

Week Three

First Love

2:1-7

“... remember from what high state you have fallen and repent! Do the deeds you did at the first ...”

When someone you love is doing the wrong thing, a rebuke shows your love for them (3:19). Because of his great love for them, Christ chooses to rebuke the churches in chapters 2 and 3. His individual messages follow a pattern: *address to the angel of the church, reference to the vision of Christ, commendation, criticism, correction, call to listen, and promise to those who overcome.*

Lord,

We love you because you first loved us. Your love is constant, but ours is fickle. As we read about a church that lost its first love, we ask you to show us how to respond faithfully to your great love.

Amen

Monday

It is likely that “*the angels*” to whom this letter and the individual messages are addressed refers to the Reader (1:3) who would be *the messenger* of each individual church. Perhaps seven men had come to John on the isle of Patmos to receive a word from him. While each message is addressed to the messenger (*angel*) of the church, it seems clear every person in the church should take its meaning to heart.

Each message is introduced by the phrase “*this is the solemn pronouncement of*” which can be literally translated “*these things says.*” This phrase is used in Greek dramas and three hundred and twenty times in the Old Testament to add solemnity a message. We are not to be afraid of Jesus (1:17), churches are to heed carefully what Christ through the Spirit says to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22).

What characteristic of John’s vision does Christ emphasize to this church? Why?

Tuesday

All the churches but the last one are commended for something they are doing good or enduring. This is certainly true of the key church of Ephesus!

What was the church in Ephesus doing right (2:2-3; compare Acts 20:28-30)?

What was a “false apostle?” (compare Galatians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 11:4-5, 13-15; 12:11)

Would you feel comfortable teaching in this type of church? Why or why not?

Many people today feel uncomfortable with the idea of *testing* or judging whether someone’s teaching. We forget that false teaching is not merely wrong, it is evil (2:2). Jesus says their intolerance of evil teaching is *commendable* (Acts 17: 11).

Wednesday

Most of the churches (five of the seven) are *criticized* by Jesus. He is speaking to correct them so they can be rewarded when they turn to do what is commendable.

What did Jesus have against the church at Ephesus (2:4)?

What do you think it means to abandon your “first love” (2:4)?

Through the years three possible meanings have been suggested:

- (1) they stopped loving Jesus himself (*Jeremiah 2:2*),
- (2) they no longer showed love to other believers (*John 13:35*),
- (3) they no longer *witnessed* to unbelievers (*Matthew 24:12-14*).

It seems most likely that their passion for Jesus which had grown cold through the years. Love for Jesus shows up in our love for his people (Jews, Christians) as well as for the lost pagans. This loss of passion interpretation is supported by the recommendation to “do the deeds you did at the first...”

What were your deeds in the early days of your relationship with Christ?

Thursday

Each of the seven churches received a word of advice or *correction* from the Lord.

What did Jesus advise them (2:5)?

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-
-

What would happen if they didn't?

Is verse 5 a threat to the doctrine of eternal security (“once saved, always saved”)? If not, what is this verse teaching?

A lampstand was a means of light. It symbolized the churches' testimony to Jesus Christ. To have it removed would be to lose the truth about Jesus and thus the privilege of witness.

There is a phrase repeated in each of the seven letters: "*The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*" This lets us know that what is advised to one church is good advice for all to follow. It also means every individual believer can profit from this message.

Friday

There is a special promise given at the conclusion of each message to "*the one who conquers.*"

First, let's consider this idea of conquering. Look up and record what you can learn about this word from its use in the following references:

Luke 11:22

John 16:33

Romans 12:21

1 John 2:13-14

1 John 4:4

1 John 5:4-5

Revelation 12:11

Revelation 17:14

Now let's look at the promise for those who overcome. What is the promise (2:7; compare Luke 23:43 and Revelation 22:14 with Genesis 3:22)?

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- At what point in your life were you most excited about Christ? What was that like?
- How do *first actions* help rekindle *first love*?
- What actions would help you rekindle your love for Jesus?
- How can we help each other keep (or rekindle) our passionate love for Christ?

Week Four

Enduring Slander

2:8-11

“I know the distress you are suffering and your poverty (but you are rich). (2:9)

This church is one of two that Christ has no criticism only encouragement. This church had suffered and would continue to be tested by suffering. For some their suffering had cost them money and property. For others it was the loss of their Jewish family and friends. Things were going to get worse before they would get better. They really needed to see Jesus!

