**Serving in Multicultural Ministry**

**Reader 4**

**Thinking About Theology**

The Bible is God's inerrant, authoritative Word. God speaks to believers, individually and communally, through His Word. Further, by means of the Bible, He calls them to come close and, by faith, experience the fullness of Christ Jesus in their hearts. “Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong” (Eph 3:17-19 NLT).

**Theology Defined**

How does theology connect to the Bible? Theology itself relates to study of God and originates from two Greek words, theos and logos. *Theos* translates from Greek as God, while *logos* as study (Ross, 2002). One can learn more about the theology by examining its Latin derivation. McMahan expanded on this thought with, “Latin textbooks use the word theologia to refer to knowledge of God and what God reveals to man about Himself and the world in which He lives” (1998, para.3).

**Theology’s Three Qualities**

Theology possesses three qualities: It brings understanding about God; provides a body of reference for study, and serves as a framework of application for life experiences (See Figure 1). Together, these three qualities create a platform upon which man can unlock the truth about the Gospel. Joshua Harris suggested, “Theology shapes the way we think and live” (2010).

Figure 1. Three Qualities of Christian Theology

**Theology as a Language**

Theology has a language of sorts--A dialect associated with a unique subset of culture. Cultures, such as academic discipline, corporate business, and people depend on language as a means of expression in order to cross communicate. Further, people use language to make sense of their inner thoughts and world around them.

The theology of God too, reflects a language distinctive to Christian faith tenets. This language reveals God identity and His attributes in one Bible of two testaments. A believer finds the foretelling of the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament and the prophecy fulfilled through Jesus Christ in the New. A Christian, then, studies the Bible to gain an understanding about God in relation to one’s identity in Christ.

When one has the mind of Christ, it works in tandem with one’s walk in Him. In

1 Corinthians 2:16, Apostle Paul wrote, “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (KJV). Upon study of the Bible, the Holy Spirit reveals to the believer how to lead a sanctified life, walking in a pathway illuminated by the Light. As a result, the Holy Spirit develops the believer’s spiritual maturity and walk in covenant with Christ in love.

**Theology Linked to Reflection**

So then, what does theological reflection encompass? When the believer reflects on theology, one seeks the presence of God through Scripture: Discipleship in spiritual growth and formation, comfort from challenges, direction with daily choices or actions, clarity in purpose, and solutions in ministry. Theological reflection seeks to formulate thoughts based on conception of a particular action, test it against God's Word, revise or validate thought, support final direction based on Scripture, relate what one learned, and apply it.

Theological reflection comprises a process. Through this process a believer makes what Regina Coll termed as, "faith connections" (1992, p. 91). Faith connections travel without a compass. These reflective processes also come from the perspective of faith. Debeer and O'Connell stated, "life experience invites us to reflect" (2002, p.1). Once saved by grace through faith, the Holy Spirit transforms the believers through renewal. A believer wears the mind of Christ; and therefore, views and translates the world from this perspective. As Abigail Johnson wrote,

Theological reflection is simply wondering about God's activity in our lives. Where is God present? What is God calling us to do? By taking time to ask questions about what happens to us—seeing our experiences through the lens of faith—we become clearer about our connection to God. We all ask questions about relationships, our work, our children, our government, and our situation in life. We all reflect, wonder, analyze, think, assess, and discuss with friends as ways of trying to understand our life. Theological reflection simply refocuses all that thinking to encourage a stronger sense of relationship with God, asking, "Where does God fit into the picture?" (Alban Institute, 2006, No. 108).

Jan Paron, PhD 2014

All Nations Leadership Institute

**Appendix 1**

**Key Terms**

* **The Seven Churches** These churches include Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The seven letters to the seven churches illustrates the moral and spiritual history of the church. Each letter provides the manner in which Christ represented Himself; the commendation or condemnation He gives the church; the reward His promises; the exhortations to hear. These apply to types of believers in every age; hence we look at them as a guide as lessons learned for overcoming in Christ. Additionally, we the mission of God as His called out people
* **Seven Candlesticks** John wrote Rev 2 before the establishment of many of the New Testament churches. They needed continual renewal to hold the candlestick, just as we need the same.
* **Bride** The bride is the Church. God’s light draws people to them.The Bridegroom is Christ. He is the Church’s First Love. The Bride presents an open invitation to others as to where you want to take part in the metaphor. Jesus continually sanctifies the Bride to prepare it for the Groom, ready for marriage.
* **Message** The message comes from the Lord’s viewpoint, which He gave to John. The Lord pronounces blessings on the one that reads, hears, and keeps the Scriptures.
* **Asia** Churches were in Asia Minor, a Roman province.

