



EARS TO HEAR Learning from the Churches of Revelation

Based on the Teachings of Nancy Leigh DeMoss

This resource was developed by Kimberly Wagner, based on an extended teaching series by Nancy Leigh DeMoss on the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. To get the most out of this tool, consider listening to or reading that series. Free transcripts are available at www.ReviveOurHearts.com, or you can order the CD series through the online store.

The content in this PDF is also available in a printed booklet, which can be ordered online or by calling 866.842.8381.

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THE UNVEILING: Seeing the Glory of Jesus Christ

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation includes this exhortation from Jesus. These letters were not just intended to speak to ancient believers in faraway places. They have a message for all churches in all times and places. And they have a message for us!

This study is intended to help you consider how Jesus’ words to the churches in Asia Minor in the first century apply to the church in our day and to our lives as believers.

As you read the suggested Scriptures and respond to the questions, our prayer is that you will:

- ★ Receive a fresh vision of Jesus Christ
- ★ Develop a sense of personal urgency
- ★ Develop an eternal perspective
- ★ Develop a biblical perspective on enduring persecution
- ★ Hear and heed what the Spirit says to the churches
- ★ Gain a vision for living as an “overcomer”

Don’t be in a hurry to work through this study. Take whatever time you need to let God speak to you through the letters to each of the seven churches and to respond as His Spirit works in your heart.

Pause for a moment, and ask the Lord to give you ears to hear what His Spirit wants to say to you as you meditate on these letters. Ask the Author of this book to fill you with understanding and to apply the truth of His Word to specific areas of need in your life.

The Roman Empire in the first century had some similarities to Western culture in the twenty-first century. The backdrop for the early church included political corruption, paganism, syncretism, every kind of sensuality and immorality, greed, materialism, oppression of the poor, social injustice, wanton disregard for the unborn and children in general, and abandonment of the infirm and elderly.

Sound familiar?

Be mindful, too, that these messages were written to Christians who were suffering hardship and being persecuted for their faith. Not only did believers experience rejection and ridicule from making godly choices in an ungodly environment, but they suffered physical torture as Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96) initiated systematic persecution of Christians throughout the empire.

You may not be facing arrest for your Christian faith (yet), but if you’re a living example of righteousness in this spiritually dark world, you are likely to be marginalized or rejected in some way.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

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Read Revelation 1. What promise is recorded in verse 3? What are the requirements to receive that promise? What reason is given for applying these to your life?

Genesis and Revelation form bookends for the entire Bible. In Genesis 3, we see the entrance of sin and the curse that resulted. In Revelation we see the ultimate elimination of sin and the blessing that is restored to the whole world. In addition to the blessing promised in Revelation 1:3, list five other blessings found in this book (Rev. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:14).

In Revelation 1:5, we see three titles for Jesus. How does this description encourage you?

The apostle John was approximately ninety years old, exiled, and isolated on Patmos—a barren island used as a Roman penal colony. Yet there is no evidence of his wallowing in self-pity, as we might have been tempted to do. How does Revelation 1:10 describe John's condition?

How do you typically respond to rejection for your faith? Why was John able to experience victory during persecution?

What do you hope to get out of this study? Record one or more personal goals, and reflect on these throughout this study.

WALKING AMONG THE SEVEN CHURCHES

A 2007 study by The Barna Group found that about 13 million Americans whom the researchers identified as being born again were “unchurched . . . meaning that they have not attended a religious service of any type during the past six months.”¹

Does this trend concern you? How do you think Jesus would view this development?

The entire book of Revelation is actually one letter that was distributed to the seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The opening chapters describe Jesus as being “in the midst” of the churches (Rev. 1:10) and walking among them (Rev. 2:1). He is actively engaged with His churches here on earth and knows them intimately.

In chapters two and three He sends a message to each of the churches in which He addresses their condition and, for most, gives a commendation, a word of rebuke, and personal counsel. In all but two cases, He calls for repentance.

Scholars differ as to whether these messages should be limited in application to the seven literal historic churches located in Asia Minor or whether these churches also represent “church ages”—periods of time in church history. In her teaching on the letters to the seven churches, Nancy Leigh DeMoss says, “Regardless of which position you take, I believe in any given time in history all these various types of churches and issues are represented.”

You can undoubtedly find glimpses of your local church in one or more of the seven churches in Revelation.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

If you’ve never experienced disappointment or heartache related to church involvement, you are rare. Many believers are discouraged with the condition of the church in general, and/or the condition of their own local church body. Read Ephesians 5:25–32. Ask God to inspire you with a fresh vision for the church and to fill you with Christ’s love for His body.

The seven letters in Revelation were written to specific local assemblies in the Roman province of Asia and are listed in the order that a messenger would have traveled if he had sailed from the island of Patmos and followed the normal postal route—arriving at Ephesus first, traveling in a circle north, then southeast, finally reaching Laodicea to complete the route. A map is provided in **Appendix A** for your reference.

Read Revelation 1:12–20. Reflect on the details of what John experienced, and consider what he saw and heard. This was not a dream, but a supernatural revelation. Why do you think God chose to bring this message to John in such a dramatic way?

What explanation is given for the seven stars and the seven lampstands in verse 20?

AN EAR TO HEAR

Jesus' exhortation, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," is repeated to each of the seven churches. Rather than being redundant, the repetition is intentional and emphasizes the need to carefully take in and respond to what is being said.

Before focusing on the messages to the individual churches, we want to take a bird's-eye view of the letters to all the churches. Take time to read through Revelation chapters two and three. (Don't let this assignment overwhelm you! It takes five to seven minutes for an average reader to cover these two chapters.) As you read, look for patterns (repeated elements) in the letters.

