



This ministry is dedicated to a progressive understanding of truth apropos to the last generation to live on earth.

Welcome to *EndTime Issues...*

The beautiful picture hidden within a puzzle fully emerges when the last piece is in place. The myriad ideas and warnings Christ gave in Revelation 2 and 3 create a living picture of heaven's ideals for the neonate Christian church.

Toward a Perfect Church

Jesus, introduced through many images in Revelation 1, becomes spokesman for the seven-church narrative. He was seen as a being with eyes "*as a flame of fire,*" meaning that nothing passes His scrutiny, and He judges the merits of what He sees. That divine insight and power was revealed when Christ was before Caiphas:

"For a moment the divinity of Christ flashed through His guise of humanity. The high priest quailed before the penetrating eyes of the Saviour. That look seemed to read his hidden thoughts and burn into his heart. Never in afterlife did he forget that searching glance of the persecuted Son of God."¹

The Book of Revelation was initially addressed to the literal seven churches in Asia (1:4). John additionally notes that the whole book was in the context of things that would "*shortly come to pass*" and "*the time is at hand*" (1:1, 3). Later, he qualified that they were for the *churches* in the context of "*I come quickly*" (22:7, 20).

- The evidence weighs for a minor historical application – but
- Encompasses a major eschatological purpose.

Compartmentalizing those churches to historical periods has come under serious question.

Feeling concern for that restricted view, Sheffield makes this observation: "The warnings and counsels to the seven churches are given for this hour. This direct word to John from Jesus himself has come down to us in our day. It is our common belief that we are those upon whom

¹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 707.

the ends of the world have come. Heeding both warning and gracious counsel is not an option. We must listen to him and become people possessed by the Spirit or we shall perish.”²

David Clover, in a personal communique to Prophecy Research Initiative noted:

“The most difficult questions regarding the Historicist view of the seven churches are those regarding the basic assumption that these messages are chronologically sequential. Throughout the prophetic portion of Revelation – which I hold to begin with Revelation 4 – the major elements are clearly consecutive (e.g., the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Seal and so forth). Such is not the case with the Churches. In fact, the seven churches to which these letters are addressed *all existed at the same time*. There was no chronological sequence to the churches. The messages that were given each applied to *different members* of the Christian church that existed *at the same time*. Such is still the case.”

Dr. Bursey, of the theology Department of Walla Walla College (now University)] notes:

“Remember the call Jesus makes seven times: ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.’ Note the plural address. Like the original listeners we are invited to consider the values of the message for ourselves. Hopefully, the original listeners did more than ‘look over the shoulders’ to see what were the sins of their contemporaries elsewhere in Asia Minor. The calls to hear suggest that you and I and all good ‘hearers’ of the Spirit need to be acquainted with all of the messages.”³

The corrective measures that Jesus conveys collectively form a basis of advice dealing with various congregations. The dynamics of these are profound and extensive. They form an administrative guide to God’s church at any era.

“These seven letters, written by John, were sent to real people in real church congregations. They outline specific methods of attack by Satan on local congregations in various settings. Alongside of Satan’s evil designs to destroy the church Christ presents Himself as adequate to meet these threats with remedies that bring healing and restoration. The messages to the seven churches are as valid today for similar church congregations as when written two ... [millennia] ago. Earl Palmer writes, ‘I believe we must avoid all luxurious interpretations of the seven letters. The seven letters of the Book of Revelation make better sense and are more spiritually and theologically helpful when they are seen in the same light as the letters of the New testament. They teach the Gospel and its implications for life.’”⁴

Each letter or “epistle” can, in turn, be divided into seven divisions – Jesus always opens with a command to write, and He identifies where the message is to go. Then come the specific thoughts for that church. How is that outlined?

1. Self-description of Christ
2. Commendation and encouragement

² Sheffield, Harold, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), pp. i, iii.

³ Bursey, Ernest J., Ph.D.; Theological Department, Walla Walla College, research document on the *Historicist View of the Seven Churches*.

⁴ Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 10.

3. Censure for sin(s)
4. Exhortation with warning
5. Special sin issues to address
6. Warnings and promises to overcome
7. What the Spirit is speaking^{5,6}

These seven divisions have church-specific issues that are presented for each individual congregation. They also outline a message that is applicable to God's last people and church. Out of every church a remnant will come. God wants that remnant to be as large as possible.

The command to write was given previously (1:1, 19). Now it is repeated prior to a specific message for each church. This gives a unique personal quality to that congregation. It is like Jesus is saying, "Dear Sardis, I am happy to write this letter to you. It is of special importance and concern for your congregation."

