

Revelation: A Study of End Time Events
Lesson Two: Chapters 2-3
Messages To the Seven Churches

Overview:

Each message to the churches is addressed to the “angel” of the church. But the Greek is *angelos* which means “*envoy, messenger, angel,*” and in this case they are human messengers, most likely the pastor of each church. John would not have been writing to angelic beings.

Some churches receive Christ’s commendation, some rebuke, and some both. We will look at the reasons for each. We will see in Chapters 2 and 3 that John is told to write a specific message to each of the seven churches. But at the close of each of these seven messages, John is told to write:

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”
This is referring to the Holy Spirit!”

The messages were not just for one particular church, and neither was the Revelation itself. The entire letter (book) was meant to be circulated to all seven churches. There is a spiritual application for all believers. At the close of each message, Christ makes a promise “to him who overcomes.” All believers overcome through faith in Christ.

Read 1 John 5:5 (same writer - John!)

Read Rev.12:11 How do we overcome?

Read Romans 10:11

The promises to the seven churches are different, yet applicable to all believers of all time, because we ALL overcome through faith in Christ. In this sense, these seven churches represent the entire Church,” from Pentecost to the Rapture (the “Church Age”). In Scripture, the number seven is symbolic of perfection or completion. The order of the churches shows a historical progression towards the “hour of trial to come upon the whole world” (Rev. 3:10). Jesus spoke of this time of unequalled distress in Matthew 24:21.

The Church of Ephesus

2:1-5

- 1) “forsaken your first love”
Christ Himself is our first love, our Savior. “Their warmth of love had given place to a lifeless orthodoxy.”¹

Read Luke 7:36-47.

What is this woman demonstrating? Gratitude to her Savior. When we forget the magnitude of our sins, and the price Jesus paid for our salvation, our love for Him will grow cold. Here, the self-righteous Pharisee showed little love for Christ even though, in God’s eyes, his sin is as offensive as the woman’s. Even if we have “cleaned up our act” since becoming a Christian, we must always remember how much forgiveness we require and cry out, “Thank you, Lord Jesus. I love you!”

- 2) We know from Rev. 1:20 that the lampstands represent the churches. Therefore, Jesus is telling them that if they don’t repent, He’ll remove their church. Today, the country of Turkey is 80% Muslim.

2:6

- 1) Who were the Nicolaitans and what were their practices? The word “Nicolaitans” (*Nikolaites*) means "destruction of people. The Nicolaitans abused the doctrine of salvation by grace to claim that sin was permitted, specifically foods offered to idols and sexual immorality.”²

Read Romans 5:20-6:4

- 2:7 Where have we read of the tree of life elsewhere in Scripture? Read Gen.3:22. Man was not allowed to eat from the tree of life after he had sinned, for he would have lived forever in that condition. God had another plan. This truth will have much to bear in the final chapters.

¹ Jamieson, Faussett, Brown, A. R., A.M., *Commentary on Revelation*. "Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible". <<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/JamiesonFaussetBrown/jfb.cgi?book=re&chapter=003>>. 1871. Public Domain.

² Jamieson, Faussett, Brown, *Revelation*.

The Church in Smyrna

2:8-10

- 1) Jesus promised those who suffered persecution “the crown of life”. What does He mean by that? Is He speaking of eternal life?
 - a) The Greek definition of “crown” (*stephanos*) used here is “the wreath or garland which was given as a prize to victors in public games.”
 - b) This speaks of a “reward” (*misthose*), which means “wages earned; rewards God bestows on good deeds and endeavors.”
Read Rev. 22:12
 - c) We do not earn salvation/eternal life. It is not a reward; it is the gift of God. Read Eph. 2:8-9
 - d) This crown of life spoken of here is a reward for perseverance, in addition to the free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ.

