

The room is quiet. The air is warm. The congregation is waiting. The preacher speaks softly, yet with conviction, as he utters the following instruction, "With every head bowed, every eye closed, and no one looking around, I invite you to make a decision. If you have never received Christ into your life, raise your hand so I can pray for you." We call that the invitation.

The invitation is perhaps the most important part of the preaching of the Word of God. God's Word calls us to respond every time we hear it. But did you realize that the mode of the invitation is greatly influenced by culture. As far as we know, the apostle Peter never asked a congregation to bow their heads and raise their hands if they wanted to be saved. Nor do we see the apostle Paul calling for people to "walk the isle" and "kneel at the altar". Billy Sunday used this method of invitation in a great way as he called people to travel down the "sawdust trail" in his tabernacle crusades. I've heard that an invitation used by Charles Haddon Spurgeon was to invite those interested in responding to come back to his study on Monday (?). I know of one evangelist who gave an invitation at the beginning of the service. The style of invitation may vary, but the fact that the Word of God calls for a response does not.

If Jesus were preaching here today, what kind of invitation would He extend to us? In a real sense, we don't have to wonder for we have in our possession an invitation Jesus used in a message He gave to a local church. It's recorded for us in Revelation 3:20-22. It's the invitation Jesus extended in His letter to the church at Laodicea.

Proposition: This morning, as we conclude our series on the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, we're going to consider the twofold response Jesus invites us to make in His invitation.

I. An Overview: The Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3

- A. They teach us about Christ.
- B. They teach us about ourselves.
 - 1. What pleases Christ?
 - 2. What displeases Christ?

II. Jesus' Invitation to the Church at Laodicea (20-22)

- A. It involves an accurate presentation of Christ.
 - 1. He is righteous.
 - 2. He is near (20a).
 - 3. He is generous (20b-21).
- B. It involves an accurate presentation of our responsibility.
 - 1. We must prize Him (20).
 - 2. We must live for Him (21).

Before we trek by foot through the final section of the letter to the church at Laodicea, I want to take us on an airplane ride to get a panorama view of all seven letters.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

In the past seven weeks, we considered the seven letters one at a time. Now let's look at them collectively.

I. An Overview: The Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3

Who wrote these letters? Humanly speaking, the apostle John did while in exile on the island of Patmos (1:9). He was the penman. But Who was the source? There can be no doubt about that question, for the same answer is given seven times, in each letter (2:7, 11, 17, etc.), "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." That statement is key for it makes two truths perfectly clear. First, the Spirit of Christ was responsible for these messages. And second, the intended audience for these letters was broader than the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and the other seven. These letters were intended for anybody that had an ear. The Lord intended these letters for US!

What can we learn from the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3? These letters can teach us in two areas.

A. They teach us about Christ.

Did you notice that each of the seven letters begins with a description of Christ (and many of the images of Christ relate to the vision John had of Christ in ch 1)? To the Ephesians, Christ revealed Himself as the One Who holds the seven stars and walks in the midst of the seven lampstands (2:1). Since the seven lampstands refer to the seven churches (1:20), Christ is revealing something very amazing. He knows His church! He is in the presence of His Church. We may not see Him, but He is here. Nothing misses His all-knowing gaze. He repeated one statement in (nearly) each of the seven letters, "I know thy works (2:2, 9, 13, etc.)." He knows.

Consider the other details Christ reveals about Himself in these letters (see the back of your handout). To the church at Smyrna, He describes Himself as "the first and the last," the One "who was dead and is alive"--speaking of His Deity and power. He told those in Pergamum He held the two-edged sword. He introduced Himself in the letter to Thyatira as One who has eyes like fire and feet like bronze--highlighting His omniscience and omnipotence. In the letter to Sardis, He is the One who holds the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars. To the Philadelphians, He presents Himself as Him Who is holy and true, Who holds the key of David with which He opens and shuts--indicating His Messianic authority. And in His final letter to the Laodicean church, He calls Himself, "The Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the Ruler of God's creation.

