

BOOK 2

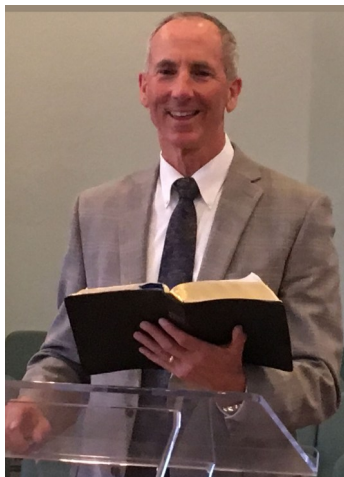
The Revelation
of Jesus Christ

Judgment
Begins with
US!

Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers

Foreword

God's Word is an infinite source of spiritual riches. Whenever I open it, the question becomes, "*What truths does God have to impress upon my soul today?*" He always answers! Not in some mystical, secret doctrine kind of way, but in showing me what has been there all along and giving me a joyful expectation of sharing it with others.



This series of booklets in the Book of Revelation are some of the truths *lying in plain sight* that we discovered during the summer of 2025. I trust they will continue to be relevant in written form to the blessing of your soul!

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large, sweeping "K" and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NIV (1984 edition) or the NKJV (1982 edition) unless otherwise identified.

Vistoso Community Church
Publication: February 2026

Introduction

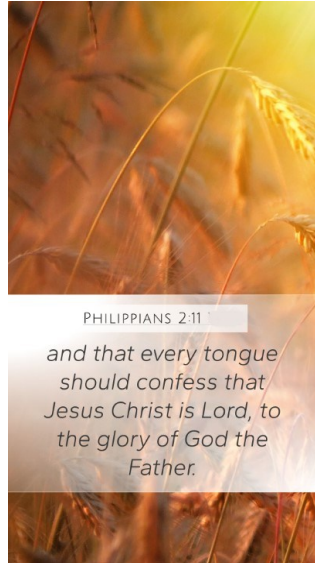
In our first foray into the Book of Revelation, we met an aspect of our Lord and Savior with which we may not have been familiar:

***Jesus Christ is Lord—and as such
He will reign and judge over all!***

Right on cue, as I taught these messages, a member of the fellowship raised the following concern:

"I think we are hearing too much judgment and not enough love and compassion!"

To be perfectly candid, I love questions from those who have taken the time to listen to the teaching. It gives me a glimpse into both how the message was received and what the individual is thinking.



But there is one thing anyone who asks such a question must know ahead of time. As a pastor and teacher, I am not under any obligation to teach those topics they *want to hear*. Rather my responsibility is to unfold the meaning of the text to the best of my ability, which typically includes the things we all *need to hear*! We are going to hear some very challenging things from Revelation Chapters 2-3—things we absolutely need to hear.

My Job Description

Allow me to remind you of my job description as assigned by the Word of God and meant to be carried out as unto the Lord.

1. *As an elder and pastor, I work for the Lord!*

... present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth. II Timothy 2:15

I spend a tremendous amount of time studying and preparing to teach so that I will correctly handle God's truth. I believe teaching the Word to be a great privilege, but I also find it to be very demanding.

2. *The Lord's calling upon the pastor-teacher is clear and concise:*

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. II Timothy 4:2

Illustrations and personal testimony have their place—a very small one. My one overriding calling is to *Preach the Word—all the time—and let the chips fall where they may!*

3. *The pastor's teaching has a clear goal in mind.*

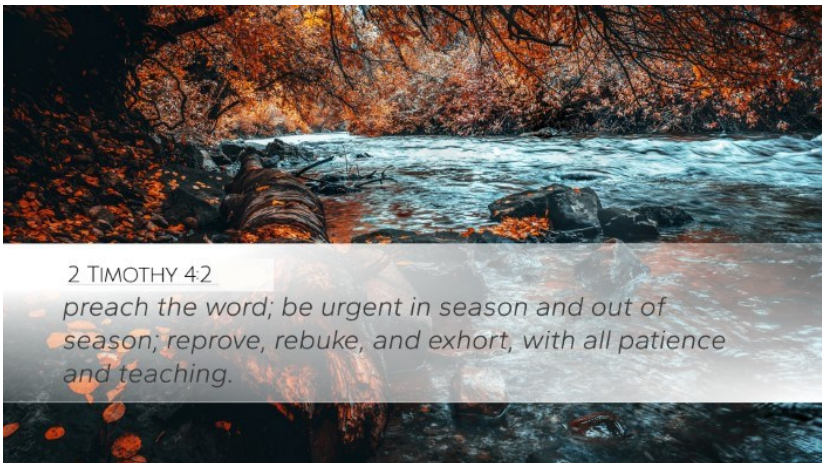
... some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13

The body of Christ is to be built up, unified in the faith, and maturing to the point of fullness in Christ!

What happens if I don't teach the full counsel of God, if I overlook passages that I know might be distasteful to the congregation? Why, I will short-circuit the process that God has in mind. I will have failed in my calling to prepare God's people for works of service and to promote their spiritual maturity.

This is why I primarily favor expository preaching—covering one book of the Bible at a time. It is the best way to ensure we don't miss anything God has included in His revelation to us. Furthermore, if I fail in my calling to help promote the congregation achieving the *whole measure of the fullness of Christ*, quite naturally, I would be eligible for discipline from Him. Which do you think concerns me more—a few upset members of the congregation or a Chief Shepherd who is unhappy with one of His under-shepherds? That should be an easy question to answer. It is for me!

In light of the question raised above—*not enough love and too much judgment*—let me give you a practical illustration of how this works. Prior to our study in Revelation,



we had been working our way carefully through the Book of Philippians. Let me remind you of several verses from Chapter 2.

