

Midweek Focus Group  
**A Study in the book of Revelation**  
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**Part 3 – Letters to the Seven Churches (Chs 2 & 3)**

As John is recovering from his overwhelming vision of the glorious, resurrected Lord (chapter 1), Jesus instructs him to write a letter to each of the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. Last week we learned that these were local churches under John's spiritual supervision.

Some students of Revelation see these seven churches as representing seven distinct periods of church history, beginning with Pentecost and concluding with the Rapture. Others see these churches as a composite view of the Church in every period of history. In either case, chapters two and three represent the Church Age, and the seven letters can apply to every church and every believer at any time. According to theologian John Stott, these letters can help us "grasp where Christ's priorities lie. There is much here to call us to repentance and renewal, much to humble and shame us, much to warn us of the malice of our enemy, and much to incite us to fortitude and perseverance."<sup>1</sup> These letters demonstrate that Jesus is intimately involved in the lives of His people. He knows us completely, loves us intensely, and continually calls us higher. One of the most well-known promises in the Bible comes from one of these letters: *"Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him, and he with me" (3:20).*

**The Formula**

Each letter follows a similar formula, with some variations. Basically, they contain the following components:

- **Salutation:**  
*"To the Angel of the church at..."*  
*"From..."*
- **Commendation:** *"I know..."* – Jesus commends the church for the things they are doing well.
- **Complaint:** *"I have this complaint against you..."* – Jesus is not only aware of their good deeds, but He also sees the areas that need correction, and He loves the church too much to leave those areas unaddressed.
- **Correction and Warning:** Jesus instructs the church as to how it can remedy the problem areas. He follows that instruction with a warning of what will happen if they do not.
- **Admonition:** In each letter, Jesus admonishes the church to *"listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you."*
- **Promise:** Jesus closes each letter with a unique promise *"to all who are victorious"* in their life and service. This suggests that individuals who remain faithful to the Lord will be rewarded, even if others in the church are falling away.

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<sup>11</sup> John R. W. Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 8.

### 1. EPHESUS—The Loveless Church (2:1-7)

**Salutation:** *"From the One who holds the seven stars and walks among the seven gold lampstands..."*

**Commendation:** *"I know all the things you do."* Jesus commends them for their hard work, perseverance, moral character (*"you don't tolerate evil people"*), and their doctrinal purity (*"You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not;" "You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do."*)

**Complaint:** *"You don't love me or each other as you did at first"* (KJV - *"You have left your first love"*)

**Correction and Warning:** *"Look how far you've fallen. Turn back and do the works you did at first. If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand ..."*

**Admonition:** *"Listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you!"*

**Promise:** *"I will give you fruit from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God."*

### 2. Smyrna—The Persecuted Church (2:8-11)

**Salutation:** *"From the One who is first and last, was dead and is now alive..."* (crucifixion & resurrection)

**Commendation:** *"I know your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you."*

**Complaint:** No complaint

**Correction and Warning:** None

**Encouragement:** *"Don't be afraid ... You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life."*

**Admonition:** *"Listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you!"*

**Promise:** *"Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death."*

**Promise:** *"I will give you fruit from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God"* (reference to the New Jerusalem - 22:1,2)

### 3. Pergamum—The Compromising Church (2:12-17)

**Salutation:** *"From the One with the sharp, two-edged sword..."*

**Commendation:** *"You live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas ... was martyred."*

**Complaint:** You tolerate the Balaam-Nicolaitan error.

**Correction and Warning:** Repent of your sin or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

**Admonition:** *"Listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you!"*

**Promise:** *"To everyone who is victorious, I will give the hidden manna and a white stone engraved with a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it."*

#### **4. Thyatira—The Sin-Tolerating Church (2:18-29)**

**Salutation:** *"From the Son of God whose eyes are like flames of fire, and whose feet are like polished brass..."*

**Commendation:** *"I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things."*

**Complaint:** You tolerate Jezebel, the woman who calls herself a prophet but is leading my people astray into sexual sin and idolatry. ... "deeper truths," as they call this false teaching, — depths of Satan, actually (2:24).

**Correction and Warning:** *"I gave her space to repent, but she does not. ... I will throw her onto a bed of suffering and strike her children dead."*

**Encouragement:** *"Hold tightly to what you have until I come."*

**Admonition:** *"Listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you!"*

**Promise:** *"To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very end, I will give authority over all the nations. They will rule the nations with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots (see Ps. 2:8,9). ... I will also give them the morning star!"*

#### **5. Sardis—The Dead Church (3:1-6)**

**Salutation:** *"From the One who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars..."*

**Commendation:** None

**Complaint:** *"I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. ... I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God."*

**Correction and Warning:** *"Wake up! Strengthen what remains. ... Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don't wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief."*

**Admonition:** *"Listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you!"*

**Promise:** *"All who are victorious will be clothed in white, for they are worthy. I will never erase their names from the book of life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine."*

## 6. Philadelphia—The Missionary Church (3:7-13)

**Salutation:** *"From the One who is Holy and True, who has the key of David. What He opens, no one can close; what He closes, no one can open."*

**Commendation:** *"I know all the things you do and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. ... You obeyed my word and did not deny me. ... Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world." I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things."*

**Complaint:** None

**Correction and Warning:** None

**Encouragement:** *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."*

**Admonition:** *"Listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you!"*

**Promise:** *"All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. And I will write on them the name of my God, and they will be citizens in the city of my God—the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. And I will also write on them my new name."*

## 7. Laodecia—The Lukewarm Church (3:14-22)

**Salutation:** *"From the One who is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's new creation..."*

**Commendation:** None

**Complaint:** *"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot or cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."*

**Correction and Warning:** *"So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference."*

**Encouragement:** *"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will share a meal together as friends."*

**Admonition:** *"Listen to and understand what the Spirit is saying to you!"*

**Promise:** *"Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on His throne."*