

# Church Audit

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Date: 04 August 2013

[0:00] In Revelation chapter 1, it says verse 4, John, to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace be unto you, and peace from him which is and which was and which is to come.

Before his throne. People in all kinds of workplaces run what's called a workplace audit. A workplace audit. We have it where I work. It's an inspection where people take a close look at all the issues in the workplace.

Safety, the finances, the way work goes on, the workplace practices, to see how things measure up, to see if that workplace measures up. We're going to have a look at doing a church audit. A church audit. We're going to board a jet plane today and head over to Asia Minor and look at seven churches. Seven churches. Here are seven real life churches.

[1:25] Some have compared them to different stages of church history. So the development of the church. We have Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Seven churches. Now when people preach on these seven churches sometimes they go through them one by one and all the different features of them. But we're going to look at them in the sense of an audit.

An audit in three measures. The seven churches here are located in seven different cities. Now a church is meant to influence a city, not the other way around.

But that was what was happening in these seven churches. There was an influence from the city that was often in a negative way that was influencing these churches adversely.

With the pagan worship, with the idolatry, with the immorality of the culture. And to be a Christian we're called to non-conformance with the culture.

[2:24] To sacrifice, to godly standards, not the worldly standards. And that's still true today as it was for these seven. So there's lots of characteristics we'll have a look through.

And we won't go one by one through the churches. But we'll look at these three measures that I've determined to consider. Three measures of seven churches.

Each of those seven churches have different qualities. Some strengths, some weaknesses. And it's a pattern that we still see in churches across the world today.

And by churches we don't mean a church building or an organisation. But gatherings of God's people together. Assemblies of God's people together.

And we're called not to be impacted by the culture. But to rather be counter-cultural. We're meant to be setting a pattern that is a godly pattern.

[3:27] A biblical pattern. So when we undertake this church audit of sorts that I've called it.

How are we to audit a church? How does the Lord audit his church? How does he examine it and assess it? And determine its quality?

In chapter 2 verse 1. It tells us who the auditor is. The auditor is the Lord God himself. It says in chapter 2 verse 1.

That he walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. And in verse 20 of chapter 1 it defines those candlesticks as the seven churches.

So these seven golden candlesticks, these lampstands, these lights represent the seven churches. And the Lord is in the midst of them. And that speaks to us of how our Lord today, likewise, is actively walking around and observing.

[4:38] He's watching what is done in his name. And you wonder when you consider that our Lord is doing that today. What would his impression be? What would his assessment be?

We know that our Lord is present. Wherever two or three are gathered, he is here. He promises to be. And he knows our activities. And he makes the assessment that really counts.

The assessment, the audit, the examination. Our Lord is examining. Our Lord is inspecting his churches today across the globe.

And I wonder what would he say? He knows us. He rebukes. He commands these different churches for certain qualities and characteristics. And he speaks to us.

He says, hear that heaven ear to hear. Let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. We want to hear what God is saying to his church.

[5:33] Here and now. And we can learn from these seven churches of this time. So let's take a notice here of what our Lord is telling us.

What he's saying to these angels or messengers, these representatives, these churches of that time. These verses show to us that our Lord is looking for some things.

He's looking for some things. He's looking for fruit. He's looking for good fruit. And he gives rebuke. Harsh and strong rebuke. Stern rebuke. He warns of judgment.

In chapter 2 verse 5. He says that he has got the authority and the ability and the power to remove the candlestick. Candlestick. In other words, our Lord has his ability in his judgment to remove a church.

That a church can lose its witness. And that can be a sad thing but a necessary thing. It's sometimes good when a church closes down. That it loses its witness when it's getting out of accord with what God wants for it.

[6:46] So there's a very strong message there that our Lord is the auditor. He watches. He walks amidst. And he can withdraw the candlestick. He can close the church.

That the church lose its witness. So it's important for us to then consider. What are the things that our Lord looks for? What is he looking for in this order, so to speak?

What would he use as those kind of measures of that order, of those things that he counts and he speaks to and he commands or rebukes for a lack of? What can we use today for such a church order if we had to kind of use such a measure?

Our Lord measures some things about these seven churches. And we're going to look, as I say, on three different dimensions. You know, as a Baptist preacher, we've got to have three points.

You know, we're talking about seven churches, but we're going to go with three points. Just to make it simple. Just so hopefully you'll remember at least one of these points as you walk out that door a bit later.

[7:50] Three different dimensions about seven churches. Now, if we could talk about more than that, but just to keep it straightforward. Three dimensions. Labor, love, and life.

