

– an uncluttered approach –

SIMPLIFYING

REVELATION

LETTERS TO THE 7 churches of Asia

Jesus Identifies Himself

Assessment of the
Church

Recommendation
for the Church

Promise to those who
Overcome

The format of the letters

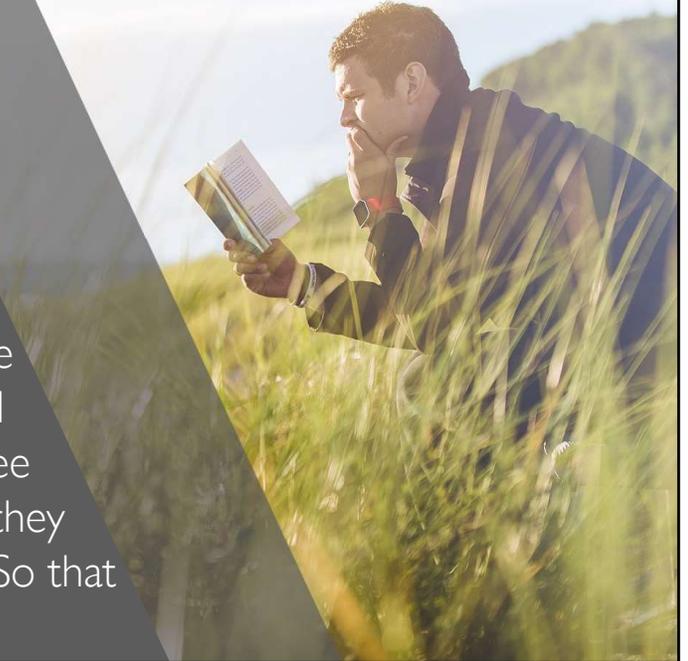
- Ch. 2-3 are letters to the seven churches of Asia.
- All seven letters follow the same format:
 - **JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF** – images introduced in ch. 1 are used in ch. 2. As we study, we'll note the use of these images is not haphazard, but fits the situations of the churches.
 - **ASSESSMENT OF THE CHURCH** – the Lord watches His people. He knows their works. He gives a candid evaluation of each church.
 - **RECOMMENDATION FOR THE CHURCH** – following up on His assessment, the Lord then gives His instruction for the church, given it's situation.
 - **PROMISE TO THOSE WHO OVERCOME** – each letter ends with a promise. Again, the wording of the promise is particular to the churches & their circumstance.

- We've said the book is figurative, and we must be cautious not to apply things literally.
- While that remains true, ch. 2-3 are perhaps the most literal portion of the book.
 - There were literally churches in these 7 cities, and there's no reason to think the letters are not intended for those 7 churches. That said, the application of the letters extends beyond the 7 churches listed.
 - Each letter gives a specific assessment of the church in question. There is no reason to think the details were not about those specific churches.

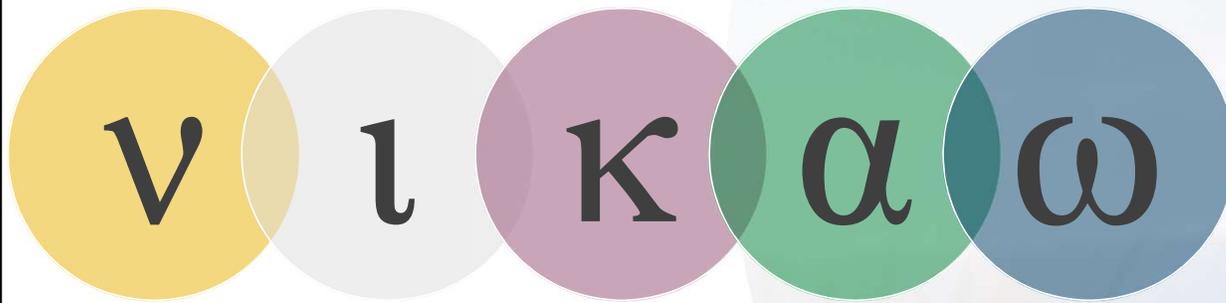
HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR

(2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)

I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' (MATTHEW 13:13-15)



- A couple of things to note before we begin to look at the letters themselves:
 - **HE WHO HAS AN EAR**, let him hear.
 - This phrase is used 7x (once in each letter).
 - This is a common idiom used by Jesus (found scattered in the gospels).
 - The idea is to have a will to hear, understand & do His will.
 - **MATTHEW 13:13-15** presents the opposite of one hearing.
 - It's not a matter of whether one has heard or not, but what they do with it.



