

The Seven Descriptions of Christ

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If you've ever studied the book of Revelation, you've probably noticed that in Revelation 2 and 3 it records what's often referred to as "the letters to the seven Churches". Because in those chapters, Christ specifically addresses seven different Churches, and He has a specific message for each of these individual Churches. But there's a standard format that you'll kind of find throughout these seven letters. They all begin with a symbolic description of the role of Jesus Christ, of His authority over the Church and you might say, His function, His role in leading the Church. What we're going to do today is to look at these particular references to understand exactly what it tells us about Christ's role. About our relationship with Him, and the role that He plays in governing the Church and the different things that He provides for it. So, if you would like a title for this sermon today, it's

The Seven Descriptions of Christ

Because what we're going to see here is, as I mentioned, each of these letters starts off with kind of a symbolic description of the role of Jesus Christ, and if we let the Bible interpret itself, it'll show us who's being described here and what it's trying to tell us about Christ's role. So, to start off with, let's turn over to the Book of Revelation. Start here in Revelation 1. Now, if you've got a ribbon in your Bible, you're probably going to want to put it here in the Book of Revelation. Particularly in Revelation 2 and 3 because we're going to focus on this area, but we're going to turn to other parts of the Bible and turn back and forth. We're going to come back to the Book of Revelation quite a bit.

But just to start off with, I'd just like to summarize the first 3 verses here of chapter 1. It kind of describes what you might call the chain of custody -- to put it in modern day terminology -- of the revelation that's revealed here. Because in modern day terminology, sometimes we refer to the term "chain of custody". Kind of documenting where something originates and all the hands it goes through to reach its final destination. Well, that's kind of what's described here. Because what it tells us in these first 3 verses is the revelation starts with God the Father. He provides it to Jesus Christ, and Christ then hands it off to an angel with a purpose of delivering it to the Apostle John. Christ tells John to then write all this and deliver it to the seven Churches, because what we're going to see here is the entire book of Revelation is addressed to the seven Churches.

Just to summarize this, we oftentimes look at the letters to the seven Churches as having basically three general ways that they can apply. One, first of all, being the time that John wrote this. There were seven literal Churches on a mail route in Asia Minor at that time. They all existed concurrently. So, that's obviously one aspect of this. There's two other aspects that are typically ways you can apply these letters as well. One is obviously, they all contain spiritual lessons that you can learn from regardless of what

time that a person has lived throughout history. The other is what's referred to as "Church eras". In other words, the idea that these letters kind of address the general theme or general condition that would exist in the New Testament Church at various phases through history. Now, that's not to say that everyone who lived at a particular time fits exactly that description. That's not the intended meaning there. It's more the idea that this is kind of the general theme. The general focus of the condition of the Church at that particular time.

Well, once you understand it from that perspective, you realize that the seven Churches represent the New Testament Church from the first century. You know, the time of the Ministry of Christ and the Apostles all the way up to the return of Christ. Well, if you look at it like that, what you see is that the Book of Revelation is addressed to the New Testament Church regardless of what timeframe a person may happen to live their physical life. Just to notice that, start in Revelation 1 in verse 4. I just want you to notice the first part of this verse. And notice that John is addressing all of this to the seven Churches.

Rev 1:4 *"John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:..."* (NKJV)

So, again he's specifically writing this to the seven Churches. The revelation starts with God the Father. He gives it to Christ. Christ gives it to an angel to deliver to John. But as we're going to see here as we read through chapter 1, John is specifically told to write all of this down and deliver it to the seven Churches. In other words, to the New Testament Church regardless of what time that they live in. Now, jump over to verse 9, because we're going to read through the rest of chapter 1 here. Because you're going to see here first of all, as I mentioned, John is specifically instructed to write down basically everything that he's given in this revelation. In other words, the entire book of Revelation, and to document all of this and to deliver it to the Churches. In other words, not only to the seven Churches that existed at that time, but again the Church of God throughout time. From the first century all the way up to the return of Christ is what's being referred to here. But just start reading here in verse 9.

Rev 1:9 *"I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11) saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,' and, 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.'"* (NKJV)

So, you can see here John is specifically instructed, everything that you receive in this revelation, which is actually the entire Book of Revelation. Write all of this down and deliver it to the Churches. Again, that's not only the seven Churches that existed in his time, but again the Church of God throughout time from his time all the way up to the end.

