

## **Seven Types Of Church Members**

### **Selected Verses from Revelation, Chapters 2 & 3**

Some things I've seen in the news.

A homosexual wedding was conducted at the chapel of Wake Forest University.

The Episcopalian church votes on ordaining homosexuals. The bishops say yes — the lay people say no in a narrow vote of 172 to 102.

The United Church of Christ ordains homosexuals.

Recently — A seminary student who was a Boy Scout leader was convicted of taking indecent liberties with minors.

Several clergymen have died with aids.

Several Protestant and Roman Catholic clergymen have been convicted of child abuse.

A deacon in a Baptist church was convicted of incest with his three daughters.

There is a burlesque stripper who does her stripping act in a Unitarian church. She calls herself a stripper for Christ.

Among these there are many other things that are degrading the church of Jesus Christ.

Rock music with suggestive lyrics has invaded the Christian church. It is called Christian Rock.

The Bible is being attacked from all fronts as liberal theologian attempt to prove that it is unreliable as a basis for faith.

Sin is not preached from our pulpits as our society advocates deception and adultery contrary to God's Holy Word.

Hell as the destination of the unsaved is no longer preached and has effectively been dropped as bad theology.

How can the church survive so much confusion? It can't, and the Word of God clearly tells us that things will get worse before the end. But there is hope — and this hope lies in how we approach all that is going on in the world around us — not only as a church, but as individuals, for the corporate church is made up of people of all levels of understanding and salvation comes to each person as God deals with individual hearts.

It is with this in mind that I'd like to bring you an evaluation of the state of the church. This is the visible church; those who profess to be Christians - the wheat and the chaff; the good seed and the bad; the large church and the small.

And John tells us about all these churches and the people in them in the book of Revelation, Chapters two and three. Here he writes about the seven stereotypes. The kinds of churches we can expect to find at any time and the kinds of church members we can expect to find in these churches. Let's look at the seven categories:

Ephesus — the busy church. Smyrna — The poor church.

Pergamos — a church in a bad neighborhood.

Thyatira — a growing church. Sardis — a

well-known church. Philadelphia — A

church with a mission.

Laodicean — the rich church.

### **1. The first of these churches is Ephesus.**

This was a busy church. The people were exceptionally busy in doing God's work.

They were busy checking out the folks who made false claims of Christianity.

They were busy being patient.

They were busy hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

They were so busy, the Bible tells us, that they had forgotten what they were founded for. They had left Christ out of what they were doing, and had put their own ideas in motion. The Bible describes this as **"They had left their first love."**

Have you ever seen Christians like that? Those who are so busy doing God's work that they totally leave God out of it. They forget that the foundations of the church is Jesus Christ, and they begin to talk for God.

They can tell you in a minute what is best for you.

They can tell you how to live your life so that it meets their standards.

These people are usually very difficult to deal with. Even though they seem to be using the language of God, they are not practicing the love of Jesus.

## **2. Then there are the people in the persecuted church as symbolized by Smyrna.**

These folks had a tough time in living from day to day. They had many trial and tribulations, but continued to hold up even when many of their members were being put to death. They knew what they believed and in whom they believed. They were all steadfast to the end.

It is a strange thing about how people react to persecution. The ones who are strong in their beliefs stick it out. The weak ones fade away.

There are churches in the world today that are being persecuted. They meet with the possibility of being arrested each time they meet, but yet the church continues even under these circumstances.

The persecuted church is always made up of strong Christians, and it will always get praise from God for what they are doing.

## **3. A church in a bad neighborhood is illustrated by Pergamos.**

Pergamos was a very busy city of commerce whose primary deities were idols. The Christians were ridiculed and even persecuted because they didn't worship the pagan idols.

But even with persecution, this bad neighborhood was responsible for the degradation of the church as the pagan ideas began to creep in to the church.

They accepted false doctrines and integrated them into the doctrines of the church. Many of them were beginning to look a lot like the pagan world around them.

Today in America, we all live in bad neighborhoods. The whole world in brought into our living rooms. We have been put into the place of Pergamos.

We accept the doctrines of Balaam, which means that by our silence, approve of the adultery, lying, cheating, stealing, and ungodlessness that goes on all about us.

Jesus sad for us to repent or we'd wind up with Him fighting against us. We have to be ever on guard against the things of the world. Or else we will look just like the rest of the world, and the non-Church members will not be able to tell the difference between us and them.

## **4. Then John wrote to the growing church at Thyatira.**

This was an active city. They were in a growing community, and the people at the church were actively working to bring in new members. But in their zeal to get the membership rolls increased, look at what they did; they brought in many unsaved people who didn't have the vaguest idea about Christianity.

Jesus compared these people to Jezebel – the Biblical symbol of deception and seduction. He clearly says that her children will be put to death.

In many of the growing churches we see this same zeal today. We rate our progress by numbers and nickels. Almost daily I hear some pastor bragging about how many people he has baptized, or how many joined his church. How big his budget is. How much money he makes, and so on.

The sins of Thyatira are still with us. Jesus wants people in our fellowship who are saved. The size of the church rolls doesn't matter. We are to be careful who we let come into our midst, for if they are unsaved, they will cause many problems within the church family, and it will make a lot harder on those who are truly born again.

Clearly Jesus teaches that the church is for the saved and we're not to mix with the unbelievers in worship.