When you've finished reading, check out the chart in [Appendix B](#). As you study each of the seven letters in the days ahead, fill in this chart to help you become more familiar with the churches and to see at a glance the different issues addressed and the specific instructions given to each church.

Fill in the first column by giving each church a descriptive name based on the characteristic that seems to best fit that church. For example, you might call the church at Ephesus the "loveless" church. Some Bibles include a description of each church as a paragraph heading.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

If Jesus sent a personalized letter to your local church, what do you think He might say?

It can be tempting to focus on the problems and "negatives" in our churches. Make a list of "positives" or "commendations" that would apply to your local church. Spend some time thanking the Lord for those things.

If your list includes specific leaders or others in the church who have been a blessing, assisted in your spiritual growth, or encouraged you in some way, consider sending a thank you note expressing how God has used them in your life.

EPHESUS: Forsaken Love

“When love dies, orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism.” — C. H. Spurgeon²

The first letter from Jesus is to the church in Ephesus. Scholars believe that John was serving this church when he was arrested and sent into exile. Ephesus had the benefit of the apostle John’s teaching over the course of many years. While there, he wrote 1, 2, and 3 John. These epistles primarily deal with the issues of love and truth. Jesus’ words of rebuke are interesting when we consider that this church personally received in-depth teaching and the life example of the “Apostle of Love.”

Jesus acknowledges and commends this church’s commitment to sound doctrine and to purity and their faithful labors and perseverance for His sake. But He confronts them with the fact that they have abandoned the love that was once the spring of their orthodox doctrine and practice.

In spite of His concern, Jesus doesn’t leave these believers without hope; He gives the prescription to regain what they’ve lost. He includes a stern warning to those who neglect their love relationship with Him but ends with a gracious promise to those who “overcome.” (Some translations read “the one who conquers.”) The concept of a true Christian being one who “conquers” or “overcomes” is a thread throughout the book of Revelation. This topic will be explored at the conclusion of this study.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Read Acts 18–20 to gain helpful background information about the history and spiritual heritage of the church in Ephesus. How long did Paul spend in Ephesus establishing and teaching this church (see Acts 20:31)? Keep in mind that the message in Revelation 2 was sent almost four decades after the church was founded.

Read Jesus’ message to the church in Ephesus (Rev. 2:1–7).

What does He commend these believers for (Rev. 2:2–3)? Use the chart in **Appendix B** to record your answer. What does this indicate about God’s view on holding “right doctrine”?

What is Jesus’ problem with this church (Rev. 2:4)? Place this answer in the “Concerns” column. Jesus is issuing the cry of a wounded lover. We’ve heard strains of this same chorus before (Jer. 2:2, 5, 11–13, 32; Hos. 4:12 6:4, 6–7, 13–14; 11:4; 12:6; 2 Cor. 11:2–3.)

How would you describe your current relationship with Jesus? Where is your heart in relation to loving Him? To help in this spiritual evaluation, review Nancy’s “40 Evidences That You May Have Left Your First Love” (**Appendix C**).

What things in your life compete with your love for Christ?

What instructions did Jesus give to those who have left their first love (Rev. 2:5)? In light of this counsel and the list you compiled above, what steps could you take to restore your love for Christ?

What warning does Jesus issue to this church (Rev. 2:5)? What might it look like for a church to have its “lampstand removed”? (Perhaps you have seen a church that is still functioning, programs are fully operational, and plenty of people filling the pews—but the “light” of God’s glory has departed.)

What promise is given to “the one who conquers” (Rev. 2:7)? Read more about this tree in Revelation 22:1–5. This promise is a reversal of the consequences of sin in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22–24)!

What “tree” opened the way for us to partake of the tree of life? (See 1 Pet. 2:24.) Spend some time thanking Him for that today.

SMYRNA: The Suffering Church

Asia Bibi is a 37-year-old Pakistani woman. Today she is being held in custody by Pakistani police under blasphemy charges. She and her husband are raising their two young daughters in a village where, out of 1,500 families, only three are Christian. When confronted by local Muslim women and pressured to renounce Christianity and accept Islam, she responded by telling them about her faith in Christ. She shared that “He died on the cross for our sins” and then asked them what Mohammed had done for them. She told them, “Jesus is alive, but Mohammed is dead. Our Christ is the true prophet of God. Yours is not true.” The Muslim women responded to her witness for Christ by severely beating her before she was arrested by the police.³

Martyr. The English word is derived from the Greek word meaning *witness*.

In 2,000 years of Christian history, approximately seventy million faithful believers have given their lives as martyrs. Of that number, 45.5 million (65 percent) were within the last century.⁴

The contrast between the “loveless” church in Ephesus and the persecuted church of Smyrna is striking. Smyrna receives no rebuke nor any mention of consequences for disobedience. Rather, Smyrna’s letter is filled with words of empathy and encouragement. These believers were willing to suffer the “loss of all things and count them as rubbish” in order to gain Christ, to know Him and the power of His resurrection, becoming like Him in His death (Phil. 3:7–11).

In many countries around the world, Christians are enduring some form of public persecution. In countries where it costs something to live for Christ, faithful believers exemplify the characteristic of “overcomers.” The watching world may see these believers as victims, but they are the ones who will wear the crown of life and will not be hurt by the “second death.”

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Read Revelation 2:8–11. Record the description of Christ in the appropriate column on your chart in [Appendix B](#).

What is the significance of this description of Christ?

Jesus' words, "I know your tribulation and your poverty" (Rev 2:9), come from One who can truly identify with those who suffer. Consider His personal experience with affliction as you read these passages: Isaiah 63:9; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 4:15–16; 1 Peter 2:22–24.

Does your family misunderstand you? Jesus can relate. Have you been rejected or falsely accused? So was He. Have you been abandoned or betrayed by someone you trusted? Turn to the One who experienced the greatest betrayal known to man. The child of God never suffers alone. Jesus has walked the path of suffering and knows it well, and He will walk with you each step of the way.