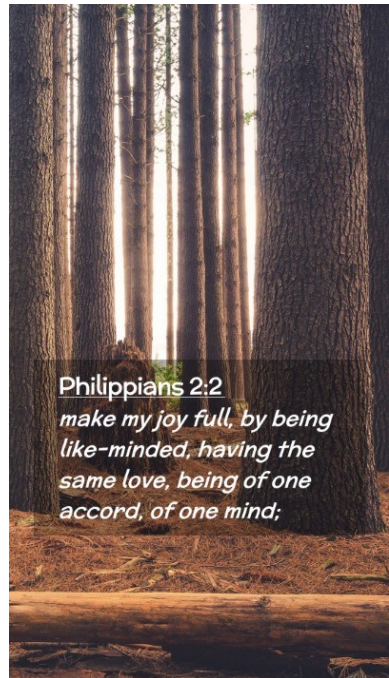
If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Philippians 2:1-2

How quickly we seem to forget. That seems to be a lot of love and compassion to me, and we spent a great deal of time on it because it was in the text! It was God revealing just a portion of all that is on His mind to us. Now that we are in the Book of Revelation, we are going to go wherever it takes us. And apparently, that is going to include some things quite different from the content of Philippians!

... "Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come."

Revelation 14:7



Now the key for us, as followers of Jesus and students of His Word, is not to pick the truths we like and find a way to ignore the ones we don't. On the contrary, our goal should be to put them all together in perfect harmony with each other. I think of the truths of God's Word like the spokes on a bicycle wheel—each truth needs to be

in the proper tension, so that the life we live is perfectly *true* to its center—which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me walk you through how this idea of *truths in harmony* with each other works by use of an example.

Harmonizing Truth—an Example

First, consider the following two passages:

... neither ... demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

“... the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.”

John 5:22-23

Which of the above passages is true? Why, of course, they both are! How do we harmonize them? If you are a born-again child of God, then you are in Christ Jesus and nothing can separate you from His love—nothing. Nonetheless, you will come before Him at the *Bema Seat* of Judgment to have the quality of the life you have lived as a Christian evaluated by your Savior. If He approves, you will receive eternal reward. (Romans 14:10-12)

Further, if you have never placed your faith in Christ, then you are not *in Him*, and Romans 8 does not apply. Your appointment with the judgment of Christ will occur at the *Great White Throne* of Revelation 20. There is only one outcome from this judgment—the *Lake of Fire* for all eternity. Not only do these two passages harmonize with each other, but I can tell you this: It is imperative to come under the love of Christ before meeting Him for judgment!

Two Additional Passages

To bring this discussion back to our study of Revelation, consider these two additional passages:

His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known ... according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Ephesians 3:10-12

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

I Peter 4:17 BSB

A Calling for the Church. Does God have a high calling and purpose for His church? He most certainly does! We are to put on display the manifold wisdom of God! Add to that Ephesians 5 where the Church is called the *Bride of Christ*! It is clear that *we*, as the Church Jesus Christ is building, have a wonderful status.

Yet what does Peter tell us? Judgment isn't set aside for the church, nor does it come last. It starts with us! Why, if that is true, and the Book of Revelation is about Jesus as Lord coming to judge and reign, what might we find as the very first object of Jesus' judgment?

A Message to the Church! This brings us to the content of Revelation Chapters 2 and 3. Consider the way that Jesus opened each of His statements to the churches:

"And to the angel of the church in _____ ... I have this against you ... I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent ... As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."

Revelation 2-3

An Introduction to the Seven Churches

The pronouncements of Jesus as judge are recorded in Revelation for our benefit. Thus, let's consider His messages to the churches.

The seven churches of Revelation 1:11 and Chapters 2-3 are seven actual churches in existence at the time John received and recorded his revelation from the Lord Jesus. In terms of our outline, they are the *things which are* of Revelation 1:19. The churches are all in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).

These churches form a rough circle and were centers for postal distribution in the Roman Empire. These cities, however, were very different in character, and encompassed a wide range of economic success and failure. Even in this early stage of the church, they seem suggestive of a composite of what might be happening across the breadth of the New Testament Church.



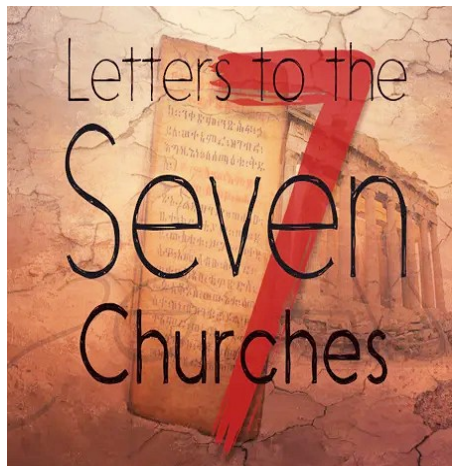
In short, each of these churches responded to the same Gospel but, as we shall see, they vary greatly in terms of their spiritual condition.

As a note for future reference, Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 are the last specific mention of the Church until Revelation Chapter 22. We will consider later why the church is missing from the intervening chapters.

An Interpretive Framework

Now, before we turn to the text, consider the following interpretive framework for Revelation Chapters 2 and 3.

- The Church that was established in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), has expanded and is in the process of becoming predominantly Gentile. And so it has continued for the last two thousand years.
- As the Canon of Scripture comes to a close, the Lord Jesus is going to provide His evaluation (judgment) of the state of affairs in these seven representative churches.
- This will allow us in the church today to compile a list of things the Lord commends, a list of things He condemns, a remedy for each failing, and the consequences for either responding or disregarding His judgment. This information should be greatly valued over the course of the past two thousand years by every church that seeks to be the kind of church that Jesus is building! We should be thankful that the Lord has included this information in the Scriptures for our benefit.



Understanding the Timing

There is one further aspect of interpretation over which there is much debate. The issue is this: Is what we have in Chapters 2 and 3 Church history in sequence, or a composite picture of what is potentially happening at any given time? Many strong Bible teachers of the past and present have favored the sequence approach. That means they see Ephesus as being descriptive of early church history, Smyrna to represent the church receiving persecution from the Roman Empire, and down through the ages until the church comes to an end with Laodicea.

Although this can be a fascinating way to study history, this approach has several major problems:

- The seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3 were all real churches in existence at the time John's message was recorded.
- This interpretation forces the church to ask, "What part of the unfolding sequence applies to us? What church are we?" Do you see the problem with this? It leads you to look for application to just one of the churches and not all seven.
- I don't think that is God's intent. In fact, I am certain that He wants us to pay very close attention to the very first church in the list—Ephesus—rather than overlook it because its period of history is past.