(2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21)

Overcome – Gr. νικᾶω

To subdue (literally or figuratively); conquer, overcome, prevail, get the victory. (Strong's)



- Another word that is found 7x in our text is the Greek word **NIKAO**.
- Sound like an English word you're familiar with? Or rather a company? **NIKE – OVERCOME**.
- The same word is used in John 16:33, *"...In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*
- Also 1 John 5:4-5, *"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."*

THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

IN HIS RIGHT HAND | his possession
...He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. (2:1; cf. 1:13, 16, 20)

- ✓ Works
- ✓ Purity
- ✗ Purpose

Remember where you were

Repent of where you are

Removal of lampstand



tree of **life**

• IDENTITY (v 1).

- He holds the 7 stars (7 angels, messengers) in His hand.
- Walks in the midst of the 7 golden lampstands (7 churches).
- The image conveys power & possession (right hand). The Lord is in charge. A message needed for a church that have left the Lord behind.

• ASSESSMENT (v 2-4, 6).

- They were a zealous group, and the Lord acknowledged their works, labour and patience.
- They **STOOD AGAINST** wickedness and false teachers. The Nicolaitans specifically are mentioned (v 6). They are believed by some to be followers of Nicolas (Acts 6), though there is no conclusive evidence.
- However, they had left their **FIRST LOVE**. They had lost

their purpose. Why matters. They were working hard, they were standing for purity, but they had lost the Lord in the process somehow.

- **RECOMMENDATION** (v 5).

- Remember Christ. Get back to the basics. Have Him as your motivation & cause.
- **REPENT**. Doing the right things for the wrong reason is not OK. It is sin. There are a variety of motives – self-righteousness, esteem, monetary gain, etc.. They need to repent of their wrong motives & seek the Lord.
- **REMOVAL**. If they would not, the Lord warns what the outcome would be. He would remove their lampstand. After all the lampstand is His, not their's.

- **PROMISE** (v 7).

- “He who has an ear, let him hear...”
- “...to him who overcomes...”
- Granted to eat of the tree of life! The last reference to the tree of life was in Genesis 3:22-24.
- Those who overcome through Christ will have access to the tree of life in heaven.

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA



Identity

- First & the Last
- Dead & came back to life!

Assessment

- Works
- Tribulation
- Poverty

Recommendation

- Do not fear!
- You will have tribulation 10 days

Promise

- A crown of life
- Not hurt by the second death

• **IDENTITY** (v 8).

- The first & last (eternal nature) – Rev 1:8
- Was dead and came to life (He has overcome!) – Rev 1:17-18
- These would be especially encouraging images for a group of Christians who were suffering. The Lord is over all, He has overcome; so can we.

• **ASSESSMENT** (v 9).

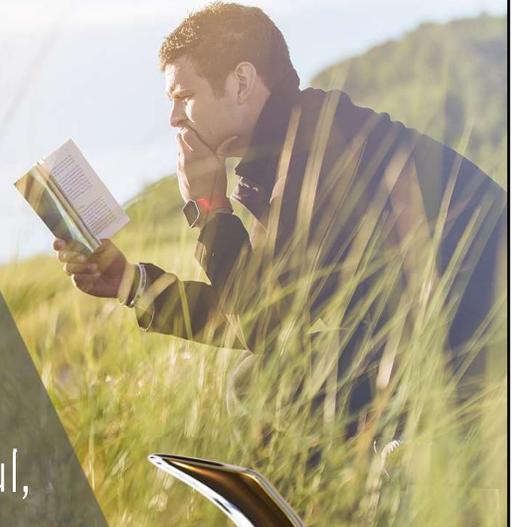
- I know your works. The Lord knows what is going on among His people.
- They had endured a lot for Him; trials, the loss of goods, blasphemy.
- Specifically it seems some of the Jews (or Judaizing Christians) have been a source of trouble for them.

• **RECOMMENDATION** (v 10).

- There was more tribulation to come. Don't fear. The enemy seeks to harm and destroy. Stand strong.
 - Ro 8:31, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*
 - Ro 8:37, *"...we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."*
 - Jn 16:33, *"...in the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*
- Some would be imprisoned – a huge test to be wrongfully jailed.
- Tribulation for 10 days. Not 10 literal days, but a short complete time frame. Images of time in the book are not literal. In a subsequent lesson, we'll look at the use of numbers in Revelation.
- **PROMISE** (v 10b-11).
 - "He who has an ear, let him hear..."
 - "...he who overcomes..."
 - A crown of life. Eternal life.
 - They might die for their faith (be faithful until death); but death cannot hold them (recall, it didn't hold Him, v8). They will rise again (1 Thes 4:13-18).