Three things. I had to make them alliterate too, just to help you remember. So I'm sure you all remember when I checked with you tonight, if you're here, to see if you remember. You know, sometimes I forget the sermon points myself.

But labor, love, and life. These are the three measures that I put to you. Could be used as an order for how God measures his church.

And do we measure up is the question. How do we measure up? So firstly, the Lord measures the level of labor. The measure of labor. It's interesting in Nehemiah that people had a mind to work. They had a mind to work. And I can see here, as you see, one of the common statements of our Lord here is, I know thy works.

[8:52] I know thy works. He says that to the angel, the messenger, the representative of the church. He says, I know thy works to each of these different churches. And to the church at Ephesus, that's the first one mentioned.

To the church at Ephesus, he talks about their labor, their work. And he points out some particular things about it. In chapter 2, verse 2 of Revelation, he says, I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil.

God rates highly the church at Ephesus for their labor. For their labor, for their hard work. And for their determination, their patience, their perseverance. And he also commends the church at Ephesus for their discernment.

They discern the false teaching of the false apostles of the day. I'll put it to you, there's some false apostles around today. There are people who, they brag, oh, an apostle, or a prophet, or whatnot. And the word says that the church at Ephesus was commended because they discerned some claiming to be prophets and apostles were actually false.

[10:05] And God commends them for their discernment. And in verse 3 it says that they had labored for his namesake. And they had not fainted. Chapter 2, verse 3.

Labor. The people at Ephesus labored. They labored with the gospel. They labored and were commended for them. And we see another church is the church at Smyrna.

The church at Smyrna was also praised by our Lord for their work of faithfulness through tribulation. Chapter 2, verse 9. The Lord says, I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, but thou art rich. The Christians at Smyrna were living in a wealthy city. And though they themselves were poor in material terms, the Lord says you're rich. You are spiritually rich.

It could be quite likely that they were suffering. As Christians in a wealthy, worldly city, they weren't ranked highly. They were probably discounted and disdained in that wealthy city.

[11:10] But God says you're rich. You're rich. Spiritually rich. And he counted that as something to commend. I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, but thou art rich.

It goes on in chapter 2, verse 18. To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These things saith 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. Notice here some of the good works that are listed there in chapter 2, verse 19.

The good works that our Lord gives credit for. And these are things we too can aspire for today, in the 21st century. The works that God commands in chapter 2, verse 19.

The things that he notices. The things that he commands them for. He knows us through and through. He knows our works. Does he see charity? In other words, love.

[12:12] Does he see service? Does he see faith? Does he see patience? These are works. We're not saved by works, but we are to work.

The Christian isn't saved by works, but a Christian will work. They'll be an active nature to their faith. And God commends us for works. He doesn't save us by them, but he praises those who will. He'll labor. And it says that in chapter 2, verse 23. It says that he which searcheth the reins and hearts.

I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts. And I will give unto everyone according to your works. So there's a sense where works are valid and valuable. And they'll be a rewarding time. So our Lord is searching hearts and he's searching them still. And he's looking for a church that has a measure of its labor. Of works, of charity, of service, of faith, of patience.

[13:13] These are works we should aspire to. Not dead works, but living works. Works that are alive, spiritually alive. I wonder, friends today, consider this.

How do we rate as a church on this kind of scale? On this continuum of work? On this continuum, on this scale of labor?

Are we undertaking the work that needs to be undertaken? Are we ready for the open doors that will come to us that our Lord puts across our path?

The church of Philadelphia. Our Lord says to them in chapter 3, verse 8. I know thy works. Behold, I have set before you an open door. And no man can shut it.

For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. The church of Philadelphia. God says there's an open door for you. An opportunity for service.

[14:10] And the Lord praised the church at Philadelphia. They were faithful to the word of God. They kept the word. They were consistently biblical. And they faithfully kept honoring his name.

It's interesting that of the seven churches. Only two were mentioned who had no bad qualities mentioned. And Philadelphia was one of them. What were they praised for?

You've kept my word. You've not denied my name. Something to consider, isn't it? A consistently biblical church. Aren't we working on lots of worthy work?

Our Lord commands labor. He commands it through the word of God. Labor is commended. The early church folk were called fellow laborers. Men and women both. Who labored in the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 3. Paul writes to the Thessalonians. He says, Remembering without ceasing. Your work of faith. And labor of love.

[15:08] And patience of hope. In our Lord Jesus Christ. In the sight of God. And our Father. Remembering work of faith. Labor of love. Beautiful things. Things to be commended.

