



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 13

Text: Revelation 1-3 Summary

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TEXTS

1. EPHESUS
2. SMYRNA
3. PERGAMUM
4. THYATIRA
5. SARDIS
6. PHILADELPHIA
7. LAODICEA

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

QUICK LINKS

SUB-GENRE ELEMENTS

- ADSCRIPTIO
- Tάδε λέγει WITH TITLES
- οἶδα CLAIM
- NARRATIO
- DISPOSITIO
- VICTORY FORMULA
- HEAR COMMAND
- CONCLUSION

OF THE MESSAGES

The Message to Ephesus

2.1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν·

2 οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοὺς, καὶ ἐπίειρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, 3 καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες. 5 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης. 6 ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ.

7 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.

The Message to Ephesus

2.1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2 I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

The Message to Smyrna

8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἐξησεν·

9 οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλοῦσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίου εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ. 10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν· ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα· γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

11 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

The Message to Smyrna

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

9 I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.



The Message to Pergamum

12 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν·

13 **οἶδα** ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπάς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. 14 **ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα** ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλάκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι. 15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως. 16 **μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.**

17 **Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.**

Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

The Message to Pergamum

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum **write:**

These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword:

13 **I know** where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. 14 **But I have a few things against you:** you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. 15 So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 **Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.**

17 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**

To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

The Message to Thyatira

18 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρός καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·

19 **οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα** καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων. 20 **ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ** ὅτι ἀφείξ τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἣ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα. 21 καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. 22 **ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, 23 καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ, καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστω κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν. 24 ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις, ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν· οὐ βάλλω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος, 25 πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὗ ἂν ἦξω.**

26 **Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν 27 καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκευὴ τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται, 28 ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν.**

29 **Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.**

The Message to Thyatira

18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira **write:**

These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze:

19 **I know your works**— your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. 20 **But I have this against you:** you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. 22 **Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call 'the deep things of Satan,' to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; 25 only hold fast to what you have until I come.**

26 **To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end,**

I will give authority over the nations;

27 **to rule them with an iron rod,**

as when clay pots are shattered—

28 **even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star.**

29 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**



The Message to Sardis

3.1 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας·

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἐμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὔρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτῃς, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνώσῃς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

5 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαιλίψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.

6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

The Message to Sardis

3.1 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels.

6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

The Message to Philadelphia

7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει·

8 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλείσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. 9 ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἦξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. 10 ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 11 ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

12 Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

13 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

The Message to Philadelphia

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:

8 I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. 11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

12 If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

13 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.



The Message to Laodicea

14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμὴν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·

15 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢς ἢ ζεστός. 16 οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου. 17 ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, 18 συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγχρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς. 19 ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐάν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. 20 Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δεῖπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.

21 Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσει μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κάγω ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

22 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

The Message to Laodicea

14 And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:

15 *I know your works;* you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.* 17 *For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.'* You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 *Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.* 19 *I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.* 20 *Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*

21 *To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

22 *Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."*

LISTING OF SUB-GENRE ELEMENTS

	Eph.	Smy.	Perg.	Thy.	Sar.	Phil.	Laod.
Adscriptio	2:1a	2:8a	2:12a	2:18a	3:1a	3:7a	3:14a
Τάδε λέγει..	2:2b	2:8b	2:12b	2:18b	3:1b	3:7b	3:14b
οἶδα	2:2	2:9	2:13	2:19	3:1c	3:8	3:15
Narratio	2:2-4	2:9	2:13-15	2:19-21	3:1c-2	3:8-9	3:15-17
Dispositio	2:5-6	2:10	2:16	2:22-25	3:3-4	3:10-11	3:18-20
Victory Formula	2:7b	2:11b	2:17b	2:26-28	3:5	3:12	3:21
Hear Command	2:7a	2:11a	2:17a	2:29	3:6	3:13	3:22

INTRODUCTION

The above chart lists the sub-genre elements by verse reference. This is important for seeing an overall picture of the messages in a unified view. We have spent considerable time and effort looking very closely at each of the seven messages. But before we leave the study, we need to step back and see the big picture of the composite message of all seven messages.

One way of doing this is through a comparison of the content of the same sub-genre element in each of the seven messages. A summary of the concluded historical meaning will serve as a foundation to exploration of possible applications to our day will be our approach. Ultimately the point of the Hear Command, that the Holy Spirit is the final authority in making general applications of each message to all the churches, pushes each of us to listen to the voice of Christ in each of these messages.

Very important here is the role of chapter one for each message in chapters two and three. In the major literary units of chapter one a portrait of Christ is presented appropriate to the nature of the literary unit.

Prologue, 1:1-3.



1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 2 ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

In this more formal prologue to the entire document, John takes pains to make it clear that the focus of the entire document is Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Revelation of Jesus Christ. The document reveals Jesus Christ to the reader in profound ways connected to His relationship with His churches and in regard to how He will culminate that relationship at the end of human history. The Greek expression Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ means both the revelation about Christ and also the revelation that Christ provides. From it we can learn profound insights about who our Savior is, but just as importantly we discover how He is working in this world in behalf of His people.

This disclosure about Christ came first to the apostle John in the middle 90s of the first Christian century while he was under arrest on the island of Patmos. It was mediated to him as the Word of God and the Witness of Jesus Christ. The reading and hearing of this document lead to obeying God and in this is divine blessing. The document comes to us then as a divine prophecy in the tradition of Amos, Isaiah and the other eighth century Israelite prophets. This is not some fanciful prediction of the future, but the “Thus says the Lord” of these OT prophets to God’s people. Both the present and the future center in God and His interaction with His people.

Praescriptio, 1:4-8



4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ 5 καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, 6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν.

7 Ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόπονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. ναί, ἀμήν.

8 Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

In what at first appears to be an introduction to an ancient letter -- but gradually proves otherwise -- gives us further glimpses into who Christ is. John focuses attention on the Christ who has given him this revelation. A large series of qualities are put on the table regarding the identity of this Christ.

1) ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

2) Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.

3) καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.

4) αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν. to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

5) Ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόπονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

6) Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ. “I am the

Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

What a powerfully inspiring list of qualities and actions by Christ! John covers the full gamut of titles for Christ, including many originally applied to the Heavenly Father in Jewish tradition. The focus is upon the historical Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

Apocalyptic Vision, 1:9-20.



9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ. 10 ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος 11 λεγούσης· ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.

12 Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἧτις ἐλάλει μετ’ ἐμοῦ, καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῶς 13 καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν. 14 Ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρρὸς 15 καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὁξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρὸς, καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ’ ἐμὲ λέγων· μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος 18 καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ἄδου. 19 γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. 20 τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὐκ εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῶς· οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν.

9 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

This last portrait of Christ shifts perspective dramatically. Now Christ is viewed from a Jewish apocalyptic vision perspective. It is no longer the historical Jesus being described but instead the risen Christ who comes down from Heaven to speak to John in this vision. But the depiction of Christ is now in apocalyptic categories which have a highly exaggerated and often bizarre tone. The hugely symbolic nature of these images are meant to stress pivotal religious qualities of the risen Christ. Additionally, as John’s response of fainting illustrates, the image portrayed in such language is intended to convey an overwhelming sense of the presence of the divine.

John's Vision in two parts

<p style="text-align: center;">Christ comes down to earth from Heaven to speak to John on Patmos in his vision</p> <p style="font-size: small;">Ἐγὼ ἦν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος ἑστῆς ὀπίσθιό μου καὶ ἠκοῦσα ὡς ἐκ τρυφῆς φωνῆς ὡς ἀκροῦσάτος I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet</p> <p style="font-size: small;">Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα ἵνα ἴδω τὴν φωνὴν ἧς ἔαυτο μὴ εἶμι, καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λαμπράς χρυσοῦς, καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λαμπρῶν εἶδον ὡς υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man</p> <p style="font-size: small;">Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτὸν, ἔπεσα πρός τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός, καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ λέγων· Ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα ὡς νεκρός. Ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα ὡς νεκρός. Ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα ὡς νεκρός. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Christ reveals to John from Heaven what God is going to do in chapters four through twenty-two</p> <p style="font-size: small;">Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ θύρα ἑνεσχυμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἧς ἠκούσα ὡς ἀκροῦσάτος ἔειπεν λέγων· Ὁ ἀκούων, ἔρχεσθε ἰδοὺ ἡ πόλις After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Christ speaks to John on earth with the messages to the churches in chapters two and three</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">From Patmos John is called up to Heaven to speak with Christ</p>

are reproduced in each of the messages. The content that is fitted into this decree framework is customized to the specific needs and situations of each of the seven churches.



As is clear from the above chart, the significance of choosing just these seven out of a much larger number of Christian communities in existence in the region at this time is mainly geographical. As is mentioned in the later church father tradition, these formed a circuit route which the apostle John occasionally traveled in ministry to these Christian communities.

The symbolism of the number seven combined with the circular nature of the route highlights the point¹ made in the Hear Command at the end of these messages:

Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.
The one having an ear should hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Thus, although each message targeted a single church, the reality is that concepts presented to each church possess relevancy to all seven churches. Note the plural 'churches' in the identically repeated formula in each letter. The objective of Christ was to present the individual message to each church, but the task given to the Holy Spirit was to take each message and apply it to all seven churches. The admonition to listen, Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω, then reaches out to all believers of all times who hear this document being read at church. The encouragement is to listen carefully to the

¹Further confirmation of this symbolism is the fact that these messages were not composed independently and then copied into the book of Revelation. Instead, they were originally written at this point in the document so that all seven churches would read all seven letters.

The foundational role of chapter one not just to the seven messages, the part one of John's vision, but to the rest of the document, part two, is abundantly clear. The central image put before the reader is Christ in the various aspects of His ministry and function to the document. The heart of Revelation is Christ, not the second coming or the end of times. Everything both now and in the future is centered on Him and His actions toward not just the world, but especially toward His people called believers.

In the first part of John's vision, Christ comes to John on Patmos because He has messages that He wants delivered in writing to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. The revelation that is then given to John is both a customized message to each individual church, but at the same time is a collective message for all seven churches. These messages are not crafted in the form of an ancient letter -- despite modern era interpretive errors in understanding their genre nature -- but rather are couched in the ancient form of an imperial edict with a heavy tone of the eighth century Israelite prophetic oracle. Thus the tone of earthly governmental authoritative decrees is heightened to a divine decree that comes to the churches on earth from Christ as ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς, the Ruler of the kings of earth. In part two of this vision beginning in chapter four the next series of images will be presented but from the perspective of Heaven rather than from earth as with the messages to the seven churches.

With the messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three, a standardized template is used by John with each of the messages. The same identical literary forms taken from both the Roman government imperial decree and the OT Israelite prophetic oracle

application of each message to the Christian community each listener is a part of. Consequently our study here comes about with the objective of pulling the seven messages into a holistic single message so that the Holy Spirit can more easily speak to us about relevant spiritual truths and principles in these messages.

A. Adscriptio

This instruction is expressed identically in all seven messages, except for the geographical term specifying each individual city:

Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· (2:1)
Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον (2:8)
Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον (2:12)
Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον (2:18)
Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον (3:1)
Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον (3:7)
Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον (3:14)

Even without reading Greek, the visual similarities of all seven of these is quite clear. Quite obviously we are reading a formal indication of the beginning of the message to each church. Thus a tone of magisterial formality is introduced at the outset.