Now, if we continue reading here, we'll notice that throughout the description through the rest of chapter 1, it's obviously Jesus Christ who's being referred to here. He's the one that's speaking here, that's delivering this revelation to John. It's also important as we read through this to pay attention to all the symbolic references that are here. Because as we're going to see as we read through the letters to the seven Churches, these descriptions of Christ that begin each of these letters, oftentimes those symbolic descriptions are going to refer back to the symbolism that's recorded here in chapter 1. And if we pay attention to that then we realize that each of these letters starts off with a symbolic description of Christ. But just continue on in verse 12 here.

"12) Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13) and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man,..." (NKJV)

Now again, that's an obvious reference to Christ.

"...clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14) His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15) His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16) He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17) And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18) I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." (NKJV)

Now, think about that description. He was alive, He died, and He's alive now forevermore. We're obviously talking about Jesus Christ.

"19) Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20) The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches." (NKJV)

Now pay attention to that because we're going to notice as soon as we get to the Church of Ephesus, it's going to refer back to this. It tells us the seven golden lampstands those are the seven Churches. And the seven stars are the seven messengers or angels of the seven Churches. And it pictures them in Christ's right hand. It's basically telling us His authority over them is what's being symbolically referenced here. But now let's start here with the Church of Ephesus. This is the first letter in chapter 2 and verse 1.

Rev 2:1 *“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.’” (NKJV)*

Now as we just read, that's obviously referring to Christ. He's the one with the seven stars in His right hand who walks among the seven golden lampstands. But we're also going to notice as we unpack these references. You're going to see a trend through most all of these letters where the description of Christ, although it's describing aspects of Him that obviously would apply throughout all of the eras of the Church, because it's Christ's role and His relationship is the same consistently. But you'll oftentimes see in these that the particular aspect that it's describing Him as at the beginning of a letter, specifically ties to the message He has for that particular Church. And you'll see this throughout all of the seven letters.

But to start off with, as I mentioned here, it's picturing the seven stars in His right hand. Again it's referring to His authority. What we're going to see here is the Father has placed Christ in full authority over the Church. When we refer to the Church of God, that's obviously the Father who's being referred to there. But the Father has placed Christ in full authority over the Church, and to see that, turn over to Ephesians 1. Now we're going to read here verse 15 through 23. And just to get the full context we'll start in verse 15, but we'll see in the latter part of this, it tells us again that Christ has been given full authority over the Church. So, starting in verse 15.

Eph 1:15 *“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16) do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18) the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19) and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20) which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21) far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22) And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23) which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (NKJV)*

So, you can see it's telling us that Christ has full authority over the Church of God, and we'll see that's obviously why He's starting off in addressing the letters to the seven Churches. It's establishing right out front here, Christ's full authority over the Church. Because as I mentioned, when we refer to the Church of “God”, that's obviously referring to the Father. The Church of the Father, but Christ has been placed in full authority over it. And Christ also refers to it as “My Church”. “My” referring to Himself. And to notice that, turn over to Mathew 16. We're going to start reading in verse 13.

We'll see a conversation here between Christ and the Apostle Peter, but in doing this, notice how He refers to the Church of God as *"My Church"* -- referring to Himself.

Matt 16:13 *"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' 14) So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 15) He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' 16) Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' 17) Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18) And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19) And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' 20) Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ."* (NKJV)

Now, there's kind of a play on words here in these verses. Because He's saying, "You are Peter", where Peter -- Petros -- means "rock". But He's like, "You're a little rock, and I'm big rock." That is basically what He's saying. Because He says, "upon this rock". He's referring to Himself. He says, "I will build *My Church*".

Notice He refers to it as *"My Church"*. He's showing us the authority that He has over the Church. That He exercises that role of leadership and authority. But as we're going to see here as we read the rest of the letter, He is emphasizing this in the letter to Ephesus because that symbolism plays directly into His message for them. So, turn back over to Revelation 2. Now we're going to pick up in verse 4 and 5. You'll notice if you read through a lot of these letters, they typically start off not only with a description symbolically of Christ, but then it will give the positive feedback that He has for that particular era, or that particular Church. And then He turns around with His criticism and kind of says, "Well, this I have against you" and then He will correct them. That's kind of a standard format, that you'll see here, but notice here in verse 4.

