

Francesco Geocondo was a new husband who wanted to honor his new bride. He felt like the best way to do this was to commission a painting of her that would capture her stunning beauty. He realized the more accurate the portrait was, the more it would represent the true beauty of his wife. He scoured the world for the ideal painter to do this.

Perhaps you've heard of him. Leonardo Davinci. And the painting that has hung in the halls of kings and queens, and now is in Paris France, is called the Mona Lisa. Today it is valued at well over a ½ billion dollars.

As we begin Chapter two and three, we must ask ourselves **why is God so interested in the church (and its members, you and I) and what happens in the church?** God loves his Son Jesus Christ and wants the world to be captured and captivated by the beauty and glory of Jesus, but Jesus is in heaven right now and working behind the scenes in people's lives through the Holy Spirit. **So what is the only way people can see Jesus with their eyes?** Jesus can only be seen through the body of Christ, the church.

**In the Bible, does the church really just refer to a brick building with a cross on the steeple?**

Absolutely not. The church is the body of believers throughout the world. At work, at school, at home, in the gas station... The church building is just where we meet for worship and building each other up to go back out into the world to function as the "church". **So what the world thinks about the CHURCH is what people end up thinking about JESUS CHRIST himself!**

This is why Jesus is so concerned about the church, why he sends these letters for these seven churches to read, why it's included in this book of Revelation, and why we are going to continue diving into the letters before we move on into the actually prophesy part of Revelation.

## **Revelation – Session Three**

### **"Jesus : Secret Shopper"**

#### **4 Common Characteristics of each letter:**

1. Each letter is addressed to the "angel" of the church.
  - a. There is much debate on what exactly this term "angel" is referring to:
    - i. **The Elder or Pastor of each church:** This is one common view as the word angel can mean "messenger", but it is only used rarely of human messengers and only if the context requires it. It seems the context here does not require it. The other 67 times the word angels appears in Revelation it is certainly referencing a heavenly angel. Lastly, it is worthy to note that the Greek language does contain a word for "angel" and a word for "elder". The other 12 times elder is used in Revelation, it is referring to a human pastor. In my opinion, it seems that Jesus would have just used the word elder here as well if He was referring to the pastor of the church.
    - ii. **The heavenly angel assigned to help guide an individual church:** In light of such scriptures as Acts 12:15, 1 Corinthians 11:10, Ephesians 3:10, Hebrews 1:14, Peter 1:12, and others, it seems that angels are assigned to help guide

churches and even individuals at times. It does call into question exactly how each angel is to convey Christ's message to each church, but if this is Jesus' intention, they will have the ways and means to get it to them.

2. **Each letter contains a unique description of Jesus Christ.**
3. **Each letter contains words of affirmations for the church (except one church).**
4. **Each letter contains words of admonitions (except two churches).**

### About these churches

- They were all within 40-50 miles of each other
- They were in an arch on a map
- They were REAL churches that existed
- They represent different conditions of churches back then as well as the different conditions of churches (and people) today

## Ephesus

- Important seaport on the Aegean Sea
- Although it wasn't a capital, it was a major
- Location of the great temple of Artemis (or Diana) (Acts 19:27). This temple was considered one the seven wonders of the ancient world.
- The city was very immoral. Great amounts of money was exchanged in the market of buying selling of trinkets and other figurines of Diana. The government ruled sinfully with Diana laying claim as their god.
- Paul spent a great deal of time here in his ministry (Acts 20:31). As Christianity and the church began to grow with Paul's teaching, the political powers became increasingly upset that Paul was leading people to truth. Literally overnight, people started ditching their trinkets and false gods to follow the one true God. The political and business leaders of Ephesus eventually forced Paul out of the city as Christianity was detrimentally affecting their income and sales of "Diana" merchandise as well as their control of the people through the false god Diana.