Further, this formula is addressed directly to the apostle John with the second person Aorist imperative verb γράψον, **write**. The remainder of each message is then addressed to τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν...ἐκκλησίας, **to the angel of the church in ---**.

Logistically, the question arises, Did John immediately write down what he saw? Most likely, no! This command to write, γράψον, comes out of one element in the apocalyptic vision found in 1:19 which covers the contents of the entire document of Revelation: **γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, write then what you see, that is, what is and what is going to be.** Given the mechanical challenges of writing in John's day, the composing of just a rough draft of this document would have taken at least six months of virtually non-stop work. And as is readily documented in ancient sources, important writings of any length were only released after undergoing numerous revisions and corrections. Absolutely no signal is given in the text that any kind of divine assistance in writing was provided that overcame these mechanical challenges.

The addressee of each message is specified as τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν...ἐκκλησίας, **to the angel of the church in ---**. Interpreters down through the centuries have struggled over identifying this reference. The dilemma is heightened with the obvious orientation of each message to the entire church, and not just one person connected to the church. This single individual becomes the church as the message content unfolds.² Thus,

²“The term ἄγγελος is used in various texts (primarily Jewish apocalypses) to refer to heavenly representatives of earthly nations, and by extension this has suggested to many scholars that the ἄγγελοι in question refer to the angelic guardians or representa-

John is not writing each message to the spiritual leader of each congregation. Confusing the dual meaning of ἄγγελος, messenger and angel, has led to other false conclusions that each church has a guardian ‘angel’ who received the message. The simple meaning of ἀγγέλω is that within the framework of an apocalyptic vision the church is symbolized as a messenger of divine truth. Viewed apocalyptically it is an ἄγγελος, but viewed non-apocalyptically it is an ἐκκλησία.

As an ἐκκλησία, the church in each city stood as a collection of multiple house churches meeting in private homes scattered across the city. They never came together in one meeting place on any occasion due to the illegal status of Christianity and the generally hostile environment in which they existed. The individual house church leaders would stay in close contact, and individual Christians from the different house churches would have contact with others from different house churches publicly in the market place etc. in the city. But the modern idea of a church having a specific meeting place with a street address did not exist for the first several centuries of Christianity.

The specification of the seven cities -- Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, & Laodicea -- paints a clockwise circuit of seven of the significant Christian centers at the end of the first Christian century in the Roman province of Asia. These were real churches -- not symbols of Christian history -- that were caught up in the day to day struggles of being a Christian witness in the midst of a very hostile pagan culture.

With the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in 70 AD, one of the primary centers of Judaism gradually shifted northwest out of Palestine to the Roman province of Asia. Three centuries before Christ, hundreds of thousands of Jews had been resettled primarily from the eastern Fertile Crescent into this region by the Seleucid rulers that succeeded Alexander the Great. The enormous wealth and prosperity of this part of the Roman empire combined with the rapidly

tives of the earthly churches (W. J. Harrington, *Apocalypse*, 80–81; Beasley-Murray, 68–70; Karrer, *Brief*, 185–86). One of the earliest traces of this conception is found in LXX Deut 32:8: ‘he [God] established the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the angels of God [ἀγγέλων θεοῦ].’ The same view may also be reflected in Sir 17:17: ‘He appointed a ruler for every nation, but Israel is the Lord’s own portion.’ Michael is the champion or the prince of the nation of Israel (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; cf. 1 Enoch 20:5). This conception appears to be transferred to the Christian church in Hermas, Sim. 8.3.3, where Michael is referred to as ‘he one who has power over this people and governs them.’ Daniel also refers to angelic patrons, or ‘princes,’ of Persia (Dan 10:13, 20) and the prince of Greece (Dan 10:20).” [David Aune, *Revelation 1-5*. Vol. 52A. *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 115]

growing numbers of Jews over the following centuries to make it a nature center of major Jewish influence in the Roman empire. Consequently, in several of the cities, the most vicious opponent of Christianity was not the local government nor even the Roman authorities. Instead, it was the Jewish synagogue or synagogues located in the city. This embedded a deep seated animosity against Jews in many of these Christian congregations that would find open expression centuries later.

Correspondingly, it also became a major center, if not the primary center, of Christianity by the end of the first Christian century. And this trend would continue to develop for the next couple of centuries at least, until the Roman emperor became a Christian in the fourth century and began a centralizing process for Christianity in Rome. The beginnings of Christianity in Asia reach back to the middle of the first century with the missionary activity of the apostle Paul, especially during the second and third missionary journeys. Both Jews and non-Jews, especially, came into Christianity in large numbers during the second half of this century. And this rapid expansion of the Gospel continued for several centuries to come. But the expansion centered increasingly in the non-Jewish segment of the local populations and produced increasing tension with the Jewish communities. Much of the very intense anti-Jewish writings of the church fathers in the second through fifth centuries have their origins in the part of the ancient world. A lot of the persecution of Jews by Christians beginning in the fifth century was launched in and from Asia.

Extensive tradition from the church fathers places the final decades of ministry by the apostle John in and around the city of Ephesus after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. All of the Johannine writings -- the gospel, the three letters, and Revelation, when understood traditionally -- emerge from this period of his ministry during the last decade or so of the first Christian century.

Thus the stage was set for John to receive this vision from the risen Christ to pass on to these key churches which then represented Christianity all across the province. Many centuries later we become a beneficiary of this revelation by having access to these messages. Clearly the spiritual truths embedded in these messages continue to have relevancy to modern Christians as well as to these first recipients in Asia.

B. Τάδε λέγει with Titles.

The imperial tone of the *Adscriptio* is followed by the formal prophetic oracle expression in the prophets of the OT. The Τάδε λέγει expression is located at this same place in each message, and reflects the LXX translation (some 250 times) of the formal introduction to a prophetic speech כה אמר יהוה (kōh ·āmar YHWH,

'thus says Yahweh'). Also in this ancient model behind John's use here is the use of the equivalent phrase to introduce Persian royal diplomatic letters and edicts. The function of such formality was to highlight the royal authority behind the words delivered to the specified audience. These were the words of the king, not some regular individual.

The distinctive in John's use of the formula comes with the specification of the person doing the speaking. Instead of the almost uniform Hebrew use of Yahweh John will specify a formal title of Christ that is mostly taken from one or more elements in the various portraits of Christ presented in chapter one. The specific title or titles used with each letter possess particular relevancy to the thrust of the message to each church. Christ's absolute authority as ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, **the Ruler of the kings of the earth**, is presented in ways particularly significant to the situation of each church.

When considered collectively, a grand portrait of Christ emerges from these titles.

Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν (Ephesus, 2:1b)

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (Smyrna, 2:8b)

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν (Pergamum, 2:12b)

Τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ (Thyatira, 2:18b)

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας (Sardis, 3:1b)

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυιδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει (Philadelphia, 3:7b)

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (Laodicea, 3:14b)

Christ is portrayed as

1) Ephesus (2:1b): of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. Taken directly from 1:16 and 1:12, this image stresses Christ's presence and activity in His churches. He holds them in His hand, thus their very existence depends on Him. He walks in their midst thus understanding every aspect of their daily struggles and challenges.

In the unfolding of this image to the Ephesian believers it becomes the foundation of both commendation of the faithfulness of the church and also of the stern warning to shut down the church if it doesn't repent of its compromise with the surrounding world (cf. 2:5). Christ possess complete authority over a congregation and whether that congregation continues to exist or not is solely dependent on His decision. A decision

based primarily on the church's level of commitment to Him.

When we speak of our church belonging to Christ, I'm not sure that folks always recognize the full extent of such a statement. It is a completely true statement, for the church's existence completely depends on Christ. And His will is the supreme standard for measuring faithfulness in the church. But the risk built into that reality, as reflected in this first message, is a willingness of Christ to close the doors of the church when in spite of being orthodox in most every way it chooses to compromise itself with the surrounding world. That reality we must not every forget!

2) Smyrna (2:5b): the first and the last, who was dead and came to life. To the smallest of the seven churches struggling along in the midst of poverty while surrounded by affluence Christ presents Himself as the eternal God whose existence transcends any beginning and ending. These poverty stricken believers were being watched over by the one eternal God who cared for them deeply. This God had bestowed upon them vast spiritual riches that transcended time and would be with them forever. The local Jewish synagogue community dealt the believers misery and persecution, including most likely ridicule for their poverty in the midst of an affluent city. Christ indicated that their situation was going to worsen but also promised to stand with them with a marvelous blessing of life eternal on the back side of the coming persecution.

3) Pergamum (2:12b): These things says the One possessing a sharp, two-edged sword. To the believers living "where Satan's throne is" Christ presents Himself fully prepared to do battle with Satan. He possesses a *ρόμφαία*, that is, a large battlefield sword while Satan and his human servants only possess a *μάχαιρα*, a short dagger. Christ comes to defend His people against their enemies. But don't misunderstand how He does this. As at Pergamum where the believer Antipas had earlier suffered martyrdom, this defense does not prevent believers from suffering at the hands of their enemies. Through persecution Christ preserves us spiritually intact and if martyrdom in the path of the crucified Jesus is our lot we know that we will come through our suffering and perhaps death without a spiritual scratch.

4) Thyatira (2:18b): these things says the Son of God, the One possessing eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze. To the church tolerating the Jezebel like woman false teacher, the penetrating vision of the Son of God saw through her perversion of the Gospel. His bronze like feet possessed the power and authority to stomp her and her followers out of the church in a temporal punishment of death. His absolute authority is the theme of this message. That penetrating gaze also

clearly distinguished the faithful believers in the church from the heretics. And Christ commends them significantly for their faithfulness to Him rather than drifting into the compromised Christianity with the surrounding paganism advocated by Jezebel.

5) Sardis (3:1b): these things says the One possessing the seven spirits and the seven stars. The first part is taken from 1:4, *τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ* (the seven spirits which are before His throne), and the second part comes from 1:16, *ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ* (holding in His right hand seven stars) explained in 1:20 as *ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν* (the angels of the seven churches). With a somewhat similar image to that given to the church at Ephesus (2:1b), the theme of the message to Sardis is similar to that for the Ephesians. The church at Sardis is spiritually dead much in the same way as was the church at Ephesus. The focus then of the title of Christ who speaks to the church is on His possessing of the church and its utter dependency on Him for its spiritual life. The Spirit of God before the Heavenly throne along with the very existence of the church as one of the stars in His right hand stand under Christ's control. That Spirit is the source of their life and existence. Thus their very life exists only in Him, whom they need to reaffirm in their church.

6) Philadelphia (3:7b): these things says the Holy One, the Trustworthy One, the One possessing the key of David, the One who opens and no one shuts and who closes and no one opens. Clearly both the longest title and the one least dependent on images in chapter one (cf. 1:18c), this depiction of Christ stresses the power and authority of Christ to control access to Heaven. Christ is the Heavenly Eliakim, king David's steward who controlled access to the Israelite king in his palace in Jerusalem. That door of access to Heaven has been opened by Christ to the believers in Philadelphia, but closed to the Jewish synagogue community because they are not genuine people of God as are the believers. Christ stands then as the only One qualified to control this door since He alone is *ὁ ἅγιος* (the Holy One) and *ὁ ἀληθινός* (the Trustworthy One), traits also possessed by the Heavenly Father. To the Philadelphian Christians this message comes as assurance that they indeed belong to God, despite contrary claims coming from the synagogue.