Read the account of the first Christian martyr in Acts 7. How does Stephen's response to those who stoned him compare to your reaction when criticized or attacked? How was he able to respond this way?

On your chart in **Appendix B** record the promise given to the persecuted believers in Smyrna (Rev. 2:10). The Greek word for crown in this verse is *stephanos*. It is the word for the victor's crown. The first Christian martyr, Stephen (Gk: *Stephanos*), received a victor's crown for his faithful witness for Christ, even as he was being stoned to death for His faith in Christ.

How can you demonstrate your faithfulness as an overcomer today?

PERGAMUM: The Compromising Church

Jesus' introduction of Himself to the church at Pergamum strikes a different tone than what we have seen with the previous two churches. This letter comes from the One "who has the sharp two-edged sword." That will grab your attention!

Many today prefer a "comfortable" God. They gravitate to the "gentle Jesus," but are repulsed by references to His wrath. Jesus' threat to "make war" with the sword of His mouth unless repentance occurs (Rev. 2:16) may sound more like the "Old Testament God" to some, but these words come from the God and Savior of both the Old and New Testaments.

Pergamum was a dangerous and challenging place for Christians to live. Situated in the center of Caesar worship, Christians lived under threat of death for proclaiming "Jesus is Lord!" Although this church was commended for holding fast to the name of Christ, there were serious doctrinal and moral issues that had to be addressed. The church was surrounded by an idolatrous, sexually immoral culture while also infiltrated with false teaching that allowed for worldly compromise.

Jesus' counsel goes against the grain of postmodern thought as He calls for repentance. His rebuke was for the entire church, for those directly involved in immorality as well as those who tolerated church members who were involved in this kind of activity. Look for parallels between the church in Pergamum and the church today as you work through this passage.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Jesus' words, "I know where you dwell" (Rev. 2:13), should encourage believers who find themselves living in difficult or threatening situations. Where does He find you dwelling today? What situations do you find yourself in or what challenges are you facing?

What commendation does Jesus offer this church? Would He consider you a "faithful witness"?

More background on "the teaching of Balaam" can be found in Numbers 22–24. God established a covenant with the Israelites as His chosen people and instructed them to remain faithful to

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Him; however, they broke their covenant and turned to pagan practices and idolatry (Num. 25:1–3; 31:16).

Read 1 Corinthians 10:14, 19–22; Jude 4; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17. What are some ways that God’s people practice spiritual adultery today?

Pray for the purity of your church. Intercede for your spiritual leaders. Ask God to fill them with the knowledge of His will and to give them courage and boldness to stand for righteousness in the midst of a dark culture.

What reward is promised to the one who “conquers” or “overcomes” (Rev. 2:17)?

As you read the following verses, consider what significance the promised “hidden manna” might have for believers (Ps. 78:24–25; John 6:31–35, 48–51, 57–58).

Read the following verses and meditate on the intimacy symbolized by being given a name that no one knows but you and your Savior (Isa. 41:10; 42:9; 43:2, 7; 44:22; 45:3; 48:6; 49:14–16).

Conclude this section by spending some time thanking Jesus for His willingness to bring rebuke when necessary in order that you might experience intimacy with Him.

THYATIRA: The Corrupt Church

You're no doubt familiar with the proverbial "frog in the kettle": If you place a frog in a pot of boiling water, the frog will immediately leap out of the water. But if you place the frog in a pot of water at room temperature and gradually turn up the heat, the frog will not notice the change until it is too late and will be cooked to death.

This may be what was occurring in the church of Thyatira. Jesus' commendation to them included praise for their works: their service to others, their love, faith, and perseverance. Their "latter works exceed the first," which indicates they were progressing spiritually. However, Jesus presents Himself to the church as One who "has eyes like a flame of fire and . . . feet . . . like burnished bronze" (Rev. 2:18). He presents an imposing picture of One who sees all and is able to bring holy judgment.

Thyatira was an important commercial city and although it was not known as a religious center, pagan practices were incorporated in the fabric of daily life through trade guilds. These trade guilds were similar to our "unions." It was difficult to succeed in business unless one was faithful to participate in guild meetings and activities. The problem for the Christians in Thyatira was that each of these trade guilds had a patron god. This meant that guild members were expected to pay respect to their "trade god" through offering sacrifices and attending pagan temple services, which could include drunkenness, immorality, even sexual activity with temple prostitutes. What was a Christian to do?

Sadly, many Christians had chosen to compromise. Toleration began to take on a new meaning—it seemed the more reasonable option than confronting sin. But there is a point where toleration becomes a sin. The church in Thyatira stands in contrast to the sister church in Ephesus that held to sound doctrine but lacked love. In the name of "love," the church in Thyatira refused to confront false teaching. Their lack of doctrinal soundness eventually led to justifying idolatry and immorality.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Read Revelation 2:18–29. Record the description of Christ on the chart in [Appendix B](#). Consider why He used this description to introduce Himself to Thyatira as you read Revelation 1:14–15; 19:11–15; Hebrews 4:13.

What does Jesus commend this church for (Rev. 2:19)? Which of these characteristics do you think He would say are true of your local church? Of your life?

“Jezebel” was probably not a reference to an actual woman by this name. Likely, the name symbolizes the evil of false religion and is used to refer to a leading woman in the church who was perpetrating teaching contrary to Scripture. To give you a context for the use of this name, spend some time investigating the Old Testament character (1 Kings 16:31–33; 18:20–19:2, 21–26).

