

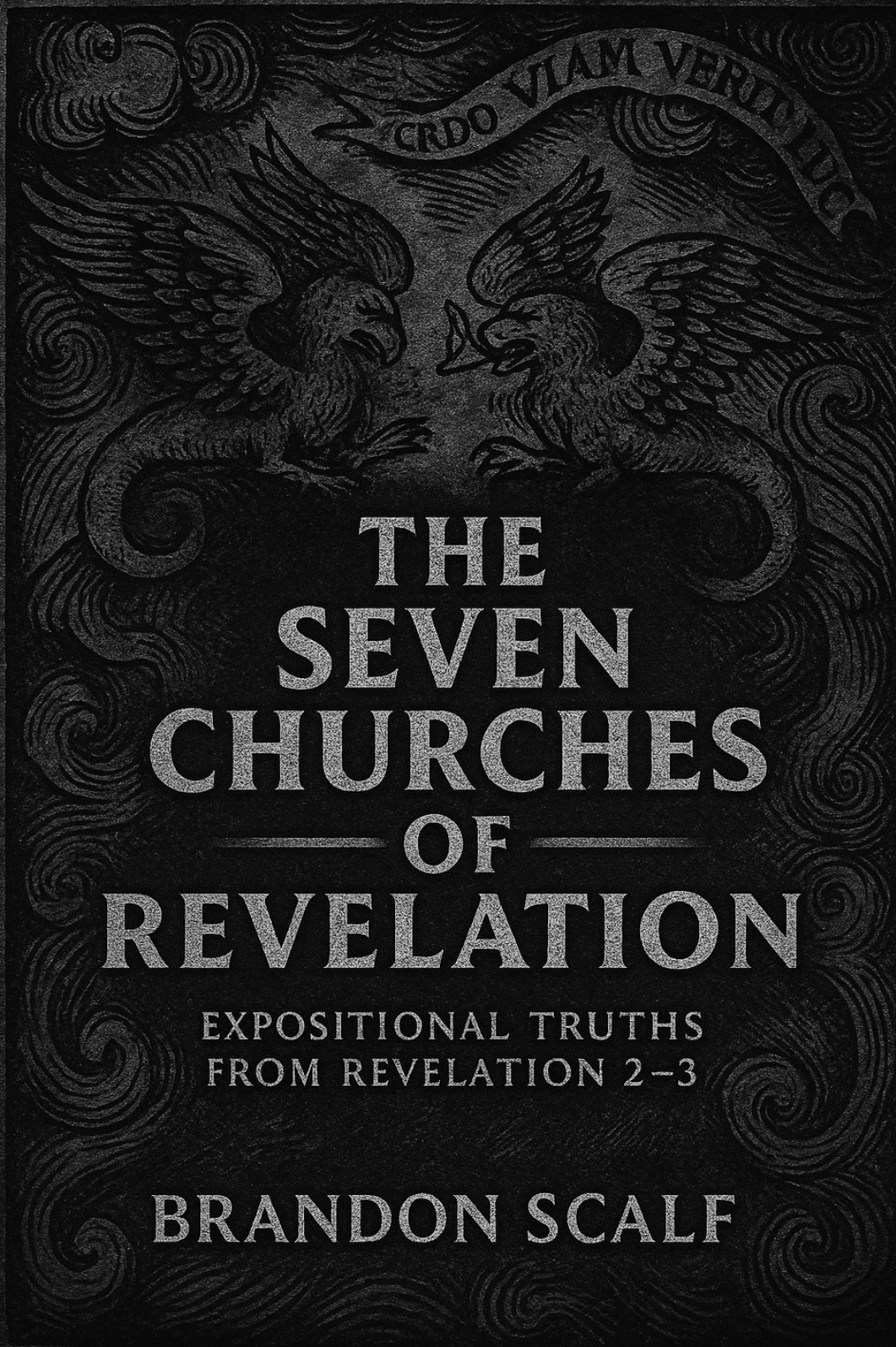


CRDO VIAM VERITATIS

THE
SEVEN
CHURCHES
— OF —
REVELATION

EXPOSITIONAL TRUTHS
FROM REVELATION 2-3

BRANDON SCALF



The Seven Churches:
Expositional Truths from Revelation 2-3

By

Brandon Scalf

7: Expository Truths from Revelation 2-3 by Brandon Scalf

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the *Legacy Standard Bible*. *Three Sixteen Publishing*, 2022.

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Introduction

When the risen Christ speaks to His churches in Revelation 2–3, He does so as the sovereign Lord who walks among the lampstands, whose eyes blaze like fire and whose voice thunders like many waters. These letters are not polite greetings from a distant ruler; they are the searching assessments and evaluations of the King who holds His church in His hand. Each letter carries both pastoral care and judicial authority—bringing encouragement, rebuke, warning, and promise.