**Appendix 2**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Church** | **Background** | **Evaluation of the Church** | **EXHORTATION**  **General Application (Correctives)** |
| **1** | **\*Ephesus (2:1)**  **CHURCH’S CHARACTER**   * THE CHURCH OF DEPARTED LOVE * Outwardly everything looked good   **CHRIST’S CHARACTER #1**   * Holds the seven stars in His right hand and * Walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (2:1b; cf. Gen 2:8; Rev 1:13, 16)   **Notes:**   * Jesus is not an absentee landlord * No room for a church to have pride * Christ alone is sovereign (not the church) (Baker, 2002 p. 211) | * The mother church * Largest city in Asia Minor –quarter million people (https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-3-church-ephesus-lost-love * Main center of Grecian culture and heathen idolatry: Temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world) Also had worship temples for Claudius, Hadrian, and Severus. * Athenians founded it * A flourishing commercial and export center for Asia Minor because of its location at the mouth of the Cayster River on a gulf of the Aegean Sea (https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-3-church-ephesus-lost-love * Connected to other major cities by highways, land, and sea. (<http://www.biblestudy.org/biblepic/churches-of-revelation-ephesus.html>) * Had an effective ministry there that became a threat to idol industry. Demetrius opposed Paul and the Ephesian church (Acts 19:23-20:1). | **Commendation (Plus)**   1. Works (Toil and persistent endurance (v.2a) 2. Intolerance for evildoers (vv. 2b, 3a) 3. Tribulation (Endured and Bore much for Jesus’ name sake, v. 3b) 4. Tested for false prophets (v. 6) 5. Shared with Christ His dislike for Nicolaitanes (v. 6; cf. Acts 20:17, 29) | **Exhortation**   1. Repent (or remove their lampstand from it place, in other words, lose their status as an assembly (2:5) 2. Do the works they did at first   Note: Remember and do  **Promised Reward**  **OVERCOMING #1**   1. **“**To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (2:7) 2. Receive the crown of life 3. Not suffer a second death   **What should do they do?**   1. Be an overcomer 2. Be steadfast 3. Hear what the Word says 4. Truly repent and come unto yourself (Luke 15: 17-19). |
| **Condemnation (Delta)**   1. Left their first love that they had at first (v. 4; cf. Matt 23:12; Luke 10:28-42; Phil 1:21) 2. Remember how far they fell   **Note:** Love for God, demands love for others…Mutually exclusive. This was a second-generation church that got caught up in doctrine and lost the first love that they had at first. Their early love had grown cold in search for orthodoxy.—You can’t love truth more than you love God or vice versa. |
| **Test**   1. They were victorious and triumphed over savage wolves and did not faint ( Acts 20:20) 2. Know their sufferings |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Church** | **Background** | **Evaluation of the Church** | **EXHORTATION**  **General Application (Correctives)** |
| **2** | **\*Smyrna (2:8)**  **CHURCH’S CHARACTER**   * THE CHURCH OF FIERY PERSECUTION   **Notes**   * Smyrna means myrrh, which gives off a sweet fragrance when crushed. This church yielded a sweet fragrance to God (cf. 2 Cor 2:14-16 * This church suffered persecution from the outside from Rome and inside with Judaizers.   **CHRIST’S CHARACTER #2**   * The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive (2:8)   **Notes**   * Christ expressed His character in absolute terms. He is supreme before all things and last as goal of all things | * Originally was an Ionian province * Declined, but Alexander the Great and Antigonus I rebuilt it and made it wealthy and famous * Call beautiful because of its wealthy, commerce, and buildings. * Much idolatry there, and not far behind Ephesus (Emperor worship) * Had a substantial Jewish population hostile to Christians * Roman persecution was at its highest there. This persecution lasted two centuries. | **Commendation (Plus)**   1. Works (v.9b) 2. Tribulation (v. 9a) 3. Poverty (but thou art rich)—They suffered the loss of all things, but are rich in faith (v.9a; cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23) 4. Knows of them which say they are Jews but are the synagogue of Satan (Judaizers, those who falsely claim to be Jews yet rejected Christ and persecuted Christians; Rev 2:9b; John 8:29-44; Rom. 2:28-29) | **Exhortation**   1. Be an overcomer 2. When threatened with the first death, they will not be hurt by the second (2:11) The second death refers to the eternal death in the lake of fire (Rev 20:6, 14-15, 21:8) (Apostolic Bible Commentary, p. 2053).   **Promised Reward**  **OVERCOMING #2**  “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death(2:11 Overcoming #2)  Receive the crown of life, not the second death  **What should do they do?**   1. Be an overcomer 2. Keep up faith 3. Trust in God 4. Hear what the Spirit says 5. Understand the meaning of suffering…Remember the right things 6. Reframe your thinking on what it means to me rich, where moth and rust don’t corrupt steel—Don’t be melancholy 7. Carry the thumbprint of the Potter. When you are broken, you will be in the Master’s hands 8. Take comfort in the promise of eternal life 9. Don’t be moved…Look to the Lord as one’s Shelter, Strong Tower, Deliverer, Present Help 10. Stand in community, strengthened by prayer. |
| **Condemnation (Delta)**  No condemnation |
| **Test**   1. Hold fast and fear none of these things. More tribulation was to come. Triumph over death with their hope in Jesus Christ (v. 2:10) |
|  | **Church** | **Background** | **Evaluation of the Church** | **EXHORTATION**  **General Application (Correctives)** |
| **3** | **\*Pergamos (2:12)**  **CHURCH’S CHARACTER**   * THE CHURCH OF WORLDLY ALLIANCE   **Notes:**  Pergamos meant marriage. The church married the world, and tolerated error  **CHRIST’S CHARACTER #3**   * He which hath the sharp sword with two edges (2:12)   **Notes:**  This is the Word of God (John 5:22, 27; Heb 4:12) | * Built on a cone shape hill 1,000 feet above Caicus River (Apostolic, p. 2054). * Also, an idolatrous city know for worship of Zeus (king of the gods), Athena (goddess of victory and patron of the city) Asclepius (god of healing, symbolize by a serpent) Dionysius (god of wine), and the cult of the emperor) (Apostolic, p. 2054) * Romans persecuted Christians because they would not show political loyalty by participating in emperor worship (Apostolic, p. 2054) | **Commendations**   1. Works in Satan’s seat (v. 13) 2. Held fast to His name (v. 13) 3. Did not deny His name (v. 13) 4. Not afraid and held fast during the time of the martyrs | **Exhortation**   1. Be an overcomer 2. Stand in the face of evil 3. Have moral and godly integrity 4. Stand against deception (Don’t be deceived by the doctrine of Balaam) 5. Bring unity and care for the Body   **Promised Reward**  **OVERCOMING #3**  “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (2:17).   1. Hidden manna may indicate a personal relationship with unseen Christ; food for the blessed 2. White stone may indicate purity from sin; don’t know the name; but it signifies a new promise 3. New name refers to a fresh and closer relationship between God and His people (Rev 3:12; 19:12; 22:3-4)   **What should do they do?**   1. Truly repent and come unto yourself (Luke 15: 17-19). 2. Guard your Christ esteem, not your self esteem 3. Let the Kingdom determine your choices 4. Consecrate oneself to the Lord (Lev 20:7; 2 Chron 29:31) 5. Draw near to the Lord (Jas 4:7-8) |
| **Condemnations**   1. Idolatry and fornication (2:14; Note: When you put things above God it leads to sexual morality as well. Idolatry frequently connects to sexual sin…Our idols are renewable resources) 2. Nicolaitanes doctrine (2:14; Note: Doctrine of Balaam) 3. They became a stumbling block 4. Ate food sacrificed to idols (2:14 ) 5. Syncretism—They diluted the Gospel to make it more palatable (e.g., A statue of a saint with a round disk behind it, the disk was a sun god that they put behind the saint…This is an example of overcontextualizaiton. |
| **Test**  Hold fast and fear none of these things. More tribulation was to come. Triumph over death with their hope in Jesus Christ (v. 2:10) |
| **4** | **\*Thyatira (2:18)**  **CHURCH’S CHARACTER**   * THE CHURCH OF CLERICAL DOMINATION   **Notes:**  Thyatira means continual sacrifice. The church of that period promoted continual sacrifice in its service.  **CHRIST’S CHARACTER #3**   * Son of God, who hath eyes like unto a flame of fire (discerns evil and cannot tolerate it), * His feet are like fine brass (stamps out evil with judgment; 2:12).   **Notes:**  Title conveys His power and authority.  Jesus is not the son of Mary, He’s the Son of God. | * Church led people astray with its teaching * Made brass for warfare at Thyatira | **Commendation (Plus)**   1. Words (v.19) 2. Charity (v. 19) 3. Service (v.19) 4. Faith (v. 19) 5. Last is more than the first (v. 19) 6. Still a remnant of faithful there | **Exhortation**   1. Be an overcomer 2. Fix it   **Promised Reward**  **OVERCOMING #4**  “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:” (2:26)  **Note:**  He gives power to those who hold fast to the end.  **What should do they do**   1. Search their hearts (Ps 51:10; “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” 2. Church needs a repentant spirit (Hos 14:5-8; “They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon” (v. 7). 3. Remain faithful and don’t compromise boundaries 4. Go into the world, but don’t be of the world (John 17:15-17, Rom 12:2) 5. Be steadfast, and don’t compromise with the mission of God (Great Commission: Matt 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:74, John 20:21 and Acts 1:8, which includes the call to the Great Compassion: Mark 6:34) |
