

## The Attributes of the Speaker of Revelation By John W. Freeland

Our recent sermon series on the Seven Churches of Revelation gave us insight into the book of *Revelation* itself, but I would like to go back and revisit those churches from a different angle. Let us begin by looking at the attributes of the speaker. When encountering such a mysterious and misunderstood book as *Revelation*, it is very important that we understand who is speaking. We give credit for authorship of *Revelation* to the Apostle John, but chapter one makes it clear that it was not John who was speaking. John was a reporter of divine revelation – Jesus is the voice of *Revelation*. In chapters one through three, Jesus used approximately thirty attributes to describe Himself. Before we look at these attributes, read the first three chapters of *Revelation*.

Ephesus was the church who had forsaken their first love. To Ephesus, Jesus was the One who “Walks among the seven golden lampstands” and “holds the seven stars in His right hand.” Ephesus had been faithful to the letter and had refused to tolerate false apostles. They had endured persecution but, in the process, left their first love. Jesus warned them that He would remove their lampstand from its place unless they repented. Only the One who has control of the churches and their leaders can exercise such judgment. Those who have left their first love cannot be expected to understand and receive a loving rebuke, so Jesus’ presentation to Ephesus was something they could understand: He has the power to remove them. We mustn’t lose our way and overlook the blessing for the Ephesian Church that is included in these attributes of Jesus. If Jesus walks among the golden lampstands, and Ephesus’ lampstand has not been removed, then Ephesus not only remains in fellowship with the other six churches but also remains in fellowship with Jesus. The Ephesians had forsaken their love for Jesus, but Jesus had not forsaken His love for them. If Jesus holds the seven stars in His right hand, then He not only controls, He also protects them and holds them close. Jesus’ rebuke is strong, but He also stands ready with a loving response should they repent and return.



This message to the Church in Ephesus is a reminder to the modern Church that Jesus walks among us. This should comfort us as we recognize the great blessing of His presence, but it should also awaken us to the reality that we can be removed from His presence if we do not return to Him with our whole heart.

Smyrna was the persecuted church. They had suffered significant persecution, and their future contained even more. In spite of persecution, Smyrna remained faithful, and Jesus had nothing to say against them. To them He revealed Himself as “the First and the Last, Who was dead, and has come to Life.” These two attributes set Jesus apart as the possessor of eternal life. To those facing execution it is a great comfort to know that the Possessor of eternal life is on your side. “The First and the Last” signifies that nothing came before Him and nothing can come after Him. He is eternal. We tend to think of eternity as having no end but forget that eternity has no beginning. Jesus’ attribute as the One “who was dead, and has come to life” reminded the Church of Smyrna that even if they died martyrs, death would not defeat them. The death of a Christian martyr is the beginning of Life.

The modern Church in the United States knows little of persecution and even less of martyrdom. The message to Smyrna reminds us that persecution is in our future, but it is not something to be feared. Persecution holds no power over those who faithfully follow “the First and the Last, Who was dead, and has come to Life.” We in the modern church must embrace the death and resurrection of Jesus before we come face to face with persecution.

Pergamum was the compromising church. They accepted false teaching and participated in pagan festivals and practices. They attempted to live a dual lifestyle. To them Jesus revealed Himself as the “One Who has the Sharp Two-edged Sword.” The two-edged sword represents the Word of God, which is, itself, Truth. Pergamum had embraced false doctrine and was being confronted by the Truth. The Church of Pergamum rode the fence. This rebuke from the “One Who has the Sharp Two-edged Sword” reminded them that Jesus is capable of bringing separation between the two realms; the Kingdom of God and the realm of darkness. Their practice of participating in both would soon end.

“The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” Hebrews 4:12. The modern Church that loves the Word of God must remain alert regarding false doctrine. Satan is the father of lies and a master of deception, and he laces his lies with just enough truth to make them convincing. No doubt Pergamum began their journey with faithfulness but was led astray by teachers of false doctrine. The modern Church need not fear the “One Who has the Sharp Two-edged Sword.” We should embrace this attribute of Christ and trust Him, and allow Him, to “trim” away errant teaching and false doctrine.

The apostasy of Thyatira was even worse than that of Pergamum. Pergamum was living a double life, but Thyatira was “in bed” with false gods and had lost all semblance of holiness. They were confronted by “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, whose feet are like burnished bronze.” These attributes are juxtaposed to paganism. The Son of God is the only One deserving loyalty and worship. Though it grieved Him greatly, the One who “has eyes like a flame of fire” personally witnessed their pagan practices. The attribute, “His feet are like burnished bronze,” indicates His power and might. He is the solid foundation, the Almighty. Thyatira left that solid foundation for the things of the world.