Across the seven churches of Asia Minor, a divine pattern of sorts emerges. Christ first **commends** what is faithful. He strengthens weary saints by recognizing their labor, their perseverance, their courage, and their endurance. For no act of faithfulness escapes His eye. Even the smallest church, weak in worldly strength, is upheld as strong in Him.

Yet Christ is not only an encourager; He is the sovereign **critic and judge**. His eyes expose sin, compromise, hypocrisy, and coldness of heart. Some churches are rebuked for losing love, others for tolerating false teaching, still others for lifeless reputation or lukewarm self-sufficiency. His words cut deeper than any two-edged sword, leaving no room for complacency.

Christ then issues a call to **repentance and perseverance**. His commands ring clear: “Remember... Repent... Return.” “Do not fear... Be faithful.” “Hold fast... Wake up... Buy from Me.” These are not suggestions but divine imperatives issued from the King who will not tolerate divided hearts or polluted worship.

Finally, every letter concludes with a **promise to the overcomer**. Each church is offered a foretaste of heaven: the tree of life, the crown of life, hidden manna, white garments, the morning star, a pillar in God's temple, and a seat on Christ's throne. These promises anchor weary saints in eternal hope and assure them that victory belongs not to the world but to those who cling to Christ.

Together, these seven letters form a complete message for Christ's church in every age. They warn us against loveless orthodoxy, worldly compromise, toleration of sin, hollow reputation, and lukewarm pride. They call us to courageous faith, persevering love, doctrinal purity, and wholehearted devotion.

Spurgeon once said, "If Christ walks among the golden lampstands, He does so as one who knows what is in the candlesticks, and what the light is which comes from them."

Nothing is hidden from Him. Nothing is overlooked. The risen Lord still speaks: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Chapter 1 – Ephesus: The Loveless Church

Revelation 2:1–7

The city of Ephesus was the jewel of Asia Minor. It was a commercial hub, a religious center, and the home of the great temple of Artemis, one of the great wonders of the ancient world. Yet, more than its wealth and architecture, Ephesus became significant because it hosted one of the most blessed and influential churches in the New Testament era. Paul labored here for years. Timothy pastored here. John himself ministered here. Few congregations had more exposure to apostolic teaching and spiritual privilege.

And yet, it is this church—so richly blessed—that receives one of the sternest warnings from the risen Christ.

Christ's Self-Revelation

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: This is what the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says:" (Rev. 2:1).

Christ presents Himself as the sovereign Lord who holds His messengers and walks among His churches. He is not distant from His people. He is present, inspecting, evaluating. No church escapes His gaze. His eyes burn with fire, and His hand holds both authority and judgment.

Commendation: Orthodoxy and Endurance

"I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance..." (v. 2).

Ephesus was doctrinally sound. They labored for truth, resisted false apostles, and endured hardship without weariness. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which Christ Himself hated. Outwardly, they were everything a church should be: faithful in doctrine, uncompromising in discipline, steadfast in suffering.

Condemnation: Abandoning First Love

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” (v. 4).

Here lies the tragedy. For all their orthodoxy, they lacked affection. They had truth without tenderness, labor without love, doctrine without devotion. They started with zeal, but their hearts cooled. They once burned with affection for Christ, but now their works were mechanical. They painted the outside of the cup, but inside it was hollow.

This is the deadliest danger for a church: to defend truth fiercely yet forget to love Christ fervently.

Exhortation and Warning

“Remember... repent... return” (v. 5).

Christ issues a threefold command:

1. **Remember** – Recall the former days of vibrant love and joy in Christ.
2. **Repent** – Turn from cold orthodoxy and half-hearted worship.
3. **Return** – Do the deeds you did at first, motivated by love for the Savior.

The warning is terrifying: “But if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place” A loveless church may keep its name, its programs, even its orthodoxy—but Christ will remove its light. Many once-great churches now lie in ruins because they did not heed this warning.

Promise to the Overcomer

“To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.” (v. 7).

The promise is nothing less than eternal communion with Christ in the paradise of God. To love Christ now is to taste the foretaste of heaven; to overcome lovelessness is to feast with Him forever.

Application: Truth Without Love is Treason

The lesson of Ephesus is piercing: A church may have sound doctrine, strong leadership, and visible endurance - and still be a heartbeat away from spiritual death. Loveless orthodoxy is not enough. Christ desires both truth and love, head and heart, doctrine and devotion.

As Spurgeon notes, “A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Lose love, lose all.”

The call is urgent. Examine your heart. Do you serve Christ out of habit or out of love? Do you defend truth but neglect the God of truth? Repent, return, and rekindle your first love, lest Christ Himself remove the lampstand.