For the purposes of our study, I am going to take the approach that these seven churches are representative of the possibilities to be found within the local church at every time in Church history. In this way, we will be exposed to a wide array of not only potential pitfalls, but also things the Lord finds commendable.

By using the composite approach to interpretation, the church has suitable guidance from our Savior applicable down through the ages. This allows us, even 2000 years later, to ask:

- What does Jesus think of our fellowship?
- Where are we weak? Let's address it!
- Where are we strong? Let's reinforce it!

Judgment Begins With Us!

Let's start our discussion with three of the churches: Ephesus, Thyatira, and Laodicea. By looking at the first, middle, and last in the list of churches, not only will we cover a lot of issues, but we'll be able to trace a downward spiral within the Church.

All of the messages to the churches begin this way:

"To the angel of the church of _____ write ..."



What Jesus Commends

Each introduction makes some kind of reference to the description of Jesus in Chapter 1. The Lord Jesus commended these churches as follows:

- Ephesus—for their good works, patient endurance, and rejection of evil.
- Thyatira—for their good works, increasing works, and perseverance.
- Laodicea—He found nothing commendable.

Point of Application: *We must ask and answer the question: Is it really possible for a church to reach the point where there is nothing commendable about them? I don't mean commendable in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God! Apparently, it is entirely possible! Those at Laodicea are named as a church—that means a fellowship of believers—and as we have seen, God has found nothing in His sight worthy of mention. What an absolute disaster for any fellowship of believers. We need to pay close attention to what God is telling us here so that we might avoid any such disaster in our midst!*

At this point, we can collectively list what God finds commendable for these churches. The Lord Jesus *commends*: good works, faithful endurance, and the rejection of evil! I have drawn them altogether, because I think we should look at them collectively. Our attitude should be:

This is what the Lord commends, so these are the kinds of things we want to be doing!

Of course, we have to apply everything else we have learned about the Christian Life—abiding in Christ, walking by faith, and walking by the Spirit. As we do so, perhaps one day we will hear: “*Well done, My faithful son or daughter!*” This, in turn, will lead to reward at the *Bema Seat* of Christ so that we can one day lay those rewards at the feet of our heavenly Father as an act of worship.

What Jesus Condemns

Unfortunately, each of these three churches has something the Lord Jesus indicts!

- He indicts Ephesus for having *left their First Love!* He admonishes them to *remember, repent, and return.*

- He indicts Thyatira for letting *Jezebel* into the church. He admonishes them to *separate, repent, and hold fast* to the faith.
- He indicts Laodicea for being spiritually *wretched, miserable, poor blind, and naked!* And if that were not enough, He abhors their *lukewarm* spirituality! He admonishes them to become spiritually rich and clothed in white.

Once again we can summarize what Jesus condemns.

The Lord Jesus indicts: *failing to abide in Him; letting Jezebel into the church; and a spiritually impoverished condition in contrast to the exalted position and spiritual riches that our Savior has in grace provided.*

What This Means

Let's make some application:

First, once you leave your *First Love*, it would seem to be downhill from there! When you turn from the Lord Jesus, don't be surprised if Jezebel finds her way into the church and it becomes so lukewarm Jesus simply has no use for it. The principle is this simple: *If you are not making spiritual progress—you are going backwards!*

"But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward."

Jeremiah 7:24

The idea that you can go your own way, and at the same time stand your ground with respect to your spiritual condition, is a lie from Satan.

We are living in the Devil's world with a nature to sin! If we are not engaged in those disciplines that promote spiritual growth on a daily basis, there is no way we are going to hold our own!



Second, are you surprised the list of things God commends is quite short: *good works, patient endurance, and the rejection of evil*? We shouldn't be! These items have been regularly emphasized throughout the Scriptures.

What God desires for us is a challenge, but it is not complicated! Read the Scriptures below. If we responded in obedience, wouldn't we have put ourselves in a position to receive the Lord's commendation?

Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you."

II Corinthians 6:17

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

**See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful,
unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.**

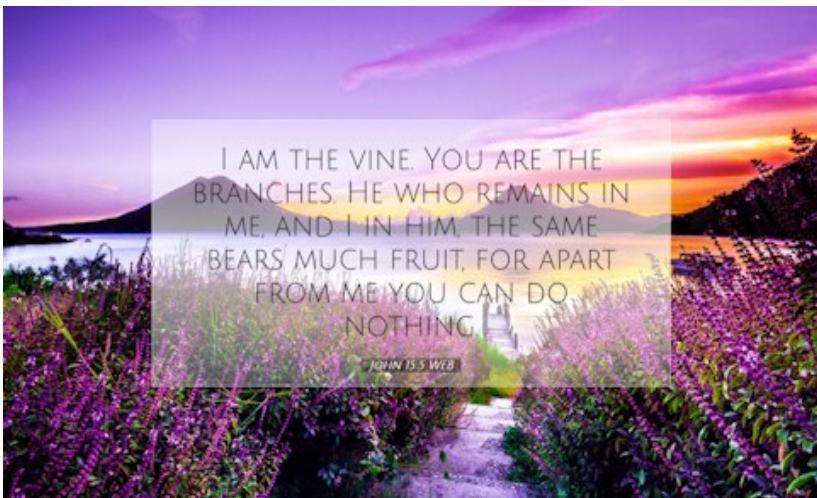
Hebrews 3:12

Third, could it really be possible for a church with all kinds of commendable ministry going on to have left its *First Love*—the Lord Jesus Christ? The only possible answer is “Yes”, since God has given us an actual example in the church of Ephesus.

I hope a thunderclap has gone off in your thinking. The above is a crucial piece of information for us, because the church in Ephesus was COMPLETELY UNAWARE of their spiritual failing. They had become a church with a great deal of busyness, but were completely barren of any fruit whatsoever that would count for eternity. They were simply stirring up a cloud of dust.