Lord,

In our own suffering, we need to see Jesus as he really is. Prepare us to face the tests that lie yet ahead in our own life and the life of our church. We thank you for the eternal life you have given in Christ, and we look forward to the day when we will see you face to face.

Amen

Monday

What aspects of the vision of Christ in chapter one are emphasized to Smyrna (2:8)?

Notice the use of the title, “*the first and the last*” elsewhere in Revelation (1:8, 17; 22:13). It is the equivalent of the phrase *Alpha and Omega* (1:8; 21:6) and relates Christ to eternity as its divine sovereign. This is confirmed through his resurrection from the dead.

How does Jesus’ power over events and resurrection help the believers of Smyrna?

Tuesday

What kind of sufferings (tribulation) and poverty did the church at Smyrna already face (2:9)?

How can He say they are rich if they are poor?

The connection between the persecution at Smyrna and the Jews comes from the political and religious situation in the latter part of the first century. Rome tolerated recognized religions as long as they did not interfere with emperor worship. Julius Caesar presented himself as a god and when he was assassinated he was deified by the loyalist in the Senate in 42 B.C. His ultimate successor, his nephew Octavian,

assumed the title by which we know him best, *Augustus*. This term had been applied to temples and sacred objects implying that the gods were all mentors and creators of something different and better. To apply this title to a man was to deify him. After his death he is referred to by the Roman historian Tacitus as “the divine Augustus.” One of his successors, Caligula, after an illness became mentally unbalanced and insisted on being treated as a god. When Domitian became emperor (81-96 A.D.), he would begin his correspondence with, “Our Lord God instructs you to do this!”

At first Christianity was considered to be a sect of Judaism and thus protected. Rome did not care if other gods were worshipped along with the state religion. But for Christians this was not an option. They would worship no god but Christ. Curiously they were considered atheists because they did not believe in the gods and would not worship them.

The Jews had an exemption which allowed them to make sacrifices to honor the emperors as rulers but not as gods. They made it known clearly to the authorities that the Christians were not a sect of Judaism and therefore not entitled to this exemption. It was this slander by the Jews which earned them the condemnation from Christ as a “*synagogue of Satan*.”

What is the connection between the Jews of Asia Minor and Satan (2:9 -10; John 8:39-47)?

Consider the record in Acts of opposition from the Jews as well (Acts 4:1-22 and 5:17-40; 8:1-3; 9:23; 12:1-3; 13:44-52; 14:1-7; 15:1,5; 17:5-9; *17:13-15; 18:12-13; 19: 33-34; 20:3; 21:26-36; 23:1-10; 23:12 -22; 24:1; 28:17-28).

Why do you think the Jews so opposed Christianity?

Wednesday

This church receives no criticism from the Lord. It is unlikely they were doing everything right, but they were facing a tougher situation.

What did Jesus say the future held for the church of Smyrna (2:10)?

Do you think the reference to “ten days” is literal or figurative?
Why or why not?

You might want to look up the number 10 in a concordance and see how it is used in the Bible.

How were they told to respond to what was going to happen?

How would this advice help you face slander about what you believe?

Thursday

While Smyrna does not receive any correction from the Lord, they do receive words of encouragement and perspective that will help them through their trials. For being faithful they are promised a “*crown of life.*”

Do you think this refers to salvation or to a tangible reward?
(James 1:12)

Have you ever been persecuted because you are a Christian?
What happened?

Are you willing to be “*faithful*” to Christ? What if it costs you money because people found out you are a Christian? What if they

threatened you with arrest and jail time? What if a street gang threatened to kill you unless you denied Christ? All these things have happened to other Christians throughout history and are currently being used against believers today: www.persecution.com

Friday

The person who puts their trust in Jesus Christ is promised eternal life (John 3:16; Ephesians 2: 8-9). This is a great blessing and a future hope. How great a blessing this is will be seen by our study of the second death. Jesus' promise is for the overcomer.

What is the promise (2:11)?

What is the second death" (2:11; 20:14)?