The *self-description of Christ* in each is an authoritative visual message apropos to each specific church: "Christ presents himself with certain attributes particularly suitable to the situation of each church, faith in which provides the basis for overcoming the specific problem that the church faces; the situation and the particular problem are reviewed (introduced by 'I know')."7

This imagery has parallels to the picture of Christ in chapter 1. "No church gets all of Jesus. But – each church gets a unique Jesus."⁸ The all-encompassing Jesus appears in a specific expression to minister to each congregation. This remarkable way each message opens continues also the pastoral leadership concern we got a glimpse of in chapter 1 as He walked among the churches. His presence is forever there to help. Putting all the images together, we see a picture of a paternalistic Savior:

1. **Ephesus** [2:1 (1:13)]: Jesus holds the seven stars. He is among the lampstands. His presence is among His people, and its leaders are secure in His hand and have the assurance of His guidance.
2. **Smyrna** [2:8 (1:17,18)]: Jesus is the first and the last. He died and is alive. To those under trials, persecution, and threat of martyrdom, in the time of trouble, He is not only the eternal God but is a fellow sufferer and has the keys to the grave.
3. **Pergamos** [2:12 (1:16)]: Jesus has a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. He will mete out justice to all wrong and to those hurting His people. He makes sure truth is clear, penetrating and not adulterated by falsehood.

⁵ Paulien, Jon, Ph.D.; *Seven Churches and a Heavenly Vision, The Bible Explorer Series* recording tapes, tape 3 (The Ambassador Group, Harrisburg, PA; 1996).

⁶ Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 225.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Paulien, *op. cit.*

4. **Thyatira** [2:18 (1:14, 15)]: Jesus' eyes are fire and His feet are glowing brass. He is the judge and executor against wrong in the last part of probation. His movements are pure and precise among His people, and He is ever present to help.
5. **Sardis** [3:1 (1:4, 16, 20)]: Jesus holds seven Spirits and stars in His hand. He has available the full measure of His Spirit for its leaders, His people, and finally, the 144,000.
6. **Philadelphia** [3:7 (1:18)]: Jesus is holy and true. God's people will be sanctified and sealed and share the throne in heaven.
7. **Laodicea** [3:4 (1:5)]: Jesus is the faithful and true witness, ruler of creation, firstborn of dead. He has been the faithful martyr and firstborn of the resurrection. The remnant will be part of His new creation and kingdom where there is victory over death.

His *commendation and encouragement* are beautiful ways to introduce His pastoral visit. He wants them to sense His sensitivity to what they are doing right. This approach maintains the relationship and prepares the congregation and its leaders to receive counsel. Collectively, it shows what ideals He wants in His end-time church:

1. Good works of service, patience (not giving up), intolerance of the dishonest and false leaders (Ephesus)
2. Bearing up under trials, persecution, poverty, and hypocrisy of other members (Smyrna)
3. Holding high the name of Jesus and the gospel even if threatened with martyrdom (Pergamos)
4. Works of charity, help to those in need, confidence in Jesus (Thyatira)
5. Maintains the Christian name in face of non-Christian elements (Sardis)
6. Though weak, obeyed My word and did not deny Jesus in word or deed (Philadelphia)
7. Nothing commendable (Laodicea)

Jesus pointedly *censures for sin* and makes it clear that He will make corrective moves to have it cease. At the end of time there is a concerted appeal to the world, but especially to His people, to go all the way with Jesus. Sin is to be given up – permanently. That will be one of the characteristics of the 144,000 before the Latter Rain and Loud Cry. It is also part of the last warning that the conflict between truth and error, right and wrong, is about to cease. His church will become pure through appeals, persecution, and the shaking.

Paulien makes a beautiful point. Since Jesus repeatedly says, "I know" relative to understanding the depth of their hearts, "there is nothing to hide any more. Thus, there is no reason why we shouldn't confess our sins."⁹ Jesus' concerns:

1. Left your first love, fallen (Ephesus – 2:4-5)
2. No complaints (Smyrna – 2:8-11)

⁹ *Ibid.*

3. Holding false doctrines (Pergamos – 2:14-15)
4. Interest in and loyalty to other gods, unable to take counsel well (Thyatira – 2:20-21)
5. Imperfect service (Sardis – 3:2)
6. No complaints (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Feels no deep need for Jesus (Laodicea – 3:17)

Then Jesus *exhorts and warns the churches* as to what corrective action needs to be taken. This parallels the appeal that began with the Christian Church as the apostles went out: “*repent.*” There is a required duality of action that has been part of developing a people He can call His own. Set aside sin, repent and cling to God–Jesus’ saving grace. This dual message does not cease till the work is done. Here, in the message to five of the seven churches, we find a focus on Jesus and the urgent command to cease what is displeasing Him.