Perhaps you think I am being too hard on them. This isn't my judgment. I might find them quite respectable, but this is God's judgment! Jesus says quite emphatically:

“... apart from Me you can do nothing ...” John 15:5



Let me touch briefly on the remedy Jesus gave to the church at Ephesus. He told them to: *remember, repent, go back to the beginning!* It is hard to make sense of that until I consider my own life. If I go back to my early days as a Christian, I remember the blessing of knowing my sins were forgiven, of being brought out of Satan's kingdom and into that of the Son, and of being so excited about every new truth I learned from the Word. Those were great days, and it reminds me that the Christian Life doesn't start with good works, fruit, or any of the other things we feel led to do as Christians. The Christian life starts with a person—our Lord and Savior. Above all else we are to *know Him, abide in Him, and manifest His life to the glory of the Father!*

Fourth, it is easy to assume we don't have to worry about letting *Jezebel* into the church. We have nothing to do with idolatry or sexual immorality!

Not so fast! Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Sidon, who married Ahab, the king of the northern portion of Israel. She brought the world right along with her into the nation of Israel—and they embraced it! She brought her idols, her ways of thinking, her morality, and all the rest of it.

We need to be absolutely clear on this—once you have let the world in, and begin to *dance to its tune*, you have let *Jezebel* in! In our day, this has happened in far too many churches. "Impossible," you say! On the contrary! When you see the church take up such issues as climate change, critical race theory, same-sex marriage, promoting illegal immigration, they have let *Jezebel* in. At the same time, you will find a pure Gospel message compromised, obscured, or missing altogether.

Many of you are now attending VCC because you could no longer tolerate the denominational church of your youth. What happened? They left their *First Love* and welcomed in *Jezebel*. Not surprisingly, their *lampstand* has been taken away. Oh, they might still be there, but they are having no impact for the Kingdom of God!

Fifth, is it possible for a church to live in an alternative reality of their own making—thinking they are doing great things for Jesus—while they are about to be spit out and their lampstand removed? Apparently:

“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” Revelation 3:17

How could a church in the first century get into such a deplorable condition? By now we should know: Leave your *First Love*, let *Jezebel* in, and rest on your prosperity!

As someone who watches the church closely, let me suggest that in our day the greatest contributor to churches that are *worldly* and *lukewarm* is the effort to market Christianity. By that I mean, shifting the church’s emphasis to satisfying the customer, obtaining market share, and regularly rebranding the product. This is a way to have Jesus remove your lampstand! Perhaps you think I am overstating this. Before you decide read the following from a church rebranding website:

Effective marketing allows a church to reach its local audience and extend its reach beyond its immediate community ... By leveraging branding, digital platforms, social media, and other marketing tools, a church can fulfill the call to share the good news globally ... Effective marketing is about crafting the correct message

... Clear communication through well-designed web-sites, engaging social media, and consistent branding ...

The pastor who wrote the above is working for one of the largest suppliers of Christian resource material in the world. He wants churches to hire him to help with their marketing. A simple question for you: Does this sound more like something Jesus will condemn or praise?



What Further Message

Now that we have an idea of what God commends from looking at the first, fourth, and seventh churches in the list, let's consider all seven. When we do, we are going to find something surprising!

The Lord Jesus commends: good works, faithful endurance (in prosperity and trial) and the rejection of evil!

The list is almost the same. I have highlighted the single modification in blue. What God wants from and to do through His Church is not that complicated. It is as if the voice of God calls: *turn from evil, trust Me, and do good!*

We will find something similar when we look at the things God indicts from all seven churches.

The Lord Jesus indicts: failing to abide in Him; letting Jezebel/[Balaam](#) into the church; and having a spiritually impoverished condition in contrast to the exalted position and spiritual riches that our Savior has, in grace, provided.

Once again, when considering major items, I found it necessary to make only one addition. In truth, adding Balaam to the list is simply highlighting another form of worldliness.

To remind you, Balaam was an Old Testament character, considered by some to have spiritual power, who was hired to curse Israel. Although Balaam told King Balak God had prohibited him from directly cursing Israel, he told the king that if he led the Israelites into sin God would judge them for him. So, King Balak lured the Israelites into sexual sin. But, in reality, any sin would have accomplished the same thing.

What we ultimately have is Satan's strategy to compromise the Church with worldliness, and any number of things will do it! Lest you think I am jumping to conclusions by attributing this to Satan, I want you to ponder something. Jezebel and Balaam were wicked and nefarious Old Testament characters, yet we find them named as being inside the Church in its first 70 years of existence. I would submit to you that they have been there ever since.

This is the world getting into the Church, and Satan is the present ruler of this world. (I John 5:19) When Jesus finds the works of Satan in His Church, He is going to condemn it!

What Can Happen

Allow me to pause for a moment and share one of the many excellent questions I have been asked since we began our study in Revelation. One of our fellowship shared this with me:

I knew a church that was on fire for the Lord. But five short years later it had lost that zeal and turned to some clearly unbiblical practices. It was doing great things for the Lord, but no longer. What happened to this church?

Of course, I don't know for sure about that particular church, but all of us should be able to hazard a guess after our short study of the seven churches of Revelation 2-3. It is very likely that this church did one or more of the following: left their *First Love*, was corrupted by worldliness, or bought into a wrong understanding of success! Once any of those things happen, the good works, faithful endurance, and rejection of evil that the Lord commends will go by the wayside relatively quickly. What a message for us to take to heart so that this would never happen within our fellowship!