Why is this description important? For this reason. These letters are from no ordinary person. If they were, if the messages contained in them were merely the opinions of some man, we could take them or leave them. But they are not. What we have before us is the very Word of Christ. These letters teach us about Christ. Therefore, we must take heed.

One of the great preachers in the 18th century was George Whitefield. In Britain and America (which he visited 7 times), he averaged 20 sermons a week for 34 years. He held audiences spellbound by preaching that was eloquent, dogmatic, passionate, and dramatic. Yet the key to Whitefield was his conviction that God was sovereign and His Word authoritative. He was convinced that the Word of God deserved respect. Once when preaching in New Jersey, he noticed an old man napping during his sermon.

Whitefield began his message quietly, without disturbing the old fellow. But then, with deliberate words Whitefield thundered these words: "If I had come to speak to you in my own name, you might rest your elbows upon your knees and your heads on your hands, and go to sleep!...But I have come to you in the name of the Lord God of hosts, and (he clapped his hands and stamped his foot) I MUST and I WILL be heard." The old man woke up startled! (John Stott, Between Two Worlds, 32-33)

Was Whitefield egocentric? No. He merely knew what we are prone to forget. We must never approach the Word of Christ with a ho-hum attitude. He deserves our reverence. So does His Word. He is awesome. That's clear from the letters in Revelation 2-3.

B. They teach us about ourselves.

Like what? Many things, but particularly the answer to two questions. The first is...

1. What pleases Christ?

All seven letters follow the same format. The church is identified, followed by a description of Christ, a commendation, a confrontation, an invitation to respond, and a reward to which they will be entitled if they respond correctly. It's interesting that of the seven churches, Christ had nothing good to say about two of them (Sardis and Laodicea), and nothing bad to say about two others (Smyrna and Philadelphia).

From these letters, we can discover what pleases Christ. Christ commended the Ephesians because they were dynamic, disciplined, discerning, and diligent. He commended the Smyrnans because they persevered under persecution. Likewise, He complimented those in Pergamum because they were willing to suffer their Lord, and the church in Thyatira because it was busy for God. Perhaps the most enthusiastic commendation was given to the Philadelphian Christians for they exhibited commitment to Christ and to His Word in spite of great opposition.

If we want to please Christ as a church, we don't have to wonder "how". We know how. We need to take heed to these words of commendation.

2. What displeases Christ?

To five of the churches, the Lord delivered words of confrontation. He rebuked them. The Sovereign Lord pulled no punches in letting them know His displeasure. By the way, three of those churches had already received compliments for obedience, but never forget this. Obedience in one area does not excuse disobedience in another.

Why type of things displease the Lord in churches? Scan the list, and we'll see. The Lord is grieved when a church leaves its first love, as did the Ephesians. He is incensed when His people exhibit compromise and tolerate sin in the church, as happened in both Pergamum and Thyatira. He is pained when a church substitutes activity in place of intimacy--when its people give more attention to programs than true spirituality, as happened in Sardis. And He is enraged when He encounters lukewarm church members, who think they are spiritual but are self-deceived, as was the case in Laodicea.

If we've blown it, if we have displeased the Lord with our lives, what should we do to experience His favor? It's significant that in each of the seven letters, Jesus gave each church a charge, an invitation, something He wanted them to DO. The Word of God was not given to us to entertain us, tickle our ears, or satisfy our curiosity, but to change

us. As you scan the letters, you'll see the following commands: "Remember! Repent! Don't fear! Wake up! Hold on!"

Perhaps you're a skeptic and wondering, "Why should I change, and get serious about pleasing the Lord with my life?" Jesus answered that question in each of the letters. In short, the answer is because for those who take heed, for overcomers, there is a reward. What kind of reward? Overcomers will eat of the tree of life, will not be hurt by the second death, will enjoy hidden manna and receive a white stone. They will also receive authority to rule the nations, receive the morning star, be dressed in white, have their names preserved in the Book of Life, be a pillar in the temple of God, obtain a special name, and sit on His throne.

