

THE THEOLOGY OF REVELATION 1-3

We're going to do something different this morning during our teaching time. Last week, we finished our exposition of Jesus' messages to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3. I thought it might be good and profitable to conclude this series by looking at the passage as a whole and extracting some theological principles about our Lord Jesus and His church. In other words, I would like to *do* theology during this teaching time, and I would like to show you *how* to do theology.

For some of us, the word "theology" is intimidating because we associate it with complexity, mystery, and density. While there may be an element of truth to this, Christian theology in its most basic sense is a set of beliefs or propositions derived from the study of Scripture. If you are a thoughtful reader of the Bible then you are a theologian, whether you know it or not, because as you are reading you are formulating concepts or drawing conclusions about God...or Christ...or morality...or the afterlife...or the kingdom of God...or the church...or many other subjects the Bible addresses. Those concepts or conclusions may not be very thorough or precise, nevertheless you have them, and they probably influence you more than you think.

But I would submit to you that followers of Christ *ought* to be progressively good, thorough, and precise theologians. That ought to be one of our greatest ambitions. And I'm not talking about becoming a theologian in an *academic* sense but in a *relational* sense. Followers of Christ are interested in Jesus, to say the least. We are interested in who He is, what He does, what He says, what He wants, what pleases Him and what displeases Him, and we discover all these things in the Scriptures. So, as we read and study the Bible and learn more and more, our concepts and conclusions become more complete and more accurate. And the more complete and accurate they become, the more they shape our beliefs, perspectives, values, priorities, behavior, etc.

Some of the most concentrated theology of Christ (Christology) and His church (Ecclesiology) in all of Scripture is found in Revelation 1-3. As we have studied each section of this passage, we have already explored several aspects of the nature of Christ and His church. This morning, I would like to organize those concepts and conclusions so that we come up with a theology of Revelation 1-3.

In the course of this lesson, we're going to be looking at quite a few verses that describe some aspect of Christ and His church, after which I will make a theological assertion or proposition. Keep in mind, these are assertions and propositions that have been derived from our careful study of these three chapters in the last several weeks. If you have an outline you may want to use it to fill in the blanks, and then write down the verses that support the proposition.

We will start with the Christology of Rev. 1-3

CHRISTOLOGY of Revelation 1-3

Rev. 1:8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, **the Almighty.**" Clearly God is speaking, but is this God the Father or God the Son? He identifies Himself as the One who is to come, which suggests this is Jesus. But more substantial proof comes at the end of Revelation where Jesus is speaking to John and says, "**Behold, I am coming soon...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end**" (22:12-13). So, if this is a reference to Jesus, what does it tell us about Him?

- Jesus is **DIVINE**

He is God! He is the Almighty! He possesses all the attributes of deity that His Father possesses.

Rev. 1:8, 17: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, **the Almighty**” (1:8). “I am the first and the last, and the living one (1:17). Along with the statement Jesus made about Himself in Revelation 22:13, “**the beginning and the end,**” what do these descriptions, “Alpha and Omega,” “first and last,” “who is and who was” tell us about Jesus?

- Jesus is **ETERNAL**

Jesus did not begin His existence in a manger in Bethlehem. He has always existed!

Revelation 1:12-15 ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around His chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and His voice was like the roar of many waters” (1:12-15).

This is a description of Jesus, and it is almost identical in its wording to Daniel’s famous and familiar vision of “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7 and 10, passages that were correctly interpreted by Jews as messianic. In other words, Jews were expecting that their anticipated Messiah would look like the man in Daniel’s vision. What does this tell us about Jesus?

- Jesus is **MESSIAH**

He is the anticipated Deliverer the Old Testament so frequently talked about who would come to earth, conquer the enemies of God’s people, and establish the kingdom of God

Revelation 1:5-6: “To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (1:5-6).

- Jesus is the **SAVIOR**

There are definitely Messianic overtones in this passage with its reference to a kingdom and priests. However, the climactic focus of Jesus’ messianic work was totally unexpected. By actually shedding His blood (dying in our place) He freed us from our greatest enemy, sin.