| **Condemnation (Delta)**   1. Jezebel spirit within the church who leads people astray with her teaching (referring to papal Rome at the time, by pointing people away from the divine authority of God 2. God condemns Jezebel, her children, and adherents (Rev 2: 22-23) 3. Passion for works outstripped holiness |
| **Test** God gave the church space to repent but she did not (Rev 2:21) |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Church** | **Background** | **Evaluation of the Church** | **EXHORTATION**  **General Application (Correctives)** |
| **5** | **\*Sardis (3:1)**  **CHURCH’S CHARACTER**   * THE CHURCH OF EMPTY PROFESSION (CHURCH OF THE MARGINS)   **Notes:**  Sardis means remnant  **CHRIST’S CHARACTER #3**   * He that has the seven Spirits of God (Reflects the fullness and perfection of the one Holy Spirit (Rev 1:20) and * the seven stars (Rev 3:1; allusion to the way Christ was revealed to the Church of Ephesus)   **Notes:**  By highlight Himself as the bearer of the seven Spirits and seven starts, Christ highlights His lordship and sovereignty (Col 2:9-10) | * Was one of the oldest and greatest cities of western Asia * At one time, was a proud and wealthy city, capital of Lydia * Had a history of many wars * Patron deity was Cybele, half human, a deity that was supposed to restore the dead * In 17 AD it fell to an earthquake * Twice in its history (546 BC and 214 BC) enemies captured Sardis because its guards failed to detect oppositional soldiers who had climbed p a crevice in the cliffs and opened the gates. * Restored and flourished until 1400 AD, that Tartar Tamerlane destroyed everything * The city never recovered from desolation * The church had more profession than life | **Commendation (Plus)**  Nothing—A dead church  Just a few remnants | **Exhortation**   1. Be an overcomer 2. Remember that which was and bring it back 3. Hold on to the memory 4. Repent 5. Strengthen the things that remain 6. Be watchful   **Promised Reward**  **OVERCOMING #5**  “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (3:5)  **Note:**  Confesses their name (Heb 2)  Carries their name (Offering a name is a high priestly function)  **What should do they do**   1. Be steady 2. Know history’s value 3. Have a right spirit in work (Slow it down enough to hear what He has to say) 4. Value the little things 5. Make margins in our time, finances…Everything should look different…Defend your borders |
| **Condemnation (Delta)**   1. Repent 2. Works 3. Sleep—They can fall in the same way the city itself had twice fallen: though lack of watchfulness |
| **Test**  Lack of watchfulness |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Church** | **Background** | **Evaluation of the Church** | **EXHORTATION**  **General Application (Correctives)** |
| **6** | **Philadelphia (3:7)**  **CHURCH’S CHARACTER**   * THE CHURCH OF THE FAITHFUL REMNANT   **Notes:**  Philadelphia means city of brotherly love…The church that kept the faith  **CHRIST’S CHARACTER #3**   * He that is holy, * He that is true, * He that has the key of David (See also Isa 22:22; df. Rev 3:12; 22:14-15 metaphor for Messiah’s authority to admit or exclude entrance into God’s Kingdom in the New Jerusalem * He that openeth (He controls entrance to the New Jerusalem.   **Notes:**   * Holy in life, True in doctrine; holy in character, true in action (Jesus does not reveal His judicial character here, but personal character) * Key of David (See also Isa 22:22; cf. Rev 3:12; 22:14-15 metaphor for Messiah’s authority to admit or exclude entrance into God’s Kingdom in the New Jerusalem) * He that openeth by the truth of His Word * No man shutteth…to hardened spirits He shutteth and no man openeth * He alone opens and shuts the controls to the New Jerusalem | * Ramsey called it the missionary city to promote unity of spirit, customs, and loyalty in the Greek world (Baker, p. 184; PBC, p.2665) * Thirty miles southeast of Smyrna (Baker, p. 184) * Lay on the major Roman postal road from Troas through Pergamum, Sardis. It was called the gateway to the east (Baker, p. 184). * Volcanic soil, ideal for growing grapes; thus, Philadelphia prospered agriculturally (Baker, p. 184) * (Earthquake also devastated Philadelphia, in addition to Sardis.