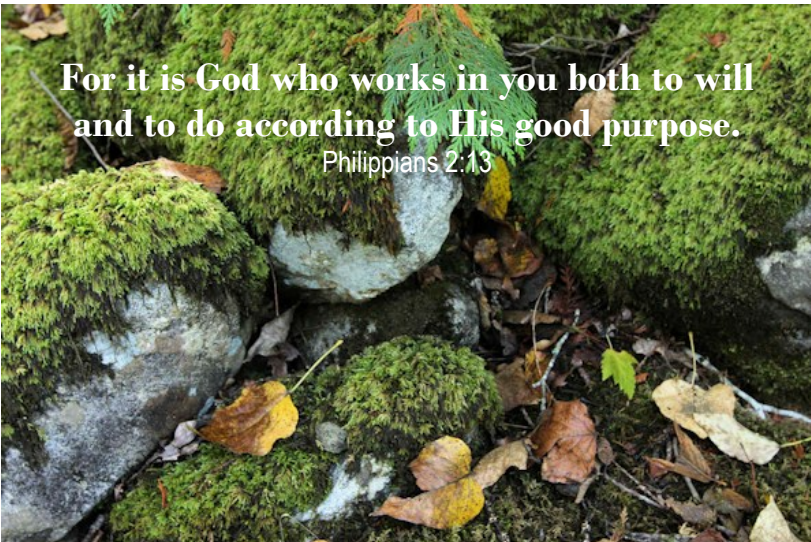


What We Have Learned

Protecting our fellowship from these kinds of failures has been on my mind for many years as has considering how we can engage in the kinds of things that would bring His commendation. The truth on both of these concerns is that God has actually given us a manageable list! Work through the following with me.

If God commends, don't we have our marching orders? How do we reinforce these orders? How do we infuse these into the life of our church so they are an indelible part of who we are?

First, we must seek to do God's works—God's way! Our recent study in Philippians is so helpful on this point. We turn from ourselves to our great God, and seek to put ourselves in a position that our thoughts are His, and our actions are the outworking of the indwelling Holy Spirit.



We need to let our expanded translation of Philippians 2:12-13, provided below, impact our approach to the works of the church if we want our Savior's commendation. Notice how the passage from Hebrews reinforces our understanding as well.

It is not about what we do; it is about what He does through us!

... continue to work out your salvation, in the Fear of the Lord and have no confidence in self, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do according to His good purpose.
Philippians 2:12-13

May the God of peace ...equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.
Hebrews 13:20-21

Second, faithful endurance is a response to our teacher of truth—the Holy Spirit!

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.
Romans 10:17

"He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you."
John 16:14

The Bible is the mind of Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit who takes the truth of the Word and reveals it to us. It is this revealed truth in which we are to put our faith.

With an object like the rock solid truth of God's Word, there is no better anchor for faith!

Third, to reject evil is to reject the world! It is often so difficult for the Christian to realize that this world is not our friend.

Read carefully the passage from I John, and you will see that the Bible warns us about allowing the world to be the object of our affections.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

I John 2:15-17

Is it not true, in your experience, that the things bombarding your soul from this world seek to stimulate your cravings, lust patterns, and pride? Is it any wonder that James says the Christian who cozies up to the things of this world has committed spiritual adultery? That would most certainly qualify as leaving your *First Love*!

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? ... the Spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely ...

James 4:4-5

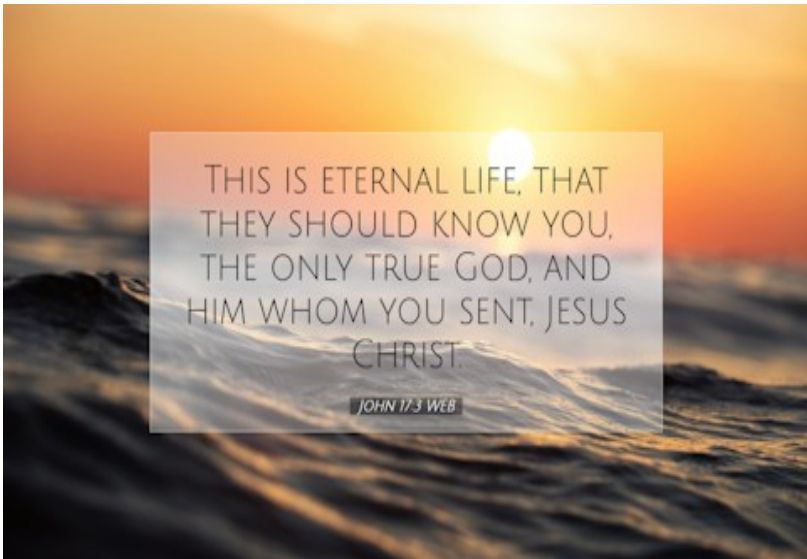
What We Should Do

Shouldn't we avoid anything God indicts, long before it has reached a crisis state? Shouldn't we be applying the remedy to potential spiritual maladies in the same way we pre-medicate certain physical conditions? Of course!

First, *Christianity is first and foremost a relationship!* Isn't that how Jesus defines it—knowing the Father and the Son?

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent."

John 17:3



Now, consider the passage in Hebrews 10, and the follow-up quote by Tozar. God wants the redeemed close to Him and in intimate relationship! How it must grieve Him when we wander off searching for greener fields in the world!

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ...

Hebrews 10:19,22

Ransomed men need no longer pause in fear to enter the Holy of Holies. God wills that we should push on into His Presence and live our whole life there.

A. W. Tozar

Second, *the "noise" of this world will seek to distract us from a depth of relationship with God!*

... "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted over the earth!"

Psalms 46:10 BSB

What great advice for one who chooses to make a relationship with Christ a priority. We must get away and simply:

- *Be still*: pause, quiet the soul, cease from human striving, and set aside worries and circumstances.
- And know: that our God is sovereign, omnipotent, holy, loving, merciful, omniscient, immutable, compassionate, righteous and just!

He is all of those things in my relationship with Him! As the Spirit has the opportunity to impress upon our quieted soul who God is, it will keep us from ever turning from our *First Love*, for there is nothing else worth turning to!

Third, *be on guard—Balaam and Jezebel come in many disguises!*

I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

II Corinthians 11:3

... Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.

II Corinthians 11:14-15

I am ashamed to admit it, but there are many well-known evangelical leaders in our day advocating for the church to involve itself in worldly affairs.



Do you know what pure devotion to Christ is meant to be? It is to be love for the will of the Father—not as man seeks to manipulate it, but as the Bible declares it!

Why do we spend so much time in Bible study at VCC? Why is our vision for the church to be a center of Bible teaching excellence? Here is my answer: So that we would be so thoroughly familiar with what is genuinely the will of the Father, that we would never be taken in by that which is counterfeit!