7) Laodicea (3:14b): these things says the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Originator of the creation of God. Some elements here come out of chapter one: *ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός*, the faithful Witness (1:5); the *ἀμήν*, amen from 1:6-7 turned into a formal title here. The One who stands as *ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ* has some affinity with *ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς* (the Ruler of the kings of the earth) in 1:5, but stresses a different

point of authority due to being creator. The content of Christ's message to the Laodiceans is a stern warning to back away from their compromising with the world around them because of its devastating impact on their spiritual life. They have forgotten that Christ stands in absolute power over the created order and its destiny lies in His hands. And it has no redeeming power. But Christ stands as the final affirmation of all things, the Amen. And His testimony of divine intention is utterly true and trustworthy.

These seven messages of Christ (Τάδε) are presented by the most powerful divine authority in existence. His words to the churches represent absolute authority that takes priority over any and every human authority. His commendations represent the greatest possible praise, and His warnings come as the most serious words believers could possibly ever hear.

What is the composite picture of Christ in both the portraits in chapter one and the Christological titles in each of the seven messages?³ To be sure, the divine commission given to John in 1:9-20 covers all of the book, not just chapters two and three.⁴ The heart of this commission comes from and centers around Jesus Christ.

In this part one of John's vision covering the first three chapters, and especially chapters two and three, some insights emerge that I believe are important for believers in today's world as well.

First, in the variety of portraits painted in chapter one we gain profound insight into who our Savior is. Central is John's application of substantial terminology first applied to God in the OT and now applied to Christ as God here. Christ is God in terms of Son of Man terminology, the Ruler of all the kings of the earth, Alpha and Omega etc. But John does not equate Christ

³"We see that these christological statements at the beginning of each letter are neither casually chosen nor mere decorations, but they serve a theological purpose. The letters contain ethical instructions and warnings, the commands of the risen Christ for living a faithful Christian life in a trying situation. Such commands cannot stand alone; they are not general or obvious moral truths. Their truth is bound up with the truth of the vision of 1:9-20, that the crucified one is the exalted Lord vindicated by God and made Lord of all. Here, as elsewhere, the ethical imperative is founded on the christological indicative, the Christian life is founded on the fact and reality of Christ." [Eugene Boring, *Revelation. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 89.]

⁴"John's divine commission narrated in 1:9-20 introduces not only the proclamations to the seven churches dictated to him by the exalted Christ (2:1-3:22) but the main part of Revelation as well (4:1-22:5). This is a commission for a particular task (i.e., to write what he will see and hear), not a report of the inaugural vision calling him to a prophetic vocation (like those of many OT leaders and prophets; cf. Exod 3:1-12; Judg 6:11-17; Isa 6:1-13; Ezek 1:1-3:11)." [David Aune, *Revelation 1-5*. Vol. 52A. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 115]

with God the Father as ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, **priests to God even His Father**, (1:6) clearly reflects.

Further this initial chapter paints Christ in terms of absolute authority and power. No human authority comes close to that which He possesses. He is Ruler over all kings; at His coming all who 'pierced Him' will wail in intense sorry and regret; He holds the churches in His right hand controlling their destiny. Christ's humility must never be taken as weakness and ineptness!

But this absolute power is combined ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, **loved us and freed us from our sins by His blood** (1:5b). Out of that came His transforming work of redemption: καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, **and made us to be a kingdom, priests to God even His Father** (1:6a). His sacrificial commitment to us is equally profound as His power.

Second, when Christ then speaks to the churches He issues His royal edicts to them out of who He is. And to each church that aspect of His character most relevant to their individual situation is emphasized in each message. There is a powerful spiritual principle here for us today. Christ is so profound in His very being that He can present Himself to us a many, many different ways. And each time He comes to speak to us He does so in the manner most relevant to our needs at that moment. Sometimes we need encouragement, and He comes to us as Comforter. Sometimes we need warning and He comes to us as a disciplining Father.

But most importantly He comes to us in every circumstance of our lives. Whatever we need in that moment He supplies. These seven churches made this marvelous discovery in the messages delivered to them at the end of the first Christian century. Most of them struggled with pressures to compromise their faith commitment with the ways of the pagan world around them. Christ warned them to step away from this at all costs. Several of them suffered horrifically from persecution, especially from the local Jewish synagogue. Christ demanded that they remain faithful to Him through the suffering, with the promise to stand with them through it to the very end where His divine blessing would blossom upon their life.

What a wonderful insight from John about Christ! We serve a magnificent Lord who is all powerful and yet cares deeply about us as His people. That compassion is not mushy, however! It is made of solid substance that is intolerant of actions and attitudes on our part which are destructive to our spiritual health. This compassion has stern discipline built into it when necessary. And marvelously Christ knows exactly what we need in every instance and applies it appropriately.

C. οἶδα claim. In every message, right after the Τάδε

λέγει... declaration comes the οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα assertion from Christ. The core verb is uniformly used along with little variation of direct object:

1) **Ephesus (2:2a):** οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ...I know your works and...

2) **Smyrna (2:9a):** οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, I know your affliction and poverty

3) **Pergamum (2:13a):** οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, I know where you live

4) **Thyatira (2:19a):** οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ...I know your works and . . .

5) **Sardis (3:1b):** οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, I know your works

6) **Philadelphia (3:8a):** οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, I know your works

7) **Laodicea (3:15a):** οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, I know your works

Several aspects are important here. The use of the Greek verb οἶδα stresses analytical knowledge of the situation in each church. The specialized tense form here focuses on knowing both the past and the present aspects of the life of the church. That is, Christ begins His words to each church asserting His full and complete knowledge of their situation.

The primary direct object in the majority of uses, τὰ ἔργα σου / σου τὰ ἔργα emphasizes what each church has done from its beginning to the present. This includes both moral behavior and religious actions by the congregations. It signals that for Christ the crucial aspect of a church life is not what it claims or says, but what it is actually doing. Its actions reflect whether or not true spiritual existence is present. Words without proper action are worthless before God.

Additionally, the οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα states the core main clause in what functions as the topic sentence for the *Narratio* section of each message. This introductory sentence at the beginning of the *Narratio* summarizes the essence of the situation present in each congregation.

What is to be learned from this? For one thing, we must never forget that of all the people who know about our church, Christ knows absolutely everything there is to know about us. He knows every secret, every word spoken by every member, every moral action done by both the church collectively and by every member, both publicly and privately. He has kept detailed records on absolutely everything that has ever taken place in the church as well as in the lives of its members. We hide nothing from Him -- ever!

No such thing as personal privacy exists with our Lord regarding each one of us. A 24-7 surveillance over our lives that extends down to every thought we contemplate is done from Heaven. And also is then recorded in the book of works (cf. Rev. 20:12) for use on judgment day.⁵ We must never forget this awesome reality. That ought to motivate us to keep our 'act straight' both as a church and as individual members.

ment day.⁵ We must never forget this awesome reality. That ought to motivate us to keep our 'act straight' both as a church and as individual members.

D. Narratio.⁶ What we encounter with the οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα topic sentence is a summation of the individual situation in each church. In some instances, this is then expanded with relevant details that Christ deems appropriate to mention. The formal nature of this section reflects a court scene, along with the imperial edict tone, in which narrating a situation becomes the basis for issuing new laws or governmental decrees applicable to a district, city, or administrative region. Usually some kind of problem prompted the issuing of new laws, which here are contained in the *dispositio* sections. This has been true throughout most of recorded human history.

Let's take a look at each of these seven *narrationes* in chapters two and three.

1) **Ephesus (2:2-4):** 2 οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ βαστάσαι

⁵Rev. 20:12-13. καὶ εἶδον τοὺς νεκροὺς, τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικροὺς, ἐστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου. καὶ βιβλία ἠνοιχθησαν, καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοιχθη, ὃ ἐστὶν τῆς ζωῆς, καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν. 13 καὶ ἔδωκεν ἡ θάλασσα τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾄδης ἔδωκαν τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐκρίθησαν ἕκαστος κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, as recorded in the books. 13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done.

Matt. 12:34-37. 34 γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, πῶς δύνασθε ἀγαθὰ λαλεῖν πονηροὶ ὄντες; ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ περισσεύματος τῆς καρδίας τὸ στόμα λαλεῖ. 35 ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θησαυροῦ ἐκβάλλει ἀγαθὰ, καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ θησαυροῦ ἐκβάλλει πονηρά. 36 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶν ῥήμα ἀργὸν δ' ἀληθῆσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀποδώσουσιν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως· 37 ἐκ γὰρ τῶν λόγων σου δικαιωθήσῃ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν λόγων σου καταδικασθήσῃ.

34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

⁶The Latin term *narratio* is an ancient rhetorical label specifying the detailing of an existing situation from the past into the present as a basis for some kind of action:

In classical rhetoric, the part of an argument in which a speaker or writer provides a narrative account of what has happened and explains the nature of the case.

Narratio was one of the classical rhetorical exercises known as the *progymnasmata*. Quintilian believed that *narratio* should be the first exercise introduced by the teacher of rhetoric.

[“narratio,” *About.com* online]

κακούς, καὶ ἐπιείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, 3 καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφήκες. 2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

The core topic sentence, found in vv. 2-3, lines out the situation of the church in Ephesus from the positive angle. This is then followed in v. 4 with a charge against the church.

On the positive side, Christ commends the church for three things, τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου, and the stance they have taken against corrupting influences in the church, i.e., the ὅτι clause. For the Ephesian believers their 'works,' 'labor,' and 'endurance' earn praise from Christ. They are actively living the Christian life appropriately and consistently. And Christ acknowledges this. In addition, they have blocked the influence of so-called ἀποστόλους, apostles, who have tried to come into the church with a corrupting influence. Finally, they are commended for having stood up for the name of Christ without faltering in their commitment.

But the charge that Christ levels against them is the loss of their 'first love,' τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην. First love is not -- as popularly understood today -- talking about one's enthusiasm for Christ. Ancient ἀγάπη had nothing whatsoever to do with emotions. Rather, they were slacking off in their unconditional surrender to Christ. Their faithfulness in service was coming less and less out of unqualified, self-sacrificing devotion to Christ and to others. Christ saw in this a huge danger to their future spiritual health. Thus His stern rebuke of them.

What a powerful message to modern churches! Consistent Christian service -- and doctrinal orthodoxy even -- can become routine and habitual. But they come less and less from the initial conversion surrender to Christ in sacrificial devotion. When this happens we are headed for serious spiritual trouble, both as a church and as individual members. Christ calls His people to live out their entire Christian life at the same level of sacrificial commitment expressed in their conversion.

2) Smyrna (2:9): οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ. I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. The single sentence introduced by οἶδά sums up the situation at Smyrna. Two core aspects are refer-

enced both in regard to the church itself and then to the place where it existed. The church was experiencing both σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, **affliction and poverty**.

The Greek construction makes it clear that their poverty was deeply connected to the persecution they were experiencing. The believers were suffering economic persecution, and as the second observation makes clear this was coming from the local Jewish synagogue. Although these believers were living in deep material poverty -- as πτωχεία specifies by definition -- Christ reminds them that in reality they were πλούσιος, **wealthy**. The wealthy Jews in the city made life miserable for the believers, but in reality it was the church who enjoyed spiritual wealth in contrast to the spiritual poverty of the synagogue.

