

# SINGULAR AND PLURAL NUMBER IN REVELATION 2–3

**Color Key:** red words (σου) are singular pronouns  
blue words (δύνη) are singular verbs

orange words (ὁμῶν) are plural pronouns  
green words (ἔξετε) are plural verbs

from Jesus

to the pastor

about the local churches (congregations)

to all Christians (Church Universal)

## TO THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

Rev. 2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 ‘I know your (σου) deeds and your (σου) toil and perseverance, and that you cannot (οὐ δύνη) endure evil men, and you put to the test (ἐπείρασας) those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found (εὗρες) them *to be* false; 3 and you have (ἔχεις) perseverance and have endured (ἐβάστασας) for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary (οὐ κεκοπίακες). 4 ‘But I have *this* against you (σοῦ), that you have left (ἀφήκες) your (σου) first love. 5 ‘Remember (μνημόνευε) therefore from where you have fallen (πέπτωκας), and repent (μετανόησον) and do (ποίησον) the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you (σοι), and will remove your (σου) lampstand out of its place — unless you repent (μετανοήσης). 6 ‘Yet this you do have (ἔχεις), that you hate (μισεῖς) the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’

## TO THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

Rev. 2:8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: 9 ‘I know your (σου) tribulation and *your* poverty (but you are [εἶ] rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 ‘Do not fear (μηδὲν φοβοῦ) what you are about (μέλλεις) to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you (ὁμῶν) into prison, that you may be tested (πειρασθῆτε), and you will have (ἔξετε) tribulation ten days. Be faithful (γίνου) until death, and I will give you (σοι) the crown of life. 11 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.’

## TO THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

Rev. 2:12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13 ‘I know where you dwell (κατοικεῖς), where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast (κρατεῖς) My name, and did not deny (ἠρνήσω) My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you (ὁμῶν), where Satan dwells. 14 ‘But I have a few things against you (σοῦ), because you have (ἔχεις) there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit *acts of immorality*. 15 ‘Thus you also have (ἔχεις καὶ σὺ) some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 ‘Repent (μετανόησον) therefore; or else I am coming to you (σοι) quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

## TO THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

Rev. 2:18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: 19 ‘I know your (σου) deeds, and your (σου) love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your (σου) deeds of late are greater than at first. 20 ‘But I have *this* against you (σοῦ), that you tolerate (ἀφεῖ) the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 ‘And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22 ‘Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of *sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you (ὁμῶν) according to your (ὁμῶν) deeds. 24 ‘But I say to you (ὁμῶν), the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who (οἴτινες) have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them — I place no other burden on you (ὁμῶν). 25 ‘Nevertheless what you have (ἔχετε), hold fast (κρατήσατε) until I come. 26 ‘And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

## TO THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

Rev. 3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: I know your (σου) deeds, that you have (ἔχεις) a name that you are alive (ζῆς), but you are (εἶ) dead. 2 ‘Wake up (γίνου γρηγορῶν), and strengthen (στήρισον) the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your (σου) deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 ‘Remember (μνημόνευε) therefore what you have received (ἐλήφας) and heard (ἤκουσας); and keep (τήρει) it, and repent (μετανόησον). If therefore you will not wake up (μη γρηγορήσης), I will come like a thief, and you will not know (γνῶς) at what hour I will come upon you (σέ). 4 ‘But you have (ἔχεις) a few people in Sardis who (ᾧ) have not soiled their (αὐτῶν) garments; and they will walk (περιπατήσουσιν) with Me in white; for they are (εἶσιν) worthy. 5 ‘He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. 6 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

## TO THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

Rev. 3:7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 8 ‘I know your (σου) deeds. Behold, I have put before you (σου) an open door which no one can shut, because you have (ἔχεις) a little power, and have kept (ἐτήρησάς) My word, and have not denied (ἠρνήσω) My name. 9 ‘Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie — behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your (σου) feet, and to know that I have loved you (σε). 10 ‘Because you have kept (ἐτήρησας) the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you (σε) from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. 11 ‘I am coming quickly; hold fast (κράτει) what you have (ἔχεις), in order that no one take your (σου) crown. 12 ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

## TO THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

Rev. 3:14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 15 ‘I know your (σου) deeds, that you are (εἶ) neither cold nor hot; I would that you were (ἦς) cold or hot. 16 ‘So because you are (εἶ) lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit [lit. ‘vomit’] you (σε) out of My mouth. 17 ‘Because you say (λέγεις), “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know (οὐκ οἶδας) that you (σὺ) are (εἶ) wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 ‘I advise you (σοι) to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich (πλουτήσης), and white garments, that you may clothe yourself (περιβάλη), and *that* the shame of your (σου) nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your (σου) eyes, that you may see (βλέπης). 19 ‘Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous (ζήλευε) therefore, and repent (μετανόησον). 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 will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 ‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

## APPLICATION

1. The seven letters to the pastors of the seven churches are like Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus—only from Jesus.
2. Jesus knows exactly what pastors are doing in their churches—and cares.
3. These letters produce fear in the hearts of pastors in the Church Age because they threaten discipline and loss of rewards now and in the Kingdom for unfaithful service.
4. These letters are a source of encouragement and comfort to pastors today because they promise rewards for faithful service in this life and in the next.
5. Rewards for overcoming are offered to all Christians. Now ask yourself, “Am I an overcomer?” “Do I want to be?”

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## COMMENTARY

John addresses his Apocalypse “to the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4) as instructed by Jesus in the first vision (1:11, 19). Then Jesus dictates seven letters to the pastors of the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3), praising them for their faithful service and rebuking them for their failures. It must be noted that the praise, warnings, commands, rebuke, promises, and encouragement from Jesus are addressed for the most part to the pastors and not to their congregations, as evidenced by the second person singular verbs and pronouns in Greek (highlighted in red and blue text at the left). The pronouns “you” and “your” are ambiguous in English: both have second person singular and plural referents. This has caused widespread confusion for readers of the English Bible: the second person singular pronouns and verbs all refer to the pastors of the seven churches and not to the local churches as a whole. For instance, the pastor of the church at Ephesus, not the congregation, has left his first love (2:4). Jesus will force the synagogue of Satan to bow down before the pastor, not before the church of Philadelphia. The pastor at Laodicea, not the church, is lukewarm, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked, and is about to be vomited out of Jesus’ mouth (3:16–17). There is no second person singular and plural ambiguity in Greek. To summarize, second person singular verbs and pronouns refer to the pastors; second and third person plural verbs and pronouns are addressed to the congregations.

Each letter follows a stereotyped form (with minor variations such as additions, omissions, and changes of order):

- a. To . . . write . . . from
- b. I know
  - Praise
  - Rebuke
  - Change (Repent)
  - Warning
  - Promise
  - Encouragement
- c. Exhortation: Let those with ears hear (listen)
- d. Promise(s) to overcomers