

# Preparing to Be **United** to Christ

## An Introduction to the Seven Churches

*"It said, 'Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.'"*

Revelation 1:11 NLT <sup>25</sup>For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her <sup>26</sup>to make her **holy and clean, washed** [\*by water] by the cleansing of God's word. <sup>27</sup>He did this to **present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.**" Ephesians 5:25-27 NLT \*NLT footnote.



- If Jesus returned today and you were standing before him, would your present life make you ashamed or pleased to see Him?

The primary key to understanding the purpose for the message to the 7 churches of Revelation 2-3 is not found in Revelation, but Ephesians 5:25-27. Jesus wants to purify and mature His bride, the universal Church, for the time she will be **united to Him**—whether walking through the door of death OR by means of the rapture (Greek ἀρπάζω—snatch away). The number 7 symbolizes *completion*. He wants His bride to be *complete*, or *mature*. The 7 churches represent 7 qualities for being spiritually complete, or mature. Furthermore, as Ephesians 5:25-27 indicates, Christ is presently cleansing the heart and mind of His bride by the water of God's word. Bible study is NOT JUST about *information*, but *transformation*! The message of the 7 churches is about Jesus preparing His bride (each individual believer) to be united to Him. Are you ready?

### Central Lesson

Christ is preparing you to be *united* to Him. He uses His Word to cleanse and mature you.

### Overview of the Seven Churches

Notice the following features of the messages to the seven churches:

1. The messages to the seven churches in chapters 2-3 is **CONNECTED** to the vision of Christ standing in the middle of seven golden lampstands recorded in the first chapter (see 1:12-16).

The beginning of each message to the seven churches refers back to Jesus as He is pictured in the first chapter vision (see 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

2. The **MEANING** of the seven stars in His right hand and the seven lampstands are explained in 1:20.

The stars represent the messengers ἄγγελοι (angels or the pastors) of the seven churches and the lampstands represent the seven churches. The reference to the seven "angels" comes from the Greek word that literally means "messengers."

This word is in the New Testament for both angelic beings and human preachers. Many Bible teachers believe that this refers to the human preachers who pastored these seven churches rather than heavenly angels. These messengers are held in the care and special position of Christ's right hand (1:20).

3. Scholars clarify that the message to the 7 churches is actually **7 SERMONS** (or oracles)—and not letters.

The genre of biblical letters has several characteristics that do not apply to the literary structure of the message to the 7 churches. Rather, they reflect the characteristics of biblical oracles" and therefore it is more accurately 7 "sermons." Some commentaries acknowledge this.

New Testament scholar, Jeffrey Weima, wrote, "The best option, however, is to identify the seven messages as 'prophetic oracles' —messages delivered by an inspired prophet dealing with a specific situation that currently confronts the people of God... The word 'sermon' helps the contemporary audience to think of the seven messages as seven sermons given by the inspired prophet John...." (pp. 4-5, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation*).

4. There is a consistent **PATTERN** to the messages to the seven churches (see overview chart - Church, Christ, Compliment, Criticism, Correction, and Consequence).

5. Each message **BEGINS** with Jesus saying **"I know..."** everything about each person and church (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8) and **ENDS** with an emphasis to be **"victorious"** NLT [**"Overcome"** NIV] (2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21).

6. The number **SEVEN** is symbolic for "completion & perfection." It appears **54** times in the book of Revelation.

7. These 7 churches were chosen for a special reason - to emphasize seven **QUALITIES** that needed to be addressed by all churches (all Christians) who wish to be purified, spiritually mature, and ready to be united with Him.

There were many other churches in Asia Minor at the time Revelation was written (see Colossians 1:2; 4:13).

Some Bible teachers believe that the seven churches represent **7 stages of church history**. But there is little agreement about the time of each period and nothing is implied in the actual text to suggest these stages. Most NT scholars today reject the stages of church history viewpoint.

A better view is the **7 qualities** for preparing the bride to be united with Christ. Would you like to know what the 7 qualities are? Join us in the weeks to come as we explore Revelation 2-3.

### Conclusion

Christ is preparing you to be *united* to Him. He uses His Word to cleanse and mature you.

**Action Steps:** ► Receive Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's Bible study. ► Attend a small group. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.