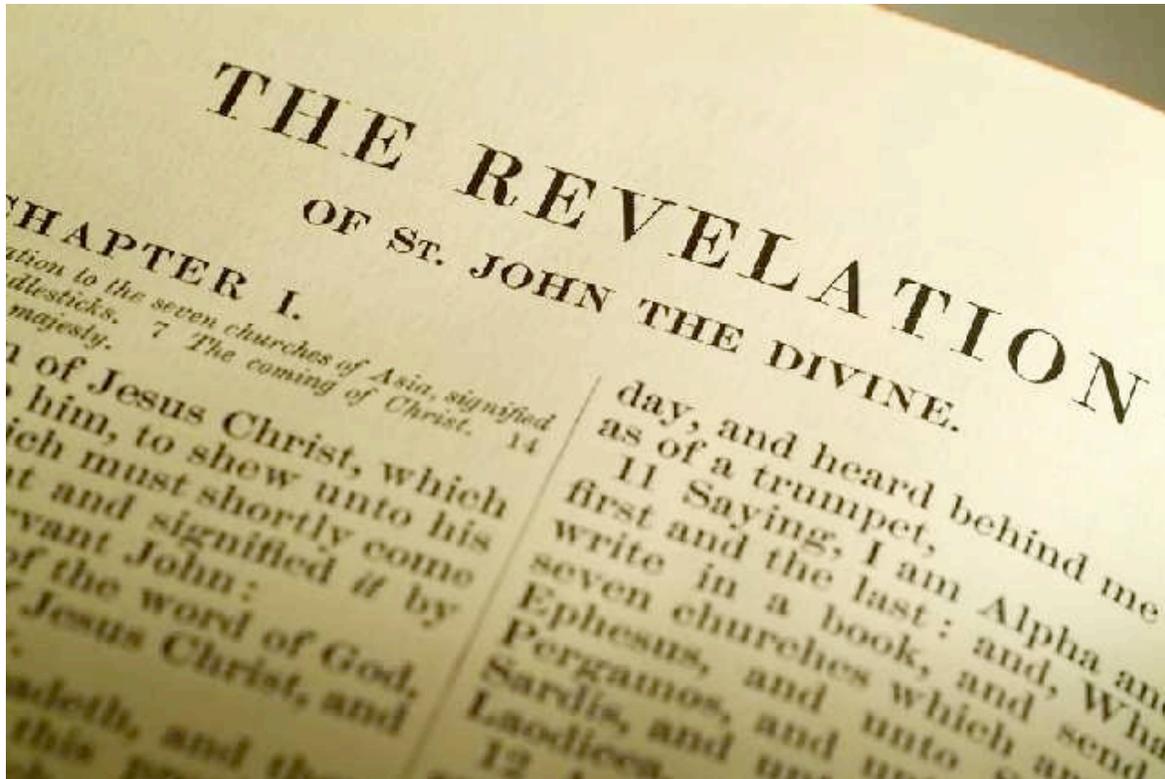


THE FIRST FACET: REVELATION 2 AND 3



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

The First Facet: Revelation 2 and 3
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Revelation 2 and 3

Revelation 2 and 3 comprise a series of messages from the Lord Jesus Christ to seven churches in Asia Minor, churches the Apostle John would have known quite well, and which would have known him.

Each message is unique, though they follow a similar pattern. For the most part, Jesus has something to commend, something to condemn, some instruction or warning, and some promise for hearing and obeying. The messages are entrusted to the pastors of these churches, and we can assume Jesus meant them to make up the substance of their preaching and teaching until problems were redressed and blessings restored.

These messages are of such a nature that they can be applied to churches in all times and places. This makes this first facet of the book of Revelation especially important, as it has a timelessness to it which every generation of believers should enter for their own instruction.

We are happy to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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We hope you find this study of Revelation a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 First Love

Week 3, Monday: The Church in Ephesus

The first facet of the gem which is the book of Revelation applies Jesus' message to John to seven churches in Asia Minor. These churches were actual historical congregations, familiar to John. They also represent all churches in all times. The message to these churches is thus the message to the Church in every age, and they challenge us to reflect on our own churches in our times. Here, in the mirror of Revelation 2 and 3, we will see both the glory of God and the state of our churches reflected for our careful consideration. We begin with the most destructive problem any church can face.