The Lord who "died and came to life again" is powerful enough to keep his faithful people safe even if they pass through the gates of martyrdom. The first death is merely death of the body; the second death is eternal separation from God (Matt. 10:28).¹

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- What kind of opposition to your faith have you experienced since you became a Christian?
- When were you most tempted to give up on your Christian faith?
- What do you fear most?
- How does thinking about Christ help you overcome your fear?

Kendell H. Easley, vol. 12, *Revelation*, Holman New Testament Commentary, 37

Week Five

Compromise

2:12-17

I know where you live – where Satan’s throne is.
Yet you continue to cling to my name and you
have not denied your faith in me... But I have a
few things against you... (2:13-14a)

The city of Pergamum was blessed with some of the richest farmlands in the area. In addition, its position on a large hill gave it a natural defensive position. Because of this it had been a banking center. A university was located there which boasted a library in ancient times of nearly 200,000 volumes. This is second only to the library of Alexandria, Egypt. The city had a famous medical center with a medical school which produced the celebrated physician Galen. One of the industries was parchment making. This is the process of turning animal skins into quality writing materials. This was developed so highly that the word parchment is derived from the name Pergamum.

For all of its learning, it was also a center of pagan worship. Christ refers to it as the place “where Satan’s throne is” and the “city where Satan lives.” Pergamum boasted temples to Athena, Dionysus, Zeus, and Asclepius (the god of healing), the symbol snakes entwined appears as a symbol of medicine even today. They had been the first city in the province to dedicate a temple for the worship of Roman emperors and the state.

It was to the challenges of the church at Pergamum that Jesus addressed himself.

Lord,

Satan puts a lot of challenges before many people, including us. Help me to understand the struggle of this church and the grave danger they were in from Satan and from You. Give me the courage to maintain my witness and achieve the recognition you promise.

Amen.

Monday

The first word of Jesus to Pergamum is to remind them that he is “*the One who has the sharp two-edged sword.*”

What is the significance of this sword (1:16; 2:16; 6:8; 19:15, 21)?

This word for sword (*hromphaia*) is used only in the Revelation and in Luke 2:35. It is describing a large broadsword used in military applications. It was sharpened on both sides and normally came to a point, but it was better for slashing than for stabbing. The other word which is translated sword (*machaira*) describes something that’s more like a long knife than a sword. Its primary use was as a butcher’s knife in preparing a sacrifice. From this it became descriptive of war and found a use as one of the side weapons of the Roman soldier. It was normally shorter, but there is an exception (Revelation 6:4).

What is the symbolic use of sword? (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12)?

If you were in this church and the letter to you began with a reference to the sword, what kind of message would you be expecting?

Tuesday

Even though the major theme of this letter is a threat of judgment, Christ begins it with a recognition that the church had done something well.

For what is the church at Pergamum commended (2:13)?

“It is possible that *Satan’s throne* is an allusion to the giant altar to the god Zeus, placed on a cliff some 250 meters above the city. The phrase means not only that Satan rules over Pergamum, but that Pergamum is, so to speak, the capital of his worldwide empire.”²

What does this tell you about the people who were in this church?

Wednesday

In spite of the fact that the people of this church were hanging on in a very tough situation, Jesus still needed to correct them against a great danger.

What did he “*have against*” the church in Pergamum?

The story of “*Balaam, the prophet and Balak, the king of Moab*” is found in *Numbers 22-25*. Balaam was an ancient prophet who loved profit. The king offered him great wealth if he would curse Israel. Four times the prophet spoke towards Israel but was never allowed to speak against Israel. This cost him a great fortune. In order to gain the money, he taught Balak and the people of Moab how to get God to turn against Israel by tempting them into sin.

What sins did they tempt Israel to commit (*Numbers 25: 1-2; 31:16*)?

²Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 52.

Apparently the “*Nicolaitans*” were a group whose practices were similar to those of Balaam and Balak (2:15).

What two related sins were these people committing?

Thursday

The remedy for sin was in the hands of the church. What course of action does Jesus command the church in Pergamum to take (2:16)?

Was this individual action or is it referring to church discipline?
Why?

Church discipline refers to the practice of rebuking and if necessary removing sinners from fellowship until they repent of their sin. This practice is described by Jesus as the final resort in a personal conflict (*Matthew 18:17*) and was recommended by a Paul for the Corinthian church (*1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 6:1-8; 1 Timothy 1:20*).

What does Jesus say will happen if they do not correct the problem?