(ASB, p. 2055). Since Philadelphia was closer to the epicenter it had lingering effects (Baker, p. 184). It was so devastated that Rome suspended taxes for five years, but attempts to rebuild were unsuccessful because of subsequent earthquakes and aftershocks. * Because people lived in fear of another earthquake, this message assured them of spiritual protection * Under severe threat from powerful Jewish presence in the city * His name reassures them that He is on their side, not the side of the synagogue of Satan (3:9) * The Jews excommunicated the Christians from the synagogue (as they did throughout the Jewish world), but only Christ has the true authority, not the Jews. * Religion was a blend of Anatolian and Hellenistic practices (Baker, p. 185) | **Commendation (Plus)**   1. Works 2. Kept His Word 3. Did not deny His name 4. Weak 5. Patience | **Exhortation**   * Hold fast * Temptation is coming * Have eyes that see   **Promised Reward**  **OVERCOMING #6**  “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (3:12).  **Note:**  **What should do they do**   1. Be hot nor cold for the Lord 2. Don’t confuse wealth for God’s approval (The church didn’t think they needed anything because of their wealth and organization, yet they didn’t see they lacked spiritual life in its midst) 3. Have a character is not one of pride or self satisfaction 4. Do not have the three-fold need of poverty, nakedness, and blindness 5. Buy gold tried in the fire (speaks of divine righteousness) and white raiment (denotes practical righteousness, and eye salve (spiritual discernment) 6. Hear the please of the plea of the Spirit of God to my heart. 7. Have zeal for the Lord 8. I am not indifferent with my attitude toward the Lord 9. Do not enact a helps-type ministry(like homeless shelters, food pantry, prison ministry, give aways) without emphasizing the saving grace of the Gospel 10. Profess the Name while keeping Him on the inside 11. Don’t substitute wealth for grace 12. Be humble 13. Have zeal with repentance 14. Open the door to His affluence 15. Give thanks giving to Christ 16. Look to reconciliation as the goal when discipling other, not blame 17. Seek personal restoration through Christ…Sin is a flesh eating disease 18. Be honest with God in all situations 19. Let God assess you first |
| **Condemnation (Delta)**  No condemnation |
| **Test** |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Church** | **Background** | **Evaluation of the Church** | **EXHORTATION**  **General Application (Correctives)** |
| **7** | **Laodicea (3:14)**  **Church’s Character**  CHURCH OF INSIPID LUKEWARMNESS  **Christ’s Character**   * The Amen * The Faithful and True Witness * The Beginning of the Creation of God   Note:   * The One who establishes all God’s promises; the   Last Word, the Ultimate Authority, the Finality of all things   * Christ never failed in witness * He is the Head of New creation (2 Cor 5:17) | * Known for financial wealth , raven-black wool, and eye salve—Lydia died the wool with excretion from mussels * They also had a medical school * Because they had wealth, they thought they were blessed * It took water from two springs—One that is hot, but becomes cold when it reached the city, the other that is cold and becomes tepid when it reached the city—They lacked an adequate water supply. * Suffered from the earthquake, but didn’t take aid from Rome because the town was wealthy * Had great compassion project absent of the Gospel * The metaphor for Philadelphia is doors. He stands at the door. If a man hears His voice, He will come in to Him and sup with he will be with Jesus (3:20). * Isa 55 Come buy from me with nothing. Come drink from the wells of salvation. Come everyone who thirst and drink from the waters. | **Commendation (Plus)**  None | **Exhortation**   1. Let God assess you first 2. Buy gold tried in the fire (**faith tested by suffering)** 3. White anointment 4. Anoint thine eyes with salve 5. Accept His invitation at the door—Open the door   **Promised Reward**  “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and sit down with my Father in his throne” (3:21 Overcoming 7).  **What Should They Do**   1. Don’t let your wealthy substitute for grace 2. Be humble 3. Have zeal with repentance 4. Open the door to affluence 5. Give thanks giving to Christ 6. Look to reconciliation as the goal, not blame 7. Seek restoration…Sin is a flesh eating disease 8. Be honest in all situations |
| **Condemnation (Delta)**   * Neither hot nor cold * Wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked |
| **Test** |