

Revelation

A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #5
Revelation 2:1-7
7/19/2006

Christ's Letter to The Seven Churches of Asia Minor

INTRODUCTION

We begin the section on the church which is also called “the body of Christ” and “the bride of Christ.” Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it. He prayed for it in John 17. After chapter three the church is conspicuous by its absence. Up to chapter four the church is mentioned nineteen times. From chapter four through chapter twenty the church is not mentioned one time. One might be prompted to ask, “Where is it?” It certainly isn't in the world or we would read about it. The answer is that the church has been caught up, raptured, away from the earth by our Lord into heaven to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

There are three ways that these letters need to be viewed.

First, these letters were to seven very real historical churches of that day.

Second, these letters contain a composite message for the church. That is, in each letter there is something that can be applied to almost every church.

Third, these letters are representative of a chronological history of the church. The first church, Ephesus, represents the apostolic church, the church of the first century. The last church, Laodicea, represents the apostate church, the church leading up to the time of the rapture.

While each of these letters describes the church as it changes throughout the ages, the characteristics of the last four seem to survive in some degree until the Lord's second coming. In each of these letters the Lord tells them that He is “coming” (2:25; 3:3,11,20) suddenly and that they are to do something until He returns.

Seven Defining Characteristics

1. Each letter begins with a salutation from Christ to *“the angel,”* the pastor, of the church.
2. Each letter identified Christ in a special way, some characteristic appropriate to that particular church.
3. Each letter asserted the Lord's knowledge of that church such as “I know thy works”
4. Each letter contained a commendation, except for the church at Laodicea, the apostate church, and each letter contained a condemnation except for two, the church at Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia.
5. Each letter contains a promise or a threat to be realized at the coming of the Lord.
6. Each letter contains an admonition about something that particular church needed to do.
7. Each letter contained a promised blessing to those who obeyed our Lord's admonition.

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Christ's Letter to The Church at Ephesus

Ephesus was the capital and largest city of the province of Asia (modern Southwest Turkey), a great seaport and the place where the cultures of the east and west met. Founded by the Hittites about 2,000 BC it was the heart of the great Hittite nation in ancient times.

When Paul landed at Ephesus, it was a city of about 250,000, the center of the worship of the fertility goddess Diana, the most sacred idol of Greek heathenism. Her temple was four times larger than the Parthenon and served as the bank of Asia. The worship of this four-breasted goddess stimulated the grossest forms of sexual hedonism and moral depravity. The worship of Diana degenerated into the wildest forms of sex orgies that were extremely excessive and vicious. We learn from Acts 19:13-19 that it also was a center for the worship of demons and is the only place "*exorcists*" are mentioned in the Bible.

Paul spent more time at Ephesus, 2 years, than any other place on his mission travels. He rented a hall and taught every day for two years and God moved mightily there and beyond throughout that part of Asia because it was such a strategic commercial center. Extrabiblical sources tell us that the Apostle John, the writer of Revelation, pastored there several years and that Timothy served as Pastor between the ministries of Paul and John..

Revelation 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

Revelation 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

Revelation 2:3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Revelation 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Revelation 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

THE SALUTATION vs. 1

The Lord emphasizes two things in His salutation: 1. He holds "*the seven stars in His right hand.*" This speaks of His authority over the pastor of the church at Ephesus, and over all the pastors of all churches; 2. He "*walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*" He is in the middle of everything that is done in the churches and knows everything that is going on. Nothing is hid from Him.

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THE COMMENDATION vv, 2-3

Jesus commended the church at Ephesus, the apostolic church, for seven characteristics.

(1) I know thy works,

Works are important for believers. They have no value for unbelievers, but they are evidence to prove the validity of the profession of those who claim to be believers. Before a person becomes a believer any works that he does actually increases his debt to God. After one becomes a believer he discovers that *"...we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10). In fact, James, the brother of Jesus, wrote *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ... Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone....For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"* (James 2:14,17,26). While works cannot produce salvation, there is no salvation that does not produce works.

(2) and thy labour,

The word *labor*, kopos (2873), means not so much the actual exertion that a person makes but the weariness that results from that exertion. This indicates that the Ephesians' passion to serve their Lord had continued and that they served Him until they were in pain and totally exhausted. Some believers still do this, but likely not as many as were in that church.

(3) and thy patience,

The word for *patience*, hupomone (5281), refers to endurance and continuation under difficult circumstances. Paul wrote in Romans 5:1-3: *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience."* Once our relationship with Jesus is secure, not only can we stand up under any kind of circumstance, but we even benefit from the worst kind. James wrote *"Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"* (James 1:3-4).

(4) and how thou canst not bear them which are evil:

They would not endure deceivers, false apostles and teachers, and evil men who pretended to be believers. They had discernment and fortitude and rejected those who were of Satan and the world even if they appeared to be *"ministers of righteousness"* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

(5) and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars,

Paul had warned the elders of the church at Ephesus that they needed to be on guard and protect the flock from *"evil men."* *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples"* (Acts 20:29-30). It appears that they had heeded his warning. Even back then, in the earliest days of the church, men pretended to be apostles and/or ministers of Christ when they really served Satan. It has not gotten any better. Each of probably knows at least one such person though we may not be discerning about their deceitfulness. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:13 *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ."* If anything is true, it seems as if there are more such servants of Satan today than there ever has been.