Fourth, *we must learn that our true wealth is firmly centered in the riches that are ours in Christ Jesus.*

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Ephesians 1:3

This was the problem in Laodicea—and any church during prosperous times. There is a tendency to get one's eyes on the material and off of the spiritual. This can lead to a disastrous assessment of one's true spiritual condition, as it did in the church in Laodicea.

Three More Things To Consider

I hope our study of the seven churches of Revelation will lead us to be constantly on guard and to closely evaluate our own fellowship. Now, as we move to conclude our study of the seven churches of Revelation, I have three more things for us to consider:

- The consequences for failing to respond (repent)
- The benefits (reward) for overcoming
- A very personal bit of encouragement

We will work through them one at a time.

The Consequences for Failing to Respond!

As we carefully review the description of all seven churches, we can group the consequences into three categories. There are further nuances, but these three stand out.

1. For leaving your *First Love*:

“... I will come ... and remove your lampstand ...”

Revelation 2:5

2. For letting worldliness in...:

“I will cast into ... great tribulation ...” Revelation 2:22

3. For being lukewarm:

“... I will vomit you out of My mouth.” Revelation 3:16

Here's a simple question: Are these consequences bad? Really bad? Are you sure? If you answered all three in the affirmative, then my job is done!

We should do everything we can to avoid these consequences. I think of it as pre-medicating! In the same way we might take antibiotics before certain medical procedures, once we know what God is going to indict, we should be zealous to keep ourselves from ever getting into a position where we know His discipline is coming. If we, by some error on our part, ever find ourselves in such a condition, we need to repent and confess our sin against our God—immediately!

Further Detail. It may be helpful to look at these issues in more detail.

First, if a church fails to repent and persists in turning from its *First Love*, God says He will remove its lampstand.

What exactly does this mean? Let me suggest several things for your consideration. First, the church has stopped *shining its light for Christ*.

The removal of the candlestick does not imply that the church might not go on apparently as before, but that it lost its place as a trustworthy witness for the Lord. Nothing makes up for distance between His people and Christ.

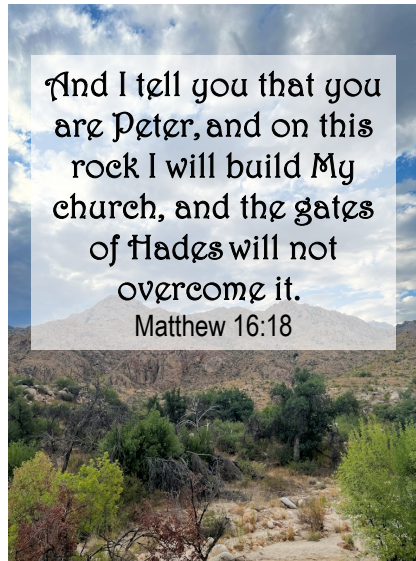
D.F. Kelly

Then there is something that I find very concerning:

"... I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

Matthew 16:18

When Jesus takes your *lampstand*; you lose the label of *My Church*. Things may very well continue. It is just that He is no longer doing the building, so whatever this particular church might do amounts to nothing of value in God's sight.



Eventually, you will end up with something like I observed in Cornwall, England during a recent trip. The wonderfully designed and sturdily built churches that stood in every little village were open during the week for tourists. But in my weeks there, I never saw a single gathering for worship on Sunday. No opening of God's Word. No singing of His praises. Their lampstands were long gone! These presumably once vibrant churches are now on the ash-heap of history!

Second, *if a church fails to drive out worldliness, then God says tribulation is coming.* Consider the following text and decide: Does this sound like a time of focused remembrance on spiritual things, or is it worldly in nature?

... I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you ... When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat ... One remains hungry, another gets drunk ... Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!" I Corinthians 11:18-22

Drunkenness and self-centered behavior on display during a Communion remembrance sounds worldly to me. Then let me suggest we should expect to find tribulation for the church in Corinth as well.

... That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. I Corinthians 11:30

Make sure you understand the seriousness of this. Those who are said to have *fallen asleep* were put to death by the Lord for their worldly behavior. The same thing happened to Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5. The Lord Jesus is simply saying, "*Not in My Church!*"

Third, *if a church fails to adequately assess its spiritual condition and persists in lukewarmness, God says He will "spit it out of His mouth!"*

Not surprisingly, Jerusalem was the headquarters of the early church. But by the time of Acts Chapter 21, some disturbing things have started to appear:

... "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law."

Acts 21:20

So then, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another ...

Romans 7:4

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. Galatians 3:25

The passage in Acts 21 indicates the church in Jerusalem is encouraging a spirituality by law. At the same time, God's guidance to the church contained in the epistles is one of being *dead to the Law* and *no longer under the supervision of the law*.

When you look at the above, I have to ask, "*Is it possible that the Jerusalem church has left its First Love?*" Substituting the Law for a vital relationship

with Christ would certainly be proof. Could they even be lukewarm to the things of God? If these things were in fact true, what would we expect to happen based on our study of Revelation? We should be able to predict the witness of the church would be removed, perhaps tribulation, and maybe God would reject them as part of His future plans.

That is pretty much what happened in 70 A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed at the hands of the Romans. The Jerusalem church was gone. This is very serious business!



Fourth, *I want to address the issue of the lukewarm church more thoroughly.* Does the church of Laodicea sound like the worst of the group? You might wish to argue, but my natural tendency is to see it as being not as bad as letting in a Jezebel or leaving your *First Love*.

But now let me ask, does the discipline it receives from the Lord sound like the worst? I think it arguably does! We think of lukewarm being kind of in-between good and bad. But given that to be lukewarm results in being *spit out* by God, apparently, He feels differently.

Let me suggest this is meant to teach us an important lesson. God is patient with the lost getting saved, with the carnal returning to the *Father's house*, and commending the faithful,

but He apparently has no use for the *lukewarm*! They just don't fit into His plans and purposes—so out they go!

Just so we have a sense of how easy it is to become *lukewarm*, let me define it for you.

To become lukewarm is to have trusted Christ unto eternal life, but then settled into a condition where you have a form of godliness, but not its power. You are apathetic toward spiritual things—the truth no longer stirs the soul—and, although you may be counting on your eternal security, there is no practical witness or transformation of the life!