Although not everyone in the church in Thyatira followed the false teaching of “Jezebel,” the church tolerated this heretical teaching and influence. Two particularly dangerous doctrines that affected the early church were Antinomianism (“against” + “law”) which proposed the notion of grace providing a license to sin, and Gnosticism (*gnosis* = “knowledge”), a type of mysticism that claimed to offer “secret knowledge” or “deeper truths” to its followers. This teaching may be what is referred to in Revelation 2:24 as “the deep things of Satan.”

Where have you seen the influence of these two philosophies today?

Is your church intentional about equipping its members to discern doctrinal error? What could you do to be better prepared to recognize false teaching?

Notice the statement of God's grace found in Revelation 2:21. Consider the mercy of God in sending warning before judgment (see Ezek. 33:7–11). How has God shown you mercy when you were deserving of His judgment?

What instruction did Jesus give to the believers in Thyatira who had not fallen for the teaching of "Jezebel" (Rev. 2:24–25)? Holding fast to God's truth takes purposeful, intentional effort. Identify specific areas where you may have relaxed your hold on truth.

What two rewards are promised to the one who conquers or overcomes (Rev. 2:26–28)? (The first reward refers back to Psalm 2.) Also, see Revelation 5:9–10; 11:15; 12:5; 19:15. The second reward is Christ Himself (Num. 24:17; Isa. 60:1–2; Matt. 13:43; John 8:12; Luke 1:78–79).

As you work through this study guide, be mindful of the needs of the church today. Ask God to be at work in your local church. Pray for protection from false teaching and doctrinal error. Ask God to establish your church in the truth of His Word. Pray for the church at large. Ask God to mercifully grant revival to the church, that He might be magnified and His glorious gospel and grace might be displayed through us to our world.

SARDIS: The Dead Church

The thick carpet and highly polished mahogany foyer tables provide an atmosphere of elegance. You are welcomed with the inviting sounds of soothing music playing in the background as you make your way to a comfortable pew. The few who've already arrived sit stiffly in their seats, some gazing at the floor, others give a slight nod at your entrance. When the minister begins his message, a still boredom settles over the crowd, most of whom have glazed eyes or distant expressions.

This is a description of a funeral service. But sadly, it depicts the weekly experience in many so-called "churches." Sadly, even many churches that are renowned for their programs and efforts and have a reputation for being "alive" show few signs of real spiritual life when the façade is torn away.

Most churches do not begin in a "dead" state. In fact, new churches usually start out with fresh vision, hope, opportunity, and life.

Although there is little known of the origin of the church in Sardis, we can assume it had life at one time. The church may have unconsciously emulated the history of the city of Sardis, which had been twice captured by enemies due to carelessness and inattention.

This church receives no commendation from the Lord, but it does receive a hopeful introduction. The One who "has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars" invites Sardis to awaken and strengthen the things that remain. With that invitation comes the grace needed to arise from death.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

The "seven spirits" represent the seven-fold (complete) ministry of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2; Rev. 1:4; 5:6). The mention of the seven stars is a reminder of the "angels" (i.e., messengers or spiritual leaders) of the churches that are in His hand! Pray for the leadership in your local church. Ask the Holy Spirit to anoint these men and to release His power in your church.

Don't miss the last phrase in Revelation 3:1. Jesus pointed past their reputation and went straight to the heart issue. Do you think these individuals were genuine believers? Who are the "few" referred to in Revelation 3:4?

What are Jesus' instructions to this church (Rev. 3:2–3)? How might these words be practically applied to your own life during spiritually dry seasons?

How would others describe your spiritual condition? Would Jesus describe it the same way, knowing what He knows about your real heart?

If you are a Christian, you have new life (John 10:10; 2 Cor. 5:17), but are you demonstrating this life by growing spiritually, sharing His life with others, and walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–25)?

What do you think is significant about the fact that Jesus' instructions to five of the churches (including Sardis) include the call to repent? What do you think Jesus means when He calls the churches (and believers in those churches) to repent? Repentance is a necessary ingredient to spiritual health and vitality. If you've never done an extended study on this word, try using a concordance or topical Bible to grow in your understanding of this important topic.

Why would Jesus' warning (Rev. 3:3) be frightening to this body? See a similar warning in Matthew 24:42–51 and 1 Thessalonians 5:6. Are you looking forward to the Lord's return? Are you ready? Do you consistently long for His return or are you more preoccupied with your life here?

How do the promises to the church in Sardis (Rev. 3:4–5) apply to you? See the end of those who are not prepared for His return in Revelation 20:11–15, and consider Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21–23.

If you are not prepared for His return or you fear you may only have the *reputation* of being alive but in reality are spiritually dead, please don't stay in that condition! Confess you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Repent of your sins and humble yourself before Him by seeking His forgiveness. He took your place on the cross to pay for your sins. By faith, receive His gift of salvation and thank Him for giving you eternal life.

If you belong to Christ, you will experience what is recorded in Revelation 7:9–17. Read and rejoice!

PHILADELPHIA: The Faithful Church

Perhaps the most personal thing about an individual is his or her name. A name carries with it reputation and identity. Traditionally, in many cultures, when a woman gets married, her surname is changed to her husband's family name. This name change indicates her new identity.

God's name holds great significance. The Ten Commandments prohibit taking His name in vain (Ex. 20:7). Throughout Scripture, warnings and instructions are given in reference to the use of His name. God's name is a means of identification for His people. The church of Philadelphia receives a high commendation when Jesus states that they have not denied His name.

His promises to the church in Philadelphia include the precious reward of receiving His inscribed names in the future kingdom. Imagine the significance of such a personal identifying mark from God being placed on His children. What a beautiful picture of the concepts of spiritual adoption, belonging, and ownership! This personal expression of God's love should be cause for great rejoicing for every child of God.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Consider the significance of Jesus' description of Himself to this church. Refer to these Scriptures that highlight Jesus as the true Messiah:

- The "holy one" (Luke 1:35; Mark 1:23–24; John 6:69)
- The "true one" (John 1:9; 6:32; 15:1; 1 John 2:8)
- "Who has the key of David" (Isa. 22:19–22)
- "Who opens and no one will shut" (Luke 13:24–28; John 10:7–9; 1 Cor. 16:8–9; Col. 4:3)

What doors of service has Christ opened to your church? To you personally? How are you responding to open doors of ministry?

