

# Revelation

*Part Two*  
*Whose Opinion Matters?*  
*(Revelation 1:4-5a)*

*With Study Questions*

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## *Part Two*

### *Whose Opinion Matters?*

*(Revelation 1:4-5a)*

**John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:4-5a).**

## **Introduction**

Without a close second, the person in my earthly life whose opinion matters the most to me is my wife. There are many reasons for this: She's my wife and I love her. The Scriptures have called me to place her into a preeminent position (Ephesians 5:25-28). She cares for our children, who are a treasure to me. I want my home to be a happy place.

She also knows me better than anyone and is honest with me about my strengths and weaknesses. Her opinion matters because it the truest opinion, not based upon a caricature. She knows the best of me and the worst of me. There are many other significant reasons why spouses should prioritize one another.

I am not assigning omniscience to my wife here. Her knowledge and opinion of me is not infallible, and she could be wrong in many things. And, just for the record, I am not suggesting that I excel at prioritizing my wife. What I am saying is, I know my job description and the related benefits. And the only person, generally speaking, whose poor opinion of me would keep me awake at night, is my wife's.

Add to that, I am much stronger in every other category of my life (as a dad, pastor, coach, friend, etc.) when my relationship with my wife is sound. When things are good at home, I feel equipped to handle the rest of life. My understanding of my wife and my efforts at being the kind of man she holds in high esteem will yield in me a superior version of myself.

I open with this because, at a level that is, or at least should be, inestimably deeper, is (if I can put it this way) the opinion of God. When

things are good with God, we are equipped, not only to handle this fleeting life, but life and death eternally. In order to handle the drama of a marriage, one needs to seek to understand, and prioritize, their spouse. Before we are confronted with the incomparable drama found in the book of Revelation, we are introduced to the One with whom there should be no competition when it comes to the treasure of our hearts-the One whose opinion matters.

**John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:4-5a).**

John is writing to churches that are deriving very little psychological, emotional or conditional comfort in their faith. At the time of the writing of Revelation, it was not, in any earthly measurable, social, economic or political sense, advantageous to be a Christian. Yet at the apex of His challenges, Jesus will call His followers to be **“faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10)**. Who has the right to issue such a challenge? And not only issue it, but to issue it with a promise that truly, the day of one’s death will be superior to the day of one’s birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1b), to be given the **“crown of life” (Revelation 2:10)**.

These **“seven churches”** on that Roman Province postal route in Asia Minor (now Turkey), before they are engaged with the many exhortations, encouragements and prophecies, will hear a greeting which contains **“grace...and peace.”**

Briefly stated, *grace* is the gift from God that we do not deserve. It is gratuitous. It includes the riches of heaven, eternally (Ephesians 1:3). We will spend all of this life, and all of eternity, unpacking these riches. This grace is free to us, but, as we shall see, comes with a heavy price paid by another. *Peace*, which seems to be the unending quest of humanity, is first found by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1) resulting in peace with God. It extends from there to one another (Ephesians 2:14-18). There is a singular answer to peace on earth. It begins with peace with God.

## **The Triune God**

It is one thing to find grace and peace from another person (e.g. a spouse), but here we find grace and peace from the Triune God, **“from Him who is, and who was and who is come to come.”** This reference to the Father rings with His answer to Moses, **“Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14)**. Before we engage in the social, political and religious landscape, let us be strengthened by the favor the eternal, self-existent One.

We live in an era where the western church has not fared particularly well in its engagement with, at least by historical comparisons, a mild pandemic. How will we manage if things heat up the way we will read in this book? These first century Christians (and all who find themselves in similar circumstances throughout history) need to know, not only whose opinion matters, but what He is capable of producing in them and achieving through them. Let us take rank with those brave souls through history who feared man so little because they feared God so much!

The seven Spirits is referring to the Holy Spirit. This is likely due to Zechariah 3:9; 4:10 where the Spirit sees all things or perhaps Isaiah 11:2, where the Spirit is given a seven-fold designation. Seven is a noteworthy number in Revelation and throughout Scripture signifies perfection. Those churches (all churches) need to know that the **“these eyes of the Lord...scan to and fro throughout the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:10b)**. God may be a transcendent being, but He is intimately acquainted with our struggles, strengths and weaknesses.

## **A Mediator**

Finally, this grace and peace comes from Jesus Christ. God is not merely Almighty, and He is not merely All-Knowing. In His Son He brings forth a redemptive love. We need help. We need a Mediator. We need One who will see us through.

**For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, Saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you’ (Isaiah 41:13).**

Not only do we see the Triune God in these two verses, we also see Christ the Mediator in His threefold office. He is the **“faithful witness,”** the *Prophet*. More than ever, we are surrounded by innumerable sources of information giving conflicting accounts of events. We are also pulled down

numerous roads in terms of what the world should be. But it is the witness of Christ is true (John 8:14). The self-authoritative words He speaks have the power to save or the power to judge (John 12:48).