Rev 2:4 *"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5) Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent."* (NKJV)

Notice how He refers to "your lampstand" because notice the description that the letter started off with. He's the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands. The lampstands symbolically represent the seven Churches, and He's saying, "Well, if you don't repent and get back in a right relationship with God, I'm going to remove your lampstand." I'm going to remove you from the Church. You're going to lose your salvation is basically what He's saying. It's a symbolic representation but He's showing us that He has full authority over them, and if they don't repent, He's going to remove them. Basically, remove them from salvation and thrust them out of His body. That is what it's referring to here. But again, you can see that connection between the

description He gives at the beginning, and the message He has for them. This is a theme we're going to see throughout all seven letters. That oftentimes they tie together.

Christ's role is consistent. Throughout time He fulfills all of these aspects that we're going to see in these descriptions at all times because that's who He is. That's part of His role. But again, we'll oftentimes see that it's emphasizing a particular part of His role because it's relevant to that particular message He has for that specific Church. Now, let's move down to the Church in Smyrna, and move down to verse 8.

Rev 2:8 *“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.’” (NKJV)*

Now again, just as a refresher, glance over again at chapter 1 and verse 17. We'll see that this ties directly into the description we saw of Christ earlier.

Rev 1:17 *“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18) I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.’” (NKJV)*

So, again we have very obviously a symbolic representation of Christ. But I want you to think about this. Notice He is specifically referencing Himself in terms of the resurrection from the dead. You know, that He came, He suffered, He died for mankind, but He was resurrected and brought back to life. Well, that's particularly relevant to the message that He has for this Church era, because let's continue reading in verse 9.

Rev 2:9 *“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10) Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (NKJV)*

In other words, He has a message for this Church saying, “Life's going to be hard for you. You're about to go through a really rough time. It's going to be painful. It's going to be something difficult. You're going to have to endure through it, and a lot of you are going to get killed. Even though you're doing the right thing and you're living a righteous life. You're going to wind up getting martyred for it.”

You know, that's not a real comforting message to give someone, but notice He's emphasizing He's been in those same shoes. Now, we won't take the time to read through Matthew 26, but if you read through that it's basically the account where right before Christ has to suffer, where He is literally begging for a plan B. Three times He's appealing to the Father saying, “Please, if there is some other way that we can accomplish Your purpose without Me having to go through this really nasty, ugly

experience, being tortured and then murdered, I'd really prefer to skip this. This does not sound like any fun."

Because He knows in graphic detail, He's very familiar with what's recorded in the Book of Isaiah. He knows what He's about to go through, and He knows this is not going to be enjoyable, and He is not looking forward to it. It's very disturbing for Him. You can see He's very emotional about it, but in spite of all of that, He submits to it. Because He's willing to say, "Hey, if it's your will Father, I will submit to it and I will go through it" and He does. Because He understands the bigger picture of what's being accomplished by all He's going through. He also knows that ultimately after He's killed and He dies, He's going to get resurrected to eternal life.

My point is, that makes it all worth it because if you just have to suffer through this life, if you're called to be a Christian and you're going to live this way of life and be committed to it, and it's just a way of life where you're just going to get beat up and suffer, and then you're going to get killed for doing what's right. You know, if there's not a payoff at the end, that's kind of a bad deal. Particularly if you think about it from a physical carnal human perspective. If there's not a reward there, you kind of got ripped off.

See, that's exactly the message that the Apostle Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 15, but his whole point is the resurrection to eternal life. The reward of salvation is what makes it all worth it. So, turn over to 1 Corinthians 15 and we'll see here this very point. Because see this is why Christ was emphasizing the resurrection to eternal life to this Church era because again He's got a message for them, but it's not real comforting. It's 1 Corinthians 15, and start in verse 16.

1 Cor 15:16 *"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17) And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18) Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19) If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."* (NKJV)

Notice that Paul is directly saying, if all you have is this physical life, and you get called as a Christian and basically told right up front this is a life you're going to have to endure through because it's going to be painful. You're going to get beat up. You're going to have to suffer, and a lot of times you might even just get killed for doing the right thing. If there's not a payoff at the end with the resurrection eternal life, you got ripped off. You know, this is a bad deal. Well, his whole point is it's worth it because of the resurrection to eternal life. Because ultimately that reward is so much greater than anything we could have in this physical life. It makes it worth it. Continue reading in verse 20.

"20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21) For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23) But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." (NKJV)

See, the whole point is we have to focus on the resurrection to eternal life. That ultimate reward. Because again if you're called to a life that's just painful and suffering and having to endure -- because that's what the Bible tells us. He who endures to the end is who is saved. In other words, it's going to be painful. It's going to be hard and you're going to have to endure through it. Well, we have to have that focus on the resurrection to eternal life. See, that's why He was emphasizing that particular aspect of His role -- Christ's role -- when He was addressing the Church in Smyrna. Because their life was going to be painful and hard, and He's basically letting them know, been there, done that, got the T-shirt. You know, I've done that myself. Focus on the resurrection to eternal life. So, let's turn back over to Revelation 2, and then we'll look at the Church in Pergamos. Revelation 2 and verse 12.