The second observation labels the claim of the Jewish synagogue to be God's people as pure blasphemy of God. In reality, the synagogue was where the Devil reigned supremely in Smyrna. The synagogue community stood not as authentic Jews, but rather as servants of Satan.

Who are God's true people in today's world? Often we point to the huge beautiful church buildings in answer. But this is not necessarily correct. Those buildings may just be the center of Satan's work in a community, even though the people in them claim to be God's people. The authentic people of God in any given city may very well be the folks gathered in a store front church located in the slum section of town. The Jews of Smyrna felt that their wealth was a divine blessing validating their claim to be God's people. But God had the exact opposite evaluation. Instead, He saw His people located exclusively in the humble gatherings of believers in house churches scattered around Smyrna.

3) Pergamum (2:13-15): 13 οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπάς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκράνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. 14 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλάκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι. 15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως. 13 I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. 14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. 15 So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The opening οἶδα sentence elaborates two fundamental points: where the church was located and the

consistent devotion of the church to Christ. The church lived in the city where Satan reigned supremely: ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, and ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. The extensive domination of Satan was over the entire city of Pergamum, and not limited to the Jewish synagogue like in Smyrna. The huge numbers of pagan temples in the city exerted almost total control over city life. Being a genuine believer in Pergamum wasn't easy. But the second acknowledgment of Christ affirms that κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπάς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, **you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives.** In the midst of this sea of paganism, the church in general remained steadfast in its commitment to Christ and resisted pagan pressure to deny Christ. This, even with the martyrdom of Antipas sometime prior to the writing of the message.

But just like a few of the other churches the ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, **but I have a few things against you** levels a stern criticism against the congregation. The ὅτι clause in v. 14 both provides the basis for the criticism as well as spells out some of the details. The problem centered in the church's toleration of false teachers following the example of the OT figure Βαλαάμ, Balaam, who tried to lead the Israelites to compromise their faith in God by worshiping the Canaanite god of Baal. Very likely the next group mentioned, Νικολαῖτων, Nicolaitans, (v. 15) is either the name of this group at Pergamum or else a group with identical teaching to the first group. The heart of this compromising teaching is defined as eating food offered to idols and engaging in sexual immorality (φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι). Although it seems incredulous to think of such teaching in the name of Christ, given the atmosphere of paganism etc. in the first century Greco-Roman world, such compromises of the Gospel are entirely understandable.

So once again a church in ancient Asia was being tempted to become more like the surrounding world rather than reflecting the image of Christ to that world. Christian ethical and religious principles cannot be compromised with the values of the surrounding world, and remain Christian values. Christians are to be a very different people in their values than those of their non-Christian neighbors. The church allowing this corrupting teaching in its midst brought about the stern rebuke of Christ. It should have followed the example at Ephesus and blocked such teachers out of the life of the church. How this could have happened is easy to understand given the multiple house church structure of the Christian community at Pergamum.

What Pergamum faced is the temptation of virtually every congregation in the modern western world today.

We must be a different kind of people from everyone else around us. To attempt this only by wearing different style clothes etc., e.g., the Amish, is to completely miss Jesus' point. It is profoundly deeper than superficial appearance or bumper stickers on our cars. We must live out our lives with a completely different set of values that are defined by Christ through scripture. Such is much more challenging, and will inevitably put us in conflict with the world around us. Christ will never ever allow us to water down these values just to avoid conflict. As with the believers at Pergamum, what He will do is commend us for standing firm for the values of the Gospel in the face of bitter criticism and opposition from the world we live in.

4) Thyatira (2:19-21): 19 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων. 20 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἔμοους δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα. 21 καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. **19 I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. 20 But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication.**

5) Sardis (3:1c-2): 1^ο οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὐρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. **1^ο I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God.**

The heart of the problem at Sardis was spiritual lifelessness without the church realizing it. The reputation of the church was a positive one, evidently both in the city and especially among the other Christian communities in the region. Clearly such is a good thing. A church needs to have a positive image to others outside the congregation. The central point of the reputation at Sardis was ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, that you have a name that you are alive. This in no way mean "you are a lively church." Possessing spiritual life has little or nothing to do with enthusiasm. This false idea wrongly links the presence of the Holy Spirit to emotions.

The heart of their problem was that they were νεκρὸς, dead. By definition this means the absence of the presence of God in their midst. Were religious activities taking place in the church at Sardis? Quite clearly they were. Were they being done with enthusiasm? Clearly yes. But all these activities were coming from 'the flesh' and not from Christ. The heart of their prob-

lem is defined with εὐρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου, I have not found your works complete before my God. With great enthusiasm projects would be started, and then seldom ever finished. Why? Because the motivation behind these came out of 'the flesh' and not from God. Christian service can only be done properly if it originates in the will of God, is motivated and enabled by the presence and power of God. Without that divine presence nothing will ever be done completely so that it pleases God.

This is just as true for us in the modern world as it was for the believers at Sardis.

6) Philadelphia (3:8): οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

The assessment of the situation at Philadelphia centers on who has genuine access to God in Heaven, the church or the synagogue. The Jewish claim to exclusive access to God as His covenant people was being made in ways that completely excluded those who were Christians. But Christ evaluates the situation totally different! The people with the open door of access to God, θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, were the believers, and not the Jews in the city. Christ who held the key granting access had unlocked this door for believers. But to the synagogue community it was closed because Christ alone controlled the door and they refused to come through Him. With blunt language Christ speaks of them as τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ, the **synagogue of Satan**. But access to God was open to the believers because ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου, **you have kept my Word and not denied My name**. This was true in spite of the very small size of the congregation in the city, μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν, **you possess little power**. They were the folks in the city who had authentic access to the throne room of the universe, despite being told they didn't by the synagogue.

How does this apply to today's world? Let me suggest something to consider. Many people assume access to God solely on the basis of belonging to a large, powerful church where they live. Whether it be the Catholic Church or some Protestant church. But Christ makes it abundantly clear to the Philadelphians that their access to God was linked to ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου, **you have kept my Word and have not denied My name**, and ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, **you have kept my word in endurance to me**. It wasn't church membership to the right church that gained them access. Rather it was being a part of a community of believers who steadfastly

served Christ and refused to dishonor Him by their actions.

7) Laodicea (3:15): οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢς ἢ ζεστός. I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. Once again most interpreters have mostly missed the point of Jesus' words to the church at Laodicea. Using a metaphor from the non-religious life of the residents of the city, Christ compares them to the petrified water piped in over a long aqueduct which the people had to drink as their water supply. They were neither hot like the boiling hot mineral springs of Hierapolis with healing properties, nor cold, pure water like what the residents of Colossae drank with it delicious pure taste. The church at Laodicea had drunk in the petrified atmosphere of the excessively wealthy city mixed in with huge doses of arrogant elitism. In the process they were managing to kill the spiritual life of the church with such compromise. Instead of being a witness to this community of the radical difference that Christ makes in the life of a community, they drank in the atmosphere of the city to such a degree that they reflected its attitudes and practices more than Christ. In the process they became so distasteful to Christ that He was prepared to spit them out of His mouth, if they didn't repent and come back to all out surrender to Him and repudiation of their worldly ways.

One really sad aspect, like with some of the other churches, is their total ignorance of their spiritual condition. By reflecting the affluence of the city, they blinded themselves to their real spiritual poverty. Christ then was no longer in the center of the life of the church. Instead, we find Him outside the church knocking on its front door in the desire to be invited back into the life of the church.

What a tragedy! And yet it leads one of wonder how often the identical situation exists among modern churches? An old chicle, popular half a century ago, raised the question of, if God withdrew the Holy Spirit from churches, how many of them would actually know it.

One central problem seems to be at the heart of every one of the five churches where Christ leveled criticism. That problem centers around compromising the Gospel with the ways of the surrounding world. In some instances the issue stems from specific false teachers openly advocating such compromise, e.g., Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira. But with Sardis and Laodicea the compromise is more subtle and not crusaded for by false teachers. Ephesus did reject the false teachers, but then ended up compromising the Gospel in this more general and less obvious manner. Christ describes this problem in different ways but these depictions all come back to the same issue.

One of the ongoing challenges to a congregation is how to be a Christ centered witness to the community where it is located.⁷ It cannot isolate itself in a hermit style of existence. But being 'in the world and not of the world' poses serious issues of spiritual insight. At what point of connecting to non-Christians around us are we starting to compromise the Gospel?

One of the insights coming out of these seven messages is that compromise starts taking place when we begin trusting in ourselves rather than in Christ. The more our Christian service is motivated by "I can do it myself" the greater the compromise. The impressive aspect of these seven messages is that Christ has zero tolerance for doing church like this. The only acceptable way of living the Christian life is through absolute dependence on Christ for everything.

In the churches were direct contrast was drawn between the Jewish synagogue and the church, this principle of 'self help religion' and Christ centered religion is drawn out even more directly. The synagogue's 'self-help' approach came off of Torah obedience coupled with long standing tradition along with established status in the city. Both at Smyrna and Philadelphia the commendation of these churches was based on their consistent dependence upon Christ, in spite of small numbers or levels of intense poverty. The arrogance of the synagogue produced severe persecution of the believers, in a vain effort to stamp out authentic devotion to God in their city.

Another tragic aspect of what was happening is that the churches did not realize that they were compromising the Gospel and thus squeezing the spiritual life out of their church. The problem was greatest at both Sardis and Laodicea where complete ignorance of their spiritual condition is strongly criticized by Christ. Compromise is a deadly spiritual disease that sucks the life out of a church without creating the impression that anything is wrong. When it spreads quietly and extensively across a congregation as was the case in some of these churches it has devastating consequences. Clearly it is easier to spot when false teachers, such as at Pergamum and Thyatira, go on a crusade advocating compromise in the name of pure Gospel. But as Ephesus reveals, when such identified individuals are rooted out of the church, this deadly disease can still get into the life of the church by more subtle, less noticeable ways.

E. Dispositio.

This section of each message completes the heart of each of the seven messages by defining impending

⁷A classic exploration of this theme is *Christ and Culture* by H. Richard Niebuhr, now in its 50th anniversary edition. I highly recommend it.

action by Christ upon each church.⁸ What we see clearly is that Christ takes action either positively or negatively based completely on full understanding of the details of the situation in each church. Christ does not act arbitrarily or capriciously in warning the churches. Neither does He praise the churches without there being something genuinely praise worthy in the church. His actions are based on His knowledge of the situation.

There is enormous assurance in this. We don't ever make 'brownie points' with Christ; we can never 'butter Him up.' He knows us too well. And so we should never attempt any of this; it is doomed to back fire on us. Whether He commends or criticizes, we know that it comes out of His complete understanding of our situation.

Both commendation and criticism surface in this section of the seven messages. But these have the form of admonitions, rather than declarative statements as in the *Narratio* sections above. We can learn much by taking a look at these sections.