Paul commends the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 15. 58. The pitiful example of the Corinthians. Paul says, Yeah. Therefore, my beloved brethren.

Be steadfast. Unmovable. Always. Abounding. In the work of the Lord. For as much as you know. That your labor is not in vain. In the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15.

58. So even the Corinthians. With all their carnality. And false. My beloved brethren. Be steadfast. Unmovable. Always abounding.

In the work of the Lord. For as much as you know. That your labor is not in vain. In the Lord. There's a question with your labor. With your works. Is it labor that's in the Lord? Or is it labor that's in vain?

[16:06] We've got to determine that. Don't we? We can all get busy. Myself included. We can all get busy laboring. But is it labor that's in the Lord? Or is it labor that's in vain?

It's one or the other. We've got to work that out. Don't we? And there's an ongoing labor problem. In the church. A labor shortage. And it's centuries old. In Luke 10 verse 2.

That familiar one. Therefore said he to them. The harvest truly is great. But. The labor is of you. Pray ye therefore. The Lord of the harvest.

That he would send forth laborers into. The harvest. His harvest. So what are some of the works. That the Lord will see. In our church. Let's consider that.

If the auditor was to say. Okay. It's audit time. You know. When it's tax time. Or you know. In businesses. They say. Okay. This is the time. It's going to happen. We're going to do a stop take.

[17:03] Or whatever it is. God might say. Today is audit day. How would he measure our works today? How would he measure our labor? Would it be labor of love?

Would it be a work of faith? Would it be. Those things that he would measure. Would it be in the Lord? Or would it be in vain? We've got to consider these things. Don't we?

Have our works. Has our labor. Eternal value. Is it going to be something. Or is it going to be like. Work hay and stubble. Just. Poof. A pile of ashes. Or would it be gold.

Silver. Precious stones. Eternal value. How do we come. In terms of that measure. You know. The worldly kind of term.

The benchmark. You know. How would we go against the benchmark. That Philadelphia set. A church. That was commended. God didn't say anything against them.

[18:01] How would we go against the benchmark. Of a church. Glorious. Spotless. A spiritual church. Some of the churches. Failed to measure up.

For example. Thyatira. They were lacking in purity. What are the works. That the Lord would see. In our lives. Individually. And corporately. The Lord measures his church.

In terms of labor. Secondly. The Lord also measures. The level. Of love. Our Lord measures his church. Most importantly.

By this. Most importantly. By this. By the level of its love. God's people are called beloved. Beloved. You know. I thank God.

That I've got brothers. And sisters. Spiritual. Ones. Beloved. Beloved. God's people are called beloved. In 1 John 4 verse 7.

[18:59] It says. Beloved. Let us love one another. For love is of God. And everyone that loveth is born of God. And knoweth God. There's that special love.

That special love. That binds us together. In God's family. As children of God. And even though the Ephesians served faithfully. They endured hardship.

They were commended as a biblical church. They had sound doctrine. They opposed the heretics. Our Lord saw something vital. Something vital.

That was sadly missing. In the church at Ephesus. Something sadly lacking. They were lacking. In their loving. The church at Ephesus was lacking in its loving.

On the love scale. On that continuum. Ephesians. The church at Ephesus was. You know. Right down the bottom. Their love level. Their love scale.

[19:56] How sad to see a church that's lacking. In its affection. It's losing its affection. For the Lord. We need to maintain that. Our love relationship. With the Lord.

To the church at Ephesus. He says. Chapter 2 verse 4. Nevertheless I somewhat against thee. Because thou hast led. Thy first love. Christians.

Here today. Fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. How is your love today? How is your love level? Have you left your first love? Has it grown dim?

Have you lost that devotion? That enthusiasm? That zeal for the truth? Has your love waxed cold? Has it grown cold? The antidote for a loss of love for the Lord.

Is in chapter 2 verse 5. He says. Remember therefore. For whence thou art fallen. And repent. And do the first works. Or else thou will come unto thee quickly.

[20:51] And will remove thy candlestick. Out of his place. Except thou repent. Our Lord in righteous judgment. Caused this. Church lacking in love.

To remember. Where they come from. Remember their first love. To repent. To come back to him. In that love relationship.

While Ephesus was strong. It was a loveless church. You know. God forbid. You know. We might have all the labour right. We might be right up here. On terms of the scale of labour. But our love might be right down here.

That's a problem. Isn't it? Love. Is important. And that's not a lovey-dovey. Anything goes. Kind of. You know. But a love that.

Is a love that's. A spiritual love. There's a. There's a oneness in Christ. There's a. There's a brotherly love. That's what Philadelphia meant. Brotherly love.