2) There are five types of crowns mentioned in the New Testament as rewards for the saints:

- The Crown of Life, for those who persevere under trials and persecution even to the point of death. (Rev. 2:10; James 1:12)
- The Crown of Righteousness, for those who have longed for His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).
- The Crown of Glory, for those who faithfully serve the Church (1 Pet. 5:2-4).
- The Crown of Joy, for those who lead others to Christ (1 Thess. 2:19-20).
- The Imperishable Crown, for those who have mastered their impulses and appetites, self-controlled as in the fruit of the Spirit (I Cor. 9:24-25).

2:11

- 1) Further, Jesus promises that the overcomer (the believer) will not experience “the second death,” which is the “lake of fire.”
Read Rev. 20:11-15. This is the judgment of the wicked.

- 2) Believers' sins have already been judged on the cross. Instead, they will stand before the judgment (*bema*) seat of Christ, where their lives will be evaluated. Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 1 Corinthians 3:15.

The Church in Pergamum

2:12-16

- 1) "Satan's seat--rather as the *Greek* is translated all through Revelation, 'throne.' Satan, in impious mimicry of God's heavenly throne, sets up his earthly throne... Æsculapius [the god of healing] was worshipped there under the serpent form, and Satan, the old serpent."³
- 2) In Rev. 2:14, we see another reference to idolatry and sexual immorality, practices that Jesus said He hated ("the practices of the Nicolaitans"). Balaam was a pagan prophet and sorcerer in the O.T. Balak, the King of Moab (enemies of Israel) summoned him and wanted him to put a curse on Israel (for money!) so he could defeat them.

Balaam wanted the money, but God did not allow him to curse Israel. So Balaam counseled Balak that if he could get the Israelites to fall into sin, by intermarrying with heathen women, they could be led into idolatry and God would judge them Himself (can be found in Numbers 22-24; 31:15-16).

2:17

- 1) Manna was the type of food that the Lord provided for the Israelites in the desert ("manna" means "what is it?"). This is a reference to Christ as bread of life. Read John 6:30-35
- 2) What is the significance of the white stone? In the ancient courts of justice, the accused were condemned by black pebbles, and acquitted by white."

The Church in Thyatira

2:18-21

- 1) The name "Jezebel" is probably used symbolically of the OT pagan Queen who was married to Israel's King Ahab, since she led her husband to forsake the Lord God and participate in idolatry (worship of idols), and the sexually immoral practices that involved.

³ Jamieson, Faussett, Brown, *Revelation*.

- 2) The Greek word for “sexual immorality” is *porneia*. It means “illicit sexual intercourse; adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc., sexual intercourse with close relatives; Lev. 18.” This is a direct quote from the Greek Lexicon. Read Genesis 2:18, 24
- a) “Man” (Hebrew “*ish*”) is defined in the Hebrew as “man, male, in contrast to woman, female. “Wife” (*ishshaw*) is “woman, wife, female, opposite of a man.”
 - b) Therefore, sexual immorality includes heterosexual or homosexual sex outside of one man/one woman marital union, including adultery (sex with one other than the spouse), “pre-marital,” living together without marriage, etc.
 - c) Are there those in the Church today claiming that these practices are not sinful? Please read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. The Greek word for “arguments” is *logismos*, which is an accounting term meaning “facts; reasoning hostile to the Christian faith.”

When we reject the plain truth of God’s Word, we are “adding up the facts” as we see them (human reasoning) and coming to a conclusion that is contrary to the Word of God. We then give that conclusion a higher value than the Word of God. Here, we are told that we are to “demolish” those arguments.

Note: These are Jesus’ own words to the Church. While He hates the worldly practices of idolatry and sexual immorality (Rev. 2:6), He loves the people committing them. Our attitude should be like that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

- 3) This union of one man/one woman is a picture for all the world to see, of the spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church.
- 4) This “Jezebel” was leading believers astray into these immoral practices in the name of Christian freedom (same as Nicolaitans). The word “misleads” (*planao*) means to deceive; seduce.”
- 5) Read 1 Cor. 5:9-11

2:22-25

- 1) So much of our suffering is caused by our refusal to let go of our sin. The Jezebel in this church will reap what she has sown (Galatians 6:7).
- 2) Her children (*teknon*) are considered “her proper adherents.”⁴ “In the NT, students or disciples are called children of their teachers because the latter by their instruction nourish the minds of their pupils and mould their characters.”
- 3) “Satan’s so-called secrets” is likely a reference to Gnosticism (“full of knowledge”), a belief that one has special revelation from God about mysteries unknown by everyone else. BEWARE !