- Neither will they be hurt by the second death (hell).

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS



...the word of God is living and powerful,
and sharper than any two-edged sword...

- **IDENTITY** (v 12).

- He has the sharp two-edged sword (cf. Rev 1:16).
- Heb 4:12, *“The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...”*
- He is the living & powerful word. A needed reminder that we need to be directed by God’s word in what we do.

- **ASSESSMENT** (v 13-15).

- “Satan’s throne” was there – Pergamos was a center for idolatry.
- They had remained strong, even though some had been martyred for the faith.
- However, they accommodated some who held false doctrines!
- They stood strong against attacks from outside but

failed to stand against those who attack from within.

- Doctrine of Balaam. Balaam is also mentioned in 2 Peter 2:15 & Jude 1:11 (context of false teachers). Balaam taught Israel to compromise their faith (sexual immorality & idolatry).
- Any teacher who suggests compromising the things of God is OK is holding to the doctrine of Balaam (for popularity, for personal gain, for sexual gratification, to avoid persecution).
- Doctrinal & moral purity are important. We need to be directed by the word of God, the “two-edged sword” in what we believe, teach & do.
- **RECOMMENDATION** (v 16).
 - To the point. Repent. Get rid of the sin.
 - If they will not, He will fight against them with the sword of His mouth (1:16).
 - The word of God will be used in judgment (Jn 12:48, *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”*).

- **PROMISE** (v 17).
 - “He who has an ear, let him hear...”
 - “...him who overcomes...”
 - The hidden manna – bread of life. Jesus is the true bread of life (Jn 6).
 - A white stone – a symbol of justice. Same word rendered “stone” here is used in Acts 26:10, “...I cast my vote (voice, KJV) against them.” It is a vote or decision in a court system. A black stone would be guilty, a white stone is acquittal.
 - A white stone with a name on it is like a ticket for admission. The idea is not that we all have a different name & no one knows my name but me. The name is the **NAME OF CHRIST**, and the significance of it is only known to those who receive it (ie. non-Christians don’t get it).



- **IDENTITY** (v 18).

- The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire & feet like fine brass. (cf. 1:14-15)
- Deity, purity & strength.
- A reminder to the saints who is in charge, what He expects, and the firmness or stability of His way.

- **ASSESSMENT** (v 19-20).

- Their works were great, even growing;
- But they tolerated an evil influence (sexual immorality & idolatry) in their midst.
- Was there a woman named “Jezebel” there or is it an image to call to mind the wickedness of OT Jezebel?

- **RECOMMENDATION** (v 21-25).

- He had given time to repent already, but to no avail.
- He will come in judgment against her & those who

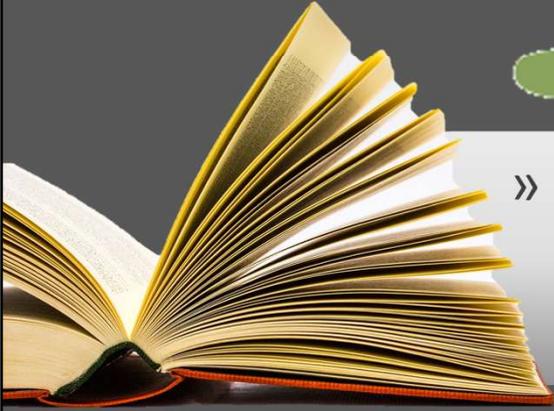
follow her, unless they repent. The wording (v 22-23a) indicates a temporal judgment or some sort or another.

- To the faithful among them (those who didn't follow Jezebel), He gave no other burden. Simply, hold fast.
- **PROMISE** (v 26-29).
 - “He who has an ear, let him hear...” (v 29)
 - “...him who overcomes...” (v 26)
 - v 26b, “*power over the nations*”
 - As discussed in ch. 1, we will not be rulers.
 - V 27 clarifies. It draws from Psalm 2:8-9.
 - Our victory is to be able to participate in His reign.
 - Regarding the morning star (v 28), in 22:16 Jesus is referred to as “...*the Bright and Morning Star*...”
 - It is a statement of His glory.

