

I. Structure and approach

A. The Seven Letters (2:1 - 3:22)

1. Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)
2. Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)
3. Letter to Pergamum (2:12-17)
4. Letter to Thyatira (2:18 -29)
5. Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)
6. Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)
7. Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)

II. The Seven Letters (2:1 - 3:22)

III. Letter to Thyatira (2:18-29)

A. Historical Background

1. Part of the Roman empire and was well known for it's many trade _____. Trade guilds were like unions in that workers in a certain field could only buy and sell if they were a part of the local guild. These guilds were heavily religious and had monthly meetings in temples that involved eating food sacrificed to idols and promiscuous, orgy filled rituals. One of the most well known guilds was the purple guild that was world renown for their dyes.
2. There were two main temples in Thyatira. One was dedicated to worshiping the sun god Tyrinnos, and the other was for the goddess Sambethe which had a resident prophetess who would reveal deep and hidden things to those who worshipped her.
3. Today Thyatira is the modern city Akhissar in Turkey. The name literally means "white castle" and the ruins of that middle ages castle can still be seen today.

B. Verse By Verse

1. Description of Jesus:

- a. Jesus asserts His _____ as the Son of God.
- b. He highlights his eyes that are burning with fire.
 - i. Jesus' jealousy for His people
 - ii. The burning anger and wrath in Jesus' heart for those who embrace wickedness and reject His offer of repentance and restoration.
- c. Feet like burnished or glowing hot bronze - He is ready to tread the earth with wrath to burn out all that is evil and hinders love.

2. Words of Affirmation

- a. Jesus has a lot of good things to say about this church.
 - i. He praises their deeds and their love. They have not replaced intimacy with Jesus with working for Him. Instead, they have worked with Him in loving partnership.
 - ii. He also praises their faith and perseverance. They have stood against persecution and endured the rejection of people.
 - iii. He also praises their service. They care for one another and all who are in need, serving as Jesus did.
- b. Amazingly, too, this is the only church that Jesus says has actually grown in their good _____.

3. Words of Correction and Exhortation

- a. The church has tolerated Jezebel.
- b. To understand this we need to take a step back and address a few things:
 - i. Jesus is not talking about the "spirit of Jezebel."
 - ii. Whether her name is or isn't Jezebel, one thing is clear: her character is similar to the Jezebel of the Old Testament.

- iii. It is not wrong for women to be prophets or minister by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This Jezebel's sin is not that she was a prophetess. It's that she was a false prophet.
 - c. She led His people astray so that they committed sexual immorality and ate meat sacrificed to idols.
 - d. Why would she teach this? In light of the guilds of Thyatira her argument was basically – business is business. It's ok to participate in these things if it's for the sake of supporting what God has _____ you to. Have you heard any similar arguments in our culture?
 - e. So Jezebel felt so strongly about her argument that not only did she live it, she began saying it was a word from God that overrode what the Apostles had said. This is a big problem. However, what was worse was that the church tolerated it.
 - f. So Jesus comes with His rebuke and His _____. Jesus has given her time to repent but she does not want to repent. Jesus gives her a new bed - a bed of sickness.
 - g. This is where we begin to get a glimpse at the perspective of Jesus over our world and our lack of love for His justice. If we're honest, the thought of Jesus killing people because of their sin causes rebellion in our _____.
 - h. Why does Jesus react so seemingly brutally to Jezebel and her followers? He wants the Church to understand that He really _____ what's in their minds and hearts.
 - i. Jesus only moves in judgment against that which keeps people from coming to Him and receiving His love! If we want to love Jesus, we must love His mercy and His justice.
 - j. For those in Thyatira who have not participated in these sinful practices Jesus tells them to just hold fast until He comes. They are doing great!
4. Promised Reward
- a. His first promise is a quote from Psalms 2. Jesus is saying, "If you partner with me on the earth now, I will let you partner with me in ruling and judging the earth then!" How incredible this will be!
 - b. Then Jesus goes even farther and says He will give to us the morning star. The morning star = _____!

IV. Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)

A. Historical Background

1. Sardis, founded before the 8th century BC, actually became the capital of the empire of Persia for a time in the 6th century BC. It was considered impenetrable to military attack until it fell to Greeks in 334BC because the _____ on its walls failed to keep watch.
2. Devastated by a massive earthquake in 17AD, it was rebuilt in glory by the Romans and became one of the leading cities of the area for the next 1000 years.
3. The chief religious cult of Sardis was that of Cybele. She was a goddess worshipped through sexual perversion and male emasculation.