1) Ephesus (2:5-6): 5 μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανόησῃς. 6 ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ. **5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

The church's loss of its 'first love' prompts this call to repentance by Christ. The demand is cast in a three-fold call: **remember** (μνημόνευε), **repent** (μετανόησον), and **do** (ποιήσον).⁹ The call to reach back to their past is framed in terms of πόθεν πέπτωκας, **from where you have fallen**, and τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον, **the first works**. What Christ demands is that the church at Ephesus return to the quality of commitment that typified its beginning during the ministry of the apostle Paul in the 50s of

⁸The term *dispositio* (meaning 'arrangement') was used by Quintilian for the effective and unified arrangement of the various parts of a speech (*Institutio oratoria* 3.3.1) but has been derived from its later application to parts of official documents in medieval diplomacy (cf. Fridh, *Terminologie*, 9–10). The *dispositio* is closely connected to the *narratio*, for the *narratio* serves as the basis for assertions made in the *dispositio*. The *dispositio* differs from the other structural elements in the seven proclamations in that it is not formally marked with a stereotypical phrase used consistently throughout. Yet the *dispositio* is marked by the use of verbs in the imperative and future indicative (futuristic presents also occur, such as ἔρχομαι, 'I come,' βάλλω, 'I throw,' and μελλω, 'I am about to'). [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 122.]

⁹The sequencing of these imperatives pulls them together into a tight-knit unitary expression: μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον (Verb + object; Verb; object + Verb).

the first century. Luke provides an inspiring depiction of both the initial contact (Acts 18:19-21) and then of the three plus year ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:1- 20:1) where the power of God flowed out through the church in the city touching the lives of hundreds of people all over the province of Asia. The key to this early time of marvelous blessing was the ἀγάπη commitment to both Christ and others. It was unconditional surrender to and dependence upon Christ. Thus their actions came from the presence of Christ in their midst, and not through self-effort. Now half a century later Christ demands that they turn away from self-effort to that beginning level of commitment to Him.

The seriousness of Christ's demand is underscored with the warning that accompanies the demand: εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς, **If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.** Unless the church turns itself around, Christ will remove the spiritual basis for its existence. As 1:20 had clearly stated, the lampstand is the church viewed apocalyptically: καὶ αἱ λυχνίαὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν. They are the holders of the divine light which enable it to shine divine truth to the surrounding darkened world. But if the church has replaced that divine light with its own self-efforts at religion, the light is no longer shining. The lost world can no longer see the light of God. The church has forfeited its right to exist. Not all was lost for Christ commends them for passionately rejecting the corrupting impact of the Nicolaitans, whose teaching pushed the church toward compromise with the world.

A major lesson to be gleaned from this warning to the church at Ephesus is to avoid compromise with the world at all costs. Here we see a view of its danger. Compromising with the world means adopting a 'self-help' religion where the individual efforts of the believer take on a central role in one's Christian life. Inevitably that pushes us away from total dependence upon Christ and His working through us to give salvational light to the lost world around us. Instead of 'first love' surrender to Christ that enables the light of God to shine brightly through us, the world begins noticing the self efforts of ordinary people trying to be religious but not overly so in order to not appear too different than the non-Christians. That kind of religion possesses no strength from God to bring about the life-changing transformation of the Gospel. Christ would rather no light shine at all, than for this hugely misleading 'light' to be burning in the presence of the lost.

2) Smyrna (2:10): μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς. **Do not fear**

what you are about to suffer. **Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

In this word to the believers at Smyrna, no criticism of them is given. Rather caution and encouragement come to let them know that just around the corner is a time of intense persecution from the Jewish synagogue. In the pair of admonitions -- μηδὲν φοβοῦ and γίνου πιστὸς -- given to the believers, Christ doesn't promise any exemption from this suffering. Rather He admonishes them not to fear it, and also to be faithful to death. It won't last indefinitely, and in the promise made to them lies eternal life at the end of the suffering: δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

Why does Christ allow the believers who had already been enduring persecution (cf. v. 9a) face even greater affliction? A part of the reason comes with His declaration that the devil is going to throw some of them into prison ἵνα πειρασθῆτε, **so that you may be tested.** The idea here is of being put to the test in order to demonstrate what they are made of. Suffering persecution provides believers the opportunity to witness to the world that they are 'made out of spiritual steel' and not flabby fleshly religion. That is, Christ is both the basis of their life and the sustainer of their life. Demonstrating this in a willingness to die for Christ then stands in judgment upon human religion to seek its own advantage at all costs.

Down through the centuries of Christian history, those who have died for their Christian faith have left a marvelous legacy of inspiration by their experience.¹⁰ The modern day 'health and wealth gospel' betrays its heresy by falsely teaching that God will make every true believer physically healthy and wealthy in this life. Nothing could be further from the truth of the Gospel! Such perversion reflects its bondage to worldliness and compromise with the world -- the very thing Christ repeatedly condemns in these messages.

Modern western Christianity is hesitant about suffering due to the enormous cultural influence of the 'pleasure oriented society' that we live in. We have breathed in much of this mentality in compromising our faith surrender to Christ. Consequently passages like this one, which are quite numerous through the NT, seem strange and our inclination is to find a loophole around this principle. But in the process we water down our Christian commitment increasingly to the level of

¹⁰One of the most inspiring records of these people comes from the Quaker author John Foxe with his *Book of Martyrs*. The first version was published in 1563 in English from the original Latin version released in 1554. By his death in 1587, the book had passed through four revisions and expansions. It remains today one of the classical writings of Christianity on martyrdom from a Protestant viewpoint.

the Ephesian believers and unlike those at Smyrna whose steadfastness to Christ is greatly commended. Yet, in other parts of the modern world, especially in the so-called 'developing countries' the spiritual truth of this message is clearly understood and embraced by millions of believers who then are making a huge impact on spreading the Gospel in their world.

3) Pergamum (2:16): μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου. **Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.**

In this message Christ's demands targets the false teachers operating in the church, the Balaamites and Nicolaitans. But His demand to repent, μετανόησον οὖν, is addressed to the church. The implication is clear. The church is given opportunity to clean out the false teachers from its midst. Or else, the warning, εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου, and if not, I will come to you quickly and will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. The warning here is stern and implies something similar to the one in the next message to Thyatira. That is, Christ threatens to put to death these false teachers and their followers in the church, if He is forced to clean up the church rather than the church doing it themselves. The signaling of this comes in the use of ῥομφαία, which referred to a battlefield sword.

One of the clear principles emerging here, and also found in some of the subsequent messages, is that Christ requires the church to keep the teaching going on in its midst pure and centered on the Gospel. If a congregation is lax and tolerates those who contradict the Gospel with teaching that compromises with the world, Christ will discipline the church along with the false teachers in it.

How can a church accomplish this goal of proper teaching in its midst? Christian history is littered with failed attempts to do this. Clearly it is not easy! In the first three centuries the challenge was greater because of at least three realities. First, Christianity did not yet have a clearly defined and widely adopted standardized set of sacred writings of its own. The Greek translation of the Old Testament was in place in several different versions of Greek translation, but this was a shared Bible with Jews, and not a distinctly Christian Bible. To be sure, during the second and third centuries the process of canonization of Christian scriptures was taking place, but not until the middle of the fourth century did it become fully stabilized.

This created a dangerous environment in which the other standard of measuring orthodoxy became the regional bishop who supposedly possessed correct oral understanding of the Gospel passed down to him in the emerging doctrine of apostolic succession. To him

came the task of preserving correct understanding of the apostolic Gospel preached and taught by Jesus and the apostles.

The second reality was the deepening compromise of Christians generally with the ways of the world. As Christianity moved increasingly away from its Jewish roots it increasingly lost sight of much of the apostolic teaching of the apostles and of Christ. The ways of the contemporary Greco-Roman world became the framework for defining orthodoxy. Even after the settling of the issue of sacred NT scriptures in the fourth century, the compromise was so deep that this bishop centered oral tradition, the *regula fidei*, became the standard by which the Christians scriptures were to be interpreted. Thus the Roman Catholic Church of today is essentially built off this emerging principle of scripture understood by tradition in the Rule of Faith, now in written expression as the Magisterium.

This way of thinking is so deeply embedded that Protestant Christianity, especially with the early reformers in the sixteenth century could not escape its clutches. Thus out of Luther, Calvin and others came various creedal statements of Protestant orthodoxy as the required standard of belief and practice.

One deviation from this that more earnestly sought to get back to the Christian scriptures as the sole authority came out of the radical reformation in the late 1500s and 1600s. Luther's principle of *sola scriptura*, the scriptures alone as the authoritative standard, was extended further than Luther, Calvin and the other reformers were willing to take it.

Out of this heritage came in the 1600s efforts among Baptists and a few other groups to develop what they called "Confessions of Faith." These were intended to be statements of what the individual groups believed but in no way were to serve as authoritative documents. They were descriptive rather than prescriptive. Baptists have been among those championing this approach the most vigorously, although the present Southern Baptist Convention in the US has largely abandoned this confessional nature in favor of a creedal approach.

But the inherent problem with all of these approaches is the failure to understand how the early church kept itself pure in its commitment to the Gospel. The demands of Christ in this message along with the similar emphasis in the rest of the NT centers far more on spiritual purity reflected in daily living than on doctrinal purity with correct thinking. The few passages that reflect concerns for 'doctrinal' purity measure this against the orally preached Gospel by the apostles. Functionally the emphasis is on believing in a way that produces observable spiritual health. Key terms here are διδασκαλία¹¹

¹¹“δ. τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ Tit 2:10 (on the gen. cp. En 10:8 ἢ δ. Ἀζαήλ); δ. ὑγιαίνουσα 1 Ti 1:10; 2 Ti 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1; Page 18

and διδασκαλία,¹² both translated as ‘teaching.’ Particularly insightful is the phrase διδασκαλία ὑγιαίνουσα. The idea is teaching that leads to spiritual health. Most of Christianity since the apostles has stressed correct thinking as the heart of Christian orthodoxy. Jesus and the apostles stressed teaching believers principles that led them to be spiritually healthy followers of Christ. These are two very different approaches. To be sure the principles to be taught originate out of the Gospel, which are embodied in the scriptures of the New Testament. But the stress is on the finished product, more than on the source of the teachings. This is the exact reason many modern churches can be as orthodox as possible in their beliefs, but completely dead spiritually. Within the framework of the approach of Jesus and the apostles, such would never happen. Again, the modern deficiency grows out of compromise with its world. It thinks like a westerner rather than like a Christian.