Rev 2:12 *"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:'" (NKJV)*

Now again, we'll notice once again this is a symbolic representation of Christ, and to see that just glance back over to Revelation 1 and verse 16.

Rev 1:16 *"He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength." (NKJV)*

So, again we know in Revelation 1, that's obviously a description of Jesus Christ. Obviously, here in the letter to Pergamos, this is once again referring to Jesus Christ. But what is this sharp two-edged sword? Because I mean, if you think of this literally it's kind of a horror movie description. You think of an individual with a tongue that's like a sword coming out of their mouth. Well, it's not literal. It's a symbolic representation, and we just need to understand the symbolism here. If we let the Bible interpret itself, it'll tell us what the symbolism is. So, if you'll turn over to Hebrews 4, we can see what the symbolism is here. We'll start reading here in verse 12.

Heb 4:12 *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (NKJV)*

So, notice here it's basically referring to God's word -- to the Bible. That the Bible is basically the sharp two-edged sword. Well, the point here is that this is the standard that we're judged by. That's what we're going to see here, and we're going to see that this is emphasized here because of the particular issues that the Church would face in the era that's being addressed here. Now again, all of these references in terms of Christ's role that He fulfills, obviously apply to everyone in all time. Christ is consistent. He's like the Father. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He doesn't change. But again, there's typically a reason as we're going to see here why He emphasizes these particular aspects because it's oftentimes relevant to the specific message He has for

that specific Church. So, we're going to see here why He's particularly emphasizing judging people according to the standard of God's word. We're going to see here with this particular Church, false doctrine was a major problem. So, turn back over to Revelation 2, and we'll see this. We'll start reading here in verse 14.

Rev 2:14 *"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. 16) Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."* (NKJV)

Now notice again how it references, how He's going to judge them with that two-edged sword -- with the word of God. He's referring to correcting them because of their tendency to fall into false doctrine. That's why He's emphasizing the two-edged sword, which again is the word of God, which teaches us correct doctrine.

This tells us our responsibility as Christians, regardless of what era that we live in, to be careful about what we follow. To be diligently studying God's word, and to be open to be taught and corrected by it and to follow doctrines that we understand. The things that are revealed to us. Even if God's word points out to us that what we've always thought was correct. Maybe it wasn't right. Because we have to be willing to be corrected. To hear His word and to be willing to change. Because as we're going to see later when we deal with the Church of Laodicea, which I personally believe is the Church of our time, and at the end. It's a Church that typically tends to think, "Well, we know everything. We're rich and increased with good and in need of nothing. We don't need to be corrected. There's nothing else that we need to understand."

We need to realize that we're judged by following correct doctrine. Even if following that doctrine might lose us some friends. You might catch some flack. The reason I bring that up is, just a few years ago it kind of came to the attention of a number of us that our understanding of God -- what we oftentimes referred to as the "God of the Old Testament". The belief that only Jesus Christ interacted with mankind in the Old Testament, and God the Father was somehow kind of not in the picture. Well, many of us came to realize a few years ago that that wasn't exactly correct. We had misunderstood a few verses.

Well, I personally had a number of friends I talked to about this particular doctrine, and it was very clear from talking to them in detail about it. They had come to really understand it. In fact, they directly stated that to me. I had friends that directly told me it's blatantly obvious that God the Father was directly involved with mankind. We had in-depth discussions about it. However, what happened later is once they realized that taking a stand for that doctrine was going to be unpopular. It was going to cause some of their friends to not like them and to kind of turn on them, and they were going to face some social consequences as a result. What happened is a lot of people turned around and just kind of put a blind eye to that and then followed the crowd because they

wanted to be popular with their friends. Following correct doctrine wasn't that important to them. Well, that's a very dangerous place to be, because remember Christ judges us with that two-edged sword.