2:26-29

- 1) We will share in Christ’s authority, but the level of our authority will depend on our level of faithfulness in this life. Read Matt. 25:21, where Christ uses the parable of the talents to describe the kingdom of heaven.
- 2) “I, Jesus [am]... the bright Morning Star.” (Rev.22:16)

The Church in Sardis

3:1 “Dead” (*nekros*) is “destitute of force or power, inactive, inoperative.”

3:2-4

- 1) Jesus is speaking to a large unsaved population within the church (only a few are dressed in white/symbolic of Christ’s righteousness credited to our account).
- 2) “Soiled” (*moluno*) is defined as “to pollute, stain, contaminate, defile. Used in NT of those who have kept themselves pure from the defilements of sin, and have not soiled themselves by fornication and adultery.”
- 3) “Walk” (*peripateo*) is “to conduct oneself.” We have intimacy and fellowship with Christ when we walk in His ways, because He’s not going to walk in ours!

3:5-6

- 1) “Dressed in white...” Read Rev. 7:14.

⁴ Jamieson, Faussett, Brown, *Revelation*.

- a) “Wash” (*pluno*) is “used figuratively of those who by faith so appropriate the results of Christ’s expiation (payment for our sin) as to be regarded by God as pure and sinless.”
 - b) All believers are dressed in white robes (righteousness of Christ). Our “walk” (v.4) speaks of how we conduct our life; the basis of correction here on earth (Galatians 6:7) and rewards in heaven (2 Cor. 5:10).
- 2) There will be more references to the “book of life,” and we will examine its meaning later in our study.

The Church in Philadelphia

Greek *Philadelphieia* means “brotherly love.” Christ prayed for all believers, in John 17: 20-23, to be brought to complete unity. The Holy Spirit is fully able to prepare the Bride/Church for the return of her Bridegroom, in answer to that prayer.

3:7-8

- 1) “The key” (*klice*) of David is a reference to Christ’s lineage through King David, as the promised Messiah. “Since the keeper of the keys has the power to open and to shut, denotes power and authority of various kinds.”
- 2) To keep His word is to uphold the authority of Scripture, and live accordingly.
- 3) These believers did not deny his name... Read Philippians 2:9-11.

3:9-11

- 1) A crown is a believer’s reward, not salvation.
- 2) “I will keep you from” from (*ek*) means “out of, from, by, away from.”
- 3) “The hour of trial” (*hora*) is “a definite period of time.” This definite period of time is to come upon the whole earth, in relation to His return, which is referred to in this passage. Read Matthew 24:1-35.

Since Christ is returning for His Bride, which includes every believer since Pentecost, and since the prophecies of Revelation Chapters 4-22 describe “a definite period of TIME” (a time of testing coming upon the whole earth, in conjunction with Christ’s second coming), it appears that the Church is being kept out of and away from it. (Similar to God’s provision for Noah and his family, placed in the ark while God judged the earth with a flood).

Read Luke 17:26-27. When the church is taken out of the way in the Rapture, it will be sudden and unexpected to the world. Then the “flood” of judgment, the Tribulation period, will come.

3:12-13

Read Rev. 21:22. If God is the temple and we are the pillars, then we have a secure position “in Christ.”

The Church at Laodicea

3:14-16

- 1) “I know...that you are neither cold nor hot.” Jesus knows the true condition of your heart:
 - a) “cold” (*psuchros*) is “...positively *icy cold*: having never yet been warmed.”⁵ This is a metaphor of a cold, unbelieving heart.
 - b) “hot” (*zestos*) is “fervor of mind and zeal.” The opposite of a cold, unbelieving heart is one warmed by the Gospel, fully trusting in Christ for salvation.
 - c) “lukewarm” is a state between two states (neither hot nor cold): those who claim to know Christ, but do not. We will see this more clearly in vv.17-18.
- 2) “I wish you were either one or the other.”
It is easier to lead someone to Christ who does not claim to know Him, than an unsaved “religious” person who claims he does!
- 3) To “spit you out” (*emeo*) is “to vomit forth.”