**What is John instructed to do and by whom in verse 1?** Jesus instructs John to write these things down as a message to the church of Ephesus

### Characteristics:

#### 1. Description of Jesus (2:1)

##### a. Jesus is "He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand"?

- i. Whether the stars represent the "pastor" of each church or the "angels" that were assigned to each church, one thing is clear. **Under whose watch are these churches? Who is the true "leader" of the church?** Jesus Christ. Angels and pastors are both under Jesus' authority and care. The bible speaks of "teachers" and "leaders" being judged more stringently even than normal Christians. **Why?** Pastors and Christian teachers must lead as Christ (through the Holy Spirit) directs them! If they don't, then their own human opinions and desires

get in the way and can lead people astray. We'll talk about this in the next verse! **Any thoughts??**

**b. Jesus is “he who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks”?**

**i. What does a Secret Shopper do? What about a “church” secret shopper?**

Secret Shoppers are hired to go into places and check things out. A church secret shopper would come into a church, often unknown, and analyze the church. How are the ministries? What are they teaching? How friendly and inviting are the members? Are things in order? They would then put their findings together and report back to the church the positives and negatives they found. This way, the church would know what they are doing good at and what they need to fix or improve/

**ii. Jesus states that he is the one that walks among the golden candlesticks (the churches). So how is Jesus like a secret shopper?**

When churches or any groups of Christians gather, Jesus is their walking among them. He is checking things out, seeing how things are ran, looking to see if truth is being taught, seeing what they are doing that is good, and seeing what is done that is not so good. He is also checking each person out, peeking in their heart, speaking to them in different ways if they are willing to open up their hearts and listen.

**iii. As we move forward, you will see Jesus has already “secret-shopped” each of the seven churches and will now be giving his “reports” to John to write down in his book “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”. This report is meant specifically for each church, as well as all churches in all places. It’s a warning for churches to look at their own church and see if they have any defects within that need addressing. It’s a warning for us to look inside our own hearts and see the defects that need addressing.**

**2. Praises: (2:2-3)**

**a. What do you think about “cannot bear them which are evil”? What device is the church supposed to use to determine good and evil or right and wrong teachings? If you take a church that uses people’s opinions to determine what is defined as good and evil, how well will that work out?**

Jesus is pointing out that the entire church cannot bear things that are evil, which means they are all under the same understanding. No doubt, people’s own selfish opinions will vary throughout the church, but if the entire church vows to let Jesus be the final say in what is evil and good, then everyone will be on the same page. The church of Ephesus appears to all be under the same understanding and collectively hate the same evil things.

**b. “Thou hast tried them which are apostles, and are not, and has found the liars.” Paul had warned the Ephesians to “try the spirits whether they are of God” for they might well be “false prophets.” Christ is now commending them for this. How do you “try someone to see whether they are a false prophet?” Check the scriptures! Check what Christ teaches. Not for the proper way to serve communion bread or the proper music to play, but for the core values of Christ! Denominations can find all sorts of menial things to argue about, but there are some core values that must be held onto to really be a Christian. What would you say the core values/beliefs that EVERY Christian should have, no matter the denomination? Jesus Christ as the savior, the redeemer, the**

triumphed over death, the Leader, the comforter, and in Spirit to lead us. Salvation cannot be earned, it is given to us not through works, but in exchange for placing our trust, obedience, and love in Christ. We are made alive in Christ.

**3. Admonitions: (2:4-7)**

**a. “Thou has left thy first love”: What is this “first love”?**

- i. Love for Jesus? Maybe they have replaced Jesus in their lives with works?
- ii. Love for evangelism? Maybe they have stopped being outwardly focused and became inwardly focused? Verse 5 actually points this out with the remedy to “do the deeds you did at first”
- iii. **Which do you think it is?** I think it is both of them. If you have a true, deep down Love for Jesus then evangelism will be a natural by-product. You will want to do his “deeds”. You will want to be a part of the mission.
- iv. **Is your first love the “goosebumps” you get during worship, at a Christian concert, or at Crossings?** No, your salvation comes from your belief and faith in Jesus Christ no matter what emotional roller coaster your going through.

**b. “Remove thy candlestick”: What is Jesus saying here? What might happen if they continue doing wrong?** This must signify either 1) the church simply closes it’s doors or 2) the church and all its members become so apostate in its teachings that in Jesus’ eyes, it is no longer even a church.