Although this church was small, their faithfulness and reliance on the power on God allowed

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them to be used in supernatural ways (Rev. 3:9). In what ways is your church being used to undermine the kingdom of darkness? Are you asking God to use you to accomplish works that are impossible with man, but possible with God—that He might get the glory (2 Cor. 12:9–10; 1 Cor. 1:26–29)?

Many commentators view Revelation 3:10 as referring to Christians being “kept” from going through the tribulation. Others see this as a reference to being “kept” in the sense of having His spiritual protection through the hour of trial. Regardless, we can be assured that He is faithful to shelter and keep His own (Isa. 43:2; Ps. 34:19; John 17:15; 2 Pet. 2:9; Jude 24).

Does the promise of Jesus’ “soon” return (Rev. 19:11) excite you? Would you be ready if it were today? Why or why not? Conclude your meditation on this letter by worshiping as you read Revelation 19:11–16.

LAODICEA: The Lukewarm Church

Many Bible students believe that the church of Laodicea is the church in Revelation that most closely resembles the American church in our day. Jesus' rebuke to this church is graphic. The reference to God vomiting should grab our attention. Perhaps that is why He begins His address with such a shocking statement—in order to shatter complacency.

A lukewarm church is a sickly perversion and misrepresentation of the Spirit-filled body of Christ. Laodicea had settled into a comfortable cycle of “checking the box.” “Doing church” in their own power for so long, they were blind to their true neediness. Their lukewarm condition allowed them to live comfortably in two worlds without making waves in either.

They had no hot zeal to live boldly for Christ (there is no mention of persecution for their faith), and yet they claimed association with Christ. They were not coldly opposing the gospel or rejecting Christianity, but neither were they defending it. They were a self-satisfied group, enjoying the social activities and the benefits of moral guidance a church can provide but anesthetized to their own spiritual ineffectiveness.

The contrast between Philadelphia's faithfulness and power and Laodicea's complacent impotence is striking. Philadelphia received no rebuke or warning; Laodicea received a sharp word of confrontation with the honest confession from God that they sickened Him. But His mercy extended beyond their current state. He offered hope and held out the promise of restoration, even intimacy with Him, if they would only repent.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Jesus opens this letter presenting Himself with the name “Amen,” a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning “truth” (Isa. 65:16). Not only is He the faithful and true Witness, but He is the “beginning of” (the One who began) God's creation (Rev. 21:6; 22:13). This introduction encompasses His faithfulness and truthfulness, His willingness to reveal Himself as Deity, and His eternal existence—it reveals His sufficiency for our every need. How has He demonstrated His sufficiency to you?

Would you consider that your church is hot, cold, or lukewarm? The spiritual “temperature” of a church is determined by the spiritual condition of the individuals within that church. How can you encourage or help maintain a passion for Christ within your church body?

Has there been a time in your life when your passion and zeal for Christ were greater than what you are experiencing today? If so, what factors have contributed to your present condition?

If you consider yourself having a “hot heart” for God today, what do you need to do to protect your heart from growing cold?

Do you consider yourself a “needy” person? Do you regularly confess to God your dependence on Him and need for His grace? Nancy has developed a helpful tool for evaluating the condition of our hearts—whether we are proud (blind to our need) or broken (realizing our neediness before God). This self-evaluation tool is provided in [Appendix D](#).

Jesus counsels the believers in Laodicea to come to Him for needs they didn’t even realize they had. Are you willing to humble yourself before God and approach Him with openness, asking Him to reveal areas of spiritual need? Consider these Scriptures: Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 55:1–2; 57:15.

Is Jesus at home and at work inside your church, or is He standing outside waiting to be welcomed in?

What about your own life? Does He rule from the throne room of your heart?

The bride in the Song of Solomon is a picture of the sleeping church that the Bridegroom desires to awaken. He longs for intimate relationship with His bride. Why do we often ignore His knocking? Consider that question as you read Song of Solomon 5:4–6.

THE ONE WHO CONQUERS

A key concept in the Christian life is that of conquering or overcoming. Overcoming is the identifying characteristic of all true believers. Jesus encouraged His followers by reminding them that they could take courage because He had “overcome the world” (John 16:33). Because of His act of overcoming, all believers are partakers in that victory (2 Cor. 2:14; 1 John 5:4). Although believers don’t often *feel* as though they are conquerors, that is *who they are*.

Jesus conquered the mortal enemy of death and through that He gives us the victory, not only over physical death but the victory to live in abundant life while on earth (1 Cor. 15:54–58; John 10:10). Christ’s conquering is the pattern for our conquering. His conquering was accomplished by His death on the cross and although it may have appeared that this was the ultimate defeat, it was in fact His greatest victory.

The key to conquering is surrendering. Surrender to the will and plan of God brings victory. Death to self is the doorway to life in Christ. To live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21). The first century believers faced the very real possibility of physical death because of their commitment to Christ. Their faithfulness and perseverance was a testimony to the overcoming victory of their Savior (Rev. 12:11).

The willingness of a martyr to lay down his or her life testifies to the worth and value of Christ. This testimony overcomes, conquers, or defeats the enemy. Likewise, the believer who experiences daily victory in her battle over sin gives testimony to the conquering power of Christ. This testimony, too, defeats the enemy. The position of conqueror is not reserved for the martyr only but is to be the lifestyle of every genuine believer.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

Each of the seven letters contained one or more promises to the “one who conquers.” Review these promises, and consider the significance of each (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

Are you living as an example of an overcomer?