⁵ Jamieson, Faussett, Brown, *Revelation*.

Believers are “in Christ” (John 14:20, Eph. 1:3-14), and will never be rejected. Unsaved church members (those who think they are saved but are not, have never trusted in Christ as their Savior, but are relying on their own good works to save them) are like food taken in, that your stomach rejects and vomits out. They were never truly “in Christ.”

(Jesus speaking to his disciples): Read John 14:20

3:17

- 1) “I am rich...” They see material wealth as true riches, making them self-reliant, rather than God-dependent.
- 2) “But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”
 - a) “Poor” (*ptochos*) is “destitute of Christian virtues and eternal riches.”
 - b) “Blind” (*tuphlos*) is “mentally blind.”
 - c) “Naked” is a metaphor for the unsaved. Believers wear a robe of righteousness (Christ’s righteousness credited to our account).
Read Isaiah 61:10 and Romans 4:22-24.

3:18

- 1) Christ tells them to ask Him for the kind of gold (wealth) that does not perish even when refined by fire - faith in Him - and He will give it.

Read 1 Peter 1:6-7

- 2) Only Christ can clothe them in righteousness, if they would but ask.
- 3) We are washed in the Blood of the Lamb. Rev. 7:14

“I counsel you” - to get saved!

It appears that the seven churches also present a chronological history of the Church from Pentecost to the Rapture. If that is the case, then Philadelphia and Laodicea are indicative of the condition of the end-times Church just before the return of Christ for His Bride (see John 14:10-12 and 17:22-23).

“Apostasy, ‘falling away,’ is the act of **professed** Christians who deliberately reject revealed truth as to: (1) the Deity of Jesus Christ, and (2) redemption through His atoning and redeeming sacrifice... ‘Apostates’ depart from the faith, but not from the outward profession of Christianity.”⁶

While Philadelphia (“brotherly love”) represents the Bride of Christ to be caught up in the Rapture, Laodicea is a picture of the Apostate Church, which consists of unbelievers within all denominations and independent churches. It will be “left behind” and continue in its structure, services, and members. This view will be developed further in Ch. 17.

The Church is never again mentioned on earth after Chapter 3.

3:19-20

- 1) **There are two views on the interpretation of this verse:**
 - a) Some see it as a call to believers to restore fellowship with Him (eat with Him).
 - b) Others see it as a call to salvation, since Christ is standing outside. (He’s not in the church, and He’s not in the heart).
- 2) Note: Christ is speaking to the “lukewarm,” those church members who profess to be Christians, but are not. They are not saved.
- 3) Therefore, "Lukewarm Christians" is a contradiction in terms. What most are referring to are believers who are living compromising or worldly lives, what Paul referred to as CARNAL (*sarkikos* = fleshly). Read I Cor. 3:1-2

3:21-22

“To him who overcomes...” Christ offers hope to those with cold unbelieving hearts, and to the lukewarm who make an appearance of faith, to overcome through genuine faith in Him.

⁶ Scofield, C.I. (Ed.). *The New Scofield Reference Bible: Authorized King James Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1304.

Who do you say Jesus Christ is?
Are you a true believer in Christ
or are you merely an unsaved church member?

If you have never trusted Christ as your personal Savior, asking for His forgiveness, you can pray this prayer of faith right now –
and He will receive you as His own:

“Lord Jesus, I believe that You are the only begotten Son of God, that You are fully God and fully human. I believe that You led a sinless life and that You died on the cross for the sins of the world – including mine. I believe that God the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, raised You from the dead and that You will come again to judge the living and the dead. I ask you to forgive me and save me so that I can be reconciled with my Heavenly Father, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and live with You forever. In Christ’s Name, I pray. Amen.”

Now What?

How will this lesson change the way you live?

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