1. Repent, remember the spiritual heights of the past (Ephesus – 2:5)
2. No corrective advice (Smyrna – 2:8-11)
3. Repent (Pergamos – 2:16)
4. Repent (she didn’t) (Thyatira – 2:23)
5. Repent (Sardis – 3:3)
6. No corrective advice (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Repent, be zealous (Laodicea – 3:19)

Then Jesus gives specific counsel He wants each congregation to follow. These are customized, *special issues to address*. Putting each of these together gives an imagery of what the remnant will be like as they are sealed.

1. Do your first works, have the same excitement you had when you first gave your heart to me (Ephesus – 2:5)
2. Fear not poverty, trials, prison, or persecution (Smyrna – 2:10)
3. No special message (Pergamos – 2:12-17)
4. Hold fast till I come, keep My works (Thyatira – 2:25-26)
5. Be watchful, strengthen the things which remain that are about to die, remember what you have had in the past and hold onto it (Sardis – 3:2-3)
6. No special message (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Buy gold, white raiment and eyesalve (Laodicea – 3:18)

In God’s final appeal there are great contrasts drawn between problems and promises. It is God finally saying, “Look what is eternally before you. See what will befall you if you turn away from Me.”

<u>Problem or Counsel</u>	<u>Promise</u>	
1. Left thy first love	Eat of Tree of Life	Ephesus – 2:4, 7
2. Be faithful unto death	Give thee crown of life Not hurt by second death	Smyrna – 2:10-11
3. Tolerate false doctrine	Eat hidden manna White stone New name	Pergamos – 3:14-15, 17
4. Tolerate false doctrine and worship	Give power over nations Rule with rod of iron Give morning star Power to rule like Christ	Thyatira – 2:24, 26, 27
5. Live like Christians but dead	Walk with me in white Clothed in white raiment His name not to be blotted out of the book of life Confess his name before the Father and angels	Sardis – 3:1, 4-5
6. Hold fast; don't let anyone take thy crown	Keep thee from hour of temptation Pillar in temple of My God Write name of My God on him Write My new name Make those of Satan worship before your feet	Philadelphia – 3:10-12
7. Lukewarm, loyalty, wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked	Sit with me on My throne	Laodicea – 3:15, 17, 21

The final shared thread between the churches is to hear the *Spirit speaking to the churches*. To God's last people this will be their final convicting appeal that will come to every Christian.

Chiastic Structure

There is a chiastic structure to the messages given to the congregation and there is a chiastic structure to the churches themselves. The latter alone presents an enormous amount of information to help us understand the messages.

Messages Themselves:

- Imagery of Jesus – divinity
- Commendation and encouragement
- Censure for sin
- Warnings and exhortation
- Special sin issue to address
- Promise to overcomer
- Hear the Spirit – divinity

Churches:

- Ephesus – lost excitement about God
- Smyrna – no complaint, be faithful
- Pergamos – evil false gods and doctrine, remnant repents
- Thyatira – evil, did not repent
- Sardis – evil, false gods and doctrine, remnant repented
- Philadelphia – no complaints, faithful
- Laodicea – lost God

Historical Application to Churches

Ellen G. White does give a historical application to the churches (as well as making a last generation association). Could there be an association between the churches and their Biblical “personalities,” including the historical eras? Adding dates fragments this application.

Ephesus:	Lost excitement about God, early church Apostolic Period
Smyrna:	Faithful church, time of persecution under Pagan Rome
Pergamos:	Constantine began era of church and state union, time of compromise
Thyatira:	Church idolatrous, tyrannical, evil Dark Ages
Sardis:	Protestant Reformation, new dawn in Christianity but counter Reformation resistance developed
Philadelphia:	Many churches rebelling against the idolatrous practice of Rome emerge
Laodicea:	God’s people become self-sufficient and defiant – church apostasy and militancy

The Crescendoing Rewards of the Churches

As if God wants to make a growing point, to *“him that overcometh”* the rewards are progressively described. This fascinating observation by Paulien adds passion to God’s message. “Look what you have ahead of you – if you repent and are faithful. Look what you will miss if you don’t overcome.”

Like a person not being heard, the reward gets ever louder and more emphatic. Jesus does not want His people to miss what He has planned for them!