B. Verse By Verse

1. Description of Jesus
 - a. First Jesus describes Himself as the One who has the seven Spirits of God. Jesus is stressing to Sardis that He is the One in ultimate authority, controlling all the heavenly hosts.
 - b. Next Jesus says He is the One with the seven stars which represent the angels or _____ of the seven churches. He is telling them He guides, protects, leads, and cares for those in charge of the leaders of the church.
2. Words of Affirmation

- a. Sardis and Laodicea are the only two churches that receive no affirmation at the beginning from Jesus. It declined spiritually very quickly from its early revival.
 - b. This church brings to mind Jesus' parable of the sower, where some seed falls among rocky soil. It springs up to life at first, but when persecution or hard times come, it falls away because it has no root.
3. Words of Correction and Exhortation
- a. Jesus tells this church that they have a reputation of being alive but they are dead. This church which had been in such great revival had nothing to show for itself but its _____.
 - b. Jesus is rebuking them for not following through and leaving their _____ imperfect or incomplete before Him.
 - c. As a result, in verse 2 Jesus calls them to return to be watchful and begin to strengthen that which remains but is about to die completely. The call to watchfulness in scripture is always a call to _____ and repentance.
 - d. Jesus says that they must repent or He will come to them as a _____. This is a motif that begins in Matthew and is seen throughout the New Testament. (Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1Thes 5:2-4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:25) The idea of Jesus coming as a thief is not meant to be a pleasant one! It is always in the context of Jesus coming in judgment to those who are spiritually asleep, lacking in good works, abounding in immorality, or not prepared for His return.
4. Promised Reward
- a. Jesus tells us that whoever overcomes the desire in us to let go of Jesus and pursue worldly desires and success will be guaranteed not only a spot in the book of life, but also white robes for eternity. Rev. 19:8 tells us that white robes are the righteous acts or good works of the saints that carry over into eternity. So when we do what is right instead of what may bring us the greatest amount of success in this life, we will wear the glory of that for an eternity.
 - b. However, Jesus tells Sardis that there are many people in their church who are in danger of being removed from the book of life. This, perhaps more than any other, is a clear teaching directly from scripture that it is possible for someone to lose their salvation. Rev. 20:15 plainly says that everyone who's name is not in the book of life at the judgment will be cast into the lake of fire in eternal damnation.

V. Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)

A. Historical Background

1. It was founded in 189 BC by the King of Pergamum and named "brotherly love" because of his love for his younger brother to whom he bequeathed his kingdom to.
2. Also devastated by the earthquake in 17BC, it was rebuilt by the Roman emperor Tiberius and became another center for Roman worship.
3. Later, as part of the Byzantine Empire it was called the "little Athens" because of its many temples and cults. This shows that the city was never fully converted to Christianity.

B. Verse By Verse

1. Description of Jesus

- a. Jesus begins by saying He is holy and true. On top of this, He has the key of David. By this, Jesus is saying that He is the one with _____ authority.
- b. Jesus is the one who gives access for His people to all earthly and heavenly treasures and mysteries. Jesus is calling His people to trust Him, even if their enemies are being blessed for a time, for He is ultimately in control and knows what He is doing.

2. Words of Affirmation

- a. Jesus says that He knows all they've done and He is very pleased with them, so pleased that he has no words of correction for them. He tells them He has opened a door for them with His authority, meaning that He is granting them the ability to access both wisdom and powers from the age to come and manifest them in this one (Heb. 6:5).
- b. Jesus is proud of them that even though they have faced persecution, they have maintained the faith and actually grown the church in number, intimacy, works, and power. Often, it's in the crucible of affliction that the _____ becomes purified and spotless.

3. Words of Correction and Exhortation

- a. Jesus gives them no correction, but only another praise combined with a warning. He tells them they've earned a crown for all of their faithfulness to Him.
- b. However, He warns them not to get complacent with how good they've already done.