If you look at Christ's behavior during His human ministry when He was on earth. What you'll see there is, when He's dealing with people who are going astray just simply out of ignorance. They just don't really understand any better. He's telling them to repent, but you'll find He's typically very nice about it. He's very kind about it. When He would interact with people who are in a very sinful lifestyle, but they were doing it out of ignorance, He's very kind about correcting them. He tells them you have to stop this, and you have to repent and change your life, but again He's pretty gentle about it. When He dealt with the Pharisees, He's absolutely brutal. The reason being they knew better. Because we're always held accountable for what we understand. That's a very important thing to realize. We're always judged on what we understand and what we know. So, if we come to understand something, we better act accordingly because we're all held accountable. We're judged by that two-edged sword.

So, now let's look at the letter to Thyatira. Let's look down now in Revelation 2 and verse 18.

Rev 2:18 *“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass.’”* (NKJV)

Now, again just to emphasize, we've already seen here it's referring to the Son of God, which is obviously Christ. But let's just notice over in Revelation 1:14, we'll see the same description here.

Rev 1:14 *“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15) His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;”* (NKJV)

So, again this is very clearly referring to Christ here in this description. Now notice again, it mentions eyes like a flame of fire. Now, there's not a verse in the Bible -- because I looked for one -- that says a flame of fire specifically is a symbolic reference of X. You know, telling us an exact meaning of it. There's not really a verse that says that, but if we look into the meaning here of the word “eyes” we're going to see here the Greek word can just refer to our physical eyes. It can have a metaphorical meaning as well, and if we look at the metaphorical meaning, we're going to notice in the letter to this Church a meaning that directly ties. Now the word here that's translated as “eyes” here in English in Greek it's “ophthalmolos”. You can see it's where we get our ophthalmology word in English. It's the Strong's # 3788, and the definition I'm going to give you here is from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. He gives a literal definition for it as well. It can mean actual physical eyes, but I'm reading for you what he gives as a metaphorical meaning for the word.

“Metaphorically the eye of the mind or the eye of the heart is the power of perceiving and understanding.”

What we're going to see here is it's symbolically referring to Christ's ability to read and to judge our hearts. That is what's it's referring to as “eyes like a flame of fire”, and to see that let's just pick up in verse 20 and read His correction to this particular era.

Rev 2:20 *“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. 21) And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22) Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23) I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”* (NKJV)

Again, it emphasizes searching the minds and the hearts. Well, that's the “eyes like flames of fire”. It's symbolically referencing how He sees everything. He sees our hearts. There's nothing that we can hide from Him because in our carnal human nature, sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that we can hide our sins. That as long as we hide it from other people, we can kind of live a double life. As long as other people don't see, well, somehow, I'm getting away with it. Sometimes in our delusion and denial in our carnality, we can convince ourselves of that and think that somehow, if no one knows about our particular sin, that somehow we've gotten away with it. Somehow, we've hidden it.

We have to realize that Christ and the Father, they see everything. They see all of our actions. They even see our heart. They know what our intentions are. So, we need to be aware of that and to realize we don't hide anything, and we have to give an account for everything that we do. Even the thoughts and intents of our heart, we're going to be judged upon those, so we have to realize and be constantly trying to correct ourselves and studying His word and praying for that discernment so that we can see what we need to repent of and change in our lives. That applies to us regardless of what time that we live in. It's a message relevant for all of us.

So, now let's turn down to Revelation 3 and verse 1 here. We'll look at the Church of Sardis.

Rev 3:1 *“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.”* (NKJV)

Now, we saw previously that the seven stars are the seven angels or messengers to the seven Churches, and Christ has them in His right hand. He has full authority over them. But what is He referring to here as the seven spirits of God? Well, to kind of unpack this, let's first turn over to Revelation 5. Because we'll see here another reference that we

know is obviously referring to Christ, who has the seven spirits, but notice here in Revelation 5, and verse 5.

Rev 5:5 *“But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” 6) And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” (NKJV)*

Now, we know the Lamb is obviously a reference to Jesus Christ, and it's referring to Him as having the seven spirits of God. Now, there's not a verse in the Bible that directly tells us a meaning of the seven spirits of God. But there is a verse in Isaiah 11, as we're going to see here, that gives us a real good clue as to what this is referring to here. Now turn over to Isaiah 11, and what we're going to see here in Isaiah 11 a prophecy that refers to Jesus Christ and the fact that He was going to come as a physical human being, and be the savior for mankind. It's saying that Christ was going to have the spirit of God upon Him as a physical human being, but I want you to notice here, when it describes the Spirit of God, it refers to it in seven different ways.

It even kind of refers to it as the spirit of this, the spirit of that. It kind of lists out seven different aspects, but obviously it's just referring to the spirit of the Father that Christ would have inspiring Him throughout His physical life. But again, if we notice how this is described and put this together, I think it provides the most logical explanation for what the seven Spirits of God are. It's really just a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit. Now notice here in Isaiah 11 and verse 1.