Perhaps this explains the Father's response. This is not why He sent His Son!

The Benefits (Reward) For Overcoming!

Let's start with a single verse of Scripture:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7

If you put a box around a passage and pull it out of context, a lot of bad theology can result. That is exactly what has been done with this passage far too often. It has been used to teach the philosophy that unless you are an overcomer (as they define it), then you are not saved. That, in turn, leads to a performance-based salvation. The net result is to use this passage to promote a theology that changes God's offer of salvation as a free gift—right in the last book of the Bible. We should intuitively know He would not change the criteria for salvation like that. Nonetheless, the challenge of correctly interpreting this passage remains.

What It Means. What does it mean to *overcome*?

First, John has used this word before and has already taught us what it means to *overcome*. In addition, in Greek the word translated *overcome* means to conquer, to prevail, and to obtain victory. It has an element of time, so it is better understood as *to overcome all the way to victory*.

... This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. I John 5:4-5

The word *victory* is the noun form and the word *overcome* is the verb form of the same word. Amazingly, all believers are by definition overcomers! Yet I would tell you that, at the same time, they are called to overcome. How can that be?

**So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to live in Him ...** Colossians 2:6

We *overcome* the world at the point of faith in the person and work of Christ. Then we are called to keep right on *overcoming* by living a life of steadfast trust in our Savior!

Second, this understanding should cause things to begin to fall into place. We don't have a change in New Testament theology at the close of Bible! On the contrary, this is a very clear call to the individual, who became part of the Church through faith in Christ, to keep on trusting in Him all the way to the end! That's not a change, but a closing emphasis on one of the most basic tenets of Christianity!

Third, there are seven blessings associated with persevering in the faith—*overcoming*—listed in Revelation Chapters 2-3. If we look at them collectively, I think the intent of what God is doing will become very clear. It is a lengthy list, but read it carefully, and consider its collective import.

"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."
Revelation 2:7

"He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."
Revelation 2:11

"To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone ... a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."
Revelation 2:17

"And he who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron ... I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star."

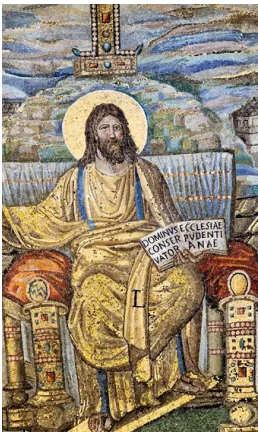
Revelation 2:26-28

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

Revelation 3:5

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem ... And I will write on him My new name."

Revelation 3:12



"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Revelation 3:21

It should be immediately obvious that the word *overcomes* is not being used to describe God's gift of eternal life! How could it be when it includes reigning with an iron scepter, hidden manna, and even a white stone? This is speaking of something different!

What Is Different. So allow me to approach this in a different manner. First, in very broad terms:

Are these all good?

Does that make them all desirable?

Mission Accomplished!

Each of these is a reward for faithfulness in the Church of which Jesus is head! This hasn't changed the means of salvation in the least! What must a lost person do to get saved? Believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ! Once saved, what are we to do? Persevere in the faith—for that is what it means to overcome. If we do, our God will richly reward! He is telling us,

"Here is what I have in store for those who learn to live a life of dependent trust in Me!"

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean
not on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5



I collect Scriptures that help me with various facets of the Christian Life, things I can turn to over and over again in time of trial. This used to be the first text I turned to, as the most compelling call in the Scriptures to persevere:

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts ... See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God ... We have come to be partakers with Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first ... There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God ...

Hebrews 3:7-4:11

I find the idea of a being a *partaker* or *partner* with Christ to be very compelling! But I must tell you that, although this passage continues to encourage me, I find what we have just uncovered to speak even more poignantly to my heart:

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Revelation 3:21

Wow! I believe the second part of the above to be true—that the Father granted Jesus to sit on His throne. But I can't even begin to wrap my mind around the first part—that it is possible for me to be seated with Christ on His throne! Is it worth responding to the call to overcome by trusting God through thick and thin? Beyond any shadow of a doubt!

Add Grace. If you consider the above to be noteworthy, wait until you couple it with the grace of God!

To which church is the above promise to sit with the Lord Jesus actually addressed? Why it is the church at Laodicea—arguably the worst of the bunch!

Why, listen to Jesus' message to them in the preceding verse:

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me."

Revelation 3:20

The above is an example of grace on full display! The church at Laodicea is arguably the worst of the group. They have pushed Jesus outside of His church, so that He is having to knock and asked to be let back in! Yet He graciously offers restored fellowship for any who will respond.



Then, He promises what is to me the most significant reward of all for those who will overcome—to sit with Him on His throne. I remind you that to overcome is to live a life of dependent faith in the very same One Who came to save! The Lord is willing to have fellowship with the lukewarm—and that would mean those who have turned away from their *First Love*, gotten tangled up in this world ... or anything else.

Repent, confess your sin, and turn to Him. This is how you open the door and let Him back in!

AND IF YOU DO SO, HE WILL COME IN!

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."

Revelation 3:19

3. A Very Personal Bit of Encouragement!

Let me close this booklet with a very personal bit of encouragement. If we take the lessons of Revelation Chapters 2-3 to heart, what kinds of things should be going through our minds? Let me suggest it would be things like: *abiding in Christ*; driving worldliness out of our lives—and keeping it out; devotion to our Savior, and the goal of steadfastly trusting in Him. With all of that in mind, let me point out a portion of text I have kept until the end, the church that we have not yet covered in any detail—Philadelphia. Consider carefully our Lord's evaluation, that we might make application to our fellowship.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true ... He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, for you have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ..."

Revelation 3:7-8

An Open Door. Did you catch what Jesus has told this church? He has placed before them an open door! No strength is needed on their part for, as we have learned in the past, the Lord Jesus has told us elsewhere:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

II Corinthians 12:9

Further, they are commended for two things, things that we can choose to do no matter what our state of life. Those two things are *keep His Word and bear witness to His name!*

The text continues as Jesus tells this remarkable church:

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

Revelation 3:10-11

Not only do I find this very encouraging, it leads me to the following conclusion:

This Should Govern Our Life as a Church Fellowship!