[21:51] Philadelphia. There was a love there. A brotherly love. That was a strength. For them. And it's a measure that we should strive after too. You know.

Here's a real easy memory verse for you. Four words. This is your memory verse today. I'm going to check you with you next week. But I'll wait for here. Hebrews 13 verse 1.

It says. Let brotherly love continue. Can you remember that one? Hebrews 13 verse 1. Let brotherly love continue. That's easy to remember isn't it?

Mark 12. It says. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God. With all thy heart. And with all thy soul. And with all thy mind. And with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.

And the second is like unto it. Namely this. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. Love.

[22:46] The auditor. Is going to check our love level as a church. And in Thyatira. Here was a church that was commended for its love. For its charity. Turn. Verse 19.

Thyatira. It's one of the good things that Thyatira had. They had some love there. So that was something God praised them for. The Lord places an emphasis on this characteristic.

So how do we measure up? This is something. It's a question individually. Each of us need to answer on this essential audit measure. Our love for him. Our first love.

Our primary foremost first love. Our love for one another. Let brotherly love continue. Our Lord measures the church in terms of its labour.

In terms of its love. And thirdly. In terms of the level of its life. The spiritual life level of the church. Is something that our Lord comes and checks.

[23:41] You know. He comes like the doctor comes. And you know. Just listens to that pulse. You know. He puts the stethoscope in. And just say. Are you still alive?

You know. And he checks our life. He checks our vital signs. How is the spiritual life level of the church? Is there an aliveness? An aliveness in the Holy Spirit?

Not a pretense of that. But the real thing. The real deal. An aliveness in the Holy Spirit. A faith that's real. And alive. And growing. Sardis was a dying church.

We see that in chapter 3 verse 2. One of the churches of the 7. Was Sardis. They were called dead. Or nearly dead. You know. They were on their death bed. Their pulse was faint.

They were spiritually dead. They blended so much into the heathen culture. Of their location. They lost their spiritual life. And we can do that too.

[24:39] You know. Sometimes the churches with all the outward glamour and gloss and hoopla and all the noise can be very dead. Very dead.

It's not about the level of noise. That's not what God measures. It's not the level of the professionalism of the band. Or the atmosphere that is created.

Or the goosebumps you come out with. It's about the real life. The real life. The real life. The real life. Where the rubber hits the road. Life. Not the outward appearance of life. That looks alive.

And maybe all loud and noisy. And lots of. You know. I can't say. All of that.

They can miss the point. And we can be. A quiet church. Where God is here. Where we can be still. And know. That I'm God. I've been in some churches where.

[25:35] You can hear a pin drop. And there was a holy reverence. And awe about the place. And that was beautiful. Sometimes the life can be in the quiet times. In the quiet places.

And in chapter 3 verse 2. Our Lord says. Be watchful and strengthen. The things which remain. That are ready to die. Life. Life. Life.

We've got life. And more abundant. Life. But what makes a church die? What kills a church? You know. We've got some in our newsletter there. What kills a church?

What makes a church to die? What makes a church to die? False doctrine is deadly. False doctrine is deadly. We've always got to be on the alert. Compromise with the world.

Is deadly. You know. Give an inch. And then take a mile. And before you know it. We're totally. Out of whack. Thyatira was another church that was weak in its spiritual life.

[26:30] It was tolerating female misleaders. There was Jezebel and her false and immoral teachings. Which could translate to. I guess accepting some pagan ways.

Or to some apparently evidently false teachings. And it says that there in chapter 2 verse 20. The Lord says to Thyatira. He says. I've a few things against thee.

Because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel. Which calleth herself a prophetess to teach. And seduce my servants. Etc. There was a tolerance there. Which led to compromise.

Jezebel in the Old Testament was a wicked queen. To Ahab. King of Israel. Who promoted the idolatrous worship. Of the Canaanite Baal.

So instead of serving the living God. They were serving dead idols. Death can come. Through tolerance that leads to compromise. We need life.

[27:29] We need to be a spiritually alive church. And so we need to be a church that stands strong for the truth. They did this in Ephesus. And the Lord praised them at least for that.

In chapter 2 verse 6 it says. Thyatist the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Which I also hate. And the Nicolaitans were not necessarily clear on what their particular issue was.

Some suggest that they become so libertarian that they just had anything goes kind of attitude. And so ended up in immoral conduct. The church at Ephesus stood up against that.

And God commended them for that. So when a church is spiritually alive. It will address false teaching. And it will also endure through time of trial and test.