Chapter 2 – Smyrna: The Suffering Church

Revelation 2:8–11

Forty miles north of Ephesus lay the city of Smyrna, famed for its beauty and prosperity. Unlike Ephesus, Smyrna receives no rebuke from Christ. This persecuted flock was poor in possessions but rich in faith.

Christ's Self-Revelation

“This is what the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says:” (v. 8). Christ reminds the suffering church that He is eternal and victorious over death. He has passed through the grave and conquered it.

Commendation: Faith in Poverty and Persecution

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)” (v. 9). Outwardly destitute, they possessed true wealth. They endured slander from those Christ calls “a synagogue of Satan.” They were despised by men but loved by their Savior.

Exhortation: Fear Not, Be Faithful

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer” (v. 10). Imprisonment and testing awaited them, yet Christ called them to courage. Their suffering would not be meaningless, it was a refining fire, producing endurance and glory.

Warning: Persecution to Death

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (v. 10). The cost of discipleship may be martyrdom. The call is to remain steadfast, even at the edge of the sword.

Promise to the Overcomer

“He who overcomes will never be hurt by the second death.” (v. 11). The world may take their lives, but Christ secures their souls forever.

Application

Smyrna teaches us that suffering is not abandonment but refinement. A Christianity without a cross is a counterfeit. Persecution strips away self-reliance and polishes faith until it gleams. For the unbeliever, this world is the closest thing to heaven that they will ever taste; for the believer, it is the closest thing to hell. Christ calls His church not to comfort but to courage.

Chapter 3 – Pergamum: The Worldly Church

Revelation 2:12-17

Pergamum was the political capital of the province and a center of pagan worship. Here the throne of Satan stood in the form of emperor worship. To confess Christ in Pergamum was costly.

Christ's Self-Revelation

“This is what the One who has the sharp two-edged sword says:” (v. 12). Christ wields His Word with authority, judging His church and His enemies.

Commendation: Holding Fast Amid Hostility

“you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas,” (v. 13). Even as believers were martyred, they did not renounce Christ.

Condemnation: Compromise with the World

“But I have a few things against you” (v. 14). Though they resisted persecution, they tolerated compromise. The teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans was spreading, seducing God's people into idolatry and immorality. They had not denied Christ, but they diluted His truth.

Exhortation and Warning

“Repent. But if not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.” (v. 16). Christ Himself wages war against a compromising church. Better the world’s hatred than Christ’s opposition.

Promise to the Overcomer

“To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.” (v. 17). Christ promises true nourishment and a new identity to the faithful.

Application

Pergamum warns us that the greatest danger to the church is not persecution from without but seduction from within. The world whispers its lies in the name of tolerance and progress. But compromise is not kindness. It is treason. Christ demands purity, not partnership with sin.

Chapter 4 – Thyatira: The Progressive Church

Revelation 2:18–29

Thyatira was the least important of the seven cities politically and culturally, but its church receives the longest letter. Known for its trade guilds, Thyatira was a place where business and idolatry mixed. To participate in the marketplace often meant compromise. Idolatry, feasts, and immorality were often tied to pagan worship.

Christ’s Self-Revelation

“This is what the Son of God, the One who has eyes like a flame of fire and His feet are like burnished bronze, says:” (v. 18). Christ reveals Himself as the divine Judge. His burning eyes see through pretense; His bronze feet crush rebellion.

Commendation: Growth in Service

“I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your last deeds are greater than at first.” (v. 19). Unlike Ephesus, their love increased. Their service and endurance were evident. On the surface, this was a vibrant church.

Condemnation: Tolerating Jezebel

“But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess” (v. 20). They allowed a false teacher to seduce the flock into immorality and idolatry. Tolerance replaced truth. Their error was not in lacking works, but in permitting wickedness in Christ’s name.

Exhortation and Warning

Christ gave time for repentance, but judgment was coming (vv. 21–23). He would cast Jezebel onto a bed of sickness and strike her followers with tribulation. His eyes search hearts; His judgment is certain.

Promise to the Overcomer

“And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations;²⁷ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received *authority* from My Father;²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.” (vv. 26–28). Faithful believers would reign with Christ and receive Christ Himself as their reward.

Application

Thyatira teaches that tolerance of sin is treachery. To excuse immorality in the name of love is to betray Christ. The world preaches tolerance, but Christ demands holiness. As the Puritan Thomas Watson said, “He who would be tender of sin must be tender of Christ’s honor.”

Chapter 5 – Sardis: The Dead Church

Revelation 3:1–6

Sardis was once a wealthy and powerful city, but by John’s day it had declined. The church mirrored the city—outwardly alive, inwardly dead.

Christ’s Self-Revelation

“This is what He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says:” (v. 1). Christ has the fullness of the Spirit and authority over His church. He alone can revive what is dead.