- i. **Let’s say 2,000 years ago, Archaeologists start digging around and finding “artifacts” of your life. They dig around and find pictures, letters, and books from your life. They hunt around and find what other people that you knew said and wrote about you. They are able to find remnants of your twitter account, text messages, emails, and even Tik-Toks. What conclusion are they going to come up with?**

**c. Jesus even gives churches chances: How bad would it have to get before Jesus would give up on an entire church (remove thy candlestick)?** It’s interesting to note that in spite of the sinfulness appearing in these seven churches, and all churches throughout time, the Lord still speaks to them as HIS church. There is still a remnant of biblical truth and practice in the church. **Can you see any resemblance of any story involving the sinful city in the Old Testament that was destroyed by fire? What did Abraham say to God and how did God respond?**

**d. Nicolaitanes?** Only mentioned here and Rev 2:15. History mentions no known sect or movement with this name during the apostolic period, so this is more than likely a descriptive term rather than a proper noun. These messages were meant for all churches in all times, so this term has to have a meaning for all churches and all times. This term literally means “overcomer of the people” **So what kind of people must Jesus be describing when he says Nicolaitanes based on what the term literally means?** In context, it almost certainly is referring to the false prophets of Rev 2:2. Isn’t this what false teachings do; try to turn the love and allegiance of people to THEMSELVES rather than to Christ? Christ states firmly that he HATES this.

**4. What special promise does Jesus give to those that are overcome the false teachers and false doctrines?** “to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”. **Do you think the “tree of life” and a true “paradise” are only historical realities or are they future**

**realities for believers as well?** Jesus is promising it as he will be returning as King one day and will set up a new kingdom on earth. Eden will be established once again!!!

# Smyrna

- A port city about 35 miles North of Ephesus
- On today's map, it is known as Ismir in Turkey.
- **While the Bible holds the supreme authority of God and other writings do not hold the same authority, do you really think "inspired" writings just completely stopped after the Book of Revelation? Revelation was written sometime around 95AD, the last book of the bible, by the disciple John. Do you think John was just a loner, or do you think him and all the disciples had "students"?** Understand this, the disciples had students, and these students of the disciples had students, and so on! Just as the disciples wrote the bible, these students and students of students continued the teachings of the original disciples. For examples, Polycarp was a student of John, and we have Polycarp's writings which echo John by name and his teachings as well as the other disciple's teachings. Polycarp served as the pastor at the church of Smyrna until about AD 155 when he was martyred for his faith.... More Here!! Get picture from Cold Case!!!
- Smyrna comes from the word "myrh", which is a perfume that is used in the embalming process. Myrh does not release it's scent unless it's under great pressure and this is exactly the situation we find with the people of Smyrna, under intense pressure.

## Characteristics:

### 1. Description of Jesus (2:8)

- a. Jesus is "the first and last, which was dead, and is alive"?

### 2. Praises (2:9-11)

- a. **What does Jesus "know"?** Thy works, and tribulation, and poverty. Jesus calls them "rich" though, even in their poverty? It is apparent the church of Smyrna was doing a good job standing against the attacks on the church. Jesus continues to acknowledge that he was fully aware of what they were going through...
- b. **At Ephesus, there were men claiming to be apostles(false prophets) and bringing false teachings to the church. What kind of men were plaguing the church of Smyrna?** These were men claiming to have become Jews and bringing a different style of false teaching into the church. **What was the main belief of Judaism that does not jive with Christianity?** Laws and Priesthood. They hung on to their OT beliefs that salvation rested on following the 10 commandments and that only the "select" that did such an awesome job following the 10 commandments were to be considered priests. **We've talked countless times about the true purpose and significance of the 10 commandments to a Christian. Can anyone recap??** The 10 commandments exposes our need for Jesus and salvation. We cannot perfectly follow the 10 commandments. If we have failed only once, we have broken the entire law. If we are depending on following the 10 commandments, and not Jesus gift of salvation, to get right with God, to be considered righteous enough to enter heaven, then we would be condemned.
- c. **At Emmaus, one section of the weekend is dedicated to talking about the "Priesthood of ALL believers". Any thoughts on what this means?** It means that when you accept Christ as your personal savior, you are no longer a rebel against God. You are a priest working for him through Jesus Christ. While you may not be called to be a "preacher",

you are inherently called to be a “priest” in the world. You are called to be a witness and you are part of the mission to help bring souls to Christ. **Do you really think a preacher can do it all? Do you think that is more of the preacher’s job? To lead people to salvation?**