Read Revelation 2

Meditate on Revelation 2.1-7

1. Jesus begins His message to the pastor ("angel", cf. Mal. 2.7, Gal. 4.14) of the church of Ephesus with words of commendation (vv. 1-3 and 6) For what does He commend this congregation? What does this commendation imply concerning what Jesus is looking for in churches today?
2. What do you understand by the "first love" of the Church? What does it mean to "leave" that first love? According to Hebrews 2.1, does this happen suddenly or gradually? Explain.
3. The commendation Jesus gave this church can mask the problem He exposed. How? How can you tell whether or not this condition exists in your church?
4. No church should be content to continue in this condition. What is required for a church to "remember" and "repent" so that it can return to its first love and be restored? What "works" (v. 5) does this entail? What should be the role of church leaders in this process? Of church members?
5. Jesus includes an ominous threat for those who fail to heed His message (v. 5). What does this mean? But note the promise Jesus makes for *all* who hear this message of the Spirit to the churches (v. 7). What does this mean for our eternal destiny? What does it mean for each day?

My Reflection

How can you tell when you are beginning to "drift" from love for Jesus into mere doctrine and good works?

The Glory of God

Why does Jesus prize love for Him more than sound doctrine and good works?

Glory to Glory

Jesus appeared to the Ephesians in the glory of commendation. He moved from that to the glory of reproach, then warning, then promise. In each of these stages, Jesus was prepared to bring the glory of God to bear on this church, and on any church which suffers from the same problem. What would each stage of this glory look like as Jesus brought it to bear on you? Jesus confronted the Ephesians with His glory through the pastor of the church. What should be your pastor's role in keeping a church focused on the glory of Jesus, at every stage?

Memorize

Our memory verse for this week is Revelation 2.29. Write this verse on an index card, using your preferred translation of the Bible. Carry this with you throughout the week, and spend some time each day working to memorize this verse.

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

Closing Prayer

You, Lord, *are* most high above all the earth;
You are exalted far above all gods.
You who love the Lord, hate evil!
He preserves the souls of His saints;
He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.
Light is sown for the righteous,
And gladness for the upright in heart.
Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

Psalm 97.9-12

2 You Are about to Suffer

Week 3, Tuesday: The Church in Smyrna

The congregation in Smyrna was experiencing hard times – persecution. It was going to get worse before it got better. Jesus did not promise to relieve their suffering, at least, not for the moment. He had already told His followers to expect it (Jn. 16.33). He called His followers to be faithful, even if it meant dying for Him. He would bless them with the ultimate crown, the crown of life.

Read Revelation 2

Meditate on Revelation 2.8-11

1. Jesus begins His address to the believers in Smyrna by reminding them of His own suffering (v. 8). Is it a good idea for Christians ever to be mindful of how much Jesus suffered for us? Why or why not?
2. Jesus said that He knew the suffering of the believers in Smyrna (v. 9). But He also knew their “works” and their “poverty.” Based on verse 9, what works in particular does Jesus seem to have had in view? And how could He say that though they were impoverished, they were rich?
3. In the face of persecution and suffering, Jesus instructed His people not to be afraid. How can a community of believers help one another to be bold and faithful in the face of persecution?
4. Persecution of believers is motivated by the devil (v. 10). Knowing this should help to embolden us in the face of challenges and trials of every sort. Why? What would you say are the keys to being able to overcome (v. 11) and remain faithful (v. 10) in the face of threats or persecution?
5. Jesus makes two promises to the church in Smyrna. What are they? How would you explain to a new believer what it means to “overcome”? What is “the second death” (cf. Eph. 2.1)?

My Reflection

Would Jesus describe you as “rich”? Why or why not? Would you describe yourself as an overcomer? Why or why not?

The Glory of God

This letter to the church in Smyrna serves as a portent of things to come. What do we learn in this brief letter about Jesus’ relationship to Satan and those who persecute the Church? To Jesus, what seems to matter most in the life of discipleship?

Glory to Glory

“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)...” How can you see in this expression an echo of what John wrote in Revelation 1.9? The “tribulation” part is a straight connection. What should we focus on as our “riches”? What is involved in exercising “patience”? Where should the believers in Smyrna expect to know the glory of the Lord?

Memorize

Let’s look more closely at our memory verse, Revelation 2.29. Recite your memory verse aloud. What kind of “ears” does Jesus want us to have? Pray this verse back to the Lord, as best you can.