Is 11:1 *“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2) The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.” (NKJV)*

Now, just to make this a little clear, I kind of broke this down. Because if you break down each aspect of this, there's actually seven different things that are referred to here. I'm just going to break them down numerically to make it a little clearer here.

1. The Spirit of the LORD
2. The Spirit of wisdom
3. The Spirit of understanding
4. The Spirit of counsel
5. The Spirit of might
6. The Spirit of knowledge
7. The Spirit of the fear of the LORD

You can see here if you break that down, you actually have seven different aspects of it. And again, this is attributed to Christ. What did Revelation tell us? Christ is the individual with the seven Spirits of God. It's really just breaking down the different aspects of the Holy Spirit, because we know the Holy Spirit is just one spirit. But these are all the different aspects and things that it can provide.

Now, there's another important message in this as well if you turn over to Acts 2. In Acts 2, what we have is the story of the Holy Spirit being delivered to the New Testament Church on the Day of Pentecost. What we'll see here in this description is -- after Christ died and was resurrected, He spends forty days there with the Apostles before He ascends to the Father. Well, after He ascends to the Father, He then sits at the Father's right hand. Well, then, as we're going to see here, at that point the Father gives Him the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not that He didn't have the Holy Spirit as a human. We know that He did. The point being is that now He can then pour the spirit out on the Church, because it directly tells us that that's what He did. That's what was happening there on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Christ was pouring out the Holy Spirit on the Church, because the Father had delegated this authority to Him. Now, notice here in Acts 2, we'll start in verse 32.

Acts 2:32 *"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33) Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear."* (NKJV)

You see, what was being poured out at that point was the Holy Spirit. He's saying Christ received this gift from the Father, and then He's then delivering it. Well see, this is an important reference to make specifically to the Church of Sardis because of an issue that they were facing, because as we're going to see here Christ is warning that the Church of Sardis, that you're on the verge of losing salvation because you're a dead Church. The definition of spiritual death is losing the Holy Spirit. Now, turn back over to Revelation 3 and we'll see this. Let's start in verse 1.

Rev 3:1 *"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.'"* (NKJV)

Now, He's not referring to being physically dead, obviously, He's referring to spiritual death. Well, the definition of spiritual death when you're talking to the Church of God is losing the Holy Spirit. Continue on in verse 2.

"2) Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God." (NKJV)

What He's telling them is if they don't repent and get their relationship with God back right again, they're on the verge of losing the Holy Spirit. Well, see, that's why He's emphasizing His role as being the one who has the gift of pouring out the Holy Spirit.

Because He has the seven spirits as we saw in Isaiah 11. That's really just a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit, and we see in Acts 2, He's the one that pours out the Holy Spirit. So, it's emphasizing that role because they're about to lose the Holy Spirit. That is why it's specifically tying that role into the message to Sardis. Again, all of these aspects of Christ obviously refer to His relationship with the Church all throughout time, but again you see specifically why that's mentioned in that letter. Because it's specifically relevant to His specific message to the Church of Sardis. So, now let's jump down to the Church in Philadelphia in verse 7.

Rev 3:7 *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’.”* (NKJV)

Now we have basically two different aspects we're going to look at here kind of separately. The first is being “He who is holy, He who is true”. Now again, we've seen a trend already through the first 5 of the eras here that these are always a symbolic description of Christ. Well, we're going to see this here as well, because if we just turn over to Revelation 19, we'll see here, “He who is holy, He who is true” is again obviously a reference to Christ. It's Revelation 19 and verse 11.

Rev 19:11 *“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.”* (NKJV)

Now, this is obviously a description of Christ returning during the Day of the LORD on a white horse in the final battle that takes place during the Day of the LORD. But this also tells us who's being referred to there in Revelation 3.

But let's also now look at the other reference that's made there because it referred to the key of David. Now, what is this about? Now, what we're going to see here is, this is actually a direct quote from the Book of Isaiah. It's actually from Isaiah 22. Now here it's stated in a different context, but obviously this is being applied to Christ in Revelation 3. So, first of all let's turn over to Isaiah 22 and understand the original reference. We're going to pick up in verse 20, but just to understand the context here, what's being addressed here is God is informing Shebna that he was being removed from his role.

