

Christ's Last Words to His Church Series: **Christ's Five Expectations for His Church** **Declared in Revelation 2 & 3**

The last book of the Bible seems to be the most fascinating, and revealing of all the books of the Bibleⁱ for believers. No where outside of the first three chapters of Revelation is there such a concentration of church-related truth; and ***are the single most important source of understanding Christ's present focus and work: of any Book of God's Word.***

In the ***Four Gospels*** we find a quadrophonic symphony of Christ's Earthly life and ministry; ***Acts*** shows what the Spirit of God, using the Word of God, can do through normal people; ***Romans through Jude*** record the doctrinal truths and foundations for everything in our new lives as believers, when we become a part of Christ's Church.

Finally—the ***Revelation of Jesus Christ*** shows Jesus working in His Church every day to get them living out all of His truths, taught in those Epistles, that He left us to do!

No Other Chapters of the Bible are Like Revelation 1-3

No other book of the Bible is anything like the first three chapters of Revelation. No where else do we see Jesus Christ, Lord of Heaven and Earth completely focused on the conduct and character of His people.

If you want to get ready to meet Jesus you need to master what it is He is revealing to us in these three chapters.

Once you see it, your life slowly changes, things that used to be important slowly drift away and things that used to seem so unimportant become the greatest attraction and focus of your life.

Revelation is all about how deeply Jesus Christ is involved in our sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and our consecration to God the Father.

The essence of Revelation 1 is seeing Christ as He is Today; the essence of chapters 2-3 is seeing Christ actively describing and encouraging His expectations for His Church.

To be exact, He reveals five clearly described expectations for each of us who know and love Him this morning.

5 of the 7 Churches Neglected Key Areas of Obedience

In Revelation 2-3, Jesus lists the areas that were keeping those believers and their local churches from pleasing God in their daily lives.

Remember that by the time Jesus was writing to these churches they had already heard the messages of the Apostles, they had Paul's Epistles, they had the Gospels, and of course Christ's Bible, the Old Testament.

So Jesus writes these seven letters, holding each of the churches personally responsible to live what He had sent them in His Word. Note that each time Jesus spoke to a church He said that what He desired was expected in ALL of the churches, not just that one.

Have you noticed that expansion to more than just that one local, geographic church? When you see that truth it means that what Jesus said then, applies to us here today. After 2,000 years of church history, it is still Christ's desire for us.

Note these repeated words in each of the seven letters:

Jesus Said Every Church Should Listen to Me

- **His Message to Ephesus, Rev. 2:7** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- **His Message to Smyrna, Rev. 2:11** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- **His Message to Pergamos, Rev. 2:17** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- **His Message to Thyatira, Rev. 2:29** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- **His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:6** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- **His Message to Philadelphia, Rev. 3:13** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- **His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:22** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The clear message Christ gives is that:

***Each believer has a personal responsibility
to hear God speak through His Word,
and obey what He has said in His Word.***

Pleasing God is always tied to receiving and acting upon the Word.

If you are sporadic in the Word, you will be sporadic in pleasing the Lord. The key is to live by a daily application time with the Lord through His Word.

The Word is the nourishment for closeness with the Lord that pleases Him.

Jesus is focused upon bringing our lifestyle into conformity with what pleases Him. In Revelation 2-3 we see Him clearly explaining His expectations for His churches, and thus for all of us who ever are a part of Christ's Church. We can say that these chapters contain the clearest and most concise description of Christ's expectations for us.

To please God, the experience His Hand most fully upon our lives, Jesus says each of us need to decide we will not neglect what God desires in our lives.

God Desires Each of us to Be

- **Loving Jesus Most** (His Message to Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7);
- **Separating from Sin** (His Message to Pergamos, Rev. 2:12-17);
- **Un-Friending Worldliness** (His Message to Thyatira, Rev. 2:18-29);
- **Overflowing with His Spirit** (His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6);
- **Living Crucified** (His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

We already started looking at these expectations that Jesus expressed; and we covered the first three as we started in Rev. 2:4. Open there with me again and trace what we found out about Christ's first expectation of them and us.