This *quick* (using the same word as in 1:1, soon) coming, do you think it refers to Christ’s second coming or a coming in judgment? Why?

Friday

What is promised to the one who conquers in the place where Satan’s throne is?

There was a “popular belief concerning the jar full of man of (the food the Hebrews ate during their 40 years in the wilderness) that had been stored in the Covenant Box (*Exodus 16:32-34; see Hebrews 9:4*).

It was believed to be the jar that had been hidden by Jeremiah in a cave on Mount Nebo after the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC (2 Maccabees 2:4-8), where it would remain until the Messianic age, when God would once more feed the people with it.”³

The “*white stone*” was common in the ancient world for a variety of purposes. It could mean an acquittal in a court case, a favorable vote for a person, or a pass for admission on special occasions. White is the color of a conqueror. This stone is further made special because of a *new name* which is written upon it. The significance of the name is still debated by scholars, but it is suggestive that only the person who receives it understands why they receive that name. This would argue against it being the name of Christ or God. Rather it is probably a name which relates to some victory in the life of the individual conquering Christian.

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- If someone you knew had been killed for being a Christian, how might it change your attitude towards witnessing of your faith?
- How does Satan use sex to draw Christians into idolatry today?
- What should a church do to address the issue?
- If the white stone with a secret name relates to your victory, what would you want that name to be?

³ Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 52

Week of Six

Tolerating Deception

(2:18-29)

“... Hold on to what you have until I come.”
(2:25)

Thyatira was a small town with a great privilege. Unlike all of their neighbors, Rome tolerated the trade guilds which flourished in their city. As a union town, all the citizens were expected to participate in honoring their patron idol. A Christian worships only God. This brought the believers, who no longer were considered exempt as a part of Judaism, into direct conflict with what was good for business and for the welfare of the town. A Christian acknowledges only one Lord, Christ. Since the local deity is depicted on a coin with the Roman emperor, they were not only in trouble locally, but also nationally. What could they do to avoid persecution that was sure to come?

Lord,

The world, in its gods, governments, and greed is pressing in all around demanding conformity. They truly consider it strange that we don't live like they do. There are some Christians who want us to get along rather than taking a stand, to substitute deeds for good living and community for Christ. Give me the wisdom to know the difference between the good deeds you prepared for me to do and deeds which make others think well of me. Keep me from denying you in my sex life.

Amen

Monday

What three things are said regarding Christ (2:18)?

This is the first time in the Revelation that Christ has been explicitly declared to be *the son of God*. This contrasts with the local view that their patron God, Apollo Tyrimnaeus, was the son of a god (Zeus) and that the Roman emperor was a living god. With eyes like a *fiery flame*, Jesus is able to clearly see what is been going on in this church and he doesn't like it. The feet *like polished bronze* seem to indicate destruction.

Does this aspect of Christ's character disturb you? Why or why not?

Such an intense portrayal of Christ should cause us to listen carefully to what he has to say to the church in Thyatira. Whatever their problem, it is extremely serious and to be avoided by one and all.

Tuesday

Christ does not criticize this church before commending them for what they're doing right. What four characteristics that Christ wants in his churches did they have?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Not only were they doing these four things, but they were getting better or at least more active. Thyatira was not a sit and do nothing kind of place. Let's think about what they had on the ball. Unlike the church of Ephesus, they were doing more to love one another.

Do you think a person can feel without *doing* and still call it love?

Could they do without *feeling* and still call it love?

Would that same attitude apply to “*faith?*” Why or why not?

They were doing well in steadfast endurance. What does this trait look like (1:9; 13:10; 14:12)?

What do the verses below teach us about the concept?

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15, NKJV; see also 21:12-19)

³² But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. ³⁵ Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:...” (Hebrews 10:32–36 NKJV)

Wednesday

What was going on in the church in Thyatira is nothing new, but then neither is poison. It reminds me of the limerick which says, “All the water in the world no matter how hard it tried could never sink the biggest ship... unless it got inside.” Outside there was pressure to conform, and inside there was teaching that they should conform.

How was this woman in Thyatira like “Jezebel” (1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:19; 2 Kings 9:22)?

What was *this* Jezebel in Thyatira doing wrong (2:20-21)?

Why does God blame the church for this woman’s false teaching (2:20)?