This next attribute of Jesus so saturates the pages of Revelation that I’m going to state it first, and then show specific ways in which it is described.

- Jesus is **SOVEREIGN**

- He has won the victory over **sin**

- “To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood (1:5)

- He has won the victory over **death**

- “I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades (1:17-18)

- “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’ (2:10-11)

- Jesus is enthroned in heaven

- “I also conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne” (3:21).

- Jesus decides who gets eternal life

- “...who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” (3:7-8)

- Jesus protects His loved ones
 - “I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (3:10)

What attribute do these next verses tell us about Jesus?

“...Who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (2:1). These seven lampstands are the seven churches (1:20).

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me” (3:20).

- Jesus is OMNIPRESENT
Jesus is everywhere at the same time. He is present in all the churches at the same time, and He is knocking on the hearts of countless people at the same time.

There is another attribute similar to omnipresence which is seen throughout this passage. “I know your deeds... I know you cannot tolerate wicked men...” (2:2-3); “I know your tribulation and your poverty...” (2:9) “I know where you dwell, where Satan has his throne” (2:13); “I know your works...”

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation” (2:10).

“I am He who searches mind and heart” (2:23)

- Jesus is OMNISCIENT
Jesus *knows* everything! He never makes assumptions but knows exactly what is going on in every person and every situation.
- Jesus is the JUDGE
 - He rewards the faithful
 - “To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone” (2:17)
 - “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron” (2:26)
 - “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels” (3:5)
 - “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name” (3:12)
 - “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne” (3:21).

Jesus is extraordinarily generous with churches who are faithful to Him and His Word, both in this life, and especially in the life to come

- He punishes the faithless
 - “I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth” (2:16).
 - “I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead” (2:22-23)

- “If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (3:3)

Jesus does not tolerate sin or falsehood in His church and will severely judge those who do. Jesus is revolted by pretense and hypocrisy and will not tolerate it in His church.

These next few attributes are classified as ***moral*** attributes, meaning that they have reference to Jesus’ moral character. They are also *communicable* attributes, meaning that, to some degree, we can also possess them.

Revelation 3:7: “The words of the holy one...” (3:7)

- Jesus is HOLY

Rev. 3:7: “The words...of the true one...” (3:7). “You hate the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (2:6)

- Jesus is TRUE

Revelation 3:19-20: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (3:19-20).

- Jesus is LOVE

Revelation 2:21; 3:20: “I gave her time to repent” (2:21). “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (3:20)

- Jesus is PATIENT

Jesus is willing and quick to forgive repentant churches who stray from Him and the Truth

Revelation 1:8; 3:14: “Who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (1:8).

- Jesus is COMING AGAIN

As you can see for yourselves, there is a lot of information in Revelation 1-3 about the Person and Work of Christ, and so it is a rich Christological passage. It may be the most concentrated or comprehensive Christological passage in the New Testament. But Revelation 1-3 may also be the most concentrated and comprehensive ecclesiological passage in the New Testament (the doctrine of the church). Which is interesting, because in the Gospel Accounts Jesus only mentions the church twice - once in Matthew 16 and the other in Matthew 18.

Yet when you read Revelation 1-3, it is clear that Jesus is very passionate about the church. And why not? The church belongs to Him (He purchased it by His own blood). The church is His Bride. He has made the choice to inextricably link His own identity with the church. Therefore, He is intensely interested in her well-being and her witness, and that is because these churches are expressions of *His* character, *His* will, and *His* work. So, what can we discern about the theology of the church from these three chapters? Let me make the theological assertions and then support them with the text of Scripture.

A church’s first priority is LOVE. In His message to the church at Ephesus, Jesus said that they were doing a lot of good, important, and commendable things. But they had abandoned the love they had at first, and He urges them to remember the heights from which they had fallen, to repent and do the things they did at first. A church that doesn’t possess or express Christ’s love is not long for this world, because love is the chief characteristic and identifying mark of the church.

