

What if God Wrote Us a Letter?

Text: Revelation 1:11, 19-20; 2-3

Edited and expanded by Bob Young [suggested by an outline from Mark Tonkery]

Introduction

What if God would send you an e-mail or a letter? What would He write? Often times on the computer I will receive an e-mail that says e-mail from God. My first thought is He already wrote me 66 letters or the Bible. Then I read the e-mail and it is usually a poem, or a story talking about some aspect of God.

But for a moment think with me “what if God would write us a letter?” What would God say?

In the book of Revelation, we hear what God tells John to write to the seven churches in Asia. Rev. 1:11, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Let’s look at what He wrote to them!

In Revelation 2-3, the letters to the churches have common elements, almost like a formula or template. There are various ways to describe these letters.

My reading of the text identifies the following five common elements--
To each church, with its messenger, “These are the words”—a description of Jesus
“I know,” Jesus knows his churches
Description the threat faced by the church
Admonition [commendation or criticism/condemnation]
Promise to the overcomers

Stafford North suggests seven common elements--
Jesus knows his churches
Christ wants the churches to guard their teaching
Christ wants Christians to live in purity
Christ wants Christians to grow in service
Christ wants Christians to be ready for persecution
Christ wants Christians to know they can be lost
Christ will richly reward those who overcome

Mark Tonkery also identified seven characteristics of each letter--
The name of the church, the assigned angel, a description of Christ, Christ knows, Christ exhorts-corrects, promises, admonition to hear.

What would Christ say to your church if He were to write you a letter? What would he say to this church?

Allow me to integrate the ideas in the above lists as major points in this sermon [closely following Tonkery and at times borrowing his wording].

First, he would call us by name.

He knows where we are.

He knows who we are.

He knows who we think we are.

Second, he would entrust the message to faithful spiritual leaders.

Act 14:23, “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Titus 1:5, “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.”

Eph. 4:11-12, Faithful evangelists and pastor-teachers.

Third, Christ would introduce himself or describe himself in a way that would encourage us.

1. In the Bible, Christ reveals Himself to us.
2. There are countless descriptions of Christ in the New Testament. We know Him as:
 - a. Mat. 1:23, "Immanuel" (God with us).
 - b. Mat. 16:16, "Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
 - c. Rev 1:5-6, "and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. 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. Amen."
3. How do we know Christ? Or for some maybe a better question do we even know Christ?
While picking up children for VBS in the church van, we sang "Jesus loves me." One little boy asked, who is Jesus and does He really love me? Many people in our world do not know who Jesus is.

Fourth, Christ would remind us that he knows what is going on.

God knows about our life as a congregation, and about our individual lives.

Jesus knows what is going on in his church.

Heb. 4:13, "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

Fifth, Christ would admonish—either commending or condemning [encourage and reprove]

1. What would Jesus commend about the congregation here?
 - Our support and work with missions?
 - How we strive to guard Biblical teaching?
 - How we as Christians live in purity?
 - How we are growing in Christian service.
 - Or the joy of our fellowship?
2. On the other hand what would Jesus condemn about the congregation?
 - Would He condemn us for our lack of commitment to His cause and work?
 - Would He condemn us for our lack of local evangelism?
 - Would He condemn us for showing favoritism or not getting along?
 - What would Jesus condemn us for?
3. The seven churches of Asia remind us that congregations are found in various conditions. Some are strong, some are weak, and some are dead. Which are we?
4. Every church should see itself in these letters and do a self-evaluation.

Sixth, Christ would give a promise those who are faithful.

1. Jesus wants Christians to know they can be lost. Each congregation had some lost members and so do we. With that being true:
2. These letters warn and encourage Christians. Jesus wants unfaithful Christians to repent.
3. Revelation uses the word repent 12 times.
4. The word means "to change one's mind and purposes" so as "to change one's conduct or demeanor." Revelation warns the sinful—both unbelievers and unfaithful Christians—to repent. God will bring judgment.
5. If the unfaithful will repent and remain faithful, Jesus will reward them.

Seventh, Jesus would invite, "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

1. Jesus offers an invitation to each congregation and no doubt if Jesus would have written to us, He would have concluded His letter with an invitation to pay attention to His message and respond to it.
2. An invitation to rejoice and continue to do the things we do well and to repent and change the things that we have failed and sinned in.
3. That same invitation is still open for each one of us today.