



REVELATION

*A Survival Manual
for the End of the Age*

Pastor Michael Cranford

Copyright © 2025 Michael Cranford

Schedule

September 14 Introduction: Cultural Markers, Rev 1

September 21 Rev 1

September 28 Rev 2-3

October 5 Rev 4-5

October 12 OFF (Baptism)

October 19 OFF (Pastor Michael at a conference)

October 26 Rev 6-8

November 2 Rev 9-10

November 9 OFF

November 16 OFF

November 23 OFF

November 30 Rev ____

December 7 Rev ____



Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

Classic dispensationalism's "historicism" view of the seven churches:

- **Ephesus** (Apostolic Church: from the time of Christ to AD 100).
- **Smyrna** (Church persecutions: 100-322)
- **Pergamos** (Church under Roman favor: 323 - 538)
- **Thyatira** (Corrupt Catholic Church: 538-1798)
- **Sardis** (Reformation Church: 1798-1833)
- **Philadelphia** (Modern Evangelical Church: 1833-start of the Tribulation)
- **Laodicea** (Apostate Church of the Tribulation)



Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

The seven churches are seven actual churches in John's time but they obviously represent some ideal or typical representation. What do the seven churches stand for?

1. Each church represents an approach to cultural pressure. Some churches have victory, some defeat, but most have elements of each.
2. Jesus encourages and/or calls each church to stand strong and to repent. The penalty is loss of salvation (i.e., not sharing in the blessings when he returns). The reward is something that happens after his return (that is mentioned at the end of Revelation). Therefore, these letters are meant to reference chapters 19-22 and connect the church to the end of the book.



Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

3. Jesus specifically tells one church that, if they stand strong, they will avoid the timeframe of the tribulation (Rev 3:10). This is proof the churches are not merely historical but also represent the church at the time of his return.
4. In light of the penalties, rewards, and promises, it is clear that these churches reflect the struggle of God's people. We therefore take these as general warnings as we wait for the culmination of Revelation.



To the Church in Ephesus

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.



To the Church in Ephesus

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.
(Rev 2:1-7)



To the Church in Ephesus

Type: The faithful church that started well but has struggled to remain close to God. But still knows and rejects moral corruption.

Challenge: Not losing love for the Lord (drifting away from God); return to the same love we had when we first became followers.

Penalty: Loss of lampstand (i.e., no further identity as the people of God)

Reward: To the one who is victorious: If you persevere, you will eat from the tree of life (i.e., eternal life) – Rev 22:2, 14, 19.

This church reflects the difficulty in remaining steadfast (strong in faith and dedicated in heart) while maintaining good cultural boundaries. Culture pulls us from our devotion to God.



To the Church in Smyrna

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. (Rev 2:8-11)



To the Church in Smyrna

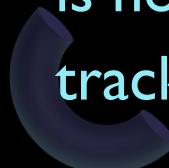
Type: The suffering church, under persecution.

Challenge: Remain faithful and don't be afraid of opposition, even if it leads to death, because you will be victorious in the end.

Penalty: None.

Reward: The one who is victorious will not be thrown in the lake of fire (the second death). – Rev 20:14-15

This church expresses the ongoing struggle of the faithful church in culture. Opposition is not a sign that God's plan has gone wrong, but is in fact a sign that we are on the right track and following the Spirit. We are not to grow afraid and give up.



To the Church in Pergamum

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.



To the Church in Pergamum

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (Rev 2:12-17)



To the Church in Pergamum

Type: The “tolerant” church that exists in a hostile, demonic culture, where some have slid into immorality and sexual sin, but most remain true to Jesus’ name.

Challenge: Repent of those sins.

Penalty: Jesus will oppose those who have fallen with **the sword of his mouth**. – Rev 19:15 (the judgment against the world at his return)

Reward: The one who is victorious: you will receive hidden food from God (rather than the corrupt idolatrous food) and a new identity. – John 6:58; Rev 3:12; 19:12

This church reflects the first level of compromise in culture, where corruption has entered the body but it’s limited. Jesus only opposes those who have compromised. It’s a reminder that the local church is not coterminous with salvation.

To the Church in Thyatira

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.



To the Church in Thyatira

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev 2:18-28)



To the Church in Thyatira

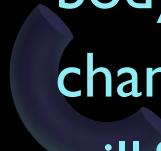
Type: The church who serves God and grows in its service, but has tolerated a counterfeit spirituality that leads to immorality.

Challenge: None. Time for repentance is over.

Penalty: Jesus will eradicate this corruption from the church.

Reward: Those who are victorious until the end will reign over the nations (in the coming kingdom). – Rev 20:6; 22:5

This church has reached the second level of compromise in culture, where the church body has been infected by a corrupt spirituality. This kind of spirituality can spread and change the nature of the church as a whole. The question then becomes if individuals will “hold on” and find their way to victory; the larger body is likely lost.



To the Church in Sardis

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev 3:1-6)

To the Church in Sardis

Type: The empty/superficially spiritual/cultural church that has no real works.

Challenge: They must wake up, repent, and strengthen what little works they have before it is too late and Jesus has returned. But a few (among them) have remained holy, and will walk with Jesus, dressed in white.

Penalty: (Not explained, but same as those who are not ready for Jesus' return)

Reward: To the one who is victorious, he will (like the ones in Sardis) be dressed in white and his name will not be blotted from the book of life. – Rev 19:14; 20:15

This church has reached the third level of influence by culture—it looks almost identical to secular culture. It is a church in name only, but there are still a few who remain holy.

There is still time for the rest to “wake up” and repent.

To the Church in Philadelphia

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.



To the Church in Philadelphia

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev 3:7-13)



To the Church in Philadelphia

Type: The obedient church that faces opposition and doesn't back down; it cannot be stopped because God provides an open door for his work.

Challenge: None.

Penalty: None (only for those who persecute and oppose them)

Reward: They are kept from the hour of trial (the tribulation, the day of the Lord) that is coming on the whole world. – Rev 4-19

This church represents the victorious church in culture: it faces opposition but does not relent, and is assured of victory by Jesus. It is the model for the faithful church prior to Jesus' return.



To the Church in Laodicea

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 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. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.



To the Church in Laodicea

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 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 that person, and they with me.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev 3:14-22)



To the Church in Laodicea

Type: The wealthy church that has no real works and is (spiritually) blind and naked, and will be spit out of God's mouth (i.e., rejected as legitimate).

Challenge: Acquire the (heavenly) wealth and holiness that Jesus offers (rather than the substitute wealth of this world). Repent and be earnest. Jesus stands at the door and knocks (i.e., there is still time).

Penalty: Jesus spits them out (i.e., rejects their spirituality).

Reward: Those who are victorious are given the right to rule with Jesus. – Matt 19:28

This church represents the final level of cultural compromise: it is the worldly church that has taken on the values of secular culture. It represents the fallen church at the time of Jesus' return (he is at the door, so there is still time).