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ, we are mere slaves, and if Jesus had not bought us we would have been left in chains to die.

We have indeed received the "high calling of God in Christ". A great future has been prepared for us - we are going to eat of the tree of life and live for ever; we are to have power over the nations,

to be clothed, fully covered, in righteousness to serve God in perfection; to become pillars in God's temple and to share Jesus' throne with him – and it is all in the very near future. It is not a matter of waiting decades; we are the generation that, in God's mercy, will witness the reality of these things, so let us put the final effort into this last lap of the race for eternity.