What was God’s plan in dealing with this Jezebel and her followers (2:21-23)?

Certain sins carry with them the seeds of the sinner’s destruction. Sexual sins are examples of this. In addition to the natural consequences of engaging in sex, there are also social, moral, and hygiene consequences. Pregnancy out of wedlock, being beaten up or killed by a jealous spouse, losing reputation and standing in the community, separation from God and his people, as well as sexually transmitted diseases are all the result of the immorality these people were engaged in. While they were being encouraged by this woman’s teaching to participate in the pagan sacrifice meals and the sexual immorality that accompanied it, they were making themselves offensive to God.

Thursday

Unlike Pergamum, this church had digressed too far into paganism for church discipline to work. Apparently the majority would not vote to rebuke this woman because they were her followers. Instead, God tells the faithful to “hold on to what you have” what is he telling them to do?

It is very difficult to be in a church which has embraced paganism and immorality as religious duties. What the believers were known for: *love, faith, service, and steadfast endurance* would be harder to hold on to among such sinful people.

In your opinion, when should a person stay in such a church trying to hold on and when is it better to leave?

Friday

The common Christian view of our future is floating on clouds and playing harps. Nothing could be further from the true plan of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

What does 2:26-27 teach about our future roles in Christ's kingdom?

What is one of the key characteristics of an overcomer (2:26)?

What does the phrase "*morning star*" mean (see 22:16)?

The morning star was the planet Venus, which was a symbol of victory to the Roman legions who had the sign of Venus on their standards. The pagan prophet Balaam had been used of God to give a true prophecy of Christ as a star. He is the victor and those who are obedient to him will share in his victory by being allowed to reign with him.

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- Does God care what people believe as long as they are loving?
- What should you do if someone you know started teaching people practices contrary to the Bible?

- What lessons do you learn from God’s attitude to this false teacher and her followers?

“If a person does not repent, God sharpens his sword and prepares to shoot his bow.” (Psalm 7:12)

Week of Seven

A Dead Church

3:1-6

“... you have a reputation that you are alive, but in reality you are dead.”

The city of Sardis was once the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. It was still an important center of commerce and industry. They produced jewelry and their location alongside the river Pactolus, made it an excellent place for textiles along with other dyed goods. For this reason, and the fact that it was on a major trade route (it was the junction point for five major roads), it was a very wealthy place. Pagan worship was predominant in this city. It was the site of a temple of Sybele (a goddess similar to Artemis in Ephesus).in 17 AD. The Emperor Tiberius Caesar had rebuilt it, but it never returned to its former prominence. Apparently the church had gone into spiritual decline as the city had gone into financial decline.

Lord,

Help me to recognize the difference between living and life. Show me where my deeds have been incomplete before you and how to strengthen what you have

given to me. Remind me of the wonderful truths of the gospel. Guide me into bringing my life into conformity with you that I may be worthy to be dressed in honor and recognized before my Father and his angels.

Amen

¹To the angel of the church in Sardis write the following:

Monday

What two features of the vision of Christ in chapter one are mentioned in connection with the church in Sardis? (1:7, 20; compare 2:1)

We have already considered “the seven spirits of God” as they relate to Isaiah 11:2-5. Now consider the contribution to our understanding that Zechariah 4:2-10. How does this relate seven to the spirit of God?

“The seven stars” are identified by John as the seven angels (messengers) of the churches (1:20). What do you think is the significance of the fact that Christ “holds” the seven spirits and the seven stars?

The seven-fold Spirit corresponds with the seven stars. Both are under Christ’s control and accomplish his will. This emphasizes that the authority for the message to this church is from him.

Tuesday

It is surprising that there is no commendation for the church at Sardis. Considering that it has been preceded by messages to Pergamum and Thyatira where people were heavily involved in worship of Satan, this

is quite surprising. If those two churches were “going, going” then Sardis was “gone.”

Why is the church accused of being “dead” (3:2, 4)?

Dr. Vance Havner has frequently reminded us that spiritual ministries often go through four stages: a man, a movement, a machine, and then a monument. Sardis was at the “monument” stage, but there was still hope!⁴

Do you ever feel that you living for the Lord is a hopeless cause?

Think over what you learned Monday about the source for spiritual life. How would you encourage and counsel someone who felt that the Christian life is too tough?