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

Closing Prayer

Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge,
Who eat up my people *as* they eat bread,
And do not call upon God?
There they are in great fear
Where no fear was,
For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you;
You have put *them* to shame,
Because God has despised them.
Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When God brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

Psalm 53.4-6

3 Hold Fast

Week 3, Wednesday: The Church in Pergamos

The believers in Pergamos were also experiencing persecution. Jesus commended them for holding fast to His name, in a hot-bed of spiritual wickedness, and for standing firm against a certain heretical teaching. But the Lord had this against the church in Pergamos: They tolerated those who taught false doctrine – probably for financial gain – and turned a blind eye to their immoral practices. Persecution or no, this church needed to repent and clean house.

Read Revelation 2

Meditate on Revelation 2.12-17

1. Note how Jesus introduces Himself (v. 12). What does this suggest about the way we should use the Bible (Heb. 4.12)?
2. Note the double emphasis on the very presence of Satan in Pergamos. Should churches be surprised to find their communities being overcome by wickedness? Should they acquiesce in such wickedness? Explain.
3. Balaam was condemned because he sought to profit financially by prophesying against Israel (cf. Num. 22-24; Neh. 13.2). Shouldn't preachers expect to be paid for ministering the Word (cf. Gal. 6.6)? What is the Lord actually condemning here?
4. We're not quite sure who the "Nicolaitans" were, or what they taught. But we are sure of this: Jesus "hated" them. Isn't "hate" a "four-letter word"? Are believers supposed to hate?
5. The promise of "hidden manna" connects to the Balaam/Balak reference in verse 14 and reminds Israel that, even as God provided for them at that time, so He will continue to do so in the midst of their present trial. He promises also to give those who hearken to His words a "white stone which no one knows except him who receives it" (v. 17). What do you make of that?

My Reflection

Antipas was faithful to the point of death (v. 13). Are you prepared to be that faithful to the Lord? If we're reluctant to talk freely and openly about our faith with others, how can we be certain we won't deny Him when faced with the prospect of martyrdom?

The Glory of God

Jesus portrays Himself as the Dispenser of manna. How does this help us in reading the account of Israel's wandering through the wilderness? If Jesus could provide manna for the people of Pergamos, can He provide whatever we need to "hold fast" to Him in the face of persecution?

Glory to Glory

Can we expect to know the glory of God if we tolerate sin and immorality in our congregations? Explain.

Memorize

Recite your memory verse aloud: Revelation 2.29. What does it mean to "hear" in this case? What does it require of us to "hear" like this?

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

Closing Prayer

Remember me, O Lord, with the favor *You have toward* Your people.
Oh, visit me with Your salvation,
That I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones,
That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation,
That I may glory with Your inheritance.
We have sinned with our fathers,
We have committed iniquity,
We have done wickedly.
Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders;
They did not remember the multitude of Your mercies,
But rebelled by the sea—the Red Sea.
Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake,
That He might make His mighty power known.

Psalm 106.4-8

4 The Sin of Toleration

Week 3, Thursday: The Church in Thyatira

Like the church in Pergamos, the church in Thyatira was doing some good things, but they were guilty of tolerating immoral practices among those claiming to be followers of Christ. Jesus is deadly serious about His churches not living this way. The world is wicked and sinful; the Church is called to be holy – no matter what it costs.

Read Revelation 2

Meditate on Revelation 2.18-29

1. In verse 15, fire and brass are symbols of purity. Why does Jesus introduce Himself to the church in Thyatira in this way? What does this introduction suggest about what Jesus expects of the “vision” and “walk” of His followers?
2. We note again that this church has many good things to commend it (v. 19). How can a church be characterized both by abundant good works and blatant wickedness? Should we accept this as normal?
3. Notice verses 22, 23. Does King Jesus intervene in the circumstances of His churches? Meditate on Hebrews 12.3-11. Why does the Lord come with discipline against His people?
4. Jesus declares Himself to be the One “who searches the minds and hearts”. What are the implications of this for your daily life as a follower of the Lord?
5. “hold fast”, “overcome”, “keep My works”: Briefly explain each of these ideas. What does Jesus promise those who manage this (vv. 26, 28)?

My Reflection

Are you trying to follow Jesus while harboring sin in your heart (Ps. 66.18)? How does Jesus, who searches the mind and the heart, feel about this? How can we keep from becoming like the people of Thyatira?

The Glory of God

Jesus cites Psalm 2 in reference to His power to exercise judgment against sinners – not just “then and there,” but “here and now” as well. Read Psalm 2. What does Jesus require of sinners? What does He require of those who acknowledge Him as the Son of God and King?

