

# First love

Sunday, February 13, 2022

## INTRODUCTION:

Some people believe the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are words spoken only to the churches of John's day. Others see them as a Prophetic timeline with each church representing a different church age.

I see them as both a prophetic word to the churches of John's days; but also, as a picture of the types of churches that will exist throughout the church age and into the last days. These prophetic messages not only serve as warnings, but give both encouragement and correction. The descriptions of these churches, the words of encouragement, and the words of corrections speak not only to churches as a whole, but also to the individual believers that make up the church.

1. **Ephesus: The Church that Has Abandoned Its First Love for Christ ([Revelation 2:1-7](#))**  
The people in Ephesus were hard-working people who endured and hated evil. From the outside, they may have looked like they had it together, but their hearts were wrong. The 2 greatest commandments are to love God and love people (Mark 12:30-31) and Ephesus was missing this single greatest component of all Christianity. Love.
2. **Smyrna: The Church that Remains Faithful Amidst Persecution ([Revelation 2:8-11](#))**  
Christ's revelation to Smyrna commends the community for its material poverty but spiritual wealth and acknowledges its wrongful persecution. Christ does not reprimand this church but warns of impending imprisonment for some of its members, urging them to remain faithful "even to the point of death" and remember the promise of their "victor's crown". The people of Smyrna were promised that they would not be hurt by the second death. They were encouraged to stay faithful, even when facing physical death.
3. **The Church of Pergamum: The Church that Compromises Its Beliefs, The Worldly Church ([Revelation 2:12-17](#))** This church was the tolerant church. Although they refused to deny Christ, they allowed sin like idols, immorality, cults and heresies to remain among them. The city of Pergamum was renowned for its pagan practices. The letter to the church there lauds the congregation for upholding its faith despite the city's pervasive pagan influences. The letter then addresses the church's sin by denouncing some of its members for following false teachings that brought about religious and moral compromise. Like the Christians in Pergamum, it's easy to normalize the non-Christian behavior of those around us and allow that behavior to dilute our values

4. **Thyatira: The Church that Follows False Prophets ([Revelation 2:18-29](#))** The church of Thyatira had love, faith and good works. They were even patient people who were eager to grow. Where they fell short was their doctrine, which was infiltrated by idolatry, sexual sin and pagan traditions. Thyatira was a wealthy commercial city. Jesus' letter to Thyatira praises the church for having grown in faith and service. The church's downfall was its devotion to a false prophet that led some members to commit idolatry and immorality. Although the false prophet remained unrepentant, Jesus affirms that the congregation can still repent by turning away from the prophet's ways. Just as some in Thyatira's church were led astray by a false prophet, Christians today fall prey to cult leaders, occult practices, and other false teachings. To share in Christ's victory, we are to avoid these "so-called deep secrets" of Satan and hold firm to Christ's teachings.
5. **Sardis: The Church that is Spiritually Dead ([Revelation 3:1-6](#))** Almost all of the people in the church of Sardis had fallen asleep spiritually, except for a small remnant of believers. Christians can fall into the trap that ensnared the church in Sardis if we merely go through the motions of practicing our faith without really feeding our spirit. The Dead Church was encouraged to kindle and revive any small bit of faith they had left.
6. **Philadelphia: The Church that Patiently Endured Despite Weaknesses ([Revelation 3:7-13](#))** Philadelphia did well. There was no rebuke for this church of faith. They kept the name of Jesus and never denied it. There is a promise in the kingdom of heaven for these Christians. Christ praises the Philadelphians for remaining faithful in the face of trials despite their limited strength. The message to Philadelphia shows us the blessings that come when we maintain our faith despite life's tribulations. In fact, those who persevere despite weaknesses will stand strong as pillars in Heaven.
7. **Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church ([Revelation 3:14-22](#))** The church of Laodicea, unlike Philadelphia, only received rebuke. They were neither hot nor cold. Their reliance on riches and things of this world resulted in a lukewarm, halfway-in type of Christianity. Laodicea was a prosperous industrial and commercial center. Jesus' letter to this church wastes no time denouncing the congregation for its lukewarm faith, threatening to "spit" the congregation out of His mouth. Christ scolds this church for allowing its economic prosperity to cause it spiritual bankruptcy and reveals that, despite its economic wealth, only He can provide spiritual wealth. Those in Laodicea's church who open the door to Christ will share in His Heavenly banquet and have the right to sit with Him on His throne. Like the church in Laodicea, it's easy to become complacent in our faith during times of abundance. Christ warns us in this revelation that he will "spit out" lukewarm disciples. Instead, Jesus urges us to keep seeking the Lord's face even after His hand has bestowed riches in our lives.

We don't have time this morning to dive into a detailed study of all 7 churches; but I do want to take a look at the first one mentioned, The Church of Ephesus, and suggest that the principles there are the key to all the rest.

Revelation 2:1-7

To the Church in Ephesus

2 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup> I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup> You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

<sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. <sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

<sup>7</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

## 1. First Love is full of EXCITEMENT and ANTICIPATION

Psalm 42:1-2

<sup>1</sup> As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. <sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Psalm 122:1

<sup>1</sup> I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD

## 2. First Love PURSUES

Psalm 119:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> With my whole heart I seek you;

Proverbs 15:9

<sup>9</sup> The LORD detests the way of the wicked, but he loves those who pursue righteousness.

Twice in the Epistles that Paul wrote to Timothy we are instructed to Pursue Righteousness (Pursue God)

### 3. First Love REFUSES TO BE SEPERATED

John 14:3

<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

John 17:24

<sup>24</sup> “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

### 4. First Love PRIORITIZES AND PROTECTS

### 5. First Love COMMUNICATES

### 6. First Love longs to be UNITED AS ONE

### 7. First Love continues to CHERISH THE GIFT

### 8. First Love EXPRESSES ITSELF

Matthew 10:32

<sup>32</sup> “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.