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(6) And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured,

The church at Ephesus had been faithful. They had “borne” the message of the cross when others had turned to other subjects. They had worked at faithfully presenting the gospel while bearing the ridicule of those who followed after fads and heresies. Jesus took note of their faithfulness.

(7) and hast not fainted.

In the previous verse Jesus had noted their “weariness,” but now He says “they have not fainted,” or grown weary. What’s the difference? In the previous statement Jesus noted that they had grown weary *in* the work, but now He says that they have not grown weary *of* the work. Those who love the Lord dearly may work so diligently that they grow very weary doing what needs to be done, but they never grow tired of doing the things that need to be done. There is surely a limit to one’s physical strength, but there need not be any limit to one’s desire and joy in doing the work of the Master.

These seven commendations applied not only to the historical church at Ephesus, they also applied to the churches in general of the first century, the period represented by this first church.

THE CONDEMNATION vs.4

Though there was much that the Lord commended the church at Ephesus for, He had a word of condemnation for it. They had lost the passion that gripped their hearts when they were first saved. Yes, they still loved Jesus, but not with the same love. As the commendation indicated they still passionately served the Lord, working for Him until they were exhausted, but something was missing, something very important.

When they were first saved, as is common to all new believers, the first thing they wanted to do was to go and tell all of their family and friends about their new Savior. They were so consumed with the love of Jesus for them that they wanted to pass that love on to others. But, they had been so busy, so very busy working for Jesus, that they had gotten distracted from doing the one thing that was most important. Working for Jesus is not the same as doing the work of Jesus.

When a person first comes to Christ it is normal and common to see him bringing his acquaintances to hear about Jesus. After some time passes, that same person may be spending so much time doing work for the Lord and the work of the church that, not only does he not bring anyone to Jesus, he isn’t even aware that there are people around him that he can and needs to bring to Jesus. Those are people that Jesus has arranged for him to meet so that they can be brought to meet Him, but they get overlooked because the believers have *“lost their first love.”*

Jesus came to reconcile lost men to the heavenly Father. When and if a believer gets too busy, and it does not matter what he is busy with, to notice and bring people to Jesus for salvation, then that believer has *“lost his first love”* and needs to pay attention to the admonition of Jesus that followed His condemnation. It applies today as much as it did then.

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THE ADMONITION vs 5

“Remember and repent” Jesus said. Do you remember the thrill, the joy, the exhilaration you felt when you were first converted? It was so overwhelming that no one could keep you from telling others about it. Some of your friends even thought you had “gone off the deep end,” and were crazy. That’s what Jesus wants us to remember. It’s our benchmark by which we are to measure ourselves today. The **“remembering”** will help us know if we have sinned by **“losing our first love.”** Do you still have that thrill and compulsion to share Jesus with others, to tell other what Jesus has done for you? If not, then you need to take the next step which is implied here.

You need to confess that you have sinned. Far too many people do not think of this as sin, but we know that Jesus does because of what He told the church at Ephesus. Jesus told them **“to repent.”** Repentance is always preceded by an awareness of and confession of sin. Awareness of sin is accompanied by a sorrow for that sin which then leads to a confession of that sin.

In 1 John 1:9 we find God’s formula and promise for believers regarding sin, confession and repentance where He says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** God tells us that **“godly sorrow worketh repentance”** and Jesus said that **“...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”** (Luke 13:3). And Jesus repeated this statement again in verse five. He emphasized what He meant by using the present tense to indicate that repenting is to be a continued, repeated experience. In other words, one, who has been converted, has acquired a new nature that is so repulsed by the presence of sin that it repents everytime it becomes aware of having sinned. If a person does not continually repent then it indicates that he has not been converted and will perish as a unsaved person.

“Remember” and “repent” and “do the first works” Jesus said. That is, return to what it was like when you were first saved, to the joy, the thrill and the compulsion to share Jesus. Jesus went on to say **“or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”**

Churches die when they fail to do what Jesus said. All around this world one can find church doors that have been shut and abandoned because they have not been obedient to what our Lord told them to do.

ANOTHER COMMENDATION vs. 6

The Nicolaitans were a cult group that followed Nicolaus of Antioch who preached that, in order to understand sin, you had to practice it. Those who followed him gave themselves over to sensuality with the explanation that such sins did not touch the spirit. It was an introduction to a perverted view of sin and sex that introduced sensual practices into the church. Jesus commended the Ephesians for rejecting and hating such a sinful heresy and lifestyle.

JESUS’ PROMISE TO THE FAITHFUL BELIEVERS vs. 7

“Hear” what I am saying to you. Do what I am saying to you and you will overcome. God’s formula for victory over Satan is found in Revelation 12:11: **“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”**