- A. Revelation 2:7 Overcomer – promised Tree of Life
- B. Revelation 2:11 Overcomer – (1) crown of life, (2) second death
- C. Revelation 2:17 Overcomer – (1) hidden manna, (2) white stone, (3) new name
- D. Revelation 2:18 Overcomer – (1) authority over nations, (2) ride over these with iron scepter, (3) morning star
- E. Revelation 3:1 Overcomer – (1) walk with Jesus, (2) dressed in white, (3) will not blot names out of book of life, (4) acknowledge name before Father, (5) acknowledge name before angels
- F. Revelation 3:7 Overcomer – (1) kept in hour of trial, (2) pillar in temple, (3) will never leave it, (4) name God writes on them, (5) name of city of God, (6) God's new name
- G. Revelation 3:14 Overcomer – promises include all 21 previous promises, plus "sit with Jesus on throne"¹⁰

The Shaking – the Final Purification of His Covenant Church

"There is ... general agreement that the final church is in a deplorable condition. The True Witness to the Laodicean church has warned us that the straight testimony of what God's ideals are for His church will be emphatically heralded. This will cause a rebellion *within* our ranks that will lead to a major shaking of apostasy and apostates out of the remnant fold."¹¹

The shaking is among God's people.

"The testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. This testimony must work deep repentance, and all that truly receive it will obey it and be purified."¹²

The Laodicean church is a summation metaphor for all the corrective *issues* of each church. It is a call for all those who claim to be His to come unequivocally to the foot of the Cross and crucify self. It is a metaphor of what will happen to every type of congregation if changes do not occur – the ultimate rejection – God spits them out of His presence.

The straight testimony will have those concerns:

1. Thou hast left thy first love, Jesus is no longer exciting
2. False doctrine in understanding faith and sin
3. Cherishing priorities that fail to put God first
4. Making pleasure of all kinds more important than God

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Sheffield, Harold; *Revelation One* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

¹² *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 181.

5. Weak in seeing and serving the needs of others
6. Failing to see the second coming as urgent

These messages are powerful tools to use to bring the purity of truth and organization back into His cherished church.

Eschatological Application

There are allusions to the coming of Jesus in the messages to the churches.¹³

Throughout the messages to the seven churches, warnings or requests have been made in relationship to Jesus' coming. Some with the associated word, quickly (*tachu*), suggesting without delay, suddenly, even by surprise.

To John: Show things – must shortly come to pass (1:1)
 For the time is at hand (1:3)
 Behold he cometh with clouds (1:7)
 Spirit on the Lord's day (1:10)

To Church: I will come unto thee quickly (2:5)
 I will give thee a crown of life (2:10)
 I will come unto thee quickly (2:16)
 Hold fast till I come (2:25)
 Keepeth my works unto the end (2:26)
 I will come on thee as a thief (2:3)
 I come quickly (3:11)

With each church a specific summary is made that includes the profound meaning of each testimony for today's Christian. Repeatedly, Jesus tells John of the urgency of His counsel because of His imminent return. This transcends ancient apostolic concern for His quick return and puts it in a context which will be built upon throughout the whole book – He is about to return, be ready. This will be substantiated by revealed signs and timed prophecies. Analysis suggests that the messages to these churches have their greater application just before Christ returns.

"This analysis of the churches serves as a preparation for God's people, so that they may be ready when the Son of man returns in glory and majesty. The reader of the Scriptures is informed that 'God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets' (Amos 3:7). Thus, before the coming of 'the day of the Lord' (Amos 5:18) for them, that is, before the tragic events of the end of the northern and southern kingdoms, in 722 and 586 BC, respectively, God sent prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel. These prophets were sent as God's representatives in a covenant "lawsuit" against His people.

¹³ Diop, Ganoune; "Jesus Christ in the midst of His people: A study of Revelation 1:9-3:22," *J Adventist Theological Society*, 8/1-2 (1997), 40-58.

“Likewise, before the coming of the eschatological ‘day of the Lord’ (2 Pet 3:10), Jesus Himself (described in the book of Revelation as being in the midst of His people) assumes this prophetic office of warning and preparing them for His return.”¹⁴

“Through the Prophet Isaiah God revealed to His people His holiness, power and wisdom. He pronounced judgment upon Israel because of their sins (Isaiah 1–39). In chapters 40–66 salvation becomes an ever-present theme. ‘Out of the tone of love, God has good news for His people. Grace takes over judgment as He announces that their “warfare is ended” ... their iniquity is pardoned’ [Barclay].