Have you experienced any form of persecution because of your commitment to Christ? If so, what kind of response have you shown? Is it consistent with the principle of “overcoming evil with good” (Rom. 12:21)?

If you’ve not experienced adverse reactions because of your Christianity, is it because you’ve been living as a “lukewarm” Christian?

Is sin being conquered in your life How are you denying self or saying no to fleshly desires? The key to not losing heart and growing weary in this process is found in Hebrews 12:1-4

Read through Romans 8, especially focusing on verses 35–37. Spend some time thanking Christ for being your conquering Savior and providing all you need to live as an overcomer!

HIS BRIDE HAS MADE HERSELF READY

How often do you think about your future “wedding”?

The noise, clutter, and pace of responsibilities, job, bills, and just daily life, can easily consume our focus on our journey from here to heaven. We often forget that we’re preparing for a wedding. It’s good for us to remind each other that we are heading toward the most climactic event in redemptive history—the return of Christ for His bride.

Before the first couple was created and the first wedding union performed, this final wedding ceremony was in the mind of God. After studying the details of the letters to the seven churches, it is good to take a step back and remember the big picture. Believers are in the midst of a cosmic conflict and what is occurring here, in your life, in your family, and within your church has eternal implications.

One thing is evident in reading these letters: Jesus loves His church! Each commendation and rebuke is delivered from the heart of a divine Lover who desires the best for His beloved. The condition of the church should matter to us because it matters to Christ. The valuable price He paid for her purchase reveals her worth to Him (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Three primary concerns for His church surface in these letters: passion, purity, and perseverance. In this season of waiting for the Bridegroom’s return, the bride is to be preparing herself—both individually and corporately. She needs to be ready for His return.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

If Jesus entered your church today, what would be His concerns? What do you think He would want to say to your church family?

God ordained the beauty and intimacy of the marital relationship to represent the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22–33). What implications does this hold for marriage? For the church?

Is your passion for Christ that of a bride eagerly awaiting her lover's return? Consider the words of the Shulamite bride in Song of Solomon 5:10–6:3, as she admires her bridegroom and awaits his return.

The relationship between Christ and His bride is often expressed in terms reflecting Hebrew wedding customs. During the betrothal period, the bridegroom would be preparing a future home for his bride. She waited in anticipation of his “return” for her and the wedding ceremony that would follow. Keep this in mind while reading Christ's words, as He speaks of His leaving, in John 14:1–3. Allow your passion to be fueled as you read of His return for His bride (1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

Review the words of rebuke given to the churches that lost their passion for Christ (Rev. 2:4; 3:1–2, 15–16).

Jesus' concern for His bride's purity involves doctrinal purity (holding fast to His truth) and practical purity (holy living). Scripture uses the symbolic description of white robes and virginity to portray this righteousness (Isa. 61:10–11; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7–8). Does your church place an emphasis on both doctrinal purity and personal, practical holiness?

How about you? Do doctrinal and personal purity matter to you? What are you doing to cultivate both?

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The commendation to those who “conquer” (“overcome”) is a commendation for faithfulness. Jesus commends them for more than just patiently enduring under trial or persecution; the word used for “endurance” in Revelation 1:9 suggests standing firm against the culture, having “triumphant fortitude” in the face of opposition—even to the point of death. Consider these references which contain this word: Revelation 2:2–3, 10, 13, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12.

How are you demonstrating this type of “triumphant fortitude” or perseverance as you face the world’s opposition to truth? If you’ve wavered or lacked endurance, consider whether this may have affected others negatively. If you’ve been inconsistent in your witness before others, pray about confessing this to them and sharing what it means to live a life of faithfulness to Christ.

A marriage supper invitation has been issued. All the faithful under the old covenant, along with the tribulation saints, are invited to participate in the wedding ceremony of the bride (the church) and her Bridegroom (Christ). This wedding feast has long been anticipated (Isa. 25:6–9). Jesus’ parable in Luke 14:15–24 describes a great wedding supper where many of the invited declined their invitation. His burden for His house to be filled should compel us to be diligent in reaching the lost. Our churches need the Savior’s heart and a sense of urgency in order to reach those who are now outside this covenant of grace.

Revelation 22 is a fitting conclusion to our study. Read this chapter, and be blessed by the anticipation of the glorious future we anticipate with our King and Savior. Join the Spirit and the bride in calling out to thirsty souls to “Come.”

Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Establish Your kingdom on earth, for Your glory!

APPENDIX A: Map of the Seven Churches of Revelation



APPENDIX B: Chart of the Seven Churches of Revelation

REVELATION CHURCH	DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST	COMMENDATION	CONCERNS	INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNINGS	PROMISE GIVEN
EPHESUS (2:1-7)						Eat from the tree of life in paradise
SMYRNA (2:8-11)		Has the two-edged sword		None mentioned		
PERGAMUM (2:12-17)	The Persecuted Church					
THYATIRA (2:18-29)				Not discerning tolerates unbiblical teaching		
SARDIS (3:1-6)					Keep His Word, repent Christ will come unexpectedly	
PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13)			None given!			
LAODICEA (3:14-22)						