Glory to Glory

Meditate on Habakkuk 2.14. Here is the Lord’s intention, to which He calls us as His people (1 Cor. 10.31). Why does this make it so important that we be as serious about sin as Jesus is?

Memorize

Our memory verse – Revelation 2.29 – tells us that the Spirit speaks to the churches. How can we know when the Spirit is speaking to us (cf. Jn. 16.8-11)?

Closing Prayer

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if *there is any* wicked way in me,

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

And lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139.23, 24

5 Dead – Almost

Week 3, Friday: The Church in Sardis

Jesus was blunt: The church in Sardis was dead. They had abandoned faith in the Gospel (v. 3) and were not inclined to the good works that accompany salvation (v. 2). Still, even in this dead church, there were a few – very few – people who still had faith in the Lord. That small remnant was apparently enough to spark the hope of revival.

Read Revelation 3

Meditate on Revelation 3.1-6

1. Here Jesus introduces Himself as the bringer of the *Holy Spirit* and the ministers of His *holy Word*. Why was such an introduction appropriate for this church? Do churches today need to be reminded of Paul's instruction in 2 Corinthians 7.1? Explain.
2. How can a church have “a name that you are alive” but be “dead” at the same time? What kinds of “works” (v. 2) would indicate such a condition?
3. “Remember therefore how you have received and heard...” (v. 3): “how”, not “what”: What does Jesus intend by this? They were calling themselves Christians so, presumably, they remembered “what” they should have remembered. What's the significance of that “how”?
4. “If you will not watch...” Whose duty is it to watch over the health of the local church (Heb. 13.17)? How should they do that?
5. What does Jesus promise those who overcome in Sardis? What warning is implicit in this promise?

My Reflection

Jesus and the Spirit search the mind and the heart, as we have seen. Elders and shepherds are supposed to watch over the souls of those in their care, as we've also seen. What is your responsibility in keeping watch over your own soul, and how do you practice that self-watch?

The Glory of God

Give some examples of works that would be “perfect before God” (v. 2) because they refract His glory to the world?

Glory to Glory

What opportunities for doing works perfect before God are you likely to have today? How can you prepare to make sure that, when the opportunity arises, you will make the most of it (Eph. 5.15-17)?

Memorize

Review Revelation 2.29. The Spirit speaks to the churches, sometimes to commend, sometimes to warn, sometimes to motivate with promises, sometimes to instruct and convict. If the Spirit were to speak to your church today, what would be His primary message?

Closing Prayer

O God, why have You cast *us* off forever?

Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?

Remember Your congregation, *which* You have purchased of old,

The tribe of Your inheritance, *which* You have redeemed—

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.
Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations.

Psalm 74.1-3

6 Faithful

Week 3, Sunday: The Faithful Church

The churches in Philadelphia had been faithful. Even though they had but “little strength” and were beset by outsiders, claiming to be true believers but teaching falsehood, still, they stayed true. But they would need to hold and fast and persevere in their faithfulness. In the Christian life, there’s no resting on our laurels. We must always be read to stay the course, come what may.

Read Revelation 3

Meditate on Revelation 3.7-13

1. Again Jesus identifies Himself as the one who opens the Kingdom of David to people. He says He has opened a “wide door” for the Philadelphians. Since they were already obviously believers, what does Jesus seem to have been saying about their participation in the Kingdom?
2. Jesus said the Philadelphians were being troubled by those who were of the “synagogue of Satan.” Compare this with Matthew 16.23. What makes a church a “synagogue of Satan” even though it claims to be a true church (here referred to as “Jews”)?
3. Jesus said that a time of testing was coming upon the world. Meditate on Romans 1.18-32. What might that time of testing look like? He promised to keep the Philadelphians through this time. How should we understand that promise?
4. Summarize Jesus’ promise to the overcomers of this church. In what ways might this apply to the here and now? What about to the hereafter?
5. Jesus mentions a “crown” which is yet to be received by all the faithful (v. 11). What does the image of a crown signify? Paul mentioned a crown awaiting him in glory (2 Tim. 4.8), and we will see next week that the saints in heaven wear crowns (Rev. 4.10). For now, how should we think about this promise of a crown?

My Reflection

Of what does faithfulness consist? How can you know when you’re being faithful to the Lord? What might be some cues to suggest you were beginning to stray from faithfulness?