Condemnation: A Reputation Without Reality

“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (v. 1). Sardis had a reputation for vitality, but Christ declared them lifeless. Their worship was empty. Their prayers were dry. Their witness was nonexistent.

Exhortation and Warning

“Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain” (v. 2). They must remember, repent, and obey. If not, Christ would come like a thief (v. 3). Judgment would fall suddenly and unexpectedly.

Promise to the Overcomer

“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” (v. 5). Eternal life, purity, and Christ’s own confession are promised to the faithful.

Application

Sardis teaches that reputation means nothing before Christ. A church may have programs, crowds, and acclaim and yet be spiritually dead. Christ is not impressed with activity but with authenticity. Better to be a faithful remnant than a hollow majority.

Chapter 6 – Philadelphia: The Faithful Church

Revelation 3:7–13

Philadelphia was a small city on a trade route, known for its vineyards. Its church was small in number and weak in power, but it was faithful.

Christ’s Self-Revelation

“This is what He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says:” (v. 7). Christ is the sovereign King, holy and true, with authority to grant entrance to His kingdom.

Commendation: Faithful in Weakness

“I know your deeds. Behold, I have given before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” (v. 8). Though small, they were steadfast. They held fast to Christ’s Word and refused to deny Him.

Exhortation: Hold Fast

“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” (v. 11). They were called to persevere, not shrink back.

Promise to the Overcomer

“I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God, and he will never go out from it anymore. And I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.” (v. 12). Christ promises stability, identity, and eternal belonging. He would write His name upon them forever.

Application

Philadelphia reminds us that faithfulness is not measured by size or strength but by steadfast obedience. Better a weak church with a strong Christ than a strong church without Christ. As Spurgeon said, “It is not the bigness of your faith, but the bigness of the God in whom your faith rests.”

Chapter 7 – Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

Revelation 3:14–22

Laodicea was wealthy, proud, and self-sufficient. They boasted in their riches, their black wool, and their medical school. Even after an earthquake leveled the city, they refused Roman aid, rebuilding themselves. Their church reflected the city's spirit—self-sufficient and lukewarm.

Christ's Self-Revelation

“This is what the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says:” (v. 14). Christ is the ultimate truth-teller, the sovereign Creator, and the faithful Witness.

Condemnation: Lukewarm Self-Sufficiency

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot.¹⁶ So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.” (vv. 15–16). Their wealth blinded them. They thought themselves rich, but Christ declared them wretched, poor, blind, and naked.

Exhortation and Warning

“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be manifested; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” (v. 18). Christ counsels

them to seek true riches, true righteousness, and true sight. He disciplines those He loves (v. 19) and calls them to zealous repentance.

Promise to the Overcomer

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.²¹ He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (vv. 20–21). Though Christ stood outside their fellowship, He promised intimate communion and royal authority to the repentant.

Application

Laodicea warns us that self-sufficiency is spiritual suicide. To boast in wealth, numbers, or influence while Christ is absent is the height of delusion. As Thomas Watson wrote, “Self-deceit is the worst deceit. Better to see the worst of your state now than to be blindfolded and carried to hell.”

Conclusion – Christ’s Word to the Churches

Ephesus warns us not to lose love.

Smyrna calls us to endure suffering.

Pergamum warns against compromise.

Thyatira warns against tolerance of sin.

Sardis warns against lifeless reputation.

Philadelphia commends faithfulness in weakness.

Laodicea warns against lukewarm self-sufficiency.

Seven churches. Seven warnings. Seven promises. The risen Christ still speaks:

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

**To watch the sermons these expositional truths were formed from, please visit

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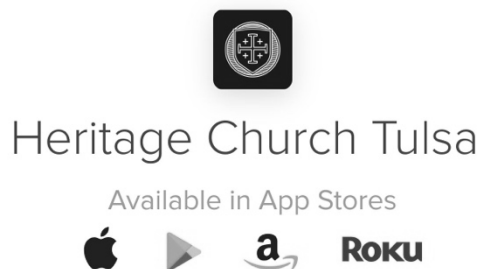
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If you do not call Heritage Church home, we would love for you to join us for a Worship Service
in **Tulsa, Oklahoma** soon!

The opening chapters of Revelation bring us face to face with an intense and sobering reality, our glorious Christ walks among His churches. He sees us. He knows us. He is not a distant observer but a present Lord who evaluates His people with eyes of fire.

The seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor remind us that Jesus Christ is not indifferent toward His bride. He commends, He corrects, He warns, and He promises. Each letter is a sovereign verdict, and each verdict has eternal consequences.

BRANDON SCALF

is the Preaching Pastor at Heritage Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He is also the founder and featured Bible Teacher at Light and Heat.