To Please God we are expected to be: (1) Loving Jesus Most

The saints in Ephesus were not being obedient to the central truth of the Scriptures Old and New Testament: Love the Lord Your God MOST. That is what had been taught them from God's Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:4 (NKJV) **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.***

The Problem: Their lives were clogged with so many other things, so Jesus was no longer first in their hearts, in their schedules, or their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their lives.

Loving Jesus Most. Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, " "You shall **love the LORD** your God **with all** your heart, **with all** your soul, and **with all** your mind.'

Action Needed: Jesus said: stop everything else from pushing me out, Go back to your original settings; and Love the Lord Your God with all you are.

Revelation 2:12 records **Christ's second expectation of His Church.** Jesus says:

To Please God we are expected to be: (2) Separating From Sin

The saints in Pergamos were not being obedient to what had been taught them from God's Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:14-15 (NKJV) **But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.***

The Problem: They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them to stay away from sin, thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them?

Separating from Sin. 2 Corinthians 7:1 (NKJV) Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Action Needed: Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of contamination by the world; and draw near to God. The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.

Now, as we move on to Revelation 2:18 we find **Christ's third expectation:**

To Please God we are expected to be: (3) Un-Friending Worldliness

The saints in Thyatira needed to stop their friendship with the world that led them to be displeasing to God.

*Revelation 2:19-20 (NKJV) **"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman***

Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

The Problem: The saints at Thyatira were tolerating pleasure dominated lives. If you are only living for pleasure, and pleasure dominates your decisions, then you are feeding the lusts of your flesh. Our world is constantly bombarding us with the desire for a pleasure dominated life.

Un-Friending Worldliness. James 4:4 Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Friendship with the world is anything that distracts us from worship, ministry, and devotion! Whatever is pulling us away from devotion to God causes us to be God's enemy.

To Un-Friend Worldliness: Submit to God

What does a lifestyle look like that "Un-Friends" worldliness? James says it is made up of the ten conscious choices we looked at last week in James 4:7-10.

Avoiding a pleasure dominated life style is avoiding anything that distracts us from worship, ministry, and devotion! Whatever is pulling us away from devotion to God causes us to be God's enemy.

Remember James said in v. 6a But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, NKJV .

The word "opposes," or "resists," is *antitassetai*, a military term meaning "to battle against."

To be a friend of God is to seek: **His** pleasures, **His** friendship, and **His** humility. These areas of our lives will be in line with God.

Next, as we move on to Revelation 3:1 we find Christ's fourth expectation:

To Please God we are expected to be: (4) Overflowing with His Spirit

The saints in Sardis needed to go back to the original plan that Christ designed for His individual believers. As we stand for the reading of Christ's letter to them and us—we all need to listen and hear with our hearts what Christ said:

*Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "**I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.** 2 Be*

*watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent.** Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis **who have not defiled their garments;** and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 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. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

They appeared dead at the moment, and no longer looked alive in Christ, their minds no longer appeared filled with new life from Christ, they were walking corpses acting, thinking, walking like all those dead in trespasses and sin around them.

They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him.

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them?

Overflowing with His Spirit. John 7:37-39 (New King James Version) On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 **He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**" 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Overflowing with His Spirit. Romans 8:8-11 So then, those who are in the flesh **cannot please God.** ⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead **will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit** who dwells in you.

Overflowing with His Spirit. Gal 5:16 I say then: **Walk in the Spirit,** and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Jesus offers us overflowing Spirit filled lives. But to be filled we must first empty what is already there in our lives.

Jesus called them to be pleasing God by choosing to repent of just going through the motions of acting like Christians and get His power at work within them. This leads to the constant desire of God for these early believers, and us today:

To Overflow with His Spirit:

Stop Loving the World

Another letter these churches would have received were the three short Epistles John wrote when he was pastoring the great Ephesian Church. As one who was characterized by his deep love for Christ, John especially warned about misplacing our love.

Especially misdirecting love for God and allowing that love to rest upon what God hates, the sinful system of the god of this world Satan. John calls the Devil's system: "the world".

Stop Loving the World. 1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV) **Do not love** [present active imperative] the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The world operates by sending us temptations packaged as enticements from our lusts.