You say, "That sounds like a strange reward." Listen, if all we care about is the here and now, it will sound foreign. If all that matters to us is a bigger salary, more notoriety, job advancement, and what the world calls "the good life," this reward won't appeal to us. But you see, the motivation Christ offers us is not the here and now, but the future. He calls us to live now with the future in mind.

Let me ask you an important question. Are you living your life with eternity in mind? Perhaps, you, like the Christians in Ephesus, have left your first love for Christ. Or, like our forefathers in Thyatira, you have a tolerant view of sin. Or maybe, you've substituted busy-ness for God in place of true spirituality. Or as happened in Laodicea, perhaps you are lukewarm. If that's the case, please listen. It means you are not living your life with eternity in mind.

It's not too late to change. How do I know? Because of the invitation Jesus gave...

II. Jesus' Invitation to the Church at Laodicea (20-22)

On the way home from church, a father asked his 10 year old son what he thought of their new pastor. The little boy said, "I like this one better than the one we had before." The father asked why and the boy replied, "Well, this preacher said, 'In conclusion,' and he concluded. The other preacher said, 'Lastly,' and then he lasted and lasted and lasted!" (Duduit, Contemp. Preaching, 216)

It's not easy to finish a sermon! As someone has said (ibid), "The twin dangers of finishing a sermon before it is done or finishing a sermon after it is done have destroyed many a pulpit venture." I am challenged by the way Jesus finished His "sermon" here. How did He finish? His invitation involved two ingredients which are essential for any, true biblical invitation.

A. It involves an accurate presentation of Christ.

The Lord is speaking in v 20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." These are familiar words which, in fact, are often used in invitations today. Unfortunately, the context is often ignored. What is the context?

This was an invitation given to church members. Christ is not speaking to the "ordinary" unsaved person, but to the person who thinks he is a Christian but is deluded. He is speaking to people who are "lukewarm" (16). He is appealing to people whose spiritual condition makes Him nauseous (16b). He has in mind individuals who make

bold claims about their spirituality (17, "I am rich...and need nothing"), but the truth is they are spiritually bankrupt (17b, "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked").

Don't miss this. This invitation went to people who had made a profession of faith in Christ. But a profession doesn't save a person. Praying a prayer doesn't save a person. Only Christ does. Walking an isle doesn't save a person. Only genuine faith in Christ does. Being baptized and having your name on a church membership list doesn't save a person. Only a genuine relationship with Christ can save a person. That's why Christ says in v 18, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold in the fire." In other words, stop trusting in your fools gold spirituality, and come to Christ for the real thing.

If Christ alone can save, then an invitation must involve an accurate presentation of Christ. What's true of Him? Notice three traits...

1. He is righteous.

In v 16, Christ says He is about to spit out of His mouth the church members in Laodicea. Why? Because He is righteous. And they are not. What did they need to do? In v 19, He told them, "Be zealous, therefore, and repent."

2. He is near (20a).

Where is Christ right now? He is near. What is He doing? V 20 is mind-boggling. The righteous Lord is pleading with unrighteous people, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Some people say, "Christianity is just ONE religion among many, and they're all basically the same." Those who say that have never considered this scene. Here is what makes Christianity unique from all other religions. God is the seeker of men. It's not man seeking God, but God seeking man. See here the picture of Christ seeking for sinful men who do not even want Him. The verb "knock" is present tense which means the Lord doesn't use a mere delicate rap on the door, but a continued knocking.