The third reality was church organization. In the very loosely structured church life early on, groups of believers met in separate private homes scattered across the city. They seldom, if ever, came together in one group at one place on one occasion. Living in the hostile environment of that time made such far too dangerous. The individual house church leaders in a city did, however, work together in co-ordinated efforts. But no ecclesiastical authority enforced uniformity. Coming out of the intense persecution of Christianity in the second through early fourth centuries there did

καλή δ. **1 Ti 4:6**; ἡ κατ’ εὐσέβειαν δ. godly teaching **6:3**. Of dissident teaching: ἀπὸ τῆς δ. αὐτῶν ἀποφεύγετε AcPICor 2:21.W. no modifiers w. λόγος **5:17**; **6:1**; **2 Ti 3:10**; **Tit 2:7**.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 241]

¹²“**2. the content of teaching, teaching** (EpArist 207; 294; Just., A I, 40, 1) by Pharisees and Sadducees **Mt 16:12**; by Jesus **J 7:16f**; **18:19**; apostles **Ac 2:42** (Iren. 4, 33, 8 [Harv. II 262, 6]; Just., A I, 53, 3 παρὰ τῶν ἀποστολῶν).—**Ac 5:28**; **13:12**; **Ro 16:17**; **1 Cor 14:26**; **2J 9f**; **Rv 2:24**; D ins; 1:3; 2:1; 6:1; 11:2; B 9:9; 16:9; 18:1. κατὰ τ. διδασκίην in accordance w. the teaching **Tit 1:9**; βαπτισμῶν δ. teaching about baptisms **Hb 6:2**. τύπος διδασκίης pattern of teaching (of Christian belief and practice) **Ro 6:17** (GRoss, Exp. 7th ser., 5, 1908, 469–75; CLathey, JTS 29, 1928, 381–84; 30, 1929, 397–99; JMoffatt, JBL 48, 1929, 233–38; FBurkitt, JTS 30, 1929, 190f.—S. also παραδίδωμι 1b end, and τύπος 4); δ. καινή **Mk 1:27** (cp. the apocryphal gospel Ox 1224 Fgm. 2 verso, I, 2–5 [Kl. Texte 83, p. 26, 19ff] π[ο]ίαν σέ[ι] [φασιν διδ[α]σχίην καιν[ήν] δι[δά]σκειν, ἢ τί β[ά]πτισμα καινὸν [κηρύσσειν;] what’s this new teaching all about that they say you’re promoting, or what’s this new baptism you’re proclaiming?); **Ac 17:19**; δ. ἀφθαρσίας teaching that assures immortality IMg 6:2. Of offensive teachings **Rv 2:14f**; **Hb 13:9**; κακὴ δ. IEph 9:1; δ. ξέναι, μωραὶ Hs 8, 6, 5. The teaching of the wicked angel m 6, 2, 7.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 242]

emerge a centralized structure with considerable power given to the regional bishop. Enforcing of this power flowed largely through the developing sacramentalism doctrine and the bishop controlling who was permitted to administer the sacraments in his region. Squabbles among the regional bishops led to the Roman emperor Constantine favoring the bishop in Rome in the middle fourth century and this laid the foundation for the Roman Catholic Church.

Protestantism has in varying ways copied the Roman Catholic model of centralized church structure and authority. But with no more success in ‘enforcing’ doctrinal conformity than has been true in the Catholic Church. Out of the Radical Reformation came a reversal of the pattern with a ‘bottoms up’ structural pattern where the local congregation has final authority and extends limited authority to more centralized denominational structures. But the success of establishing correct belief has been little greater this way than with the other approaches.

What comes to the surface clearly in Christian history is that correct belief can never be successfully ‘enforced’ by any human authority. This comes in part because demanding correct ‘belief’ is false and anti-NT in the first place.

What has worked far better across the centuries is where the church atmosphere is focused on complete surrender to Christ, coupled with sincere and insightful interpretation of scripture. When these traits are placed into the hands of the Spirit of Christ, He will keep the church moving in the proper direction, that is, into deep spiritual health. And there is where you will find the blessing of God in abundance. This was at the heart of what Christ longed to do at Pergamum.

4) Thyatira (2:22-25): 22 ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, 23 καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενώ ἐν θανάτῳ. καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἔραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν. 24 ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις, ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδασκίην ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν· οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος, 25 πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὗ ἂν ἴξω. **22 Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call ‘the deep things of Satan,’ to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; 25 only hold fast to what you have until I come.**

The word to the church at Thyatira is very similar to the one to the church at Pergamum. The narratio

section of both messages commends the believers for their steadfastness in commitment to Christ. And to those at Thyatira the commendation praises them for increased surrender to Christ over time that led to even greater service. But the church also had a Jezebel like woman teaching serious compromise with the surrounding world and its ways. Substantial signals strongly suggest the driving motivation for such teaching was money. This Jezebel like leader in the church was a wealthy business woman who did not want to see her business diminish because she had become a Christian. In the guise of 'charismatic revelations' she was advocating the same essential compromise being taught at Ephesus, and Pergamum. To be a Christian but not have to live differently from her pagan business clients was her goal. The choice of the OT wife of King Ahab as the point of comparison could suggest marriage to a Christian husband, but no clear indication of such is present in the text.

But what is made clear is that Christ had given her time to repent and cease such false teaching. And that opportunity was just about expired. The warning is that He is going to strike her down with some kind of physical illness that will serve as divine judgment on her. Also, her followers in the church will be struck down with death, unless they repent of this compromising teaching and practice. His intention is to make an example out of her as a warning to all the churches.

Christianity and paganism do not ever mix successfully. One always faces an 'either/or' choice; never a 'both and' choice. Christ defines the requirements, not the individual considering Christianity. And every decision on our part carries with it a high level of accountability before God, both in this life and certainly on Judgment Day.

At the end of this message is a reassurance to those in the church not under this woman's influence that Christ is pleased with their commitment as it is being lived out. Their task is to maintain carefully this level of commitment as they move forward.

5) Sardis (3:2-4): 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὗρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτῃς, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν. **2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.**

The word to the church at Sardis centers on a call for them to wake up to the spiritual lifelessness that is plaguing their church. Far too much of their service is being done 'in the flesh' and not out of the power of Christ. Their situation is not completely lost but they are in serious trouble spiritually. In seeking spiritual awakening they need to go back to πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον, **how you received and heard, and begin obeying along with a repentance.**¹³

In the warning Christ compares Himself to a thief slipping in unexpectedly to do his work. A reminder that analogous language plays off a single point rather than multiple details, the point of comparison is the unexpected arrival of Christ in punishment of the church. They won't know in advance when His judgment will fall on the church.

The distinctive angle on religious compromise in this message is a call to wake up to what is happening in your midst. Compromise with the world can come in the overt false teaching of individuals in the church. But Sardis reminds us that it also slips in largely unnoticed as a congregation begins to be too cozy with the surrounding world. Christ can and will expose our lifelessness, but we can see this ahead of time by comparing our present spiritual commitment to the initial conversion commitment of all out surrender to Christ. If our present commitment doesn't match up to that initial commitment, then its time to repent and turn things around. Otherwise, we face the humiliating coming of Christ to expose it openly.

6) Philadelphia (3:9-11): 9 ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεῦδοι. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἦξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. 10 ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 11 ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου. **9 I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying — I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word of patient endur-**

¹³The sequencing of the verb actions here via the different tenses of the indicative and imperative verbs creates major translation challenges. Clearly the first two Aorist indicative verbs εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας call the church members to go back to the time of their conversion to remember how they first became believers from hearing the Gospel presented to them. This is signaled also by the present imperative μνημόνευε, that demands this recollection not as momentary but as ongoing. The second present imperative verb τήρει calls on them to recover that initial level of obedience and to continue it. Such obedience must become the norm in their lives. The third verb, an Aorist imperative, μετανόησον demands a decisive turning around in their thinking, coming out of the recovering of their conversion level of commitment.

ance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. 11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

Only Smyrna and Philadelphia have no criticisms leveled at them by Christ. And only Philadelphia has a single admonition directed its way: κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, **hold fast to what you have**. The encouragement of Christ to this congregation centers on promises made to them. At some point -- most likely prior to judgment day -- Christ promises to force the Jewish synagogue community in Philadelphia to openly acknowledge the church as the true people of God. How He intends to do that is not specified, but that He will do it is unquestionable. Secondly, He promises to sustain the church during a coming time of general suffering by the population of the region. This τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ, **moment of testing**, will especially target those persecutors of believers (τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης and τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, basically code words in Revelation for those opposing Christ and His people). The testing (πειρασμοῦ / πειράσαι) will expose those who are true believers and those who are not the people of God. This will become abundantly clear through this experience coming to Philadelphia. Thus the church is encouraged to maintain its firm commitment to Christ in order to reflect who they actually are in contrast to the claims of the Jewish synagogue.

What is the lesson for us from this message? Hopefully Christ's encouraging words to this church will inspire us to continually live at the deep level of all out commitment to Christ. For both them and the church at Smyrna, such was not easy. Both churches faced intense Jewish persecution challenging their claim to be the people of God. In the face of such pressure the believers did not flinch in their commitment to Christ. Even though even stiffer pressure lay just around the corner for them, Christ's promise was to sustain them through it and to force their persecutors to acknowledge that the church was where God was working in the city, not the synagogue. When we encounter opposition as Christians, will we remain firm in our commitment to Christ as the Philadelphians did? By firm in our commitment is not meant arrogant in our Christian commitment. That approach represents fleshly resistance to opposition. True commitment is full dependence on Christ in the way He modeled dependence on the Heavenly Father through His earthly ministry and especially during His trial and execution. Here is the way we demonstrate to the world that we belong to Christ. Here is how Christ is able to sustain us through the opposition. Flinching on that commitment with sinking down to an angry rebuttal or arrogant lashing out at our enemies represents a fleshly action that risks τὸν στέφανόν, **the crown**, of

God's blessing and presence in our lives.

7) Laodicea (3:16-20): 16 οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρός, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου. 17 ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλοῦσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, 18 συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγγρίσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς. 19 ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. 20 Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐὰν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ. **16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.**

This final message is one of the most detailed warnings to any of the churches. The problem of worldly compromise that plagued the church at Sardis was worse at Laodicea. Worldliness had been breathed into the life of the church from the affluence and arrogance that typified this wealthy city. It had turned the church into χλιαρὸς, **putrid water**, that made Christ ready to spit out of His mouth. They tasted to Christ just like the χλιαρὸς water the residents of the city drank daily from the aqueduct system as their water supply. The same spiritual blindness that plagued Sardis dominated Laodicea.

But also in this word we see a compassionate Christ reaching out to the church for them to repent and turn things around. In the commercial language of the city, He presents Himself as a Salesman possessing just the goods and remedies they needed to experience spiritual renewal (v. 18). As a good father, He warns them of His willingness to severely discipline them in order to get them going the right way (v. 19). As a potential friend, He stands outside the church knocking on the front door so He can be invited in and develop a deep long lasting friendship with them (v. 20). He is not yet ready to give up on the church.

This last message possesses obvious relevance to us in today's world. When worldly compromise becomes deep seated in the life of the church, we develop a repugnant odor and taste to our Lord. Yet, He comes to us seeking our repentance so that spiritual renewal can take place. May God help us to be wise

enough to take advance of such opportunity!

These seven words to the churches in the *Dispositio* sections portray an important picture of Christ to us. It is the same portrait found elsewhere in the New Testament, and particularly in the four gospels. Christ comes to us as His church both in compassion and sternness. He absolutely will not stand idly by and watch us compromise ourselves into a disastrous worldliness. His ongoing objective is that each church live out its life in unconditional surrender to Him and in complete dependence on Him working in and through us for the advancement of the Gospel. He will shove us, push us, warn us, admonish us, discipline us toward living this way continuously. He wisely knows that worldliness means fleshly efforts at doing religion rather than Christian service in the power of Christ. Only His power can transform and save the lost world around us. That world can only come to know Him when they see Him working in and through His church.

Further, we must never overlook that Christ is fully prepared to put a church completely out of business if it is unwilling to turn away from its compromising worldliness. No witness at all is better than a false witness creating a false sense of relationship with Christ. As Jesus blasted the Pharisees over this (cf. Mt. 23:15), such a false witness makes an individual twofold the child of Hell.

F. Victory Formula

This victory formula stands as one of two elements somewhat externally connected to each message. The command to hear (see below) is the most detached in that the exact same wording exists in all seven messages. Close links to the individual messages are found in the victory formula in that the specific promises of eternal life are made using terminology consistent to the theme of each message.