Wednesday

It seems a strange thing to tell dead people the wake up and yet that is exactly what Christ tells this “dead” church to do.

What do you think he is telling this church to do?

Obviously they were not actually dead but were nearly lifeless as a church. The life of a church is the product of living according to the Spirit’s leading through the Word of God.

How do the following verses add to your understanding of what they were to do?

Revelation 16:15 -

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), Re 3:1.

Matthew 24:42-50 -
 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 10 -
 1 Peter 5:8 -

What are they to “remember” (3:3)? What is that?

What does “come like a thief” convey about what Christ would do to this church if they do not wake up?

What a sobering thought! This could be our last warning before Christ brings calamity upon us as a church. Remember the things that are written in the Revelation “must happen very soon” and we are reminded that “the time is near.” How much better to be living as a Christian each day of our short life on this earth.

Thursday

While this church was described as “dead,” we know that not everyone was lacking. There were some of the believers in Sardis who had taken the gospel to heart and were not only professing their faith but living their life in its truth. These would be able to wear the white linen garments priests.

White garments symbolize to us cleanliness and purity. It is very easy to see when someone wearing white has gotten some dirt on their clothing. The cause their deeds were incomplete, some in the church had “stained” their garments. But this was not true of everyone in this church. We are told that there were some who were worthy (Revelation 19:8).

Based on what you’ve already learned and on what you can discern from the following references what does it mean to have “unsoiled” garments (3:4; compare 1 Corinthians 8:7; Revelation 14:4; James 1:27; Jude 23)?

What are some things people do today that result in spiritually defiling their garments?

For extra credit, compare what the following scriptures say about white garments and their meaning (2 Chronicles 5:12; Ecclesiastes 9:8; Isaiah 1:18; Daniel 7:9; 11:35; 12:10; Matthew 17:2; 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Revelation 4:4; 7:9, 13-14; 19:14)

Friday

What three things are promised to those who conquer (3:5)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

We have already seen what it means to be clothed in white. It is a sign of one's purity to be a priest. The second expression, "never erase his name from the book of life," has troubled some. Let's first consider what this "*Book of Life*" is. First, you will notice that it is commonly used in the Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).

Write a short summary of what you learn by looking at these references:

There is some reference to this book elsewhere. Moses offered to have his name erased from this book to receive forgiveness for Israel (Exodus 32:32-33; compare Romans 9:3). In Psalm 69:28, a scroll of the living refers to those who have physical life and compares it to those who are righteous, that is, those who deserve to go on living. In Psalm 139:16, we are told of a book where the details of the days of our life are written.

The closest parallels to the Book of Life as given in Revelation is found in the prophecy of Daniel. In 7:10, is an exact parallel to the scene of Revelation 20:12-15. The promise given in 3:5 is parallel to that given in Daniel 12:1-2, we're having your name in the book means you will escape, even if you die.

In the New Testament, we are told that Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and others in the church at Philippi have their names in this book (Philippians 4:3).

Is it possible for a believer to have his or her name erased from the Lamb's Book of Life?

Those who have declared Christ's name before the world by their confession ("I am a Christian.") and who have backed it up by living the pure life of a Christian, they can look forward to having their name confessed in heaven. They will be introduced before the Father and his angels as Christians. This is also supported in the following passages which help us understand what is meant by confession (Matthew 7:23; 10:32-33; John 9:22; 12:42; Romans 10:9 – 10; 1 Timothy 6:12; Titus 1:15-16; Hebrews 11:13; 13:15; 1 John 1:9; 2:23; 4:2-3, 15; 2 John 7).

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- Do you remember what it was like to be spiritually dead?
- Have there been times in your life when it was too hard to live as a Christian? How did you "wake up?"
- If we confess Him, then he will confess us. What opportunities do you have to confess Christ?
- Is there anything in your lifestyle that is not Christian?

Week of Eight

Opportunity

3:7-13

“Look! I have put in front of you an open door
that no one can shut.”

Do you ever think that your opportunities are rather limited? Sometimes people feel like they never get the “breaks” that others have. Under the Law of Moses, people who were not Jews or who had a defect were excluded from the temple of God (*Leviticus 21:16 -23*).