Now, Shebna was basically, you might say the number two man in the kingdom of Judah under King Hezekiah. He was basically, you might say Hezekiah's right hand man. He kind of had full authority over the nation serving right under Hezekiah. Kind of similar to the role that Joseph played in Egypt with Pharaoh, where he's kind of the number two man and exercises full authority as a result of that, just being right under the king. Well, this is similar to the role that Shebna had, but Shebna was misbehaving. We won't get into all the details there, but he was very much misbehaving in his role. And as a result of that God is taking him out of this role. This is where He's telling him this and basically says, I'm taking you out of this role, and I'm going to put a guy named

Eliakim into your role, and then He's describing the role that He's going to give to Eliakim.

What we're going to see here in this description where He mentions the key of David, and He also basically mentions this role of being able to open and close doors. It's basically a symbolic reference to the governing authority over the kingdom of Judah that would be given to Eliakim as his role being number two under Hezekiah. Now notice here in verse 20.

Is 22:20 "Then it shall be in that day, That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; 21) I will clothe him with your robe..."

In other words, He's taking it away from Shebna and giving it to Eliakim.

"...And strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah. 22) The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open. 23) I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father's house." (NKJV)

So, you can see here we have this same reference to the key of the house of David and the authority of opening and closing. Now, again this is a symbolic reference to administrative authority is what's being referred to here. Obviously, Revelation 3 is directly quoting from this. But in Revelation 3 it's attributing this to Jesus Christ, rather than to a physical individual. But notice as we started off with this sermon, we noticed in Ephesians 1 how Jesus Christ has been given full authority over the Church of God. Even though it's the Father's Church, the Father has delegated to Christ a similar role. Eliakim would be kind of the number two man to King Hezekiah. Well, Christ is in a similar role. He's like God the Father's number two man. He has been delegated this authority of administration over the Church. Well, notice here that it refers to opening and closing doors, and again this is about His administrative decisions that He can make. That's the reason why this is referred to here. Because it refers directly to a promise that's given to the Philadelphia Church and to the Philadelphia era. So, turn back over to Revelation 3, and I'll read in verse 8.

Rev 3:8 *"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."* (NKJV)

See, He specifically talks about Christ's authority to open and close doors and then says, "I've opened this door for you, and because I have this authority, I've opened this door, and no one's going to be able to shut it until I decide that it should be shut." Now again, we won't take the time to go through all of the verses that address this, but if you look through the New Testament, specifically when it talks about a door being open, there are numerous references where the Apostles talk about a door being open for

them. It's always in the context of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God to a receptive audience. It's having an opportunity to spread the gospel. Not just having a platform to be able to freely preach it but having an audience that's receptive to it. People that are responding to the message that they're delivering. Well, as I mentioned when I started off this sermon -- my personal view -- I think there's 3 different ways that these letters can apply. One is there's seven literal Churches that existed on a mail route at the time that John was writing this. There's spiritual lessons throughout time, and there's also kind of themes of historical eras.

Well, now if you look at the Church of Philadelphia, the one in Asia Minor that existed at the time that John was writing this. One of the things that they were known for was successfully preaching the gospel and evangelizing to other individuals. Well, also if you look at this as eras -- themes throughout the history of the New Testament Church. If you look back at the ministry of Worldwide under Herbert Armstrong, what you'll see there in terms of not only preaching the gospel, but the response, the number of people coming in and responding to the truth and being baptized. The numbers are kind of off the charts. And then in terms of comparing that to Church history -- because if you look back through the 2000 years of Church history prior to that. Through much of that time it's kind of hard to find the Church of God being mentioned in history because it's small, it's persecuted, it's really kind of insignificant on the world scene.

Well, if you look at the impact that Worldwide had under the leadership of Herbert Armstrong, it's kind of off the charts in terms of the television impact that we had. The magazine that had millions of subscribers. Not only that, if you lived back during that time and experienced that like many of us did, it was very common to know people in most every congregation that were fairly new in the Church. The numbers of new baptisms that were coming in on a regular basis were significant. We weren't just able to preach the message. People were responding, who were being baptized. Now, if you look at the numbers after he died and going forward and even to today, now we're almost 40 years after he has died, and there's an obvious difference that's taken place here. Because there's numerous organizations that have done all that they can to preach the gospel.

They've tried to get on television programs. They use the internet -- which wasn't really around at the time Mr. Armstrong was working -- and various other means, and they put effort out to preach and to spread the message, but the response is just nowhere comparable. In fact, if you just look at the number of new baptisms that most organizations have today, the overwhelming majority of those are children of members. In other words, people who've grown up from childhood attending a Church of God organization and then make the decision to be baptized and make that commitment.