4. Promised Reward

- a. Jesus says that He will reward their faithfulness by keeping them from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.
- b. Clearly this hour of trial coming on the whole world is referring to the Great Tribulation or the last 3.5 years of human history leading up to the return of Jesus.
- c. This can easily be misunderstood as Jesus saying He will remove them out of the great tribulation so they don't have to experience it. However, the Greek word here translated as "keep from" is "tereo ek." It only appears in one other place in the Bible which is in the book of John – hey it's the same author and he wrote it about the same time period.
- d. John 17:15: *"I do not pray that You should take them out of (ek) the world, but that You should keep them from (tereo ek) the evil one."* Here Jesus is praying to the Father asking Him not to pull Christians out of persecution, but to help them stand strong and not be overcome by Satan in the midst of persecution. So, ultimately Jesus isn't telling the church of Philadelphia that He will rapture them away from persecution, but that He will sustain them and protect them in the midst of it. This is a promise available to all Christians, especially those on the planet during the Great Tribulation.

5. Other Promises

- a. *I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God* – Jesus is offering them stability and permanency in His presence forever.
- b. *I will write on him the name of My God* – Both the 144,000 and the servants of God will have the Father's name as a seal on their foreheads for eternity as a sign that they fully belong to Him and are set apart for His love and purposes.
- c. *and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem* – Jesus is granting overcomers access and authority forever in His kingdom.
- d. *and My new name* – This speaks of the revelation of Jesus' nature and beauty imparted in an amplified way in this and the next age, permanently impacting us.

VI. Letter to Laodicea

A. Historical Background

1. Founded in the 2nd century BC this city became a major commercial center under the Romans. In fact, it was one of the _____ cities of the empire.
2. Laodicea had a large Jewish population, many of whom converted to Christianity quickly. In Laodicea, Christianity faced very little persecution because of the many wealthy and high ranking members of society that were quickly converted.

3. It was a strong and wealthy city until the Muslim invasions and was completely destroyed in the 12th century by the Turks and Mongols.

B. Verse By Verse

1. Description of Jesus

- a. Jesus calls Himself the Amen and the Faithful and True Witness. He is showing that He is completely _____ to represent the Father's will in its entirety.
- b. He is also the beginning of the creation of God. This doesn't mean that He was the first thing the Father created. It means when the Father began creating, Jesus was the one through whom it happened.

2. Words of Affirmation

- a. Just like Sardis, Laodicea receives no words of affirmation. They actually get the sternest rebuke of all.
- b. Even though He rebukes them severely, He loves them passionately and calls earnestly for them to come to Him. How kind is our great God!

3. Words of Correction and Exhortation

- a. So many powerful sermons are preached today on being luke warm vs. hot or cold, that I won't spend much time here.
- b. It is interesting to contrast Laodicea with Smyrna. The church in Smyrna was financially poor and spiritually wealthy, the opposite of Laodicea.
- c. Jesus died for a passionate, loving, single-hearted Bride, and Laodicea is anything but this.
- d. Jesus says they need to scratch everything and start over. He has to teach them through specific steps as one might teach a child, how to actually love and serve Jesus.
 - i. Buy gold refined in the fire – Jesus is telling them they must develop a life and history of connecting with God through prayer and intimacy with Jesus in this age. He calls them to buy from Him even though they are poor because the currency of heaven and repentance and sincerity. They can afford it if they just let go of what they feel is so important.
 - ii. White garments – He tells them they need to start doing good works, not neutral works.
 - iii. Anoint Your eyes – They need to pursue revelation in the knowledge of who He is and what He wants
 - iv. I will come to him – Jesus says He will respond to them and visit them in intimacy and power if they will just take the first step in His direction.
- e. Verse 20 is not about _____ people getting saved. It's about Jesus being shut out of His church. Whereas Philadelphia is a church with an open door, Laodicea is closed and Jesus is shut out.

4. Promised Reward

- a. Jesus promises that those who overcome the love of money and success will get to sit with Him on His throne. The hardest obstacle in our relationships with God to overcome in this life is not sexual temptation or persecution. It's _____. However, when we overcome the trappings of success we gain spiritual and Kingdom authority – true success - that is unrivaled by anything we could ever gain or earn on this earth.
- b. In the next age, those who overcome will not all sit on one big chair. We will be partnered with Him, wielding His full authority, as we rule and reign with Him over all of creation for eternity. This is truly success!