“Isaiah’s idealistic vision of God’s New Age does not stand alone. Every quality of life prophesied by the prophet is repeated and reaffirmed in the Book of Revelation. To discount Isaiah’s vision is to deny the Revelation and to deny the Revelation is to limit the redemptive purpose of God [Palmer].”¹⁵

This unique insight is really the summation of these messages. Though Jesus threatens judgment, He comes with abundant grace. The outcome is based on man’s will. He appeals to church leaders to beckon the church members – repent. Grace is full of promises awaiting that decision.

Conclusion

Seven Churches – Described and Identified

	<u>Ephesus</u>	<u>Smyrna</u>	<u>Pergamos</u>	<u>Thyatira</u>	<u>Sardis</u>	<u>Philadelphia</u>	<u>Laodicea</u>
I know thy works	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Good works initially observed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Never	Yes	Never
Things against you, complaints	Yes	Never	Yes	Yes	Yes	Never	Yes
Summary judgment	Repent		Repent	Repent	Repent		Repent
Hear what Spirit says	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Promise to overcomers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁵ Shumate, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

	<u>Evil Church</u>	<u>Evil City</u>
Ephesus	Left first love (whole church)	Cult of Artemis (Diana)
Smyrna	Blasphemy (segment church)	Temple to Roma – spirit of Rome
Pergamos	Idolatry	Temple to Caesar Augustus
	Sexual immorality	Temple to Zeus
	Nicolaitans (segment church)	Temple to Serpent-god Asclepius
Thyatira	“Allows” idolatry (whole church)	Oppressive trade guilds
Sardis	You are dead (segment of church)	Immorality – easily defeated
Philadelphia	Local Jews (segment of church)	Earthquake – only natural disaster
Laodicea	Lukewarm, poor, blind, wretched, miserable	Banking center, wealth, medical school, self sufficient

Jesus’ Position and Authority

Ephesus	Holds seven stars in His right hand who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (nurtures ministers, nurtures churches by power of His sovereign will); encouragement to believers
Smyrna	Says the first and the last, who was dead, and came to life (has control of time and the grave); encouragement to persecuted
Pergamos	He who has the sharp two-edged sword (he will execute justice – will convict hearts of truth); stern executor of judgment
Thyatira	Son of God, eyes like a flame of fire, feet like fine brass (He sees all – will judge all – will refine); will cleanse His church
Sardis	Has seven Spirits of God and the seven stars (He represents fullness of Spirit – controls church leaders); Spirit will guide His leaders
Philadelphia	Holy, true, has keys of David (is truth and holiness, therefore, governs who enters heaven – though open to all); inviting everyone – He’s the final gatekeeper
Laodicea	Amen, Faithful and True Witness; beginning of the creation of God; the “ <i>so be it</i> ,” faithful and true martyr; I’m from very beginning of creation; will be your companion forever

Second Coming Statements

	<u>Allusions</u>	<u>Promise</u>
Ephesus	I will come quickly and remove your Lampstand Sounds like punishment but it is more like what results will happen if not <i>repentant</i>	Eat from tree of life in Paradise of God
Smyrna	Prison, tested, tribulation faithful to death Crown of life clearly an allusion to the Little Time of Trouble	Crown of life Not hurt by second death Post-millennium Sealed – no harm
Pergamos	I will come quickly and fight against them with sword Allusion as to what will occur at His coming and harvest, judgment	Eat hidden manna (Jesus) New name on white stone; Acquittal stone
Thyatira	Hold fast what you have till I come Keeps my works until the end till I come or death	Power over nations; shall rule; Morning star
Sardis	I will come upon you as a thief Will not know what hour I will come Second coming allusion? Yes! (GC370)	Clothed in white garment Not blotted out of Book of Life Confesses before Father and angels
Philadelphia	Keep you from hour of trial which shall come upon the world	Make a temple pillar Have name of God and His city, New Jerusalem (sealing) No harm
Laodicea	I stand at door and knock – last opportunity	Sit with Me on throne

Reward

Ephesus	Eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God (2:7)
Smyrna	Crown of life; not be hurt by second death (promise of heavenly reward beyond sin)
Pergamos	Hidden manna to eat; white stone; new name (promise of Christ's companionship; named citizen of heaven)
Thyatira	Give him the morning star (promise of Jesus Himself)
Sardis	Clothed in white garments; not blot name out of Book of Life (promise of Christ's righteousness; registered citizen of heaven)
Philadelphia	Pillar in temple; write name of God, city and New Jerusalem; My name (promised part of heaven; ownership of God's home)
Laodicea	Dine with Him; sit on My throne (promised part of Jerusalem; sitting as king with Him)

Someday soon, the saints, the remnant, the chosen, will be part of a perfect group that will be drawn upward to a perfect heaven.

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