THE CHURCH IN

SARDIS

7 SPIRITS STARS



» Remember
» Hold fast
» Repentance



- **IDENTITY** (v 1).

- He who has the seven spirits (Holy Spirit) and the seven stars (messengers of the churches), 1:4, 16. They are at His disposal.
- Why mention these to Sardis?
- They are void of the Spirit and don't listen the message of the messenger.

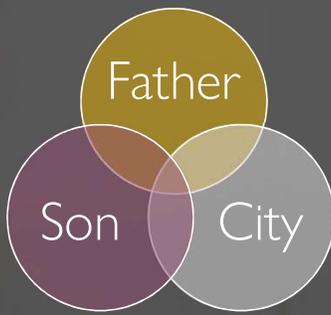
- **ASSESSMENT** (v 1b-2).

- To the average outsider (perhaps even to those gathered), they may have looked fine. The Lord sees what others do not. They are a dead church.
- He admonishes those who are not quite dead to be watchful & to strengthen themselves.

- **RECOMMENDATION** (v 3-4).

- Remember the commitment you made to Christ.

- Heb 10:32, 34, *“...recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with suffering ... for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.”*
- Hold fast to God’s way, repent of turning from Him.
- He warns them, if they will not turn back to the Lord, they will fall in judgment.
- Those who hadn’t defiled their garments walk in white with the Lord.
- All could do so – if they would remember, hold fast, & repent.
- **PROMISE** (v 5-6).
 - “He who has an ear, let him hear...” (v 6)
 - “...him who overcomes...” (v 5)
 - Clothed in white garments – follow up on v 4;
 - Name kept in the Book of Life – the record of the faithful;
 - Confess his name before the Father (cf. Mt 10:32-33)



3 NAMES

I SET BEFORE YOU AN
open door

He who is holy, He who is true

He who has the
KEY OF DAVID

• **IDENTITY** (v 7).

- He who is holy & true (1:5).
- The key of David (cf. Isaiah 22:22).
- Written concerning Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, whom God appointed as steward in the house of Judah due to the unfaithfulness of Shebna. He served for a time and was faithful. Now Christ is given the key of David; He is charged with the kingdom. He is both worthy and faithful in this calling.
- The Philadelphia brethren can trust the Lord. He is holy & true.
- What are keys used for?

• **ASSESSMENT** (v 8).

- The Lord has opened a door for them.
 - 2 Cor 2:12, "...in Troas ... a door was opened to me

by the Lord...”

- Col 4:3, “...praying ... that God would open to us a door for the word...”
- Ac 14:27, came to the church in Antioch and reported “...God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”
- When the Lord opens a door, no one can close it.
- They are described as having “a little strength” (perhaps a small church).
- Size doesn’t matter – faithfulness does (“have kept My word & not denied My name”).
- **RECOMMENDATION** (v 9-10).
 - Those referred to as “the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews but are not...” (3:9) are Jews (or Judaizing teachers) who made trouble for the church.
 - They feigned faithfulness to the Lord, but caused hardship for His people.
 - NOTE – the word “Jews” is used here as it is in Romans 2:28-29
 - “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he