In Christ, all believers are going to be included in the worship of God. While it is a great privilege of fellowship with one another, it will be more than wonderful to forever be in the presence of our Creator. The church in a city named for Attalus Philadelphus, a king of Pergamum, Satan’s capital city, did not have many prospects. The city’s history of earthquakes meant a difficult time in getting ahead. The opposition by the Jews meant they were coming under the same pressure as the other Christians (*1:9*).

Lord,

You’re the one who determines who gets to dwell in your presence. Help me to see the doors that you’ve opened to me for salvation. Spur me on to obey you and to faithfully declare your name. Reward me with your holy presence for eternity.

Amen

Monday

One of the significant things about the church in Philadelphia is that they are one of two who receive no criticism from the Lord (*Smyrna is the other, 2:8-11*).

What do both churches share in common?

What three characteristics of Christ are mentioned?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

These three characteristics are not actually mentioned in the vision (1:12-16). *Holiness* characterizes God in a way that is not true of other beings. Isaiah saw a vision that clearly depicted the supremely holy One:

6:1 In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the sovereign master seated on a high, elevated throne. The hem of his robe filled the temple. 6:2 Seraphs stood over him; each one had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and they used the remaining two to fly. 6:3 They called out to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord who commands armies! His majestic splendor fills the entire earth!"

[In Hebrew, when you wish to say something is the greatest, you repeat it three times. Something can be holy, or more holy (*holy, holy*), or holiest (*holy, holy, holy*). Anything that is holy is set apart to the Lord for His use only.]

True describes Christ as *the faithful witness* (1:5). Beale states that the word for *true* "can have the sense of both *genuine* ... and *trustworthy* ... so that the idea of a true and faithful witness may be included in it."

In 1:18, Christ is pictured with the keys of death and Hades. Are these the same as “the key of David?” (see the idea in its context in *Isaiah 22:15-24*)

What does having the keys mean (3:7,9,12)?

Tuesday

What was Christ’s assessment of the church of Philadelphia (3:8)?

What does it mean, specifically and practically that they had an open door? (compare with the idea in 4:1 and in *Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3*)

Do you think God can give us an open door as well?

Read 2 *Thessalonians* 3:1-5 and re-write it as a prayer for one of our missionaries:

Wednesday

Who is the “synagogue of Satan” and what were they doing (3:9; see *Revelation 2:9*)?

Why would it have been shocking for them to “bow down” before the church (see *Isaiah 49:23* and *60:11, 14*)?

Do you think “*the hour of testing*” refers to the Great Tribulation? Why or why not? (Consider 7:14 and Matthew 24:21)

How does perseverance lead to protection (3:10)?

Thursday

What did Christ mean when He said, “*I am coming soon*” (3:11)?

Since it has been so long, how does this phrase serve as an incentive for Christians (1 John 2:28)?

What does it mean to “hold on to what you have” (3:11; 2:13, 25; 3:3)?

What crowns are promised to those who believe Christ?

1. 1 Corinthians 9:25 -
2. Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19 -
3. 2 Timothy 4:8 -
4. James 1:12; Rev. 2:10 -
5. 1 Peter 5:4 -

How might someone take away our crown (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)?

Friday

How is church like a “*temple*” (3:12; compare with Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5)?

What does it mean, “he who overcomes will not go out from it [the temple] anymore” (compare 22:21 and Isaiah 56:4-5)?

What do the final three names signify?

1. =
2. =
3. =

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- What opportunities for speaking up for Christ do you see us having?
- How confident are you in your ability to present the Gospel clearly?
- What would it be like to have Christ’s name written on you?

Week of Nine

Lukewarm about Christ

3:14-22

“I wish you were either cold or hot!”

The drinking water for the town of Laodicea was piped in from a hot water mineral spring 6 miles away in Hierpolis. By the time it had traveled the distance it was no longer hot, but tepid or lukewarm. This geographical feature of the town’s water supply fit perfectly the spiritual condition of this church.

Lord,

I want to listen carefully this week. There is nothing I have of any value that does not come from you. Show me what I still need and where I have blindly begun to trust worldly wealth instead of a worthy Savior. More than anything else I want to fellowship with Christ both now and in the kingdom.