We see that the people of Smyrna were commended for that. They remained true even at great cost to themselves. The word Smyrna apparently means bitter affliction.

[28:30] You know it could reflect that that was the trial that they were going through. A bitter affliction. And they were strong. They remained strong and faithful. Enduring through that time.

You know maybe our life can be purified by persecution. It might be a good thing for us to have some share of that. The church at Smyrna learnt faithfulness.

In chapter 2 verse 10 our Lord says, Be faithful unto death. Now the context there it's saying, Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer.

It says you're going to be thrown into prison, some of you. Some of you are going to be tried. You're going to have tribulation. Now it's interesting isn't it? Does our Lord promise here when persecution comes that it will cease if you are faithful?

No it doesn't. It says when persecution comes, Be thou faithful unto death. He urges us to a life of faithfulness.

[29:36] Now some would think, Oh, if you, God will deliver you from all of the bad things that might come to us in life. But not necessarily.

He says be thou faithful unto death. Don't let anything put you off. Just plough through. Faithful to the end. Finish strong. The people of Pergamos were also Christians who held strong.

That means great persecution. They had some laxity in their morality. And so the Lord commanded them to repent. That's the church of Pergamos.

He commands the church for holding the truth against opposition. But he reprimands them for compromising with false doctrine. And we see that in chapter 2 verse 13. That I know thy works where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is.

And thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith. We've got to hold our course. And the life of the church is not swayed by the external opposition.

[30:41] The life of the church is not detracted from by the troubled times that we may face. Our strength as a church is not in having everything running smoothly, and people to be speaking well of us.

In a way that's when we've got to think, are we on the right track? It's probably better that we have people speaking against us. It's probably better that people say, oh, I've got to church for you. That load of whatever they are.

You know, people speak ill of you. But God says, woe to you when everybody speaks well of you. That's when you've got to worry. So it's good if there's opposition that's provoked by our godliness.

Then that's a good thing. And Laodicea was a lukewarm, complacent church. In chapter 3, verse 15, we know the one where he says, I would that you were cold or hot.

Not lukewarm. But because you're lukewarm, I'm going to spew you out of my mouth. Very strong words. In Revelation 3, verse 16. God grew sick of this church.

[31:55] It was a weak, lifeless church. A lukewarm church. They had a vision problem. They lacked spiritual perception. God says, get some eye salve, get some eye treatment, so you can see.

They'd lost their vision. They'd grown cold and deathly. And they'd lost their zeal and freshness.

And yet they were bragging on. It says here in Revelation 3, verse 17, saying, you say, I am rich, increased with goods, without need of nothing.

But you don't know that you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked. The spiritual order of the church at Laodicea found they were sadly lacking.

Sadly lacking. They'd lost their life and power. They'd lost the power of God's spirit. So, what about us? What about us today? Let's be real.

In Samson's day, when Delilah cottoned on to what his source of strength was, his hair, and cut it off, he awoke as at other times, and this is Judges 16, verse 20, he awoke out of his sleep and said, I'll go out as at other times before and shake myself.

[33:05] And he wished not, he knew not, that the Lord was departed from him. As Judges 16, verse 20, the Lord had departed from Samson. His strength was gone, because God had left him.

In 1 Samuel 4, verse 21, we read of a time where a child was born. They named the child Ichabod, saying that glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God was taken.

The glory was gone. Ichabod was written over that nation. Friends, we've got to take a stock take.

We've got to come to that spiritual order, that church order, if you like. Come and sit at the feet of the auditor, who will look with those eyes flaming with fire.

And he won't look at the razzmatazz, or the hoopla, or the worldly kind of reputation or credentials that we might have as a church, or all the things that the world might recommend or look for in a church.

[34:11] When people go church shopping, they've got the little shopping list of the things. Oh, this is my ideal church. Tick, tick, cross, cross, cross. No, not that one. But what does God say?

What does God say matters in a church? What does God say in this order that he gives to these seven churches? He looks at their labour. Is it a labour of love?

Is it a work of faith? He looks intently at their circumstances, and he evaluates what really counts, what really matters.

He looks at the labour of a church. He looks at the love of the church. Is that a relationship with the Lord?

Is it strong? Is it vibrant? Is it growing? The love for one another, the love of the brethren, the loving one another. How is the love level?

[35:09] And thirdly, the life. Is it like Laodicea, grown cold and lifeless, deathly, lukewarm? Or is it vibrant, alive, filled with God's Spirit?

In chapter 3, verse 19, our Lord says, As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent. God wants us to be zealous and to repent.

Let us aspire to that today. Amen.