Without love, what a church is and says and does is ultimately without meaning or value (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

A church is the GUARDIAN of truth. Remember, Jesus is the truth—He is the embodiment of truth—and as the expression of Jesus’ character, will, and work in this world, churches must hold fast to the truth. Over and over in these letters Jesus either commends a church for holding fast to the truth or condemns a church for diluting the truth or accepting false teaching. He identifies some of this teaching by name—the teaching of Balaam, the teaching of the Nicolaitans, and He comes down very hard not only on those who embrace these false teachings, but on those who tolerate them. That’s because distortions of the truth are a serious threat to a church’s health and holiness, and Jesus will most certainly judge those who propagate them

A church is to be HOLY

Holy means set apart for Jesus, and it is the opposite of worldliness, lawlessness, and moral compromise. Jesus condemned the church at Thyatira for tolerating Jezebel, because she seduced some of them to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols, churches that tolerate known but unrepentant sin in their midst are condemned by Jesus because He is holy and the church is to be holy as well.

A church is VULNERABLE

When Jesus purchased the church with His blood and betrothed Himself to the church, He did not take away her free will. And since every member or participant in a church still has the remnants of a sin nature and still succumbs sometimes to temptation, it means that the church is vulnerable to lots of things. Jesus identifies many of those things in Revelation 2-3.

- **The church is vulnerable to LOVELESSNESS.** It is interesting that the church at Ephesus was commended by Paul for its love in his epistle (3:14-16). They also had prominent pastors (Paul, Timothy, Apollos, and John) who emphasized love. But only thirty years later—a new generation—they were about to be extinguished for their lack of love. And eventually they were.
- **A church is also vulnerable to DECEPTION.** Four of the seven churches Jesus addressed in Revelation 2-3 had been deceived by false teachers, outward appearances, or abundant resources.
- **A church is also vulnerable to SELF-DELUSION.** Sardis and Laodicea were particularly self-deluded, thinking that they were healthy, robust, vibrant communities of faith, when in fact they were near death or nauseating to Jesus. Once again, since churches are comprised of fallen human beings who are not only prone to be deceived but to have high opinions of itself, a church’s spiritual self-assessment can be distorted. And this is a serious problem, because it is so difficult to judge from outward appearances. Yet Jesus clearly states that past prominence, present reputation, abundant material resources, and even correct doctrine do not guarantee spiritual success. In fact, they can be hindrances to spiritual success. Spiritual success, which is measured solely by the Lord of the Church, has to do with love, humility, soft-heartedness, faithfulness, prayerfulness, and devotion to Him.

A church must be VIGILANT. Every church must be vigilant, including ours. That is because any given church can be seduced by false teaching and succumb to worldliness and idolatry. That’s because even solid churches can succumb to serious sin and error. And that’s because it does not take long for a church to be derailed by the devil. Look what happened to the church in America

during the pandemic. It showed just how susceptible we are to conspiracy theories and lies. It showed just how immature we are—that we can get so upset and even divide over our views about whether or not to wear masks.

Do you know how we stay vigilant? It's not by being suspicious or paranoid about the government or scientists or other influential people in our culture or community. It is by fixing our eyes on Jesus and holding fast to His Word. It is by repenting as soon as possible when we do wrong, so that our hearts stay soft and tender and don't become calloused. It is by loving Jesus first and foremost and loving one another.

The Theology of Revelation 1-3

Introduction: Christian theology is set of _____ or _____ derived from the study of Scripture.

CHRISTOLOGY of Revelation 1-3

- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is our _____
- Jesus is _____
 - He has won the victory over _____
 - He has won the victory over _____
 - He has authority over _____
 - He is enthroned in heaven
 - Jesus gives _____
 - Jesus _____ His loved ones
- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is the _____
 - He _____ the faithful
 - He _____ the faithless
- Jesus is _____

- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is _____
- Jesus is _____

ECCLESIOLOGY of Revelation 1-3

- A church's first priority is _____
- A church is the _____ of truth
- A church is _____
- A church is _____
 - To _____
 - To _____
 - To _____
- A church must be _____