- d. **“tribulation 10 days: be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”: What is Jesus talking about? Will all people only experience 10 days of testing?** This is a general biblical principle to help sustain Christians when they are being persecuted, no matter how intense or weak. **Read Daniel 1:12, 14-15:** This is the only other biblical reference to 10 days, and is an appropriate reference made by Jesus. Daniel experienced 10 days of testing, but then God blessed him with 70 days of vital ministry. 70 days is also reference to completeness, so basically Jesus is saying....”Endure whatever tribulation comes your way, you will one day receive your “crown of life” for eternity!!
- e. **Tribulation means in Greek to be “under pressure”. Have you ever felt pressure for your faith?**
- f. **Jesus says he knew their poverty. Actually many store owners/business people/shop owners were having their stores and livelihoods vandalized, looted, or boycotted because of their faith.**
- g. **Jesus says he knew the blasphemy being charged against them. Christians in Smyrna felt the pressure of six different charges being brought against them falsely.**
  - i. Cannibals: Because they ate of the body and blood of Christ
  - ii. Immorality: Because they participated in the love feast which was nothing more than the communal meal the church had every Sunday night
  - iii. Destroyers of Families: Because Christian families were ostracized for their belief in Christ
  - iv. Atheists: Because they refused to bow down to the Emperor and Pagan dieties’
  - v. Treasonous: Because they got the Romans riled up because their first allegiance was not to Caesar but Jesus Christ
  - vi. Anarchists: Because they taught the world would be destroyed one day and a new earth take its place.

3. **Admonitions:** Interesting, Jesus does not seem to find any deficiencies in the church of Smyrna

## SUMMARY

**Would you be faithful even if it cost you’re your life?** We Christians in America, at least right now, will probably not have to face that question. **You do realize, though, that could one day change even here in America? You do realize too that right now as we speak, there are hundreds of millions of Christians that are under severe persecution throughout the world?**

**Did you know President Trump was the first leader of any nation in history to ever address the United Nations exclusively on the subject of religious liberty? Why has no one done that until now???**

**1/3 of the world is living under religious persecution, and 80% of them are Christians. Do you feel like that is “over there” and there is just no way it could ever come “over here”?** I think we are living in a bubble. We are living in an abnormal time and place in history compared to the rest of the world where

Americans have been spared religious persecution. I think we are slowly seeing that bubble being burst. We need to be ready for it, but we need to remember Jesus' words for those that are persecuted.

**In closing, I would like to read a completely true account from a missionary who worked in Egypt to convert Muslims to Christianity. His name is Zakaria Botros.**

*Zakaria: Due to my preaching the Gospel, Egyptian soldiers broke into my home putting their guns to my head. Without telling me why, they arrested me and placed me in an extremely small prison cell (1.8x1.5x1.8 meters, which was further problematic, since I am 1.83 meters tall), with other inmates, and in well over 100 degree temperatures, with little ventilation, no windows, and no light. No beds of course, we slept on the floor--in shifts, as there was not enough room for all of us to lie down. Due to the lack of oxygen, we used to also take shifts lying with our noses under the crack of the cell door to get air. As a result, I developed a kidney infection (receiving, of course, no medical attention). Mosquitoes plagued us. Food was delivered in buckets; we rarely even knew what the gruel was. The prison guards would often spit in the bucket in front of us, as well as fling their nose pickings in it.*

*Reporter: My heart goes out to you in terms of this terrible suffering you endured. What is your primary purpose in what you do?*

*Zakaria: Simple: the salvation of souls.*