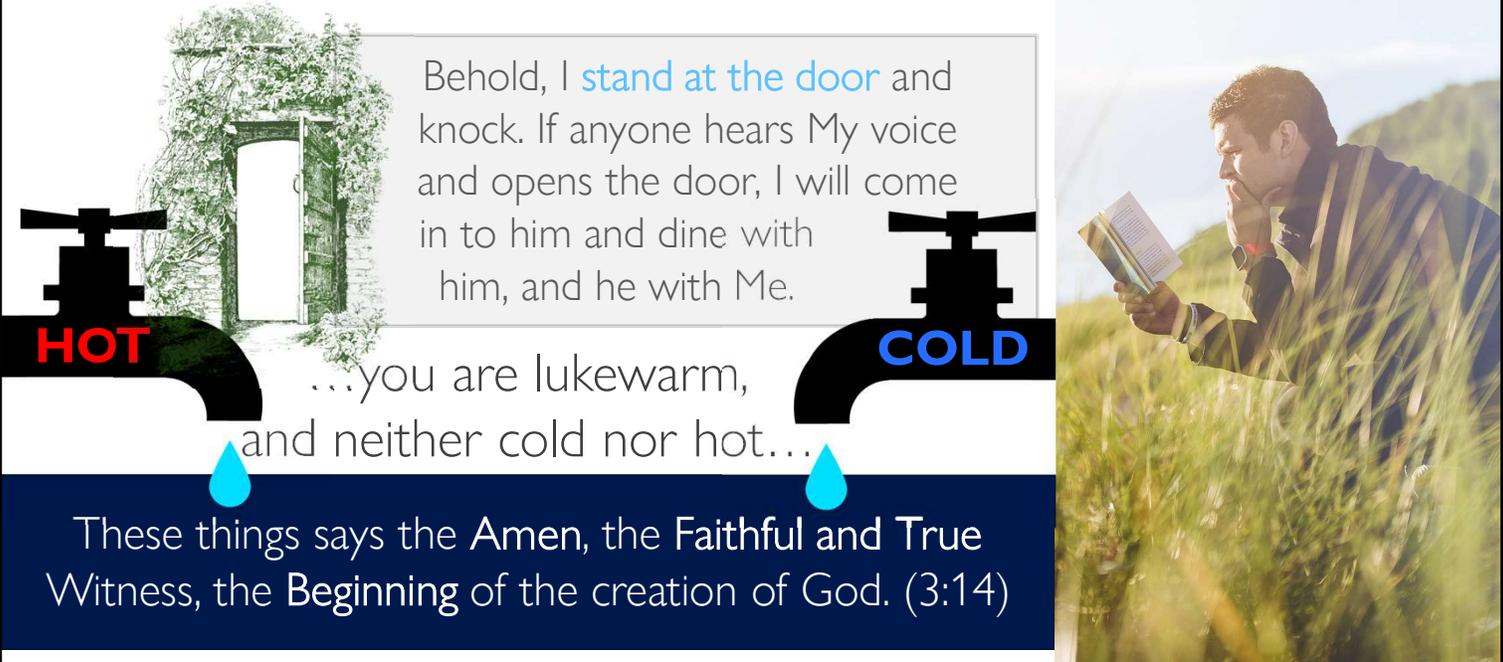
is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”

- Essentially they were Jews (hereditary) who were not Jews (faithful to God).
- They would not be worshiping the faithful Christians but would be made to acknowledge that they are indeed the people of God.
- The Lord would protect the Philadelphian Christians from a trial that would be felt elsewhere (v 10).
 - We don't know what the trial is, but we can be confident that the Lord is our help in trials.
 - Recall, Paul received assurance when he went to Corinth on his 2nd journey that he would find safety there, unlike the persecutions he'd faced on the 1st journey and the first part of the 2nd journey (Acts 18:10). This would be like that.

- 2 Pe 2:9, “...*the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...*”
 - Not necessarily temptations as in being tempted to sin – but trials.
 - Gr. pi-ras-mos, “...a putting to proof ... adversity; temptation; try.”
- **PROMISE** (v 11-13).
 - “He who has an ear, let him hear...” (v 13)
 - “...He who overcomes...” (v 12)
 - V 11 promises the Lord’s coming. Our hope of salvation is tied to His return. Be faithful, stand fast, and there is a crown of life in store for us.
 - V 12, faithful Christians are established as “*pillars in the temple of God*”
 - Peter identifies us as spiritual rocks in a spiritual house (1 Pe 2:4-5).
 - Pillars carry the idea of strength, security – pillars are important to a structure.
 - Gal 2:9, James, Peter & John were identified as pillars in the church at Jerusalem.

- Three names are mentioned as being written upon His people.
 - 1 – “...the name of My God...”
 - Rev 14:1 says the 144,000 have the Father’s name on them.
 - Rev 22 pictures the faithful in heaven, seeing the Lord and having His name on their foreheads.
 - 2 – “...the name of the city of My God...”
 - Which is the New Jerusalem.
 - When the census is taken of the heavenly city, all the faithful are listed as citizens (Php 3:21).
 - 3 – “...I will write on him My new name.”
 - There is an eternal association with Christ.
 - We are overcomers through Him, we are partakers of God’ mercy, glory and victory through Him.
 - His name is upon us here (Christians); His name shall be upon us in eternity.

the church of the **LAODICEANS**



Behold, I **stand at the door** and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

...you are lukewarm,
and neither cold nor hot...

These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God. (3:14)

• **IDENTITY** (v 14).