The Glory of God

Jesus is powerful to test the world. Does He test His people? Meditate on Hebrews 12.3-11. What are some ways Jesus might test us? How should we respond to such tests?

Glory to Glory

Jesus holds open a wide door of Kingdom opportunity for those who are faithful. Among other things, this seems to imply greater access to and experience of the glory of God. Write a brief prayer expressing your desire for Jesus to open that door wider for you, and declaring your intention to be found faithful by Him in all things.

Memorize

Recite Revelation 2.29. Pray through this verse in the light of everything we’ve seen in Revelation 2 and 3. Plan to share your memory verse with someone today.

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

Closing Prayer

Use your memory verse to write a prayer of your own about hearing the Lord Jesus and being an overcomer for His Kingdom and glory. Carry that prayer with you and pray it frequently today.

7 Sickening

Week 3, Saturday: The Church in Laodicea

Simply put, the church in Laodicea was sickening to the Lord. He could nearly vomit it out of His mouth, so bad was the taste of what that congregation had become. The believers in Laodicea had settled into a kind of complacency that saw them comfortable and self-satisfied in their faith. They had deceived themselves into thinking that their Christian life was as good as it could get, and they didn't bother with cultivating the kind of zeal for witness and good works the Lord expects of His people. Out of His great love for the Church, Jesus confronted this congregation head-on and in-your-face. Would that He would do so in our day once again.

Read Revelation 3

Meditate on Revelation 3.14-22

1. Again, it's important to note how Jesus introduces Himself to this church (v. 14): "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God." Why would this way of introducing Himself have been especially relevant for this church?
2. The Laodiceans were deceived, thinking that everything about their faith was just fine. They had become complacent and content in a kind of status quo Christianity (v. 15). In fact, their situation was dire, at least, as the Lord saw it (vv. 17, 18). Could such a situation befall churches in our day? How does this happen? How would we ever be able to recognize if it did?
3. Meditate on verse 19. Recall that Jesus is giving this message to the pastor(s) of this church (v. 14). It was their duty to pass it along to the congregation. What does this suggest about the duty of pastors when it comes to the overall health and growth of the local church?
4. Meditate on verse 20. What does this look like in your life? Are you dining daily with the Lord over His Word (Jer. 15.16)? Are you being equipped, day by day, to overcome our natural tendency toward complacency?
5. What would it mean for the Laodicean Christians to "overcome"? What did Jesus promise them if they did? Meditate on Ephesians 2.6 and Colossians 3.1-3. Is this the perspective from which you live your life? Have you overcome to rule with King Jesus?

My Reflection

"neither cold nor hot" – Does this describe you in any area of your Christian life? Your prayer life? Love for and delight in God's Word? Witness for the Lord? Good works of love? Let's be blunt: Does the Lord delight in the savor of your Christian life, or do you make Him sick?

The Glory of God

Jesus is true, faithful, and eternal. His Word is the last word on everything. Meditate on verse 18. Suppose you were going to "buy" these commodities from King Jesus. What would you actually be seeking from Him?

Glory to Glory

Imagine a spectrum of spiritual life, with "cold" at the far left, let's say, at number 1; "hot" at the far right, at number 10; and "lukewarm" in between at number 5. Where would you put yourself on that spectrum? Why? Where would you like to be able to put yourself by the end of this study of the book of Revelation? What will it take for you to begin moving in that direction, from glory to glory, beginning today?

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

Memorize

Today, share your memory verse for this week (Revelation 2.29) with a Christian friend, and briefly explain what you have learned about this verse.

Closing Prayer

Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;
Look down from heaven and see,
And visit this vine
And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,
And the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself.
It is burned with fire, *it is* cut down;
They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.
Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
Upon the son of man *whom* You made strong for Yourself.
Then we will not turn back from You;
Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.
Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
Cause Your face to shine,
And we shall be saved!

Psalm 80.14-19

Revelation 1-3, The First Facet
Revelation 2 and 3

Week 3: Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Review Jesus' message to each of the seven churches of Asia Minor. In your own words, summarize what Jesus wanted those pastors to tell His congregations:
2. How can you see that these messages are not just for the churches of John's day, but for all churches – and all believers – in all times and places?
3. Jesus repeats the phrase "him who overcomes." What do we need to overcome? How may we overcome it?
4. What are the most important lessons for you personally from Revelation 2 and 3? Summarize those lessons:
5. How are you beginning to implement those lessons in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.