#### **5. Then there was a letter to the well-known church at Sardis.**

This was probably a church that had a well-liked, excellent speaking pastor. He could probably preach sermons that would make the devil come to the altar, and perhaps even join the church.

People would ride their donkeys for miles just to attend church at Sardis– probably riding past three or four lesser known churches on the way. They just wanted to be associated with the First Church at Sardis.

It gave them a sense of pride to tell their neighbors about the great things going on there. The great preacher, the well-rehearsed choir, the covered dish suppers, and the big fellowship hall – all the things that go along with a well-known, popular church.

What happened at Sardis is a warning to these kinds of church. Jesus said that there were on a few at Sardis who had not been defiled.

This is what happens when the church becomes more important than its founder. The well-known church gets so busy with entertaining people, and church programs that they forget all about Jesus Christ.

They go around feeling good about what they are doing without realizing that they are dying without realizing that they are only existing to satisfy their own needs and desires.

Jesus Christ does not accept these kinds of people in to the kingdom of God. The only reward they will get is here on this earth, for they will go to their final destination with their true leader, Satan. After all he is the real God of those who worship self.

There is always a remnant of believers, even in these popular churches, but their voices are so small that they are never heard from. They can't be heard over the noise of the larger crowd of unsaved. They are ineffective in serving the cause of Christ.

The popular church will grow, but it is self-serving – God gets left out.

## **6. The sixth type of church is one with a mission– the Philadelphian church.**

Here is the kind of church that Jesus had in mind when it was originally founded. Look at it. He found no fault with the people in this church.

The key to their success is they have kept His Word. What is the Word? The revealed Word of God as found in the Bible. That's the Word pure and simple. They had not let it get corrupted with the modern day theories of so-called science. They accepted it purely and simply as the holy Word of God and lived by it.

They were severely criticized for doing so. Some of the other churches were jumping all over them for being too zealous. You know what Jesus called their adversaries? – The Synagogue of Satan.

These are the churches today that put other things ahead of the Word of God. They let church tradition override the teachings of the Bible. They set themselves up as the authority and then persecute those who don't go along with them.

But Jesus said to hold fast for a crown of glory is awaiting the folks in the Philadelphian church.

There is one major message here on how we are to live as Christians.

We are to stick to God's Word in our churches.

We are not to be critical of others, but at the same time we are not to bend to the world's way of thinking.

We have to be straight in our dealings with all, and take the punishment the world sends our way because we are Christians. Jesus will take care of those who persecute us, and assure us that we have a greater reward waiting in heaven.

Jesus said of those who persevere, **“I will write upon him my new name.”** Do you know what this is? We are the bride of Christ and we take on the name of Jesus at our own marriage supper of the Lamb.

### **7. John presents the rich church of Laodicea last for he wanted to leave this message clear in our minds.**

The people at Laodicea had a money problem. They had a nice church building, paved parking lot, a multipurpose recreation center, four associate pastors, and two music directors.

They were so rich that they didn't even need Christ. They were at the peak of self-centeredness, but didn't stop long enough to realize it.

They probably had a lot of rich members who gave liberally to the church and in doing so gained a lot of power over the other members. Man has a tendency to respect the rich regardless of what he's like morally.

One only has to look at the modern day American scene to realize this. If one is a multimillionaire, he gets all the attention and admiration of the whole world. It doesn't matter how he got rich, just so he has it.

We have modern version of this, in the Kennedy Clan. Their wealth came from illegal dealings of the founder of the clan in the 1920's. He bought respect with money and passed this respect on to his children. One of them even became president of the US.

But Jesus warned us earlier about money. He said that we can't serve God and money too.

The modern day Laodicean church has never understood this part of the Christian message. They go about the work of the church as if it's a banking institution and enjoy the richness of this world at the expense of missing all the richness of the next world.

Clearly Jesus is on the outside of the Laodicean church as he says, **“Behold I stand at the door and knock.”**

These seven types of churches and their corresponding seven types of church members illustrate what we find in the congregations of any church, anywhere.

The Question is, **“What kind of church member are you?”**

1. Ephesus – The once active church member who has gone away from the things of God– left your first love.

2. Smyrna – The church member who holds fast, even to the death If necessary.
3. Pergamos – Those who accept false doctrines and intermingle them with the Word of God.
4. Thyatira – Those who accept the ungodly practices of the world as being all right. They even bring these practices into the church with them and lead other astray.
5. Sardis – Those who are more concerned about the things of the church that they are of God; how well the speaker speaks, the carpet on the floor, the things that please the eyes and themselves. Selfishness is the main problem of this kind of church member.
6. Philadelphia – These are the true Christians in the church. Brotherly love is the meaning of the word Philadelphia. Love is the key to following the commandments of Christ. **“Love one another as I have love you,”** He said. It is those loving Church members who are the backbone of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes they can't get heard, but Jesus knows who they are and what they are saying.
7. Then there is the Laodicean church member. The wealthy person that wants recognition; the one who wants to run everything because he has money. We usually accept this member with open arms, because the church always seems to need money. I suspect that most of our deficits come because we want to do certain projects whether God wants them done or not.

Seven types – What kind of church member are you? Each of you fit into one of these categories. Some are saved – some aren't. Some are backslidden, and others just need to get things right with God.

Come back to your first love Jesus is saying to the churches.

The message of John rings clear in our ears as it has down through the centuries, **“Listen to what the spirit says to the churches.”** And I add to this, **“Listen to what the spirit is saying to you as a church member.”**

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