Now, I'm not saying at all that there's not new people being called into the truth. Obviously, there are. I know a number of them, but again if you compare the numbers, it's a night and day contrast. I think what's obviously being referred to there, is if we just look at this from an era perspective, that was the Philadelphian era that had the open door. Because again God is obviously still calling new people coming in, but it's just not

comparable at all to what we saw in previous years. and I think that's what's being put across there with Christ saying, "I give you this open door" because that promise is only made to one era. It's not that God wasn't calling new people in all the other errors. It's just that was something unique to the Philadelphia era, and again if we just look at the numbers during the ministry of Herbert Armstrong, the numbers are just off the charts and it's not comparable to any other time. It's certainly not comparable to our time. So, now if we just jump down to verse 14, we'll notice the letter to Laodicea.

Rev 3:14 *"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:'" (NKJV)*

To see who's the "faithful and true witness", let's just turn over to Revelation 19.

Rev 19:11 *"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war." (NKJV)*

So, you can see here, obviously it's Christ that's being referred to here. But let's also notice the meaning of the Greek word that's translated as "witness" here in Revelation 3. Because what we're going to see here is why this is particularly emphasized that Christ is the "faithful and true witness". Now the Greek word here is transliterated into English as "martus". It's Strong's # 3144, and again the definition I'm going to give you is from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates.

"A witness. One who has information or knowledge of something, and hence, one who can give information, bring to light, or confirm something..."

As we're going to see here if we read the rest of this letter, Christ doesn't have much of anything positive to say about the Church in Laodicea. In fact, He's going to directly tell us here that they have a hearing problem. He has some very corrective instructions to give them, but as He even says here, they're not listening. They're not hearing Him, because see, who they're not hearing is the "true and faithful witness". Now, to see this let's just continue reading in verse 15 of Revelation 3.

Rev 3:15 *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16) So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17) Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18) I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20) 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." (NKJV)*

Notice He says, "If anyone hears Me". He's expecting that many of this group will not hear Him. They have a hearing problem. And who are they ignoring? The "true and faithful witness". The individual that has the information that they need, who can tell them what they need to change. Who can give them the formula for how to turn their lives around so that they're not spewed out of His mouth. Because what that is really saying is, "I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth". "I'm about to eject you out of the body", is what He's saying. You're on the verge of losing your salvation is what He's telling them, but He knows this is an audience He's talking to who thinks they've got it all together. They think they know everything already.

If you notice the kind of the theme in the Church of God today, more often than not people think, "Well, we understand everything there is to know now. We just need to hang on to this and just ride it out to the end." They don't feel like there's anything else for them to learn. They don't feel that they need to study or to dig into His word, to see if there's more that they can be taught because they're rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing. They already understand it all and that creates a blindness. That creates not only a blindness to understanding God's word, but to seeing our own spiritual condition. What we need to repent of. What we need to change to overcome. Because it's he who overcomes who makes it into the Kingdom. So, that's something we need to be very aware of and mindful of because that's the Church in our time, the Laodicean era. So, we need to be very diligent in studying God's word. Again, not just for intellectual understanding, but what do I need to change about my own life to get my relationship right with God and Christ? You know, to understand Christ's role and what I need to be doing and to be in step with Him, and to be living my life appropriately.

Because we can see from all of this, as I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, the Book of Revelation is delivered specifically to the Church. Because as we saw kind of the chain of custody from the beginning, God the Father gives this revelation to Christ who then uses an angel to deliver it to John. But the instructions to John are to write this to the seven Churches. Well, the seven Churches is the New Testament Church from the time of the first century, all the way up to the end. That's all of us. This is a message given to all of us, and this is specifically delivered to the New Testament Church. So, it's something that we need to take seriously.

We can see from all of this Christ's role throughout all of time. Because again all of these descriptions that apply to Christ, they're symbolic representations of Christ's role. Obviously, He's very consistent and these roles apply for all of us. But we can see oftentimes what's emphasized in each letter is specific to the message to that particular Church. But we here in the Laodicean era, need to be particularly aware of all the instructions here because we have a lot we need to change, and to grow according to Christ to get ourselves right with God. So, as we go forward from this Sabbath, let's be diligent in studying God's word. Not only understanding Christ's role as it pertains to our lives, but making sure that we're hearing Him. That we're paying attention to what He's trying to tell us so that we can be overcomers and make it into the Kingdom of God.