

**Practicing This One Thing:
How to Pray for Our Church
Revelation 2-3**

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Text Introduction: We are in the middle of a prayer challenge. We are calling our challenge “This One Thing.” This is not only guiding our times together on Sunday morning as we examine the Scriptures about prayer, but we are also challenging one another about our discipline and habits of prayer. And what a time it is to pray! I could not have imagined the importance of this effort when God birthed this in my heart early this summer. But, now, all of this makes perfect sense, right?

We are in a phase of our study where we are considering Biblical instructions for praying in different areas. I want to examine with you today the subject “How to Pray for Our Church.”

Praying for the church where you worship ought to be a regular part of your prayer strategy. The reasons are obvious. Outside of your family, your church family is the most important group with which you are associated. For all of the reasons that you desire to pray for your family, you should desire to pray for your Church. We need to be praying for God’s direction and God’s blessing on us as a church. We pray for God’s protection. The list is long, but I want to help us to get a handle on this matter.

Jesus’ words through John in Revelation can help us to formulate a prayer strategy for our church. Jesus addressed seven historical churches in Revelation 2-3. Jesus’ words to these seven churches have similar characteristics. We want to use the similarities found in these letters to guide our praying.

Now, obviously, having a passage of study that is two chapters in length presents some challenges for us this morning. We are helped in that there is a pattern to these letters. Let’s read the first letter as a representative of all the letters. Leave your Bibles open as we consider something in each of the seven letters.

Text: “Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus:

“The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands says: ²I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. ³You also possess endurance and have tolerated many things because of My name and have not grown weary. ⁴But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷“Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in God’s paradise.

Introduction: As John begins the Revelation of Jesus Christ, he first addressed seven churches in the region of Asia-Minor. These were seven historical churches of the latter part of the first century. Jesus’

observations about these churches are representative of the kinds of problems churches throughout history have faced. We do well in heeding Jesus' message to these churches.

In heeding the messages to these churches, we know how to pray for our church.

The Pattern in the Seven Letters: Before we identify some prayer points for our church, notice the specific pattern that each of these letters follows.

1. Address of the Church
2. Identification of Jesus as the one who is giving the message
3. An account of the Church each beginning with "I know"
4. An assessment of the Church
5. An exhortation to the Church
6. A promise to the Church each having to do with overcoming
7. An appeal to the Church to hear what the Spirit is saying

Though the messages are different, we can use this pattern to develop our prayer strategy for our church.

As we pray for our church, let us be careful to pray that we . . .

Remember always who is the Head of the Church.

After the address in each of these letters, Jesus identified Himself in quite descriptive ways. These descriptions point to the sovereignty, the majesty, and the omniscience of the Lord. Jesus' self-identification points us to at least two truths.

1. Jesus is the sole authority of the Church.

My mind immediately goes to Colossians 1:15-20.

He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.

¹⁶ For everything was created by Him,
in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—
all things have been created through Him and for Him.

¹⁷ He is before all things,
and by Him all things hold together.

¹⁸ He is also the head of the body, the church;
He is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead,
so that He might come to have
first place in everything.

¹⁹ For God was pleased to have
all His fullness dwell in Him,

²⁰ and through Him to reconcile
everything to Himself
by making peace
through the blood of His cross—
whether things on earth or things in heaven.

And, because He is the sole authority. . .

2. The only analysis of our Church that really matters is the analysis of Christ.

The account of each church begins with “I know.” What matters is what God thinks about our church not what others think about our church. Some might think too low about our church. That really doesn’t matter. Some think too high about our church. That does not matter either. What matters is what Jesus thinks about our church.

Repent of any sin that the Lord would make known to us.

The accounts in these letters are the heart of the letters. This is the place where we will note the most difference in these seven letters. The assessment forms the heart of what we ought to be praying about for our church. Now, you will notice in a complete reading that 5 churches receive a negative assessment. Two churches receive a positive commendation—Smyrna and Philadelphia. As such, our prayer notes come from 5 of the 7 letters.

Now, remember these are historical churches with historical problems. We need to repent of any sin that the Lord would make known to us, but we can start here with these 7 letters.

Start with these Questions

1. Have we lost our love for Jesus? (2:4)
2. Are we teaching the truth? (2:14-15)
3. Are we being too tolerant of sin? (2:20)
4. Have we gone to sleep on some things? (3:1)
5. Are some among us not saved? (3:15)

Now, don’t misunderstand this. We are not supposed to go around judging other people’s salvation and examining other people’s salvation, but it is a question to us as individuals.

Receive always the message that the Lord would have for us.

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

This is what I pray in our week of revival. This is what I pray for regarding stewardship.

Resolve to be a Church that overcomes.

We are going to have many opportunities to not overcome. We are going to have many opportunities to abandon the mission.

Jude began his letter: "I found it necessary to write and exhort you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all." (Jude 3)

We will have some ups and downs as a church. Some people will leave, and some will stay. Regardless of all of this, we must have a resolve to overcome.

So What?

Praying for our church is not an option. We must pray according to how Jesus, the Head of the Church, sees the church and instructs the church. Anything less is selfish.