In the first century, the differences between Christianity and the Roman world were vast. We might see fewer differences if we look at the Church and the world today. To what should we attribute this decrease in difference? The modern Church should be both *comforted* and *confronted* by His “eyes like a flame of fire.” I remember a teacher telling me one time, “I’ve got my eye on you!” Once I heard a girl say, “I’ve got my eye on you” (unfortunately she wasn’t talking to me) – two entirely different meanings. So it is with Jesus and the Church. Jesus has His eye on us just as He had His eye on the Church of Thyatira. With the one eye, He watches lovingly as a loving husband admires his wife – pleased with her beauty and accomplishments, and longing for friendship and intimacy. With the other eye, He watches, with horror and repulsion, the apostasy the Church practices both ignorantly and arrogantly. In spite of the contradictory actions of the Church, Jesus gracefully reaches out, as He did with Thyatira, and invites us to return to firm footing in the presence of the One “whose feet are like burnished bronze.”

Sardis' reputation said otherwise, but Jesus knew that they were dead. Jesus however revealed Himself as the One who "has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." The church was dead but not without hope, because there was still a remnant in Sardis. They were called to "remember what [they had] received and heard; and keep it, and repent." Deep down, they knew *life*. The threat against Sardis was that the remnant, the *life* of the church, would be removed. Deep down the modern Church knows *life*. We just need to "remember what [we] have received and heard, keep it and repent." "Even now, declares the Lord, 'Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'" (Joel 2:12 NLT)

Philadelphia was a faithful church. Jesus held nothing against them. To them He revealed His attributes of holiness and might. Philadelphia remained faithful even though they had only a little power. They needed to hear from the Holy One who recognized their faithfulness and had the power to sustain them as they continued in that faithfulness. To Philadelphia Jesus revealed His attributes as "Holy and True, the One who has the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, and who shuts and no one opens."

In the modern Church we have, in many ways, attempted to open our own doors. We have schemed and compromised to make our own way, sometimes watering down the Gospel to appeal to "seekers" and sometimes looking away from corruption and sin. The Church as Christ's bride cannot forsake holiness and truth for our own advancement. We must look for the doors Jesus Himself has opened for us and walk only through those doors. We must, in addition, allow Jesus to shut the doors He chooses to shut.

Being a faithful church means relying not on our own power but on the power of the Divine Doorman, but referring to Jesus as the "Divine Doorman" may cause alarm. Consider the doorman in a fine hotel. He is the first and the last person one sees. That makes him the best representative a hotel can have. The proper response to our Divine Doorman is to allow Him to open and shut the doors. The faithful church only enters the doors He opens and leaves shut the doors He closes.

The seventh church, Laodicea, was lukewarm and the most detestable of all the churches. Jesus threatened to spew them out of His mouth and used adjectives against them that are shocking. Jesus described them as wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. To them He revealed His attributes as Truth and as the Beginning of Creation. Laodicea was very much in need of re-creation. They were lost in self-deception and spiritual blindness. They needed to know that Jesus bore witness against them but had the power, and the desire, to restore them. The original Greek language of the message to Laodicea is shocking. Jesus told Laodicea they made Him vomit. Even though they did not stand in opposition to Jesus, they were everything He is not. He revealed His attributes as the 'faithful and true Witness' and "the beginning of the creation of God." Laodicea was far from a faithful witness. In a lukewarm state they sat on the witness of the grace God had shown them. He had made them a new creation, yet they soiled their spiritual clothes with sin and suffered spiritual blindness.

Laodicea, more than any other church in *Revelation*, represents the modern church. We are lost in self-deception and spiritual blindness and have grown lukewarm. We sit on our witness. Our inaction makes Jesus gag. Love is a decision and not an emotion. We love because we choose to love, not because we feel like loving. We must make a decision to act like we love Jesus. Lovers talk about the one they love and do the things that please their lover. Where is the talk that demonstrates the love the modern church

has for Jesus? Where is the walk that demonstrates the love the modern church has for Jesus?

What message does the speaker of *Revelation* have for us?

- For those who have left their first love, know that the One who has the power to remove you from His presence desires to draw you close.
- For those who experience persecution, know that the Conqueror of Death is on your side.
- For those who have compromised their faith, know that the One who is the Word, the foundation for faith, confronts you and will comfort you.
- For those who are in bed with Jezebel, know that Jesus sees your heart. He knows the apostasy that resides there, but He also sees the Truth it overshadows. There is still hope.
- For those virtually dead, know that you are not without hope. The one who “has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars” is concerned about you.
- For the faithful, know that Jesus holds nothing against you. You may have little power of your own, but Jesus has far more power than you will ever need.
- Finally, for those who are lukewarm, may Jesus have mercy and not spew you from His mouth. God’s re-creative power is available for you if you will open the door to Him.

Your servant,  
Pastor John