Christ is also **“the firstborn from the dead,”** our *High Priest*. He prays for us (John 17) and He offers His own blood as **“an anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19)**. His resurrection grants assurance that those who trust in Him will find eternal peace in their own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Finally, we have this office of *King*. If ever a designation seemed inconsistent with the reality these seven churches must have been experiencing, it lies here. Jesus is **“the ruler over the kings of the earth.”** In a constitutional republic such as ours, we rely on safeguards designed to disallow any individual person to have too much power. History has taught us how dangerous that can be. But at the writing of this letter, Caesar (likely Nero) had horrifying power beyond any ruler in the world today.

If Jesus was ruler over Nero, why not merely depose him? The deposing of Caesar is very much included in the Revelation. But the means by which this evil is overcome will be by the fulfilling of the Great Commission. Let us not misunderstand, as it appeared the apostles did, asking **“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6)?** As if it was going to be a single, cataclysmic act. We have been given a commission. We are called to be **“witnesses” (Acts 1:8)**.

In the meantime, recognize this: in the same way the evil king of Assyria was a rod of God’s anger and a staff of His indignation (Isaiah 10:5), the Caesars were mere utensils in the hand of God (Isaiah 10:15). Pilate assumed he had, at his disposal, the greatest power available to man when he asked Jesus if He was not aware that His fate lied in his hands. It is noteworthy that the same apostle who wrote Revelation, recorded the dialogue with its own revelation.

**Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above (John 19:11a).**

Let us all be both comforted and challenged, when we feel we are the mercy of people or events, that not one sparrow **“falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (Matthew 10:29).**

**The Earth**

Pressing this issue a bit further, notice that John refers to Jesus as the ruler over the kings of the “**earth**”. It is here that I would like to address two (IMO) common errors when it comes to the Revelation in general.

First is the relegating of this book entirely to the immaterial, spiritual realm. We see this, at some level, with amillennialism (certainly not all). The victory of Christ over all evil, according to some, finds little extension into the material world. According to this view, there are corresponding movements of good and evil in history, without either making any significant headway.

But the kings over which Jesus rules are not in heaven or in the realm of the immaterial. They are actual worldly rulers. And their very hearts are in the hands of God.

**The king’s heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *Like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes (Proverbs 21:1).**

There are many fine theologians who consign all the victory we see in Revelation to that which is spiritual. And, for the most part, I agree with their spiritual conclusions. I think it just doesn’t go far enough. Spiritual victories, as with our individual lives, yields fruit which extends into the material world. A changed heart results of a changed person.

This approach has encouraged a commitment to cultural insignificance. To sit on the sidelines, as it were, yielding this world to worldliness. People refer to Christ’s statement that His “**kingdom is not of this world**” (John 18:36) as if He were saying that His kingdom would have no effect upon this world. That is not at all what that means. Even in its infancy, the church was turning “**the world upside down**” (Acts 17:6).

R. J. Rushdoony comments:

**To deny the triumph of Christ in time is to undercut the validity of the resurrection and its implications for history; it is to reduce Christianity to any otherworldly cult and to make a retreat from life the essence of faith.<sup>1</sup>**

The second error to avoid is supposing that all the victories in Revelation are after the Second Coming. There will be a physical, bodily return of Christ known as the Second Coming. But it is a mistake, with

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<sup>1</sup> Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*. p. 88.

consequences, to suppose that the great blessings associated with the resurrection of Christ come after the Second Coming rather than through the course of history.

John is not writing that Jesus will become the ruler over the kings of the earth. Jesus is currently the reigning King. He is currently **“King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16b)**. It was when He was **“raised from the dead” (Ephesians 1:20)** that He ascended to that throne...

**...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:21).**

We must be convinced that the first chapter of Revelation presents a Savior who has done all that is necessary for every great promise associated with the Messiah to come to pass. Jesus will come again, as the author of Hebrews indicates...

**...not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28b).**

Though this passage likely has, as its primary focus, the bearing of sin, the common idea that Jesus has unfinished business (other than judgment) which will be resumed at His Second Coming, strikes a blow at our estimation of what was accomplished in His work of redemption. As Calvin explains,

**When we come to the tribunal of Christ, we shall find that there was nothing wanting in his death.<sup>2</sup>**

In our next meeting we will discuss more fully what Christ accomplishes in His saints in order to equip them for the task ahead. At this juncture, let us recognize the aim of this glorious greeting. As Hengstenberg explains,

**From God and Christ comes here a strengthening to an endangered faith, and a bulwark against despair.<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Hebrews* (electronic ed., Heb 9:28). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

<sup>3</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 31

Let us be strengthened and fortified for the unfolding dramas that lie before us!

## Questions for Study

1. In all your earthly relationships, whose opinion matters most and why (pages 2, 3)?
2. What was the environment of the seven churches in Asia Minor who were receiving the Revelation (page 3)?
3. Define grace and peace. How are these things achieved (page 3)?
4. From whom is grace and peace extended? Why does this matter (pages 3, 4)?
5. What are the offices of Christ and how do we see them in this passage (pages 4, 5)?
6. What is the means by which evil is overcome in history (page 5)?
7. What are the implications of Jesus being King over the rulers of the earth (pages 5-7)?

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