Consider. If we seek to make this an example, we should consider the following concepts.

First, *faultless is possible!* Why would I start with the possibility of a *faultless* church? Because God has found no fault with the church of Philadelphia. It is possible to be such a church because God has provided everything we need:

... for life and godliness ... that we may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption of this world ...

II Peter 1:3-4

Ours is simply to *hold-fast* in dependent trust to His Word and be ready to bear witness to His name!

Second, *it answers the question, “How much personal strength does it take to be successful?”* It doesn’t take any! Our Lord will open the door, He will supply the enabling power, and He will one day gather us to Himself!

Third, *what great deeds are we asked to do?* Our list is straight-forward—keep His Word, bear witness to His name, and remain steadfast in faith! This is God’s call for His church, until He comes for us or we go to Him!

Fourth, what do we already have? We already have a crown! We are simply reminded—don't give it up in the time you have remaining!

The Word of God is a source of infinite riches. It unfolds the Christian Life, layer by layer, always adding new information and compelling reasons to respond. That is exactly what has happened with our study in Revelation! As we step back, we must also be struck by the simplicity and perfection of God's plan of redemption for lost mankind.

It starts with entering the family of God by becoming a *child of God*! Here is how that occurs: We must see ourselves as helpless, hopeless, and hell-bound—in need of salvation. That is what makes us receptive to God's gracious gift of salvation! His grace starts with the *Right Person*, the eternal Son of God who



came to this earth in order to become one of us—taking on humanity in addition to His deity! It continues to the *Right Work*—Jesus going to the cross in our place, bearing our sin, paying the penalty for our sin—death! That brings us to the *Right Response*, a response that includes no works on our part, for our salvation is solely a work of God.

The Final Question. So we ask, "*What must we do to be saved?*" This question has already been asked and answered:

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ..."

Acts 16:31

That is not only the *right response*. It is the only response acceptable in God's sight! Am I sure this is all it takes to enter the family of God?

Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God ...

John 1:12

Upon the authority of God's Word, I am absolutely sure!

And, having become a child of God, we are called to keep right on going with the same response by which we were saved!

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him ...

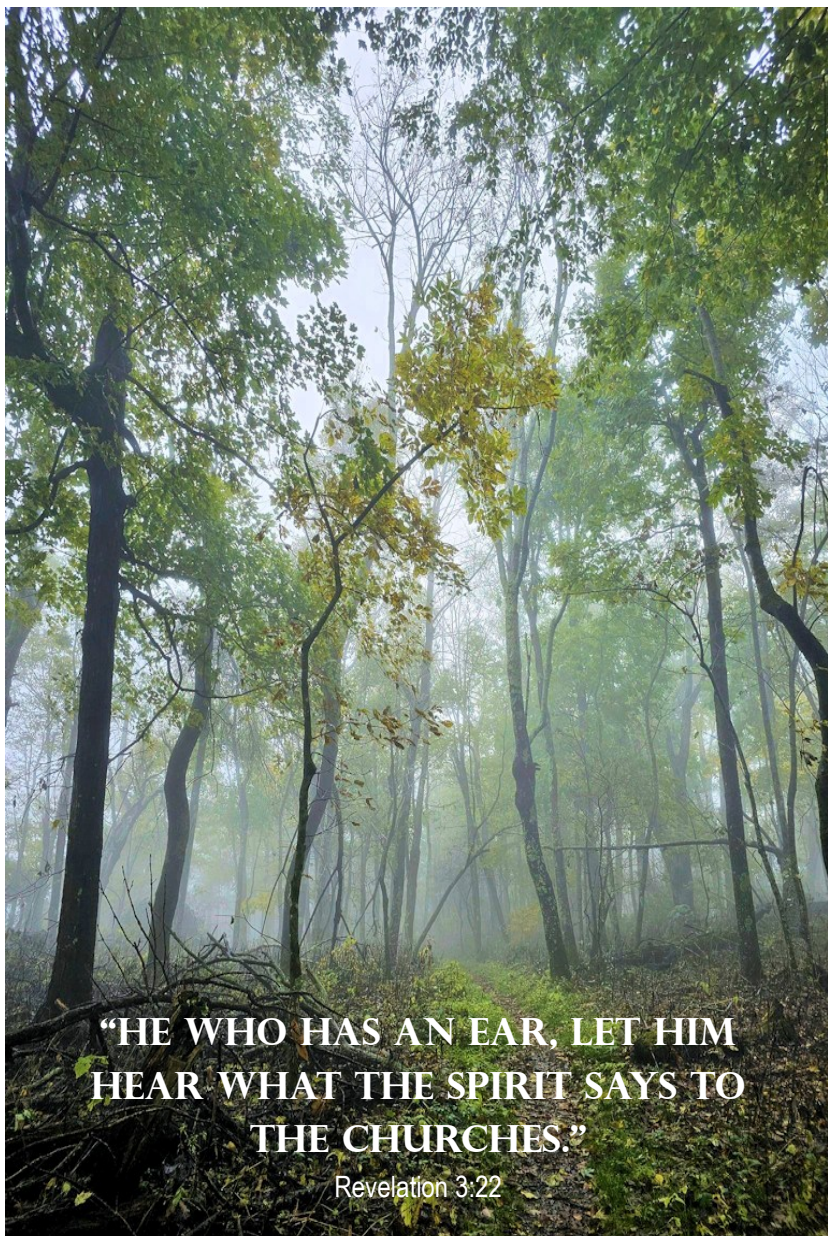
Colossians 2:6

What is the victory that has overcome the world? Even our faith! (1 John 5:4) It is a faith that continues until it becomes sight when we are face to face with our Savior. It is a faith grounded in God's Word and strengthened into a walk of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. The goal is to *prevail* as a Christian—to be an *overcomer*!

Will it be worth it? I think God has made that pretty clear in this closing book of His Revelation to us! Take it to heart. And all God's people said, "*Amen!*"

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Revelation 3:22



**“HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM
HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO
THE CHURCHES.”**

Revelation 3:22



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