The formula plays off a common structure. The overcoming one is defined by a substantial appositional participle either in the Greek dative case, $\tau\tilde{\omega}$ νικῶντι (2:7, 17), or in the Greek nominative case, Ὁ νικῶν (2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The participle stands as the antecedent of the personal pronoun αὐτῷ which is the dative of indirect object in all of the messages except for Smyrna (2:11) and Sardis (3:5). The use of αὐτῷ signals also the use of the future tense verb δώσω, **I will give**. One additional minor deviation is in 3:12 with a synonymous expression, ποιήσω αὐτὸν, **I will make him**, with Ὁ νικῶν as the antecedent of the personal pronoun αὐτὸν as the accusative of primary object. Where δώσω or its equivalent ποιήσω are not used, the overcoming participle stands as subject of a passive voice verb: Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ, **The overcoming one will never ever**

be harmed, 2:11, Smyrna; Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται, **the overcoming one will thus be clothed**, 3:5, Sardis. One other slight variation surfaces in 2:26 where a parallel participle is added: ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν, **the one overcoming and the one obeying**. Uniformly the overcoming participle always stands at the very beginning of the sentence in the most prominent spot of the sentence.

Interestingly the sequence of inclusion of the victory formula and the hear command differs with the victory formula coming after the hear command in the first three messages (2:7, 11, 17) but before it in the last four messages (2:26-27; 3:5, 12, 21). No clear signal emerges as to why this variation occurs beyond in the pre position the content of the victory formula seems more closely linked to the Narratio/Dispositio theme of each message. But the descriptive content in each of the formulas grows out of both the Adscriptio language and the theme emphasis in the message itself.

One important theological point to remember is that the victory promise is eschatological in focus, as signaled by the use of the future tense verbs along with the content of each one. Thus the promise of victory in each one is the promise of eternal life in Heaven as the consummation of the salvation process begun in conversion. What Jesus describes in these formula promises is entrance into Heaven by His people on the day of judgment. And as such these victory formulas then anticipate in part chapters four through twenty-two in part two of John's vision.

Additionally the one common prerequisite for entering Heaven in all seven messages is to be an overcoming person: $\tau\tilde{\omega}$ νικῶντι (2:7, 17) and Ὁ νικῶν (2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The present tense form of both participles that come from νικάω specifies the most common theme in the messages, that of being faithful and consistent in one's commitment to Christ. Repeatedly, Christ calls several churches back to their conversion surrender of themselves completely to Him as the benchmark of Christian living all through their spiritual journey. Living the Christian life is a matter of living in daily surrender and dependence on Christ to guide, sustain and work through you for His glory. In this only, can one become an overcomer. That is, to become victorious over temptation and successful in service to Christ. The bottom line is that this is the criteria of authentic discipleship and thus of eternal salvation.

Now for a look at each depiction of entering Heaven.

1) Ephesus (2:7b). $\tau\tilde{\omega}$ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. **To the one overcoming, I will give to him to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.**

To enter Heaven is to be granted the privilege of eating from the tree of life located in Heaven. The phrase

παράδεισος τοῦ θεοῦ, **paradise of God**, is an Old Persian loanword literally meaning ‘garden.’ In the LXX it is used in reference to the Garden of Eden (Ezek. 28:13; 31:8, 9; cf. Isa 51:3). In Jewish apocalyptic tradition it came to be associated with the eternal dwelling place of God (e.g., 2 Enoch 8:1; 1 Enoch 24-25).



The image of a tree of life surfaces in Revelation at four places: 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19, which also locate the tree in the paradise of God.¹⁴ As these references in the Conclusio of the book make clear, such a privilege to eat from this tree is a picturesque way of depicting life being nourished eternally by God where He dwells. Although the Aorist infinitive φαγεῖν could suggest eating just upon arrival, the summarizing capability of the Greek Aorist tense captures all eternity in one snapshot with God’s people eating this fruit forever. Rev. 22:2 expands the image to a monthly harvest of fruit that becomes available.

The image reverses the divine command in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were driven from the garden because of eating from the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). The concept of the tree of life with eschatological salvation is widely used in Jewish apocalyptic literature and early Christian writings.¹⁵

Christ promises the overcomer the blessed privilege of a life eternally nourished in God’s own garden. No chemical fertilizers corrupting the fruit! No back

¹⁴Rev. 22:2. ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν **ξύλον ζωῆς** ποιοῦν καρποὺς δώδεκα, κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδίδουν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὰ φύλλα τοῦ ξύλου εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν.

In the middle of the street of the city and on either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Rev. 22:14. Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ **ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς** καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσελθῶσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

Rev. 22:19. καὶ ἐάν τις ἀφέλῃ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, ἀφελεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ **ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς** καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

¹⁵“A number of other Jewish texts use the eating of the fruit of the tree of life as a metaphor for salvation (1 Enoch 25:5; 3 Enoch 23:18; T. Levi 18:11; Apoc. Mos. 28:4; Apoc. Elij. 5:6), and this metaphor continues to be used by Christian authors (T. Jacob 7:24).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 152.]

breaking harvesting in order to obtain the fruit! Just eat it and live forever. That’s an image which resonates!

2) Smyrna (2:11b). Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἔκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου. **The one overcoming will never ever be harmed by the second death.**

To the believers being persecuted at Smyrna the promise comes that no possibility of being hurt by the ‘second death’ exists. Most of them were suffering harm and the possibility of a physical death due of Jewish synagogue persecution. But physical death is not the ultimate issue for Christ. He experienced that personally at the end of His earthly life.

What is the ‘second death’? The concept is better defined latter in Revelation (20:14b): οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερός ἐστιν, ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός, **This is the second death, the lake of fire.**¹⁶ In the language of this book, the second death is Hell presented as a lake of fire creating eternal torments for those confined to it.

To the persecuted believers at Smyrna living in poverty Christ declares complete protection from any danger of Hell with all its torments. To enter Heaven means eternal protection from the fires of Hell. The Greek double negative οὐ μὴ intensifies absolutely the negating of the verb action against the believers. οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ equals no possible harm coming. Heaven is an absolutely secure place. Although Satan has managed to take over control of the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna (i.e., συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ in v. 9) and thus make life miserable for these believers now, they will be completely beyond his reach in Heaven.

What a marvelous promise to God’s people. So often in this life the devil works havoc on God’s people and causes them great suffering and harm. But Christ promises a complete end to this in Heaven.

3) Pergamum (2:17b). Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων. **To the one overcoming, I will give to him from the hidden manna and I will give to him a white stone, and on the stone is written a new name which no one knows except the one receiving it.**

¹⁶See also Rev. 20:6. μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ **δευτερος θάνατος** οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ’ ἔσσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη.

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.

Rev. 21:8. τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς καὶ ἀπίστοις καὶ ἐβδελυγμένοις καὶ φονεῦσιν καὶ πόρνοις καὶ φαρμάκοις καὶ εἰδωλολάτραις καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ψευδέσιν τὸ μέρος αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ τῇ καιομένῃ πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ, **ὃ ἐστὶν ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος.**

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Entering Heaven in the message to Pergamum is defined in two distinct ways. First, it means access to τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κερρυμμένου, the hidden manna. Although a variety of possible implications of the adjective κερρυμμένου exist, the clear meaning of the image of manna comes straight from God's divine provision for the needs of the children of Israel in the exodus. What Heaven means is that God will provide for our needs completely. That provision is a Heaven manna, rather than the material manna given to the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness. This manna lasts forever and will supply all our needs.

But Heaven can be characterized not only from the Jewish heritage but also in the secular world of Pergamum comes another critical image, ψῆφον λευκὴν, a white stone. The Greek word ψῆφον referred to a variety of valuable stones, or gems, in the ancient world, even a magical stone. With the inscription of a secret name written on it, ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων, the white stone most likely symbolizes citizenship or membership as was commonly the case in the ancient world. In their non-status existence in the city of Pergamum, Christ declares to them a Heavenly citizenship which they can know about but which outsiders are totally ignorant of.

Thus from both the Jewish and the Greco-Roman cultural traditions Christ depicts Heaven to these believers at Pergamum. And this depiction affirms God's provision and affirmation of them as very important people. What a marvelous promise to the people of God!

4) Thyatira (2:26-28). 26 Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν 27 καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντριβεται, 28 ὡς κάγω εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωῒνόν. 26 And the one overcoming and keeping to the end my works, I will give to him authority over the nations, 27 and he will shepherd them with an iron rod as when clay pots are shattered -- 28 even as I also received from My Father and I will give to him the morning star.

To the believers at Thyatira come two promises about entering Heaven. Entering Heaven means being given both ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν and τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωῒνόν. Again both the Jewish and the Greco-Roman backgrounds define the significance of both these images.

First, the granting of ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν comes as a summation of Psalm 2:8-9 from the LXX. The image of 'ruling' is actually ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, shepherding them with an iron rod.¹⁷ In apocalyp-

¹⁷“Again the αὐτῷ, literally ‘him,’ refers to all who conquer (whether men or women), underlining the figurative character of the reward, since taking it literally would mean that the entire group of conquering Christians would rule the nations as a body,

tic Judaism Psalm 2:9 was interpreted messianically (e.g., Pss. Sol. 17:23b–24a). Clearly the sense of this Hebrew image is that believers will share in the divine authority of God over the powers of evil and of earthly rulers. We will not exercise independent authority of our own, but we will be blessed to be standing with God in His absolute control over the world and the devil. Christ in His exaltation was granted such blessing and now He shares it with His people. Believers will no longer stand on the victimization end of evil power.

Second, from the Greek tradition of Venus as the τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωῒνόν comes the promise of Christ as the guarantor of divine blessing for all eternity.¹⁸ The Greeks and the Romans looked to Venus as the goddess who would give them a good day. Believers look to the morning star and see a symbol of Christ who promises a good forever! Thus entering Heaven means entering into this blessed forever lived out in the presence of Almighty God.

5) Sardis (3:5). Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. The one overcoming thusly will be clothed in white garments and I will never ever blot out his name from the book of life and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

The picture of entering Heaven given to the church at Sardis contains three promises: 1) new clothes, 2) no blotting out of one's name, and 3) Christ's confession.

First, the ἱματίοις λευκοῖς. In the previous declaration Christ mentioned those in Sardis who had not soiled their clothes and thus would walk with Him clothed in white since they had proven the genuineness of their faith commitment. The promise in the Victory Formula picks up this declaration with the adverb of manner οὕτως and turns it into the generalized promise of the formula. Something unique in the seven messages.

White garments in the ancient world symbolized a variety of meanings centered on ritual and moral purity.¹⁹ In Revelation, the redeemed of Heaven are

which clearly is inappropriate for the kingship model presupposed here. Vv 26b–27 are closely modeled after Ps 2:8–9,” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 210.]

¹⁸“To take this promise literally would somehow involve the corporate possession of the morning star by all conquering Christians, which would be meaningless. The ‘morning star,’ ‘day star,’ and ‘evening star’ are three modern ways of referring to the planet Venus (known in ancient Babylonia as the star of Ishtar), which appears at dawn before the sun and so was understood in ancient times as the herald of a new day.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 212.]

¹⁹“White garments symbolize a range of positive meanings that center on the concept of ritual and moral purity (see Her-

dressed in white robes: 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13. This affirms the true redemption of those having overcome in faithful commitment to Christ. When we enter Heaven we change clothes! And the new garments reflect our status as the redeemed people of God.