God says that lusts are packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...but they fall into one of three categories:

1. **We are tempted by the flesh to chase pleasures: this equals the cravings of the body.** *These are all of the sensual temptations.* Whether for food, pleasure, or fun: our bodies are built to crave and God says don't allow your flesh to control your cravings. That is worldly and I am against that lust in any form in your lives.
2. **We are tempted by the eyes to chase stuff: this equals the lusting of the eyes.** *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!
3. **We are tempted by pride to chase status, this equals the boasting of the mouth.** *These are all of the personal temptations.*
 - This can be selfishness because I'm most important.
 - This can be irritableness because life revolves around me.
 - This can be untruthfulness because I need to protect myself.
 - This can be laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself. All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition.

- Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn. In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin. Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate. Lust means worldliness which offends God, it separates us from His blessing.

If you are sporadic in the Word, you will be sporadic in pleasing the Lord. The key is to live by a daily application time with the Lord through His Word.

Jesus is focused upon bringing our lifestyle into conformity with what pleases Him. In Revelation 2-3 we see Him clearly explaining His expectations for His churches, and thus for all of us who ever are a part of Christ's Church. We can say that these chapters contain the clearest and most concise description of Christ's expectations for us.

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- Overflowing with His Spirit (His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6); and next time:
- **Living Crucified** (His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

Pleasing God is always tied to receiving and acting upon the Word.

ⁱ For a moment, let me give you a thumbnail survey of the content of God's Word:

A Thumbnail Survey of The Entire Bible

The opening book of the Bible: **Genesis**, traces the origin of both ourselves as humans and the Universe in which we live, and the people through whom the Bible and the Messiah would come: the Nation of Israel.

Exodus gives us the rescue of Israel from Egypt; **Leviticus** gives the way God looks at sin and redemption; **Numbers** explains God's expectations for obedience; and **Deuteronomy** His way of keeping His covenant promises.

Joshua explains God's power to deliver; **Judges** portrays His unwillingness for His people to do their own thing; and **Samuel through Chronicles** shows God's simple evaluation of the lives of His people: they either do right in His sight or evil.

Ezra traces God getting the Jews back into the Land of Israel from their 70-year Babylonian captivity; **Nehemiah** captures the 52 day wall building project around the city of Jerusalem; **Esther** describes how God watches over His people to keep them from extinction.

Job reveals the God who is enough, Who is named El Shaddai; the **Psalms** lead us in how He is worshipped by His people; **Proverbs** explains how to "live daily" pleasing Him; **Ecclesiastes** gives the framework for "a lifetime" of pleasing Him; **Song of Solomon** shows the parallels between marital love and Divine Love.

Isaiah can be called the Gospel in the Old Testament; **Jeremiah** cries out about how hard it is to minister to God's Wayward People; **Lamentations** records the pain that came to God's disobedient people; **Ezekiel** records Yahweh God's explanation of how to know that He alone is the True God; **Daniel** portrays the "God who rules" over all nations, empires, and peoples.

Hosea explains how faithful God is to His unfaithful people; **Joel** paints the record of the Day of the Lord to come; **Amos** is the account of a God who sees and repays all wrongs.

Obadiah is the portrait of how evil pride becomes; **Jonah** is about how patient God can be with sinners and saints who disobey; **Micah** shows how God never gives up on His people even when they sin.

Nahum reveals how bad Ninevah got after their revival, and the ruin God brought them; **Habbakuk** is built around a Psalm of hope in the midst of the burdens of life; **Zephaniah** describes God's wrath against sin, and His remnant that always follows Him.

Haggai declares the way God's people so easily get distracted from the real reason they are here; **Zechariah** lays out God's Future plans for His chosen people of Promise the

Jews and how that fits into world events; and finally **Malachi** shows how much God pays attention to all the actions of His people.

Then we have the **Four Gospels** giving us a quadrophonic symphony of Christ's life and ministry; **Acts** shows what the Spirit of God can do through normal people; **Romans through Jude** gives God's expectations of His Children in Christ's Church.

Finally, the most , fascinating and revealing of all the books of the Bible for all of us believers who are part of Christ's Church—the **Revelation of Jesus Christ** shows Jesus working in His Church every day to get them living out the expectations, taught in those Epistles, that He left them to do!