- the Amen; the Faithful and True Witness (cf. 1:5).
 - Amen means “sure, faithful, truth.”
 - This text could have as easily been rendered, “..the trustworthy, trustworthy, and true..”
- The Beginning of the creation of God.
 - “...*a commencement or chief, beginning, comer, first, magistrate, power, principality, principle, rule.*” (Strong’s)
 - He is not saying He is the first thing created – He is the origin or cause; He is the Creator.
 - In 1:3, “...*all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*”
 - Col 1:16, “...*by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and*

invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”

- He who is holy & true (1:5).

- **ASSESSMENT** (v 15-17).

- They were indifferent in their commitment to Christ.
- They were not so cold as to have no interest, but they were not so hot as to want to live for Him.
- Their commitment to the Lord went so far as their comfort and no further.
- That said, they thought they were doing fine – they considered themselves to be faithful disciples.
- *“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”*
- The truth was they were *“wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.”*
- In their current state, they were sickening to the Lord; he was ready to vomit them out.

- **RECOMMENDATION** (v 18-20).

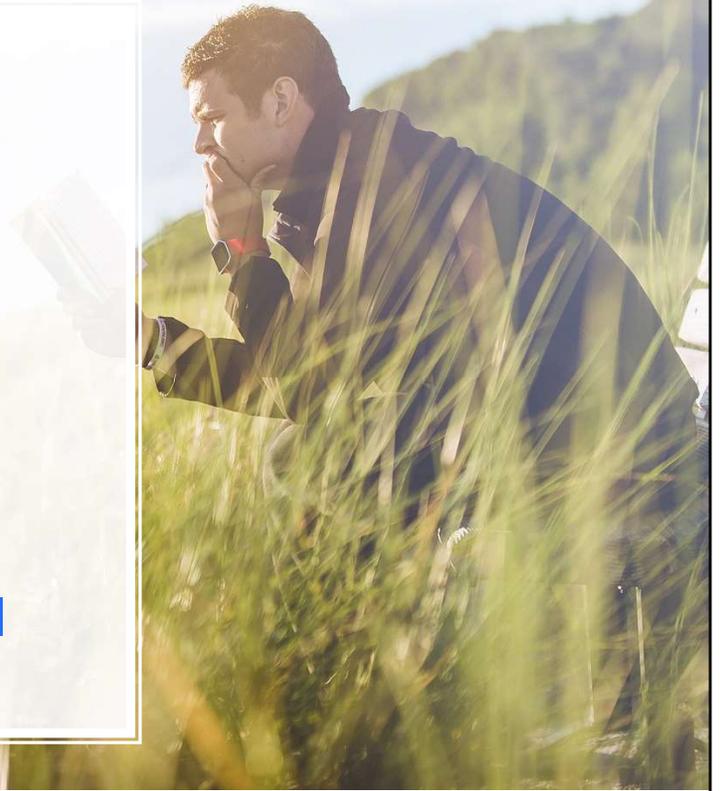
- V 18 – He has the solution for all their problems. First, they must realize there is a problem!

- They are poor – He provides gold refined in the fire (truth, spiritual focus). Physical wealth is of no eternal value. What are we willing to trade our soul for?
- They are naked – He provides white garments (purity).
- They are blind – He provides healing, so they might see (spiritually).
- V 19 – it is never easy to be rebuked, but He rebuked them because He loved them.
 - Heb 12:5-6, do not “...*despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.*”
 - His words were not intended to discourage, but to save them. To motivate zealous repentance.
- V 20 – the Lord wants people to invite Him in.
 - He knocks on the door of our hearts.
 - If we will open ourselves to Him, He will be with us.

- But, we need to be committed to Him. He is not looking for fair-weather followers.
- **PROMISE** (v 21-22).
 - “He who has an ear, let him hear...” (v 22)
 - “...him who overcomes...” (v 21)
 - To sit with Him on His throne.
 - We shall reign with Christ.
 - He likens our victory to His victory (same enemy – sin, death, devil).
 - We will reign with Him in eternity (part of the royal priesthood)

SUMMARY OF THE **CHURCHES 7**

- EPHESUS **Lost Their Focus**
- SMYRNA **Were Persecuted**
- PERGAMOS **Tolerated Sin**
- THYATIRA **Tolerated Sin**
- SARDIS **Was Dead**
- PHILADELPHIA **Was Faithful**
- LAODICEA **Was Lukewarm**



- A quick summary of the seven churches...
- What kind of church are we?

Next week...

❖ How numbers are used
in the book of Revelation

SUPPLEMENTAL