APPENDIX C: 40 Evidences That You May Have Left Your First Love

1. You can go hours or days without having more than a passing thought of Him.
2. You don't have a strong desire to spend time with Him.
3. You don't have a strong hunger for the Word; Bible reading is a "chore"—something to mark off your "to do" list.
4. Spending time in prayer is a burden/duty rather than a delight.
5. Your worship is formal, dry, lifeless, merely going through the motions.
6. Private prayer and worship are almost non-existent . . . cold and dry.
7. You are more concerned about physical health, well-being, and comfort than about the well-being and condition of your soul.
8. You crave physical food while having little appetite for spiritual food.
9. You crave human companionship more than a relationship with Christ.
10. You spend more time and effort on your physical appearance than on cultivating inner spiritual beauty to please Christ.
11. Your heart toward Christ is cold and indifferent, not tender as it once was, not easily moved by the Word, talk of spiritual things, etc.
12. Christianity is more of a checklist than a relationship with Christ.
13. You measure spirituality (yours/others') by performance rather than the condition of the heart.
14. Christianity is defined more what by what you "do" than who you "are" ("doing" vs. "being").
15. Your obedience and service are motivated and fueled by expectations of others or a desire to impress others, more than by passion for Christ.
16. You are more concerned about what others think and pleasing them than about what God knows and pleasing Christ.
17. Your service for Christ and others is motivated by a sense of duty or obligation.
18. You find yourself becoming resentful over the hardships and demands of serving Christ and others.
19. You can talk with others about kids, marriage, weather, and the news but struggle to talk about the Lord and spiritual matters.

20. You have a hard time coming up with something fresh to share in a testimony service at church or when someone asks, “What’s God been doing in your life?”
21. You are formal, rigid, and uptight about spiritual things rather than joyful and winsome.
22. You are critical or harsh toward those who are doctrinally off-base or living in sin.
23. You enjoy secular songs, movies, and books more than songs or reading material that point you to Christ.
24. You prefer the company of people who don’t love Christ to the company and fellowship of those who do.
25. You are more interested in recreation, entertainment, and having “fun” than in cultivating intimacy with Christ through worship, prayer, the Word, and Christian fellowship.
26. You display attitudes or are involved in activities that you know are contrary to Scripture, but you continue in them anyway.
27. You justify “small” areas of disobedience or compromise.
28. You have been drawn back into sin habits that you put off when you were a young believer.
29. “Little” things that used to disturb your conscience no longer do.
30. You are slow to respond to conviction over sin—or you ignore it altogether.
31. You enjoy certain sins and want to hang onto them. You are unwilling to give them up for Christ.
32. You are not grieved by sin—it’s no big deal to you.
33. You are consistently allured by certain sins.
34. You are self-righteous—more concerned about sin in others’ lives than in your own.
35. You are more concerned about having the right position than the right disposition.
36. You tend to hold tightly to money and things rather than being quick to give to meet the needs of others.
37. You rarely give sacrificially to the Lord’s work.
38. You rarely have a desire or burden to give when you hear of legitimate financial needs within the body, your church, or a ministry.
39. Accumulating and maintaining material “things” consumes more time and effort on your part than seeking after and cultivating spiritual riches.
40. You have broken relationships with other believers that you are unwilling or have not

attempted to reconcile.

APPENDIX D: The Heart God Revives

Proud people focus on the failures of others.

Broken people are overwhelmed with a sense of their own spiritual need.

Proud people have a critical, fault-finding spirit; they look at everyone else's faults with a microscope but their own with a telescope.

Broken people are compassionate; they forgive much because they know how much they have been forgiven.

Proud people are self-righteous; they look down on others.

Broken people esteem all others better than themselves.

Proud people have an independent, self-sufficient spirit.

Broken people have a dependent spirit; they recognize their need for others.

Proud people have to prove that they are right.

Broken people are willing to yield the right to be right.

Proud people claim rights; they have a demanding spirit.

Broken people yield their rights; they have a meek spirit.

Proud people are self-protective of their time, their rights, and their reputation.

Broken people are self-denying.

Proud people desire to be served.

Broken people are motivated to serve others.

Proud people desire to be a success.

Broken people are motivated to be faithful and to make others a success.

Proud people desire self-advancement.

Broken people desire to promote others.

Proud people have a drive to be recognized and appreciated.

Broken people have a sense of their own unworthiness; they are thrilled that God would use them at all.

Proud people are wounded when others are promoted and they are overlooked.

Broken people are eager for others to get the credit; they rejoice when others are lifted up.

Proud people have a subconscious feeling, "This ministry/church is privileged to have me and my gifts"; they think of what they can do for God.

Broken people's heart attitude is, "I don't deserve to have a part in any ministry"; they know that they have nothing to offer God except the life of Jesus flowing through their broken lives.

Proud people feel confident in how much they know.

Broken people are humbled by how very much they have to learn.

Proud people are self-conscious.

Broken people are not concerned with self at all.

Proud people keep others at arms' length.

Broken people are willing to risk getting close to others and to take risks of loving intimately.

Proud people are quick to blame others.

Broken people accept personal responsibility and can see where they are wrong in a situation.

Proud people are unapproachable or defensive when criticized.

Broken people receive criticism with a humble, open spirit.

Proud people are concerned with being respectable, with what others think; they work to protect their own image and reputation.

Broken people are concerned with being real; what matters to them is not what others think but what God knows; they are willing to die to their own reputation.

Proud people find it difficult to share their spiritual need with others.

Broken people are willing to be open and transparent with others as God directs.

Proud people want to be sure that no one finds out when they have sinned; their instinct is to cover up.

Broken people, once broken, don't care who knows or who finds out; they are willing to be exposed because they have nothing to lose.

Proud people have a hard time saying, "I was wrong; will you please forgive me?"

Broken people are quick to admit failure and to seek forgiveness when necessary.

Proud people tend to deal in generalities when confessing sin.

Broken people are able to acknowledge specifics when confessing their sin.

Proud people are concerned about the consequences of their sin.

Broken people are grieved over the cause, the root of their sin.

Proud people are remorseful over their sin, sorry that they got found out or caught.

Broken people are truly, genuinely repentant over their sin, evidenced in the fact that they forsake that sin.

Proud people wait for the other to come and ask forgiveness when there is a misunderstanding or conflict in a relationship.

