



[Revelation 2:4](#)

(4) Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

[Revelation 2:9-11](#)

(9) "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. (10) Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (11) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.""

[Revelation 2:13-15](#)

(13) "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. (14) But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. (15) Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

[Revelation 2:19-20](#)

(19) "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as for* your works, the last *are* more than the first. (20) Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

[Revelation 3:1](#)

(1) "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,"These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

[Revelation 3:4](#)

(4) You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

[Revelation 3:8](#)

(8) "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

[Revelation 3:11-12](#)

(11) Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (12) He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name.

[Revelation 3:15](#)

(15) "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

[Revelation 3:19](#)

(19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
New King James Version

Note that each of these congregations—those in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea—was located in a Gentile city, and in all probability, each congregation's membership was primarily Gentile. It is quite likely that in each

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congregation the Jews were a minority.

Recall that the Romans ravaged Jerusalem in AD 70, and its Christians had to flee to Pella to save their lives. It is highly probable that none of these congregations had any communication with any survivor of the first congregation in Jerusalem. All of the apostles except John were dead, and he had been banished to Patmos. This circumstance was far different from the one in which the church was founded.

Were these Gentile congregations still part of the [true church](#)? Were they free of flaws and perfect in their character, attitudes, and doctrines? Would such a negative judgment eliminate them from being a true assembly?

Consider these further factors: [Revelation 2:4](#) commends the congregation in Ephesus for doctrinal vigilance but castigates it for leaving its first [love](#). [Revelation 2:9-11](#) shows Christ commending Smyrna for being spiritually rich, but He also admonishes them to overcome. Despite His commendation, they are not a finished product.

[Revelation 2:13-15](#) praises those in Pergamos for not denying their [faith](#), but its members are doctrinally divided, and they permit [heresy](#) to continue. [Revelation 2:19-20](#) presents Thyatira as growing in good works, but its members tolerate heresy and are guilty of sexual immorality.

[Revelation 3:1, 4](#) exposes Sardis as spiritually dead, though it contains a few who remain undefiled, indicating that its members have virtually lost their faith and are capable only of dead works. [Revelation 3:8](#), 11-12 reports that those in Philadelphia are faithfully enduring, but Christ admonishes them to hold fast and overcome. Finally, [Revelation 3:15](#), 19 judges Laodicea as spiritually bankrupt and gives it no commendation at all. The congregation is strongly advised to be zealous and repent.

What does a composite picture of these congregations reveal?

1. All seven of them are admonished to [repent](#), hold fast, or remain faithful.
2. Only two of them, Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive strong commendations and no listing of their sins and other shortcomings.
3. Two of them, Pergamos and Thyatira, receive a lesser commendation and fairly strong rebukes for sexual immorality and allowing deceivers into the congregation.

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4. Two of them, Sardis and Laodicea, receive strong rebukes and no commendations.

In terms of a true church in a single corporate body, what do we see? Only sixty years or so following [Christ's resurrection](#), we have a mixed bag as regards overall stability and righteousness.

Even so, is any one of them not a true congregation, an assembly of truly called-out ones? Does Christ in any way say that even one of them was no longer part of His church, His body of people? Not in the least. There are, however, warnings that, if they did not repent, some within their [fellowship](#) might not be within the Body of Christ in the future. Two things are sure:

1. Some of these congregations are clearly spiritually better than the others.
2. Some of them are decidedly awful, even though, using carnal judgment, they may outwardly appear good.

Since Revelation is an end-time book, the overview given in [Revelation 2 and 3](#) is especially significant at this time. It is forecasting what things will be like just before Christ returns, and He uses these first-century congregations to illustrate His forecast for our time.

Remember that [God](#) is judging us individually within each group. An attitude that we should not allow to grow in us is to think that we are the only ones who retain a true-church identity. The other side of that same concept is that, even if we agree that others are still part of the true church, we are still better than they are—indeed, everybody else is [Laodicean](#) by comparison.

This unmistakably holier-than-you attitude is extremely destructive to true brotherhood and proper fellowship and unity. [Luke 18:9-14](#) records this teaching of Christ concerning self-righteousness and its effects on these matters. Those who elevate themselves in their judgment of themselves as compared to their fellow members bring on themselves this condemnation. God does not justify them when they make this kind of judgment.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

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[Is There a True Church?](#)

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