Second, the promise to never ever blot out our name. In the background stands a widespread Jewish tradition that God keeps a record of all those who are His covenant people. Especially illustrative is the Jewish apocalypse *Odes of Solomon* 9:11: “Put on the crown in the true covenant of the Lord, And all those who have conquered will be inscribed in His book.” No sort of predestined inclusion is intended by Jesus’ promise. Rather, the promise of inclusion in the Book of Life²⁰ comes to those overcoming, which in 2:26 is unquestionably defined as ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, **the one obeying until the end My works.**

In the Greco-Roman world a similar book was kept in each city as a record of those who held citizenship in the city. Usually only death or the committing of some serious crime against the laws of the city -- namely a capital offense -- resulted in one’s name being erased from the citizenship record. Again the point of Christ with the double negative **οὐ μὴ** ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ is the stress that such will never ever be done since those overcoming have already had their name inscribed in Heaven’s citizenship record. That record is now forever permanent.

Third, Christ Himself promises to acknowledge the overcomer as His own in formal confession (ὁμολογήσω) before both God and His angels. Here echoes of Luke mas Vis. 4.3.5). Heavenly messengers are frequently described as wearing white garments (2 Macc 11:8; Matt 28:3 = Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Rev 4:4; 19:14; Hermas Vis. 4.2.1; T. Levi 8:2; Lucian Philops. 25), and in Dan 7:9; 1 Enoch 14:20, God is described as wearing white (just as deities in the Greco-Roman world were thought to wear white). Priests in the ancient world often wore white (Exod 28:4; Lev 16:4; Jos. Ant. 11.327, 331; 20.216–18; J. W. 2.123, 137 [Essenes habitually wore white; see Hippolytus Ref. 9.19]; Lucian Alex. 11; Ps.-Lucian De dea Syria 42), as did worshipers who participated in sacrifices and processions (Acts John 38). By the first century a.d., the dead were buried in white in Judaism (see Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* 1:550 n. 212; Ps.-Philo *Bib. Ant.* 64.6), a practice found in the Greco-Roman world (Plutarch *Quaest. Rom.* 26.270D–F), and perhaps based on this custom the notion developed that white garments will be awarded to the righteous after judgment as a heavenly reward (b. Šabb. 114a; Rev 6:11; 7:9, 13; Hermas *Sim.* 8.2.3; see Lucian *Peregr.* 40 [Peregrinus is seen wearing white garments after his suicide]).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 223.]

²⁰Cf. Rev. 20:12-15; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27. Two phrases refer to this book ἡ βίβλος τῆς ζωῆς and τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς with the diminutive form τὸ βιβλίον also being used. These are used synonymously in Revelation. A lot of manuscript variation surfaces in the hand copying of Revelation with scribes seeking to synchronize the terminology in the recognition of their synonymous meaning.

12:8 and Matthew 10:32 surface. In final judgment the overcomer will be formally acknowledged as belonging to Christ and thus eligible for Heaven. This guarantees our eternal citizenship in Heaven.

6) Philadelphia (3:12). Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. **The one overcoming, I will make him to be a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never ever leave it, and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from My God, and My new name.**

To be believers at Philadelphia under persecution from the Jewish synagogue, Christ depicts entering Heaven in terms of the Jerusalem temple. The synagogue in longing for the days of pilgrimage to Jerusalem for worship in the temple -- now destroyed almost thirty years before -- laid claim to being the true people of God in the fervent Jewish nationalism of the second half of the first century. But Christ declares that not the members of the synagogue will enter the Heavenly temple in the new Jerusalem. Instead, the overcomers at Philadelphia would be. In fact they would be incorporated into the very structure of that Heavenly temple as στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου. Even more assertive is the designation of the Heavenly temple as ναὸς rather than as ἱερίον. This specifies the inner court of the temple reserved only for Jewish men. But now every believer -- male, female, child, Jew, Gentile -- will stand directly in the full presence of Almighty God.

Further validation of belonging to God comes in the promise to write three names on the forehead of the overcomer: 1) of God, 2) of the new Jerusalem, and 3) of Christ. Out of Exod. 28:36-38, the inscription “**Holy to the Lord**” was written on a gold plate mounted on the front of Aaron’s high priestly headdress worn on his forehead. The inscribing of God’s name on the overcomer as he enters Heaven marks him as dedicated to God forever. Against the backdrop of citizenship records in the ancient Greco-Roman cities, the second name to be inscribed is that of the new Jerusalem. The overcomer by this mark becomes a permanent citizen of God’s dwelling place. Finally, the third name is that of Christ’s τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. The precise reference is unclear although the idea seems to come out of Isaiah 62:2. Often in the church fathers the name ‘Christian’ was put forth, but this is Christ’s name inscribed on the forehead of the overcomer rather than His name for believers. But the point is to indicate that the believer belongs to Christ forever. Given that the city of Philadelphia had been given a new name twice during the first century by different Roman emperors, this promise

had particular meaning.²¹

7) Laodicea (3:21). Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. **The one overcoming, I will give to him to sit with me on My throne, just as I also have overcome and have sit down with My Father on His throne.**

In words similar to those at Thyatira (2:26-28), Christ promises the overcomer that he/she will sit down beside Christ on His Heavenly throne, even as He sits next to the Heavenly Father on the throne (cf. Rev. 12:5; 22:1, 3). Standing in the background here is Psalm 110:1 with the promise of ultimate authority to the Son from the Father. Now the Son shares that authority with His people. From the moment of entering Heaven onward the believers will share positively in the benefits of the reign of Christ and God. Christ's enemies will feel the overpowering sting of that reign in their eternal damnation.



Roman coin with image of a bisellium, a two-seated throne.



What a picture of entering Heaven! Each image in the seven messages depicts the one point of coming into the Heavenly abode promised to the people of God, described here in terms of being an overcomer. In formal language and yet customized to the situation of each church Christ pledges to grant eternal blessings.

Those who qualify are designated as Ὁ νικῶν, **the overcomer**. As made explicitly clear in 2:26 the ὁ νικῶν is also ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, **the one keeping**

²¹“The first new name was “Neokaisareia” (after Tiberius or Germanicus), given to the city after the earthquake of a.d. 17, while the second, “Flavia,” the family name of the emperor Vespasian, was given during his reign, i.e., a.d. 70–79 (Ramsay, Letters, 397–98, 409–12).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 245.]

my works until the end. The criteria for authentic Christianity is measured against the standard of consistent commitment from conversion onward. Whether we are saved or not is determined not by our claims nor by a superficial decision made years before. Rather it is determined by whether the conversion surrender to Christ is lived out faithfully in dependence on Christ day by day.

Thus to the overcomer is given these blessed promises of participation in the Heavenly blessing of Almighty God through Jesus Christ.

G. Hear Command

The final element attached to each of the messages is the command to hear, or as sometimes labeled, the Proclamation Formula. It shows up either before the Victory Formula (2:7, 11, 17) or following it as the final item (2:29; 3:6, 13, 22) in each message. Additionally it is structured exactly the same in all seven messages: Ὁ ἔχων οὐς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, **Let the one having an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**²²

In the background of this formula lies most closely the tradition of Jesus in teaching through parables: ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκουέτω, **Let the one having ears listen** (cf. Mt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mk. 4:9, 23; 7:15; Lk. 8:8; 14:35). All through the gospels much emphasis is placed on listening. The formula ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκουέτω comes as the ‘signature’ of several of Jesus’ parables, in a manner duplicated here in the seven messages.

Both formulas have their origin in the OT prophetic oracles where “**Hear the word of Yahweh**” introduces the words delivered by the prophet as the words of God to His people (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19; Amos 7:16; Jer 29:20).²³ The command to listen was often associated with public announcements and courts of law. But as a ‘signature’ coming at the end the formula stands as a communication device reminding the listener of the divine nature of what has been said.

The object of the Aorist imperative verb ἀκουσάτω

²²Two variant forms of the formula surface elsewhere in Revelation:

Rev. 13:9. Εἴ τις ἔχει οὐς ἀκουσάτω. **If anyone has ears, let him listen.**

Rev. 13:18. ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου. **Let the one having understanding calculate the number of the beast.**

²³“Proclamation formulas (variously phrased) often introduce OT prophetic oracles with such expressions as ‘Hear the word of Yahweh’ (1 Kgs 22:19; Amos 7:16; Jer 29:20). Originally derived from public announcements in assemblies and courts of law (cf. Mic 6:2; Jer 2:4), proclamation formulas were used to introduce legal instruction (Prov 4:1; Job 13:6; 33:1, 31; 34:2, 16; Isa 49:1; 51:4) and instruction in wisdom (Deut 32:1; Prov 7:24; Ps 49:1; Isa 28:23).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 124.]

is τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, **what the Spirit is saying to the churches.** In the message -- beginning with Τάδε λέγει and ending with ὁ νικῶν -- Christ speaks to each individual church. But with the Hear Command, the Spirit is speaking to all of the churches from each message of Christ.

First a very close connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit is set up here. Second, it is the duty of the Holy Spirit to take what Christ said to individual churches and to make it relevant to all of the churches.

Out of this comes clearly the universal relevance for churches of all times of all of the messages that Christ spoke to these seven historical churches in the province of Asia. Hopefully this survey summary of all seven messages has helped make that collective message clearer.

CONCLUSION

Chapters one through three of Revelation present us with a hugely exalted vision of Jesus Christ. In this picture He remains the Savior who gave His life for sinners.

And we also see Him as a loving and compassionate Son of God. When His people experience persecution at the hands of evil men, and especially in the name of religion as did some of the Jewish synagogues, Christ is concerned. He comes to His people not with a superficial comfort, but rather to let them know that He is standing with them through their hurt and difficulties. He will not ever exempt them from suffering, as these chapters make very clear. But He reminds His suffering people that by standing faithful to Him in the midst of their persecution a brighter outcome awaits them at the end. Their suffering is used by God as a validation of their genuineness as God's people, and thus as a witness to the rest of the world about the Gospel and its power to deliver one from sin and its horrible fate. This message of Christ reminds us that God sides not with the rich and powerful of this world, but rather with the down trodden and persecuted believers with few if anything of this world's goods.

But the most prominent element of this apocalyptic picture of Christ is one of His deity and His power to judge and to sentence individuals for all eternity. Repeatedly Christ commends the believers who walk daily in faithful surrender to Him. Climatically these are the overcomers to whom He promises entrance into Heaven, and no one else. He alone is the One who opens the doors of Heaven to the overcomers, and closes it to all others, including the synagogue members. He alone invites the overcomer to sit down next to Him and the Heavenly Father on the eternal throne in Heaven.

And it is He who warns a 'lukewarm' church to repent or face being closed down. He demands church-

es that are tolerating teachers advocating compromise with the world to take disciplinary action against the corruptors of the Gospel in their midst. Otherwise, He threatens to come and 'make war against' them with devastating consequences for the entire church. He alone evaluates churches with reputations for being a lively church and assesses them to be spiritual dead, or else He will close them down. Christ declares to each οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, **I know your works,** reflecting complete knowledge of absolutely everything about each church. Nothing -- absolutely nothing -- is hidden from His inspecting eye! And His judgments both positive and negative upon each church come out of this total awareness of each one.

The ultimate point then to each of us as readers is stated in the beatitude of 1:3,

Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

If we desire the blessing of God both now and for eternity, then we must pay close attention to what Christ says in these messages. For in them we discover the key to being an 'overcomer' and thus to entering Heaven, as well as experiencing His presence along our journey on earth.

God help us to be good readers and listeners!