Broken people take the initiative to be reconciled when there is misunderstanding or conflict in relationships; they race to the cross; they see if they can get there first, no matter how wrong the other may have been.

Proud people compare themselves with others and feel worthy of honor.

Broken people compare themselves to the holiness of God and feel a desperate need for His mercy.

Proud people are blind to their true heart condition.

Broken people walk in the light.

Proud people don't think they have anything to repent of.

Broken people realize they have need of a continual heart attitude of repentance.

Proud people don't think they need revival, but they are sure that everyone else does.

Broken people continually sense their need for a fresh encounter with God and for a fresh filling of His Spirit.

APPENDIX E: How to Pray for Your Church

The letters to the seven churches in Revelation reveal Christ's heart and His concerns for His church. They also provide a basis for us to know how to pray for the church in general and for our local churches in particular. Here are four specific areas where we can intercede:

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

- ★ In John's vision in Revelation, Jesus is holding the "angels" (i.e., messengers) of the churches in His right hand (Rev. 1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1). Many believe this term refers to the spiritual or pastoral leaders of the churches.
- ★ These leaders have been given by God as "gifts" to the church (Eph. 4:11–16), to build up believers and to equip God's people to serve Him. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to intercede in prayer for our spiritual leaders and to lift up their hands as they serve the body of Christ.
- ★ Ask God to meet their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs (1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; 5:17–18). Ask Him to show you how to minister to them and their families (1 Cor. 16:13–18; 1 Tim. 5:17–18).
- ★ Ask God to help them be faithful in ministering to their own children and mates (1 Tim. 3:4–5). Pray for spiritual protection over their families.
- ★ Ask God to establish your pastors and elders in His Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Intercede for their spiritual protection, growth, and maturity (1 Tim. 1:18–19; 4:12–16; 6:11–12; 2 Tim. 2:21–25). Pray for them to stay humble, dependent on Christ, and aware of their need for His grace.
- ★ Pray for them to have boldness, courage, and perseverance as they stand for righteousness (1 Tim. 6:17–21; 2 Tim. 1:8–14; 4:1–5).
- ★ Ask God to give His vision for your church, for your pastors to have spiritual sensitivity and insight when encountering the lost, giving counsel, and leading the body. Ask for God's anointing to rest on their ministries.
- ★ Pray for them to have a burden for reaching the lost and a vision for revival in the church (1 Thess. 1:5–8; 2 Thess. 3:1–2), being faithful and trustworthy stewards of the mysteries of God (John 15:1–8; 1 Cor. 4:1–2).

PURITY

- ★ Ask God to safeguard the doctrinal purity of your church (1 Tim. 1:3–6; 6:3–5; Titus 1:10–11).
- ★ Pray for the church to cultivate mature discernment (Col. 2:8; Phil. 1:9–10). Ask God to establish your church in sound doctrine (Gal. 1:6–7).
- ★ Pray that the Word of God would be honored as the final authority in your church (Ps. 119:105).
- ★ Pray for those who hold teaching responsibilities to be diligent students of the Word, faithful in teaching preparation, careful in their handling of the Scripture (2 Tim. 2:1–7, 14–16).

Pray for personal purity in your church, that individuals would develop a love for holiness (Ps. 24:3–4; 51:10–13).

- ★ Ask God to develop an atmosphere of repentance, where individuals are quick to acknowledge and confess sin with the commitment to reconciliation, restitution, or any other redemptive actions that may be needed (Ps. 32:1–6; Matt. 5:23–24).
- ★ Pray for the membership to encourage one another in the pursuit of personal holiness, to excel in personal sanctification which fulfills God’s purpose for their lives (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 3:13–4:8).
- ★ Ask God to grant His grace for individuals to overcome specific sinful patterns that were part of their lives before coming to Christ. Pray that they would be conformed to His holiness (1 Pet. 1:14–16).

PASSION

- ★ Pray for believers to love Christ with all their hearts and above all else (Ps. 63; Matt. 22:37).
- ★ Pray that the church and its members will be characterized by fervent love for others (Matt. 22:38–40; John 13:34–35; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:14–18, 23; 4:7–12, 19–21).
- ★ Ask God to give church members His burden for the lost and a desire to glorify God by bearing much fruit (Col. 3:3; John 15:1–17). Ask God to give your church body a sense of urgency for advancing His kingdom (Matt. 9:36–38).
- ★ Pray for your church to operate from an eternal perspective (Eph. 5:15–17), recognizing the brevity of life (Ps. 39:4–5; James 4:14).

PERSEVERANCE

The example of Jesus and the hope of the resurrection provide the church with motivation to persevere, even in difficult times (Heb. 10:36; 12:1–4). The grace of God empowers the church and its members to endure.

- ★ Ask God to raise up prayer warriors who persevere in fervent prayer—individually and corporately (Rom. 15:30–33; Phil. 4:6–7; Col. 4:2–4).
- ★ Ask God to strengthen and prepare your church body to faithfully endure suffering, persecution, and opposition in a manner that glorifies Him (Luke 21:12–19; Rom. 12:12; 2 Cor. 1:3–7; 12:7–9; 1 Pet. 2:19–24).
- ★ Pray for God to fulfill all His purposes through your church body (1 Cor. 1:4–9; 2 Cor. 13: 7–9; Col. 1:11; 2 Thess. 1:4–7, 11–12; Rev. 21:1–7).

END NOTES

¹ www.barna.org: “Unchurched Population Nears 100 Million in the U.S.”

² C. H. Spurgeon, “Love’s Complaining,” a message delivered on October 24, 1886.

³ www.persecution.com: “Pakistan: Christian Woman Arrested”

⁴ www.ewtn.com: “20th Century Saw 65 percent of Christian Martyrs”