Sometimes people will say, "I found the Lord at such-and-such a time." Actually, the truth isn't that they found the Lord, but that He found them. No man seeks after God (Rom 3:11). If it weren't for His sovereign and gracious knocking, we would be eternally lost. Lehman Strauss said it well (104), "We speak of sinners finding Christ, as though men go about knocking on doors seeking Him. This is not true. The fundamental fact of Christianity is that this loving Saviour is ever seeking men and appealing to them one by one."

Right now, this may be happening in your life. The Lord is standing and knocking at your heart's door. You say, "But I don't hear Him." Perhaps you're listening for the wrong sound. Don't listen for angelic voices, and don't look for lightning bolts. Jesus calls to us through His Word. We hear His voice in His Word. A third trait stands out...

3. He is generous (20b-21).

Notice His generous offer in v 20. To the person who responds to His knocking, what will the Lord do? "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Eating together meant a lot more in the 1st century culture than in ours. We can munch on our "Big Mack" in a booth right next to total strangers without ever even exchanging words. Not so in that day. Eating together was an act of intimacy and privilege.

The Greeks had three meals in a day (Barclay, 147). There was breakfast which was little more than a piece of dried bread. There was the midday meal which a man did not go home for--it was a picnic snack eaten on the run. Then there was the evening

meal, the "deipnon." That was the main meal of the day. Since their day's work was done, people would linger over the "deipnon." That's the word Jesus uses in v 20. What He invites His people to enjoy is no hurried meal, but one of lingering fellowship.

There's more to His generous offer. V 21 "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." A "throne" signifies royalty. To sit on a throne is a royal honor. That's the generous offer the Lord extends to us. When we invite Him in, the supper room becomes a throne room (Wiersbe, 581)! What an amazing offer! The Lord says He will do for us what the Father did for Him!

Here's the first ingredient for a true, biblical invitation. It involves a clear presentation of Christ. But there's another vital ingredient. What is it?

B. It involves an accurate presentation of our responsibility.

What is it that Christ calls us to do? We have a twofold responsibility.

1. We must prize Him (20).

Notice again v 20, this time paying attention to what the Lord calls us to do. "If any man HEAR my voice, and OPEN the door." How do we prize Christ? By engaging in two activities: We must hear, and open.

Don't miss the importance of proper "hearing." In each of the seven letters, this was underscored, "He that has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says." How well do you listen well when the Word of God is read and taught? (Suggestion--One reason some of us are poor hearers is we are failed to prepare ourselves to hear. Try a couple of practical things next week. Get to bed earlier Saturday night, and get up early enough Sunday morning to prepare yourself to hear. Eat a good breakfast so you're not "starving" by 11:30, and bring a pen so you can take notes).

You say, "Why go to all that effort?" Because proper hearing is essential if we are going to prize the Lord.

Having said that, mere "hearing" is not enough. What else must we do? V 20 tells us, "Open the door." Please notice that Christ does the knocking, but He doesn't break in. He allows us, indeed He calls us, to invite Him in. How do we open the door? By repenting of our sin, and by faith, inviting Him to come in and take the controls of our lives. We must prize Him.

Some people think such a decision is merely "fire-insurance" from hell--"Open the door to Christ, and then do whatever you want with your life." No.

2. We must live for Him (21).

How do we know? According to His words in v 21, "To him that overcometh." True Christians are overcomers. You can tell that they've opened the door to Christ. How? How can you tell if a person prizes Christ? They live for Him.

Conclusion: Don't miss something very important. Though Christ extended this invitation to the church as a whole, He had individuals in mind. He says in v 21, "To HIM that overcomes," and in v 22, "HE that has an hear, let HIM hear." We all have a decision to make this morning. No one can make it for us. We must choose to prize Christ and live for Him.

Some here have never opened the door of their life to Jesus Christ. He is on the outside. He is knocking. You have a choice to make. It's very simple. You can either respond to His gracious offer and open the door, or you can spurn His offer and keep right

on living the way you have been. I plead with you to listen to Jesus' voice, open the door of your life to Him, invite Him in, and enjoy the thrill of His life-changing presence today.