

Letters to the 7 Churches in Revelation

John is on the island called **Patmos**. He is in **prison** “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” Rev 1:9 - for sharing the word of God.

Vision of Jesus: first he heard him, loud **voice like a trumpet**. He walked among **7 golden lampstands**. One like a **Son of Man**. **Robe** down to his feet with a **golden sash** around his chest. **Hair** as white as wool/snow. **Eyes** like blazing fire. **Feet** like bronze glowing in a furnace. **Voice** like the sound of rushing waters. **Face** like the sun shining in all its brilliance. **Out of his mouth** a sharp double-edged sword. (*Heb 4:12 “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*) **7 stars** in his right hand.

7 lampstands = 7 churches, 7 stars are the 7 angels (messengers/ministers)

Sharp double-edged sword (symbolizes Christ’s word of divine judgement) coming out of his mouth.

More awesome than NYE fireworks

Revelation Ch. 2 & 3 - Letters to the 7 Churches

Some interpret these churches as being the state of the church down through the ages but they were **actual churches in Asia Minor** at the time when John wrote so I am going to take it quite literally which is the most common held view.

For most of the churches there is **affirmation and criticism**. Commendation and condemnation. Like a parent with a child. Praise and correction.

Church in Ephesus:

Affirmations

- hard work
- perseverance (x2)
- don’t tolerate wicked people
- tested and discerned false apostles
- endured hardships
- not grown weary
- hate the practices of the Nicolaitans

Criticisms

- forsaken your first love

Church in Smyrna: Different - encouragement through a difficult time.

Church in Pergamum:

Affirmations

- you remain true to my name despite living where Satan rules
- did not renounce your faith (under pressure)

Criticisms

- some who hold to the teachings of Balaam – eat food sacrificed to idols, commit sexual immorality

- some who hold to the teachings of the Nicolaitans

Church in Thyatira:

Affirmations

- love and faith
- service and perseverance
- doing more than you did at first

Criticisms

- tolerate Jezebel – misleads people into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols

Church in Sardis:

Affirmations

- a few who are worthy (they have not soiled their clothes)

Criticisms

- reputation of being alive but you are dead
- deeds not complete in the sight of God

Church in Philadelphia:

Affirmations

- kept my word and have not denied my name (despite little strength)
- endured patiently

Church in Laodicea:

Criticisms

- neither hot nor cold, lukewarm
- wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, naked

Jesus commands/implores each church very clearly to **REPENT**. Not just to confess and receive forgiveness but to **turn around** 180 degrees and do the opposite of those sins. Otherwise there will be **severe consequences**.

The practices/teachings of the Nicolaitans, Balaam, Jezebel

The **Nicolaitans** were a heretical sect within the church who **compromised** with the pagan society. They taught that spiritual liberty meant they could continue to participate in pagan festivals where there was feasting on **food offered to idols** and rampant **sexual immorality**.

(In a time of persecution, **eating or not eating food sacrificed to idols** was a crucial **test of faith**, just as in countries where Christians are persecuted **today** the test is often whether or not a person is willing to **deny the name of Jesus**.)

Balaam advised the Midianite women how to lead the Israelites astray by inducing them to sin, specifically in idolatry and sexual immorality. He is typical of corrupt teachers who deceive believers into **compromise with worldliness**.

A similar group at Pergamum held the **teaching of Balaam** and some at Thyatira were **followers of the woman Jezebel**. From their heretical tendencies it would appear that all three groups were **part of the Nicolaitans** or at least part of the same sect.

Their main sin was **compromising with the world/culture**.

A Summary of all the Affirmations

Affirmations

- hard work
- perseverance
- don't tolerate wicked people
- tested and discerned false apostles
- endured hardships
- not grown weary
- hate the practices of the Nicolaitans
- you remain true to my name despite living where Satan rules
- did not renounce your faith (under pressure)
- love and faith
- service and perseverance
- doing more than you did at first
- a few who are worthy (they have not soiled their clothes)
- kept my word and have not denied my name (despite little strength)
- endured patiently

A Summary of all the Criticisms

Criticisms

- forsaken your first love
- some who hold to the teachings of Balaam – eat food sacrificed to idols, commit sexual immorality
- some who hold to the teachings of the Nicolaitans
- tolerate Jezebel – misleads people into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols
- reputation of being alive but you are dead
- deeds not complete in the sight of God
- neither hot nor cold, lukewarm
- wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, naked

As much as these things were written to the churches in Revelation I want us to consider it at the moment on a **personal level**. I have been challenged recently by these things and I believe God wants to **challenge** all of us.

What is God saying to you? What **affirmations**? What **criticisms**? It may not be things on these lists; could be **other things** – thoughts, attitudes, etc.

Listen to him and see what he says.

When **God puts his finger on something** in us that needs to change we have **3 choices**:

- try harder in our own strength
- give up
- **draw close to Jesus** and ask for **his strength and power** to help us - walk closely with him and talk to him, asking for help, and depend on his grace to lead us into freedom.

2 extremes

- **Blind to our sin**, thinking we are without fault
- Feeling completely **condemned**, overwhelmed by sin.

There is a **balance**. For our whole lives we will be continually in the process of being made more like Jesus.

We are not meant to feel the **guilt of sins committed in the past** once we have repented and received forgiveness. This is false condemnation from the enemy. However sometimes there are inevitable **consequences**.

Ps 103:10-12 “He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; **as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgression from us.**”