

What Kind Of Letter Would We Receive?

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Do you like to receive mail? Would you like to receive mail from Jesus? Just over 1900 years ago, Jesus actually wrote letters to seven churches in Asia. They were shocking letters, combining praise and rebuke. While we can look at these letters in numerous ways, I often wonder, "What if we were one of the seven churches of Asia? What kind of letter would we receive?" I also wonder, "What if everyone in this church was like me? Would Jesus rebuke us or praise us?"

Discussion:

- I. Would Jesus rebuke us for declining or praise us for improving?
 - A. Jesus rebuked the Ephesians in **Revelation 2:4** because they had left their first love. There are probably as many ways to explain this statement as there are commentaries about it. But however you interpret this verse, you recognize that the Ephesians had declined. They were not where they used to be and Jesus rebuked them to return to where they once were.
 - B. In contrast, Jesus praised Thyatira in **Revelation 2:19** because their latter works were greater than those done at first. They had grown. Of course, there was room for more growth. But Jesus was pleased that they had improved.
 - C. What would Jesus say to us? Would He be able to praise us because we have grown? Or would He have to rebuke us because we had declined? What about you? Are you growing? **II Peter 1:5-8** tells us to grow, we must be increasing.

- II. Would Jesus rebuke us for tolerating sin or praise us for not bearing with evil?
 - A. Jesus rebuked both Pergamos and Thyatira because they both tolerated sin within the church (**Revelation 2:14-15, 20**). How easy it is at times to develop an "us-them" mentality. We can easily assess the sins of those people who are not one of us. But sometimes when one of our own sins, we can overlook it or become comfortable. When sin becomes tolerated, discipline is avoided and the church dies.
 - B. On the other hand, Jesus had praise for the church at Ephesus because they could not bear those who were evil (**Revelation 2:2**). Ephesus was so strong regarding this that even people who claimed to be apostles were put to the test. The Ephesian church would not allow the impenitent in the church. They would not allow false teachers. They would not tolerate evil.
 - C. What would Jesus say to us? Would He praise us because we work to restore the sinner (**Galatians 6:1**), but if he will not be restored, we purge out the old leaven (**I Corinthians 5:4-7**). Or would He rebuke us for tolerating sin? What about you? Do you tolerate sin? Do you wait for others to deal with sin in the church? Or do you work to bring sinners to repentance?

- III. Would Jesus rebuke us for being lukewarm or praise us for using our strength?
 - A. In **Revelation 3:15-16**, Jesus rebuked the Laodiceans because they were lukewarm. You understand what is wrong with being lukewarm, don't you? A lukewarm drink is one that has become so affected by its environment that it is no longer good for anything. A cold drink can cool you down and refresh you on a hot day. A hot drink can comfort and warm you on a cold day. A lukewarm drink, however, has been so affected by its surroundings that it is no longer good for anything. Most of us have had a taste of room temperature coke or coffee and we know it is good for nothing. It no longer has any strength. That was Laodicea.
 - B. On the other hand, Jesus praised the church at Philadelphia because they had a little strength (**Revelation 3:8**). Isn't that intriguing? You would think that having only a little strength would be a place for rebuke. But Jesus did not rebuke Philadelphia but praised them. In fact, Jesus had nothing but praise for them. Why? Because they used what strength they had.
 - C. What would Jesus say to us? Would He be able to praise us because we are using our strengths and walking through the doors He is opening for us? Would He praise us for still affecting those around us? Or would He have to rebuke us because we have become so much like the world that we are no longer effective in His kingdom? What about you? Are you hot or cold, using the strengths you have to affect others? Or have you been so stifled by the world that you have essentially assumed room temperature?

- IV. Would Jesus rebuke us for focusing on the physical or praise us for being spiritually minded?
- A. Jesus also rebuked the Laodiceans because they were confident in their riches. They were focused on physical things (**Revelation 3:17**).
 - B. On the other hand, Jesus praised the church at Smyrna because of their poverty (**Revelation 2:9**). But, Jesus added that they were really rich. Why? Because they were focused on spiritual things. The Philadelphians obviously knew that the most important blessings from God were not their houses and clothes, but their salvation and eternity.
 - C. What would Jesus say about us? Would Jesus be able to praise us because we are not distracted by the physical things of this world, but are focused on things above (**Colossians 3:2**)? Or would He have to rebuke us for being focused on physical things? Look at our nice building. Look at how blessed we are. Do we allow the great physical status to make us complacent? What about you? Upon what are you focused, the physical or the spiritual.
- V. Would Jesus rebuke us for trusting in ourselves or praise us for trusting in God?
- A. Jesus additionally rebuked the Laodiceans because they trusted in themselves, not God (**Revelation 3:17-18**). God exhorted them to turn to Him for white garments that they may be clothed and salve with which to anoint their eyes.
 - B. However, Jesus praised the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, because they trusted in God (**Revelation 2:9-10; 3:8-10**). These churches were unmoved in the face of the synagogue of Satan. They put their trust in the Lord to protect them, help them and in the end save them.
 - C. What would Jesus write to us? Would He be able to praise us because we continue to trust in Him? Can He see our perseverance in the face of our adversaries? Can He see our devotion to His truth in the face of false teachers? Can He see our refusal to compromise in the face of a worldly environment? Or would He have to rebuke us for trusting in ourselves and in the things of men? What about you? Do you trust in God, staying true to His word? Or do you trust in the things of men, compromising God's truth?
- VI. Would Jesus rebuke us for only having a reputation or praise us for real strength and life?
- A. Jesus rebuked the church at Sardis because all it had was a reputation (**Revelation 3:1**). Jesus had almost nothing good to say about the church there, except that there were a few faithful, living, strong members of the church. Who knows how they developed such a reputation? Maybe they had once been truly alive and now they were simply living on the past. Perhaps the few who had not defiled their garments worked very hard and provided the good reputation. The point to learn is that Sardis did not have real strength, they only had a reputation.
 - B. On the other hand, Jesus praised several of the other churches because they really were working. They had some real strength and life in them. He praised Ephesus in **Revelation 2:2-3** for their work and their patience. He praised Smyrna in **Revelation 2:9** because of their work even in tribulation and poverty. He praised Pergamos in **Revelation 2:13** because of their works even in the face of persecution and martyrdom. Finally, He praised Thyatira in **Revelation 2:19** for their "works, love, service, faith and your patience." These churches did not just have a reputation. They had real strength, which they used.
 - C. What would Jesus write to us? Would He praise us because we have real strength? Would He praise us because we, as a whole, are truly working to do His will? Or would He rebuke us because all we have is a reputation? Would He rebuke us because we are riding on past success? Would He rebuke us because all we have are a few names that are undefiled and the rest are riding on the waves of their work? What about you? Is life and strength more than just a reputation for you? Could Jesus praise you or would He have to rebuke you?

Conclusion:

What if Jesus were to write us a letter, what would it say? Perhaps it would be nice to receive a letter from Jesus so we know exactly where we need to improve. But then, isn't that what we have in the Bible? We simply have to use it that way, allowing it to guide and strengthen us, being totally honest with its rebukes and encouragements. We need to read it and obey it. Because the next question we will have to answer is not what would Jesus say if He were to write us a letter. The next question is what will Jesus say when we stand before Him in judgment.