Amen

Monday

How do Christ's three titles span His entire career (3:14)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Amen is a Hebrew word whose use and pronunciation has been carried over into the New Testament. Whenever this word is used in this book it is a response, except here. (1:7; 5:14; 7:12; 19:4; 22:20). Often this word is taken to be an expression of Stoicism over things we cannot change. But a better translation of the word is "Surely it is true!" This is an excellent descriptive title for the person of Christ. Whatever he tells us is surely the truth. When understood this way, the expression *the faithful and true witness* is seen to be a clarification of this meaning. What he says is true even when it conflicts with our own perception of ourselves and our situation.

It is important to understand Christ is also *the originator of God's creation*. This idea was used in a letter of Paul, Colossians, which was sent to the church in the nearby city of Colosse and which was to be sent to Laodicea for them to read also (Colossians 4:16). Since he is the one who began all of creation, he then is the one for whom all of creation exists. This truth is clearly declared:

"He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things." (Colossians 1:18, NET)

Having declared to them the vision of himself, we are prepared to hear the Lord Christ commend them for their works or for their trials or for the fact that at least a remnant had remained faithful, but it is not to be. As bad as the other churches were there was at least something to praise them for, but for Laodicea there is no positive note.

What does this suggest to you?

Tuesday

On what basis did Jesus judge them to be *lukewarm* (3:15; see also 28:12)?

There is nothing better on a hot day than an ice-cold cup of water (Matthew 10:42) with the possible exception of a steaming hot cup of chocolate on a really cold day. There is nothing more disgusting when you want something cold that tasted and defined it has become room temperature. Being lukewarm is equally unsatisfying when you want something really hot. To drink the mineral water of Laodicea without it being either cold or hot was a disgusting experience.

How does this analogy help us to understand the emotion at that the church at Laodicea produced in Christ?

What was so distasteful to God about this church (see 3:17)?

Wednesday

In 3:17 John says that the Laodiceans think they are rich when they are, in fact, poor (compare 2:9).

What dangerous mindset develops as a result of having material wealth?

What does a bank account have to do with being lukewarm (Matthew 19:23; Luke 8:14; 12:21; 16:11; 1 Timothy 6:9,18)?

Laodicea was a prosperous banking center; proud of its wealth, it refused Roman disaster relief after the earthquake of A.D. 60, rebuilding from its own resources. It was also known for its textiles (especially wool) and for its medical school and production of ear medicine and undoubtedly the highly reputed Phrygian eye salve. Everything in which Laodicea could have confidence outwardly, its church, which reflected its culture, lacked spiritually.⁵

From this description of the city, consider the irony of Christ's description of them and the remedies He recommends.

What words describe the true condition of these rich Christians?

Why does Jesus advise believers to “buy from Me gold refined by fire” (3:18)?

“Who can endure the day of his coming?

Who can keep standing when he appears?

For he will be like a refiner's fire, like a launderer's soap.

He will act like a refiner and purifier of silver

and will cleanse the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Re 3:17.

Then they will offer the LORD a proper offering.” (Malachi 3:2–3)

If they had stood up for Christ, and they would have received persecution and its benefit as Peter points out:

“ ... you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials. Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold – gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away – and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but you believe in him, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, because you are attaining the goal of your faith – the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:6–9, NET)

What does their need for white clothing indicate about their spiritual experience (see 3:4)?

What is the literal and figurative use of “eye salve” (see John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16)?

What is there about your own spiritual condition that you need the Lord to show you clearly?

Thursday

This assessment of the church in Laodicea had been read publicly in each of the other six churches before it came to them. Such a harsh assessment of their true spiritual condition had to make people wonder what God’s plans for this church were. Perhaps the greatest surprise of this message is the statement Christ loves them.

What is the characteristic true love (3:19; cf. Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:24; Hebrews 12:5-6)?

Does this help you understand the role of a parent in the life of their children?

How does this work in marriage? in the church?

What is God's remedy for the tepid soul (3:19-20)?

Is verse 20 a call to salvation or fellowship? Why or why not?

Friday

Although Jesus' sternest rebuke and condemnation is directed toward this church, He reserves for her the most glorious and precious promises given to any of the seven churches (3:21).

What is so significant about reigning with Christ (see Matthew 19:28; 25:31; Acts 2:30; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 4-5; 20:4)?

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- Would you describe a time in your life when you were lukewarm toward God?
- What is the appeal of being lukewarm? Why do people sometimes live lukewarm lives?
- Share a time in your life when you were lukewarm to the things of Christ.
- How can you avoid lukewarmness?